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Fall 2023

The Effectiveness of a Social and Emotional Learning Intervention Program with Middle School Students in Central Georgia

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The Effectiveness of a Social and Emotional Learning Intervention Program with
Middle School Students in Central Georgia

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Professional Learning and Innovation
John H. Lounsbury School of Education
Georgia College and State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

The Effectiveness of a Social and Emotional Learning Intervention Program with
Middle School Students in Central Georgia

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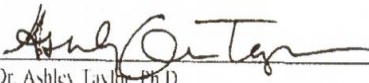
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to express my gratitude to everyone who has helped me along this journey. First, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my committee members. I am grateful for the time and support provided by each of them.

I would also like to thank my fellow "Fab Five" cohort members. Without your support, encouragement, and ears to vent to, I would most likely have given up on this educational endeavor a long time ago. I will be forever grateful for being a part of this group of talented individuals.

Last, but certainly not least, I thank my family and friends for taking this journey with me. To my friends for providing a listening ear and laughter when I needed it the most. To my mother, Big Faye, who has supported and cheered me on for my entire life. To my daughters, Adaja (Aubri & Ky) and Cheylin, thank you for being my silent motivation. I do all I do for my family.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my love, my life, my everything, my wife, Chasity.

Thank you for always being there for me, believing in me, and loving me all the way through this

process. Thank you for sacrificing and supporting my dreams of becoming Dr. Daymond Ray, Jr.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

Addressing the social and emotional learning of students can lead to increased social and emotional functioning, improved classroom and school behavior, and increased academic performance. This study investigated the effectiveness of a social and emotional learning (SEL) intervention program in a middle school in central Georgia. The study utilized a mixed methodology and examined the effects of a semester long SEL intervention program called Second Step. The participants in the study consisted of 60 7th-grade students between 11 and 13 years of age who were enrolled in a health education course for the second semester at ABC Middle School. Descriptive statistics and paired-sample t-tests were used to test the hypotheses of this study with the scientific approach and gather quantitative data. Qualitative data were collected from pre- and post-intervention surveys and open-ended questions from five participants to understand a more in-depth look into the rationale behind their survey answers. The study's results revealed a significant disparity between students' pre-training and post-training perceptions of their classroom and school. From the findings of this study, it can be inferred that the positive difference in students' perceptions of their classroom and school after participating in the Second Step. The study's results indicated a reduction in disciplinary referrals after students participated in the Second Step, although this reduction was not statistically significant. These findings highlight the importance of incorporating social and emotional learning interventions into the school curriculum while suggesting the need for further exploration of enhancing classroom behavior outcomes.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The goal of education in schools today is not just to educate students academically. Many countries have begun to focus on developing students who are socially aware of the vast changes happening in our world today (Mahmud, 2020). These countries also try to educate a child on becoming socially and emotionally competent (Ahmed et al., 2020). Many countries affected by civil unrest, social injustice, and war might benefit from teaching social and emotional learning in their schools. Socially and emotionally competent students grow up having the skills to communicate effectively, show empathy, and are more able to handle stressful situations in positive ways (Ahmed et al., 2020).

Research shows that schools that address their students' social and emotional learning needs tend to have a student population that shows growth in academics, a decrease in peer conflict issues, and a better overall school experience for their students (Durlak et al., 2011). Robust evidence demonstrates that children who participate in social and emotional learning (SEL) programs exhibit fewer disruptive behavior problems and better behavioral regulation post intervention than children in a comparison or control group (Strahan & Poteat, 2020). Another study done by Knight et al. (2019) found that when children display enhanced social and emotional skills in the classroom as a result of SEL intervention, it is possible that these enhanced competencies will reduce the likelihood that they will be retained in grade due to behavioral issues.

With all the obstacles and distractions facing teachers and students in education today, it is mind-boggling why social and emotional learning curricula or programs are not required in all schools across America. A lack of social and emotional competencies has been linked to youth violence worldwide (Ahmed et al., 2020; McCormick et al., 2019). Addressing children's social

and emotional learning needs in schools is even more paramount now than ever during our current social and political climate. Black Lives Matter, the 2020 presidential election, and protests in the wake of the killing of George Floyd amid the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic have all generated discussion about how the younger generations are processing the current events (Grossman & Duchesneau, 2021).

Researchers suggest SEL needs to be integral to education from preschool through high school. A meta-analytic study conducted by Durlak et al. (2011) concluded that students who participated in some type of social and emotional learning program at school were more emotionally stable and showed improvement in academic achievement. Managing thoughts, feelings, actions, and attitudes are all skills taught within the scheme of social and emotional learning. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, or CASEL (2017), SEL is the process through which children acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to (a) understand and manage emotions, (b) set and achieve positive goals, (c) feel and show empathy for others, (d) establish and maintain positive relationships, and (e) make responsible decisions. Students of all ages have missed several months of face-to-face social interactions with peers and teachers due to being on remote learning. Research conducted by Neth et al. (2020) tells us that children must grow and develop social and emotional skills to flourish academically and mentally. Schools are held accountable for the teaching and learning of students, but more and more emphasis is being put on what is the school's part in addressing non-academic issues like social and emotional learning.

Problem Statement

Over 46 million children suffer from traumatic events in the United States each year (Grossman & Duchesneau, 2021). Psychological trauma caused by exposure to alcohol, drugs,

crime, mental abuse, physical abuse, and neglect affects children negatively (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Both Flanagan and Rodriquez (2021) and Dowling et al. (2019) found that many of the negative consequences of trauma can be alleviated by fostering a positive school climate by addressing students' social and emotional needs. The whole child approach to education recognizes the interrelationships among all areas of development and designs school policies and practices to support them (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Schools today focus on academic learning and behavioral management but neglect the whole child's development (Barbetta et al., 2005). McCormick et al. (2015) stated that social and emotional learning programs focus on developing students mentally, emotionally, and socially to increase academic performance. Implementing an SEL program into a school's curriculum may help schools in their endeavors to educate the "whole child."   Currently, there is no social and emotional learning being taught at ABC Middle School.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine investigate whether participation in the Second Step Social and Emotional Learning Program (hereinafter referred to as Second Step) is related to 1) increased social and emotional functioning, 2) improved classroom and school behavior, and 3) increased academic performance.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to bring awareness to schools and school systems about the importance of addressing the social and emotional learning needs of their students. Addressing the needs can be done in many ways; however, implementing a social and emotional learning program is the strategy on which this study focuses. The school, the school's community, and all involved stakeholders will benefit from students' participating in any

intervention that helps students build social and emotional learning skills. Acquiring such skills will help students make better decisions, build positive relationships, and become more aware personally and socially. Presently, ABC Middle School does not have a research-based social and emotional learning program in place to address the social and emotional learning needs of its students.

This study will lay a foundation for other research on middle schools in rural areas in the southeast. In addition, surrounding schools and districts similar to ABC Middle School and ABC County can use this study to conduct their own research or use the results of this study to inform interventions at their schools. Also, schools with similar demographics in the area can collaborate with the teachers and administrators at ABC Middle School to discuss the benefits or negative impacts that the social and emotional learning program had on their students.

Research Questions

The following questions will guide this mixed-method study.

1. Is there a difference in how students feel about their classroom and school after participating in the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum?

2. Is there a difference in the number of office disciplinary referrals in middle school students after participating in the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum? $H1_\Theta$: There is no difference in the number of office disciplinary referrals of middle school students after participating in the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum.

3. Is there a difference in academic performance as measured by course grades and the MAP standardized assessment in middle school students after participating in the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum?

H1$_\Theta$: There is no difference in academic performance between middle school students after participating in the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum.

Theoretical Framework

The study drew on the concepts and definitions from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). According to the CASEL framework, SEL is defined as "the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (CASEL, 2017, para. 1). CASEL framed their work around results from a 213 school-based meta-analysis. Research done by Waters and Sroufe (1983) defines a competent individual as "one who is able to make use of environmental and personal resources to achieve a good developmental outcome" (p. 81). Individuals become competent through the experience they have by interacting with their environment and interrupting those interactions. The five core competencies of CASEL's social and emotional learning are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2017). All five competencies are integrated and have to be addressed if SEL is to be effective. This study examines the Second Step social-emotional learning intervention program, whose primary goal is to equip middle school students with the skills, knowledge, and mindsets that will help them successfully navigate adolescence (Ozsoy, 2016). All five core competencies of CASEL are addressed and implemented throughout the lessons presented in the Second Step program (Committee for Children, 2021). The theoretical framework will be explained in more detail in Chapter 2.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions apply.

Relationship skills: "The ability to cultivate and sustain healthy relationships with diverse individuals and groups and to communicate clearly for effective problem-solving; elements include communication, relationship-building, social engagement, and teamwork (CASEL, 2017, para 4).

Responsible decision-making: "The ability to make healthy, informed choices about behavior and social interactions based on social norms, safety concerns, ethical standards, and potential consequences for self and others; elements include identifying problems, analyzing situations, solving problems, evaluating, reflecting, and ethical responsibility (CASEL, 2017, para 5).

Self-Awareness: "Self-awareness consists of identifying one's emotions and thoughts and understanding how they influence behavior" (CASEL, 2017, para 6).

Self-Management: Self-management is "the ability to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations" (CASEL, 2017, para 7)

Social Awareness: Social Awareness is "the ability to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts" (CASEL, 2017, para 8).

Social-Emotional Learning: Social and emotional learning is "the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (CASEL, 2017, para 9).

Whole-Child Approach: The whole-child approach is a pedagogical method that inspires creativity, promotes imagination, instills compassion, awakens self-knowledge, enhances social skills, and improves emotional health in addition to focusing on academic progress (Yoder, 2014).

Research Methodology and Design

This mixed-methods study examined the effects of a semester-long Second Step on middle grades students' feelings about their classroom and school, their behavior office referrals, and their academic achievement. Descriptive statistics and paired-sample *t*-tests were used for testing the hypotheses of this study with the scientific approach and established procedures (Askarzai & Unhelkar, 2017)

The participants of this study were 7th-grade students who were enrolled in a health education course for the second semester at ABC Middle School. The academic grades, MAP standard assessment, and office referrals of these students were compared pre- to post-participation in the Second Step. Also, the students were administered a pre- and post- survey called *How I Feel About My Classroom and School.* At the end of the semester and the Second Step, five students were interviewed separately and asked to elaborate on their answers to the post survey. The program was taught by the certified health teacher at the school.

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

Every study is bounded by delimitations, limitations, and assumptions that clarify the researcher's thought process. Throughout the study and data collection processes, there may be instances where delimitations, limitations, and assumptions of the study must be revisited and adjusted to improve validity, authenticity, and fidelity in the study.

Delimitations

Delimitations aim to clarify the boundaries of the research combined with the narrowing of the research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Delimitations are boundaries set by the researcher. This study was limited to 7th-grade students. The researcher felt that including other grades in the study would include students with different grade-level experiences. The study was also limited to the 60 students enrolled in health education. Including the other grade level students would have been unmanageable when implementing the Second Step curriculum with fidelity. The study was limited to one middle school in the rural southeast. The findings and conclusions at the end of the study cannot be generalized to all middle school campuses. The data were collected only during the 2022-23 school year. The data sources of this study included administrative records from students, including academic and behavioral records. The pre- and post-survey results were collected.

Limitations

In a mixed-method research design, limitations are influences that a researcher cannot control and will not affect the outcome of any findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The sample was a limitation due to only one school being the focus of the study. There is only one middle school in the ABC school district, so a comparison with another middle school in the district was not possible. A small sample may make it difficult to determine if a particular outcome is a true finding.

Assumptions

The study was conducted under the following assumptions. The researcher assumed that the participants completed all the lessons in the social and emotional learning intervention,

Second Step. The study was also conducted under the assumption that the teachers taught every lesson with fidelity and adhered to the scope and sequence on the curriculum map.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter 2 contains a review of related literature. First, the theoretical framework is introduced. Second, a review of the literature is presented. The topics covered in the literature review include: (a) the history of social and emotional learning, (b) the definition and components of social and emotional learning, (c) how social and emotional learning relates to academic performance and behavior, (d) benefits of social and emotional learning, (e) the relevance of social and emotional learning today, and (f) funding for social and emotional programs in schools. Lastly, a few different social and emotional learning programs are discussed.

Chapter 3 contains a description of the methodology, design, data collection, and data analysis procedures, participants of the study, instruments, the role of the researcher, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 provides a detailed review of data analysis procedures, findings, and results. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the research discussion with a summary and conclusion of the overall study, followed by implications and recommendations for research and future practice.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review provides the reader with a theoretical framework of social and emotional learning in schools and the benefits of including this approach in the curriculum. First, a brief discussion of the history of social and emotional learning is presented. The researcher then examines funding sources that can support the implementation of SEL programs in schools. Next, a clear definition of SEL, along with an organized introduction of each of the five components of SEL, is provided (CASEL, 2017). Next, SEL's influence on student behavior and student academic performance is provided. Lastly, this review discusses teachers' perspectives and perceptions on implementing SEL in the classroom.

History of Social and Emotional Learning

Most people agree that maintaining a positive outlook on life and having healthy relationships with others is essential. In fact, being attuned to one's mental, social, and physical needs are necessary for living. According to Mygind et al. (2019), if a person does not meet their mental, social, and physical needs upfront, they will struggle with all parts of their life. Therefore, individuals must address these needs early and often throughout life.

Social and emotional learning is a topic that has been and continues to be heavily discussed in K-12 education. Although the coined usage of social and emotional learning is relatively new, the process can be dated back to ancient Egypt (Cohen, 1999). The actual term social and emotional learning was introduced to mainstream education during a student advocacy summit hosted by the Fetzer Institute (Greenberg et al., 2003). The goal was to discuss the lack of resources provided to schools to address students' needs. The CASEL foundation was founded shortly after the student advocacy summit (Greenberg et al., 2003). The CASEL foundation emerged as the leading support and resource institution for SEL. The CASEL foundation

researched different SEL programs and their effectiveness in addressing the five competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible making (CASEL, 2017).

Defining Social and Emotional Learning

Studies conclude that teaching students social and emotional learning skills benefit human development physically, mentally, and socially (Ahmed et al., 2020; McCormick et al., 2019). McCormick et al.'s (2019) study also examined the effects of SEL program intervention on special education students and retention rate of students. Social and emotional learning involves several different aspects of life about human social and emotional development. SEL involves acquiring the skills to effectively handle stress in daily life while building positive and healthy relationships with others in a personal and professional setting (Sande et al., 2019). Many definitions have been used to define what SEL is, and much research on SEL centers around the definition developed by CASEL. According to CASEL (2017, para. 1), "SEL is the process of managing emotions, identifying and achieving goals, communicating and developing relationships with others, making healthy decisions, and showing empathy." Children must develop these skills and strategies to help them grow and develop socially and emotionally. Being socially and emotionally competent is vital to any child's development. "Social and emotional competence measures the ability to understand, process, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of our lives" (Cohen, 2006, p 2). Social and emotional competence is the ability to communicate and interact effectively with others. A socially and emotionally competent individual is also capable of finding solutions to problems, self-motivated, and goal-oriented (Ahmed et al., 2020). According to Ahmed et al., students who exhibit the

11

aforementioned characteristics tend to succeed academically and develop into well-rounded adults.

Social competence skills like being empathetic, managing emotions, and effectively solving problems are skills that help students with making friends and being socially accepted by their peers. As mentioned earlier, showing empathy is a byproduct of a socially and emotionally aware person. Responding to someone else's feelings appropriately and understanding their emotions is empathy (Sande et al., 2019). Students who are not able to solve problems, handle their emotions, and are not empathic may fall victim to being bullied or becoming the bully (Sande et al., 2019)

Five Components of Social and Emotional Learning

The five components of SEL that will be addressed were selected based on the CASEL research. The five core competencies of CASEL's social and emotional learning are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2017). All five core competencies are integrated and must be addressed if SEL is to be effective. If addressed, individuals can make educated and wise decisions independently and are not easily influenced by external factors (Durlak et al., 2011). Educators encourage students to think on their own and make independent decisions. Teachers also teach students to seek assistance when it is necessary. SEL is a significant part of classroom interactions that students experience at all grade levels. Self-awareness consists of identifying one's emotions and thoughts and understanding how they influence behavior (CASEL, 2017). It also refers to an individual's self-confidence, self-efficacy, and ability to assess personal strengths and weaknesses (Zins & Elias, 2006). Self-management refers to the effective regulation of a person's emotions, actions, and beliefs (CASEL, 2017). Controlling impulses and delaying

gratification are areas encompassed within this competency and emotional regulation and impulse control (Buzgara & Giurgiuman, 2019). Social awareness includes understanding others' behavior, considering their perspective, and empathizing (CASEL, 2017). Social awareness skills are critical to the effectiveness of other social and emotional competencies, especially responsible decision-making, and relationships. Relationship skills include establishing and maintaining healthy relationships, communicating with others, working collaboratively, and handling stressful situations calmly (CASEL, 2017). Relationship skills involve social problem solving, specifically with personal relationships. Responsible decision-making involves making safe and respectful decisions about one's behavior and interactions with others (CASEL, 2017). As such, it includes skills in problem-solving and moral reasoning. Children with more persuasive skills in this area are typically more popular among their peers (Buzgara & Giurgiuman, 2019). These five core competencies of CASEL's SEL are the foundational areas of this research study.

Self-Awareness

Psychologists Wicklund and Duval developed a theory of self-awareness used in psychology (Feize & Faver, 2018). This theory states that self-awareness has two categories. When individuals look inward, the view is objective, and when the self-view is outward towards the environment, the view is subjective (Feize & Faver, 2018). This theory has been discussed and debated for years in psychology. This literature review uses a less complex definition of self-awareness as it relates to SEL. According to CASEL (2017, para. 6), self-awareness is "labeling and acknowledging one's feelings; assessing individual strengths; advocating for oneself." Being aware of oneself is key to having positive relationships with others. One must be consistent with how they interact with their environment and how their decisions affect the

things around them. Self-awareness is becoming aware of how one responds to things physically, mentally, and emotionally. If we are self-aware, we are better equipped to support and help others deal with their emotions (Hatton-Bowers et al., 2020). Being mindful is a vital part of being self-aware. Mindfulness is the ability to focus on what is happening at present without bias (Hatton-Bowers et al., 2020). Being mindful can help one make better decisions when stressful or complex situations arise. Mindfulness is the ability to step back and take a holistic assessment of the situation at hand. Self-compassion is another essential factor of self-awareness. Self-compassion is the ability to forgive oneself, self-reflect, and be aware of your strengths and weaknesses (Hatton-Bowers et al., 2020). Self-reflection is vital to learning from one's mistakes and making better choices moving forward. Taking time to self-reflect can help one grow spiritually, emotionally, and socially. All of these concepts put together will help individuals become more self-aware and mindful of their feelings.

Self-Management

CASEL (2017) defined self-management as a person's ability to effectively regulate emotions, actions, and beliefs (CASEL, 2017). According to Zhu and Doo (2021), students who can self-manage also have the ability to self-motivate and are aware of their actions. Accepting constructive criticism and feedback is also a characteristic of self-management (Lorig & Holman, 2003). Students who take responsibility for themselves and depend less on others to help them navigate life are seen as more mature. These students will be able to persevere through the trials and tribulations of adolescence (Zhu & Doo, 2021). Controlling emotions and the way one responds to different situations is self-management (CASEL, 2017). Students experience many stressful situations at school, at home, and in the community. Self-managing is vital in all three of these settings. Three components of self-management, according to Bravo et al. (2020),

are (a) being able to complete a specific task independently and recognize appropriate and inappropriate behavior, (b) the ability to self-monitor, and (c) the ability to self-reward. Individuals who are taught these components of self-management and exhibit the qualities tend to be successful when faced with adversities. In a classroom setting, students who submit assignments on time, follow directions, and stay on task are typically considered good self-managers (Grady & Gough, 2014). These students require little to no supervision from their teachers when given independent assignments on which to work. On the other hand, students who fight, are disruptive or speak out of turn typically struggle with self-management.

Developing good self-management skills can help a person throughout life. Several short and long-term benefits are related to early self-management skill development. A study on PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) concluded that pre-K students who develop self-management skills early in life continued to show benefits into early adulthood (Grady & Gough, 2014). More studies are needed to see the correlation between older students and the long-term initial introduction to self-management skills. However, a quasi-experimental study by Donahue-Keegan et al. (2019) did show an increase in the GPA of students who exhibited pre-tested self-management skill development.

Social Awareness

Being empathic and showing concern for others, especially ones from different cultures, is known as social awareness (Stevenson & Markowitz, 2019). Acting and responding in social situations responsibly and empathetically is a part of social awareness. Students from many diverse backgrounds interact daily in and out of the classroom. Students who struggle with social awareness are more likely to experience difficulties seeing things from another perspective, especially if it involves students from another culture other than theirs (Stevenson & Markowitz,

2019). Students need to develop several skills to become socially aware. These researchers described four skills: perspective-taking, empathy, appreciating diversity, and respect for others. One of the fundamental skills of social awareness is perspective taking. It is defined as seeing the situation from a perspective other than one's own. Perspective-taking will help students become more socially aware because they will share thoughts and ideas with their classmates and friends and become aware that all households may not be governed like theirs (McKown, 2019). Empathy is a skill that involves sharing and understanding the feelings and emotions of others. Being empathic is a skill that is important for children to develop and for adults as well. People use a common phrase when they speak about showing empathy: "being on the other side looking in" and seeing how the situation may affect the person. Being empathic toward a person does not necessarily mean that one agrees with them, but more so that one understands why they feel the way they do (McKown, 2019).

Diversity is all around us, and in this social media age, students can come in contact with people from around the world with just a click of a button. Appreciating diversity and diverse communities is a crucial aspect of social awareness. Social justice is a popular term used today, which involves showing equal justice to people of all backgrounds and races. Celebrating diversity in schools will help students understand that everyone should be treated fairly and with respect regardless of race, sexual orientation, culture, or beliefs. Having respect for others is not only a core concept of social awareness but also for social-emotional learning as a whole (Stevenson & Markowitz, 2019). Respecting others' opinions, privacy, and culture will open up many others for people to interact positively and collaboratively in school and the community. Respect for others is the golden rule of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Studies show that students who exhibit social awareness are more successful academically,

communicate well, are less aggressive, and develop more positive relationships with their peers and family members (Stevenson & Markowitz, 2019).

Relationship Skills

As stated in this paper, relationship skills refer to establishing and maintaining healthy relationships, communicating with others, working collaboratively, and handling stressful situations calmly (CASEL, 2017). According to Ferreira et al. (2020), communicating clearly, listening well, cooperating with others, resisting inappropriate social pressures, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed are skills that individuals need to develop or process to develop healthy relationships. Good relationship skills are the foundation for positive interactions and communication with peers and adults at school and at home. In addition, relationship skills are a must to build connections with people from different races, cultures, and age groups (CASEL, 2017). Positive relationships help people grow and become productive members of a global society. However, having negative relationships can yield positive results if the individual can learn from their mistakes. Some positive benefits of students developing relationship skills in school are increased academic achievement, school attendance improvements, self-motivation, and increased self-awareness (Ferreira et al., 2020).

Responsible Decision-Making

Making decisions is a normal part of life. That said, making sure that one makes a responsible decision is even more critical. Making bad decisions can end up costing a person their freedom or life. CASEL's fifth identified competency is responsible decision-making. This competency involves the ability of an individual to make sound, healthy, and thoughtful decisions when interacting with others and themselves (CASEL, 2017). Responsible decision-making is a skill that comes easier to some than others. According to Newcomb et al. (1993), the

more popular students develop healthy decision-making skills, some more than others, because of their social persuasive skill set. During the middle-school-age years, peer pressure comes into play with most students' decisions. Decisions related to drug usage, personal relationships, and future endeavors come into play. Students who have developed good decision-making skills will handle these decisions with careful thought and consideration (Newcomb et al., 1993). Higher academic performance, less stress, and lower anxiety levels are also linked to students who are responsible decision-makers. Students can communicate much misinformation about alcohol, sex, and violence. That is why schools need curricula or programs that help students develop healthy decision-making skills (Newcomb et al., 1993).

Social and Emotional Learning and Student Behavior

Student behavior plays an essential role in the daily operation of a school. Good behavior can help with the regular flow of the class, and off-task behavior can distract other students and the teacher. Scarpaci (2006) stated that poor behavior also harms other students in academics and extracurricular activities. A study found that students' poor behavior may influence other students to skip school or get into altercations (Scarpaci, 2006). A study on implementing an SEL program in schools shows an increase in student social skills and a decrease in discipline issues (Durlak et al., 2011). Findings also indicated that compared to students who do not participate in an SEL program, students demonstrated improved social behaviors, increased self-awareness, and better academic performance (Scarpaci, 2006). Other research on SEL program effectiveness did not support the program's positive effects on students. One trial study investigating the impact of different standard SEL programs used by many schools nationwide found that these programs resulted in no significant improvements in students' behavior or school climate (Social and Character Development Research Consortium, 2010). Many believe that

addressing SEL will help decrease the number of behavioral problems in the classroom, as stated previously, thus keeping students and teachers on track, and focused on the class. Students need to participate in an SEL program in and out of school. Daily attendance and classroom engagement also improved when students participated in SEL (Durlak et al., 2011). These students were more sociable and less likely to bully others or experiment with drugs or alcohol, according to Durlak et al. (2011). A study done by Espelage and Colbert (2016) showed that students with disabilities who participated in SEL showed an increased awareness to intervene in bullying situations at school compared to their peers who did not participate in the program. Research reviewed showed mixed results for SEL programs. More research is needed on the topic related to the influence on student behavior.

Social and Emotional Learning and Academic Performance

A study on SEL and its effect on student achievement has yielded positive results on academic performance (Aidman & Price, 2018). Students are less stressed, less depressed, and more motivated when their social-emotional needs are addressed. Children who come to school and know how to deal with the roller coaster of emotions and feelings associated with adolescence are more prepared to focus more on their studies. According to Armstrong (2006), students in middle school need to be taught in an environment that can help them work their way through puberty by assisting them to develop skills that grow them intellectually, socially, and emotionally. Getting students to focus on academics when struggling mentally and socially in school is hard. A meta-analysis of research on comprehensive and effective implementation of SEL is related to increased students' "social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior and academic performance" (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 405).

According to Zins et al. (2007), once a school acknowledges that teaching SEL is essential, they will see academic performance improvements. Schools are places where many social interactions happen daily. With academics being the primary focus of education, the social-emotional aspect of growth also has to be addressed. Ignoring students' social-emotional needs can impede their learning, leading to decreased academic performance (Zins et al., 2007). Adelman and Taylor (2000) stated that schools that do not address SEL would inevitably fall short of achieving their primary goal of educating students. A study by Durlak et al. (2011) showed an 11-percentile increase in student academic performance. A related study by Espelage and Colbert (2016), conducted on students with disabilities, showed a half-grade increase in reports when the students participated in SEL. A 30-week pre-and post-test quasi-experiment also yielded increased year-end grades for students participating in SEL (Brackett et al., 2012).

Teachers' Perceptions of SEL in the Classroom

According to Durlak and Weissberg (2011), "fostering young people's personal and social development should be a fundamental focus of our educational institutions" (p. 3). Educators can positively impact the whole child's social and emotional development by addressing their curriculum and student age group's academic standards. Teachers are the driving force behind any initiative or program implemented in a school. SEL is essential to children's development; arguably, it is one of the most critical skills to be taught in schools (Ahrari, 2019). A study by Ahrari in a suburban school district in the Northeast concluded that teachers felt that teaching SEL in their school benefited students. However, the teachers thought more professional development was needed to effectively implement SEL school wide (Ahrari, 2019). Elementary school teachers are more likely than secondary teachers to be more aware of the importance of teaching SEL in schools (Cohen, 2006). Teacher professional development in SEL is as

important as professional development in other academic areas. A study conducted by Esen-Aygun and Sahin-Taskin (2017) reported that many teachers have never even heard about SEL. Even though teachers addressed the social-emotional behaviors in their class, it was done haphazardly. No research-based curriculum was used; teachers just tried to instill self-confidence in their students. Once teachers were introduced to the SEL program and provided support, most of the teachers in the study wanted to teach the program (Esen-Aygun & Sahin-Taskin, 2017). Many new teachers entering the profession receive social-emotional training during their degree programs (Zins et al., 2007). Higher education has begun to address the issue of SEL in teacher preparation programs. Regardless of the number of years in education the teacher may have, they all need support and resources when teaching SEL. If teacher buy-in is low, SEL programs are less successful (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Students spend a large portion of their day in school or school-related activities. Therefore, teachers should take advantage of this time and help students grow socially and emotionally and promote well-being and positive behavior. Teachers believe that teaching students social and emotional learning skills will improve their attitude toward schools and increase individual student learning (Ahmed & Abdullah, 2020).

Benefits of Social and Emotional Learning

Researchers have found many short-term and long-term benefits for individuals participating in social and emotional learning programs (Carpio de los Pinos et al., 2020). In general, students who participate in these programs show a stronger ability to handle stress, build positive relationships with others, improve school behavior, and show some increase in attendance and academics (Coelho & Sousa, 2018). A 2011 meta-analysis conducted by Durlak et al. (2011) yielded the following statistics and also found that students participating in SEL

programs showed significant gains in social-emotional skills, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as academic achievement.

• 11% gain in overall academic achievement

• 23% improvement in social-emotional skills

• 9% improvement in attitudes about self, others, and school

• 9% improvement in school and classroom behavior

• 9% decrease in conduct problems, such as disruptive classroom behavior and aggression.

All of these general benefits can be observed in grades K-12. In addition, many post-secondary institutions and companies have shown that they have noticed some of the same benefits as the employees who participated in the school's social and emotional learning programs (Fairless et al., 2021). Socially and emotionally competent individuals are also advanced problem solvers, have high self-esteem, are culturally competent, and are confident in their ability to reason (Abali & Yazici, 2020). These skills will help most students be successful in school, work, and personal life.

Some students' first interaction with individuals outside of the immediate family is when they enter preschool or primary school (Arikan, 2020). Many of these children are still learning to speak and communicate simple requests, let alone begin to verbalize independent thoughts and sentences (Coelho & Sousa, 2018). Introducing children to social and emotional learning in the primary grades increases the well-being of developing young children. Social skills are the most essential skills that primary students can learn (Abali & Yazici, 2020). Young children with poor motor skills, learning disabilities, and inadequate phonemic language skills will benefit from social and emotional learning programs (Coelho & Sousa, 2018). Communicating with friends,

working together in cooperative groups, establishing personal boundaries, and developing simple problem-solving skills are a part of the daily life of primary school children. Young children learn these skills by observing and mimicking how they see their peers, teachers, and parents interact. Socialization is a result of observation (Abali & Yazici, 2020). Therefore, observing positive adult role models for primary school children is vital. Teaching social and emotional learning skills in the pre-K and primary grades will help set the foundation for a child to develop properly in a healthy way (Abali & Yazici, 2020).

Middle and high school students benefit from being introduced to and taught social and emotional learning skills. During this period, children develop personal relationships, some of which will last a lifetime (Arikan, 2020). Students deprived of developing social and emotional learning skills tend to struggle socially during these years of development (Arikan, 2020). Middle and high school students also experience heightened peer pressure and self-esteem issues (Sande et al., 2019). Being self and socially aware, building positive relationships, making healthy decisions, and being able to self-manage all come into play during adolescence. (CASEL, 2017). Showing social and individual responsibility during the teenage years shows that the students have grown emotionally and can show empathy and compassion for their feelings and others (Arikan, 2020). Drugs and sex are two of the most damaging experiences that a teenager goes through at this time in their life. Cohen (2006) stated that "emotional intelligence predicts success in academic achievement, employment, marriage, and physical health" (p.13). Social and emotional learning teaches students how to handle pressure, make educated decisions about these two issues, and many more. As teens' bodies, mental states, and social interactions begin to fine-tune themselves in middle and high school, students still must remain focused on performing well academically in class (Sande et al., 2019). Incorporating social and emotional

learning into a school's curriculum helps develop self-management skills that will assist them in juggling all pressures and stresses they encounter daily (Arikan, 2020).

High school students develop social skills that will help them decide to start dating, apply for a job, and apply for colleges. In addition, emotional skills taught in SEL programs assist high school students in dealing with breakups, the loss of a friend, and the disappointment of not doing well academically. The social and emotional learning benefits taught in pre-K through 12th grade are endless. SEL has improved student engagement, motivation, and academic success (Durlak et al., 2011). These skills are needed as students matriculate from high school into the workforce, college, or the military after graduation.

Schools provide the space and environment for all students to grow and learn socially, emotionally, and academically. Research shows that students perform better and learn more in a supportive learning environment (Sande et al., 2019). Schools that provide SEL programs are consciously trying to create a learning environment where students can express themselves openly without feeling judged negatively (Arikan, 2020). Inclusivity is a vital component of social and emotional learning. Whether they have an SEL program, they should be a primary focus of every school, making students feel welcomed and included in the learning process regardless of ethnic background, gender identification, or socioeconomic status (Schnittka Hoskins, 2021). According to Bond (2020), results from meta-analyses done by Payton and colleagues and Taylor, Oberle, and colleagues linked an increase in positive student academic performance to SEL.

Relevance of SEL Today

Over the past two years, the world as we know it has changed drastically. Social interactions are at an all-time low due to the growing concern about the spread of the Covid-19

virus. Virtual learning was the educational setting for a large portion of K-12 students for the 2020-2021 school year (Bond, 2020). Most students did peer interaction and collaboration via a computer screen, and education transitioned from being in a brick and mortar building to Zoom and Google Meets classrooms across the country (Bond, 2020). Sadly, the students who were already behind academically were the ones who were vulnerable to falling further and further behind as the world switched to virtual learning (Palacios & Lemberger, 2019). Access to the internet, a laptop, and an adult being home to monitor the learning process are things that are not typically present in the house of lower socioeconomic families. The academic achievement gap widened between races, sex, and class during Covid-19 (Palacios & Lemberger, 2019). SEL is needed now more than ever as students have taken nearly 18 months off of being in a regular classroom and are beginning to transition back to the school building. Many primary-age students are starting second grade, and the fall of 2022 was their first-time attending school with other students. This experience alone can traumatize young and older students (Bond, 2020). Teachers need to be equipped with the necessary skills and lessons to teach students how to cope with the traumatic events that have taken place in their lives and the lives of many of their loved ones over the past two years. Social and emotional learning skills will help students deal with social anxiety issues from returning to school (Bond, 2020). Self-management skills taught through SEL programs at school benefits students possibly having self-esteem problems or peer conflict (CASEL, 2017). During the past two years, more and more emphasis and pressure have been put on policymakers and school administration to put interventions in place to care for our children's increasing emotional and social instability (Bond, 2020). Many students are dealing with the trauma experienced during this global pandemic, and it will be up to the educators of this world to help students make sense of it all, today and in the future.

Not everyone advocates for social and emotional learning being a focus in schools. As schools shift from focusing solely on academics, some fear that this will take the accountability off the academic part of schooling (Palacios & Lemberger, 2019). According to Bond (2020), many teachers argue that in a system that evaluates teachers based on standardized test scores, they are reluctant to spend instructional time on anything other than core academic concepts.

Funding SEL Programs in Schools

Nearly every pre-K program in the United States has implemented some type of SEL program into its curriculum (Aidman & Price, 2018). In addition, several states have passed provisions requiring their educational system to develop a plan of action to address the students' social and emotional learning needs attending their schools. According to Grant et al. (2017), with the enactment of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the federal government allows states to use federal funds to address students' emotional and social well-being. ESSA provided three different categories to spend funds under to support school-based SEL interventions and programs: Title I: Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged, Title II: Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers, Principals, or Other School Leaders, Title IV: 21st-Century Schools (Young et al., 2017). Unfortunately, many SEL programs present in most states are not comprehensive or focused enough to meet the needs of most students. Kansas, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Illinois are the only states that have adapted systemically and developmentally-sound SEL standards for the k-12 educational system (Aidman & Price, 2018).

ESSA identified three tiers that SEL programs can fall under to utilize federal funding. The three tiers are evidenced-based interventions: Tier I (strong), Tier II (moderate), and Tier III (promising). An additional Tier IV level is also identified under the tiers, allowing states and

districts to provide a rationale for any intervention that is not evidence-based (Young et al., 2017). According to Grant et al. (2017), there is an overwhelming concern about the importance of addressing SEL at all grade levels. Some schools seek to understand social and emotional learning, while others implement research-based SEL programs into their daily curriculum to address individual student needs (McCray, 2021).

According to a press release by the U. S. Department of Education (2021), Georgia schools received over $400 million in federal funds from the K-12 Coronavirus, Aid, Relief & Economic Security (CARES) Act to address learning loss and students' social and emotional needs. School districts can utilize these federal funds to address any learning loss they believe occurred due to the pandemic. Many school districts across the state are making social and emotional learning a top priority this fall. Some school districts use these funds to purchase social and emotional learning curricula like Second Step to help educators address SEL needs (Grant et al., 2017). In a recent article published in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, the Atlanta Public School System plans to spend over $300,000 on a program that will assess how their students are doing mentally when they return to school this fall (McCray, 2021). Other school districts use CARES Act funds to hire additional social workers, school behavior specialists, or school psychiatrists to work with students individually.

Different Social and Emotional Learning Programs

There are several SEL programs on the market today. Some are research-based and are implemented in many schools across the country. Others are new programs that are not valid and reliable and are still in the early research stages. Strong Kids, Second Step, and PATHS are more widely used evidence-based programs.

Strong Kids is an SEL program that focuses on helping children without internalizing stresses and problems (Neth et al., 2020). Strong Kids can be implemented in grades K-12. However, the lessons and assessments are ideal for primary and secondary grade levels. Lessons come ready-made and are teacher and student friendly. "The program teaches students skills in five categories: (a) learning to create strong attachments early in life, (b) gaining age-appropriate skills, (c) having experiences that promote healthy well-being, (d) feeling they control their fate, and (e) learning to deal with stress in healthy ways. The Strong Kids program consists of 12 lessons, each lasting approximately 50 minutes." (Neth et al., 2020, p. 3).

PATHS, Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies, is another widely implemented social and emotional learning program. The program focuses on reducing aggressive actions and reactions to social and personal situations in the classroom while simultaneously continuing the learning process (Kusche & Greenberg, 1993). The PATHS curriculum is a program that yields better results when implemented for multiple years in different grade levels. Students are engaged in age-appropriate activities taught by the teacher or a counselor. Improvements in emotional suffering, happiness, and healthy relationships are a few of the benefits schools that have used the PATHS curriculum to address their social and emotional learning needs have reported (Humphrey et al., 2016).

Second Step is another researched-based SEL program that is used in many schools. Second Step can be taught in the classroom by teachers in grades K-8. The curriculum for Second Step is grade-level specific, which helps with classroom discussion (Ozsoy, 2016). According to Ozsoy (2016):

It is designed to reduce impulsive, high-risk, and aggressive behaviors and increase children's social competence and other protective factors. The program builds on

28

cognitive-behavioral intervention models integrated with social learning theory, empathy

research, and social information-processing research. It is intended to teach children to

identify and understand their own and others' emotions, choose positive goals, and

successfully manage reactions when emotionally aroused. (p. 27)

Second Step helps students achieve a high level of social and emotional competence by teaching

adolescents ways to cope with challenges, develop positive relationships, and create critical

thinking skills they need to succeed socially and academically (Committee for Children, 2021).

According to Committee for Children (2021), the maker of Second Step:

SEL can help children and adults navigate differences, appreciate one another's

perspectives, and act with empathy and compassion in their day-to-today lives.

Committee for Children also believes SEL can be leveraged to speak to children's

cultural assets, help educators examine their policies and practices through an equity lens,

and elevate the voices of those who have historically been silenced. (p. 2)

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This mixed-methods study examined the effects of a semester-long Second Step Social and Emotional Learning Program on middle grades students' feelings about their classroom and school, their behavior office referrals, and their academic achievement. I selected to study these outcomes because past research studies provided evidence that students participating in SEL programs showed significant gains in (a) overall academic achievement, (b) social and emotional skills, (c) attitudes about self, others, and school, (d) improvement in school and classroom behavior, and (e) a decrease in conduct problems, such as disruptive classroom behavior and aggression (Durlak et al., 2011).

In the first stage of this study, participants filled out a pre and post survey that gauged their feelings about their classroom and school before and after the Second Step intervention. In addition, the participants' academic records and behavior office referral data were collected and compared before and after the same intervention. In the second stage of study, in-depth, follow-up, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five students who were chronic behavior issues to further explore how the Second Step impacted student emotions, behaviors, and achievement.

Study Participants

Sixty 7th grade students, ages 11 through 13, were asked to participate in this study. These students attended the ABC Middle School, a rural Title I school with 100% of its students receiving free or reduced lunch. The students were enrolled in a Health Education course that lasted for one semester. The Second Step program was part of the required curriculum for the second semester of the course. Among the 60 students, 37 were male students and 23 were

female students. In addition, 72% were Black, 25% were White, 2% were Hispanic, and less than 1% were Asian.

Protection of Participants

All the students enrolled in the Health education course received the Second Step as part of the required curriculum. All 60 of the students enrolled in the health class parents gave consent for them to participate in the program. The participants completed a pre and post survey via an online platform. Each participant was assigned a unique number so that their pre and post survey results as well as archival data (grades, scores, and behavior referrals) could be matched before and after the Second Step. However, participants' identities were kept confidential, and the research data could not be linked to individual students. Similarly, each of the five students who were selected for the follow-up interview was assigned a unique number, and pseudonyms were used in future reports to keep their identities confidential. The teacher of the Health education course did not have access to the survey, interview, or archival data.

The Intervention

Second Step is the social and emotional intervention used in this study. It is a researched-based SEL program developed for primary, elementary, and middle schools. The program's objective is to strengthen students' social and emotional learning skills as they relate to (a) self-awareness, (b) self-management, (c) social awareness, (d) decision-making, and (e) relationship building. Each lesson consists of an information presentation, a video, an engaging activity, and a review activity. The health teacher taught a lesson per week for 15 consecutive weeks. Each lesson lasted between 25-45 minutes.

Outcome Variables

- **Feelings about the classroom and school**. The 23-item *How I feel about My Classroom and School* questionnaire (CASEL, 2019, Appendix D), written on linear numerical scales with options ranging from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree), was used to measure the participants' feelings about their classroom and school before and after the implementation of the Second Step.

- **Academic achievement.** Participants' academic achievement was determined from two sources: (a) the letter grades (A [90-100], B [80-89], C [70-79], D [below 70]) in four major content areas (i.e., English, Math, Science, and Social Studies), and (b) the standardized assessment scores on the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) benchmark tests. Academic grades and standardized assessment scores at the end of the first semester (i.e., before the Second Step) and at the end of the second semester of the 7th grade (i.e., after the Second Step) were collected and compared against each other.

- **Office referrals**. An office referral means when a student is sent to the school's office for any disciplinary infraction. Both the total number of referrals and the types of referrals were recorded. Referrals occurred during the first semester (i.e., before Second Step) and during the second semester of the 7th grade (i.e., during and after the Second Step program) were collected and compared against each other.

Data Collection

To answer research question #1, "Is there a difference in how students feel about their classroom and school after participating in the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum?", I administered the "How I feel about My Classroom and School" questionnaire to the sixty 7th grade students at the beginning of the spring semester of 2023 before Second Step was implemented and then at the end of the same semester after Second Step was completed.

Following the post survey, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured, individual interviews with five selected 7th grade students who had chronic behavior problems to further probe their feelings about the classroom and school by asking them to elaborate on their responses to the survey questions before and after Second Step. These five students are students who had multiple office referrals for disrespect to staff, defiance to staff, inappropriate physical contact with other students, and at least one incident of fighting. Three of the five students were male and two were female. Four students were Black, and one student was white. The purpose of the follow-up interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of (a) the targeted students' reactions and feedback to Second Step, and (b) the mechanisms through which the program influenced the participants' attitudes, emotions, achievement, and behavior.

To answer research question #2, "What is the difference in the number of office disciplinary referrals in middle school students before and after participation in the Second Step Program?", the total number of office referrals and types of referrals were collected from all the participants at the end of the first and second semesters of the 7th grade. The information about office referrals was obtained from Educators' Handbook on the student information system used by the ABC Middle School. In addition, a common discipline matrix was used by all the teachers in the school to determine what was considered an office referral offense versus a teacher handled offense.

To answer research question #3, "What is the difference in middle school students' academic performance, as measured by course grades and standardized assessments, before and after participation in the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum?", students' academic grades and their scores on the MAP standardized assessments were obtained from Infinite Campus, the student information system used by the ABC Middle School. Teachers at

the ABC Middle School utilized common planning and common assessment. Teachers had common grading procedures that they followed.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and paired-sample *t*-tests were used to analyze the pre- and post-survey results. The total score of the survey was compared.

In addition, office referral data at the end of the first and second semesters were summarized using descriptive statistics. The increasing and decreasing trends, as well as the patterns for the types of referrals, were determined based on summarized data.

Descriptive statistics and paired-sample *t*-tests were also used to compare participants' scores on the MAP standardized assessments at the end of the first semester and at the end of the second semester. The Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality were used to compare students' letter grades in each of the four major content areas at the end of the first semester and at the end of the second semester. Since letter grades are ordinal data and non-normally distributed, this non-parametric paired-sample test is more appropriate in the case of comparing letter grades. Finally, I transcribed the interview data. The initial rounds of coding relied on the grounded theory approach or open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As analysis continued, initial codes that shared similar attributes were grouped together into themes or categories. Although I held rough hypotheses entering this study based on our review of the relevant literature, the coding categories were induced from the data.

The Role of the Researcher

In the first stage of this research, my role as the researcher was independent of the actions of the participants. In particular, Second Step was taught by the Health Education teacher, who assisted in the collection of the pre and post survey data. In addition, the researcher did not observe and was not involved in any aspect of Second Step other than sourcing, vetting, and orienting research participants. Furthermore, the assistant principals handled the behavior

referrals. My role in this stage of the research was to perform a primary analysis of the survey data and a secondary analysis of the participants' archival data, including achievement and behavior referral data.

In the second and interview stage of this study, I was the human instrument of data collection. However, my role is mostly etic, or an objective viewer, because as explained earlier, I was not directly involved in the implementation of Second Step. However, as a responsible researcher, I kept a research journal to help me constantly reflect on how my personal beliefs, expectations, and assumptions during the research process might have influenced my interpretations of the research findings. I needed to be especially cognizant of (a) my hope, as both the researcher of this study and the school's principal, to eventually be able to use Second Step as a schoolwide intervention program to help students build the necessary SEL skills to succeed in life, and (b) how my hope might potentially introduce biases into the research process.

Ethical Considerations

There were several ethical considerations to keep in mind during the study. First, although this study involved minimal risks, if any participants exhibited adverse reactions from participating in the study, they were supposed to be removed immediately. Second, if the intervention showed positive results, it would be administered to all the grades 6-8 students enrolled in the Health Education course at the ABC Middle School. Third, students might feel obligated to participate in this study due to my role as the principal and the researcher. Therefore, it was important to secure parent consent and be clear that participation in this study is voluntary. There were no adverse reactions experienced by any of the students who participated in the program. Also, no students were removed from participating in the program.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

This mixed-methods study considered how a semester-long Second Step Social and Emotional Learning Program affected middle school students' feelings about their classroom and school, behavior office referrals, and academic achievement. As a result, the researcher explored whether involvement in Second Step was associated with: (a) improved social and emotional functioning, (b) improved classroom and school behavior, and (c) improved academic performance. The purpose of this study was to raise awareness among schools and educational systems about the necessity of addressing their students' social and emotional learning needs. Addressing the needs could be accomplished in a variety of ways; however, the technique on which this study focused was the implementation of a social and emotional learning program.

The mixed-method study was directed by the research questions listed below.

RQ 1: Was there a difference in how students feel about their classroom and school after participating in the Second Step program?

RQ 2: Was there a difference in the number of office disciplinary referrals in middle school students after participating in the Second Step program?

RQ 3: Was there a difference in academic performance as measured by course grades and the MAP standardized assessment in middle school students after participating in the Second Step program?

The results of this study are reported below according to the research questions. The quantitative research findings, such as paired-sample *t*-tests are reported first, followed by qualitative findings based on in-depth follow-up interviews with five students.

Quantitative Results and Findings

Test of Assumptions

The study sought to determine whether participation in Second Step had a relationship with improved social and emotional functioning, classroom and school behavior, or successful academic performance. After participating in the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum (pre- and post-survey design), the study tested three main research questions: Whether there was a difference in how students felt about their classroom and school (SEL), whether there was a difference in the number of office disciplinary referrals in middle school students, and whether there was a difference in academic performance as measured by course grades and the MAP standardized test. To determine whether there was a difference in SEL, disciplinary referrals, and academic achievement before and after a 15-week SEL intervention, a dependent paired t-test analysis was used.

In order for the dependent paired t-test analysis to give valid findings, the data must always meet certain assumptions. Even though the paired t-test is extremely robust, it is generally a good practice to assess the quality of the results by evaluating the degree of deviation from these assumptions. The two assumptions investigated were: (a) there should be no major outliers in the differences between the two related groups, and (b) the distribution of the differences in the dependent variables should be generally normally distributed.

A Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was performed (Table 1) for the differences in scores of dependent variables in the study under the assumption of normality. The null hypothesis of the Shapiro-Wilk test is that the sample was drawn from a normal distribution. The test findings showed that four of the five dependent variables had p-values larger than .05, meaning that the

null hypothesis was accepted. This meant that, except for differences in discipline scores, all other dependent variables were normally distributed.

Table 1

Shapiro-Wilk Tests of Normality

	Statistic	*df*	*p*
Difference in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)	.987	60	.706
Difference in Attendance	.987	60	.677
Difference in Class Grades	.982	60	.410
Differences in Discipline	.948	60	.005
Difference in Standardized Tests	.989	60	.780

The *p*-value for the differences in discipline scores was .005, indicating that the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted; the data did not have a normal distribution. The assumption of normalcy is critical for the validity of the results when doing a t-test. In practice, however, the *t*-test is frequently seen as robust to violations of normality, particularly when the sample size is large (Kim & Park, 2019). Even if the data are not exactly normal, the *t*-test can still yield reasonably reliable results if the sample size is big (usually, *n* > 30 is considered a sufficient sample size).

The final assumption concerning outliers was evaluated visually using box plots (Figure 1), and the results revealed that some outliers were discovered in four of the five dependent variables. Outliers in box plots were data points that were positioned far apart from the rest of the data and were shown as isolated points beyond the "whiskers" of the box plot. No outliers were found on the standardized test scores. The outliers, on the other hand, were few and varied from one to three data points. The study then moved on to the outliers, and as with violations of normality, larger sample sizes can improve the t-test's resilience to outlier influence (Widerberg,

2019). Larger samples have a lower impact on overall results when extreme values are present. Outliers exist in the data and can indicate genuine, extreme findings in the population. Outlier removal may result in an incomplete and skewed depiction of the underlying data distribution (Gress et al., 2018).

Figure 1

Box Plots Showing Distribution of Data
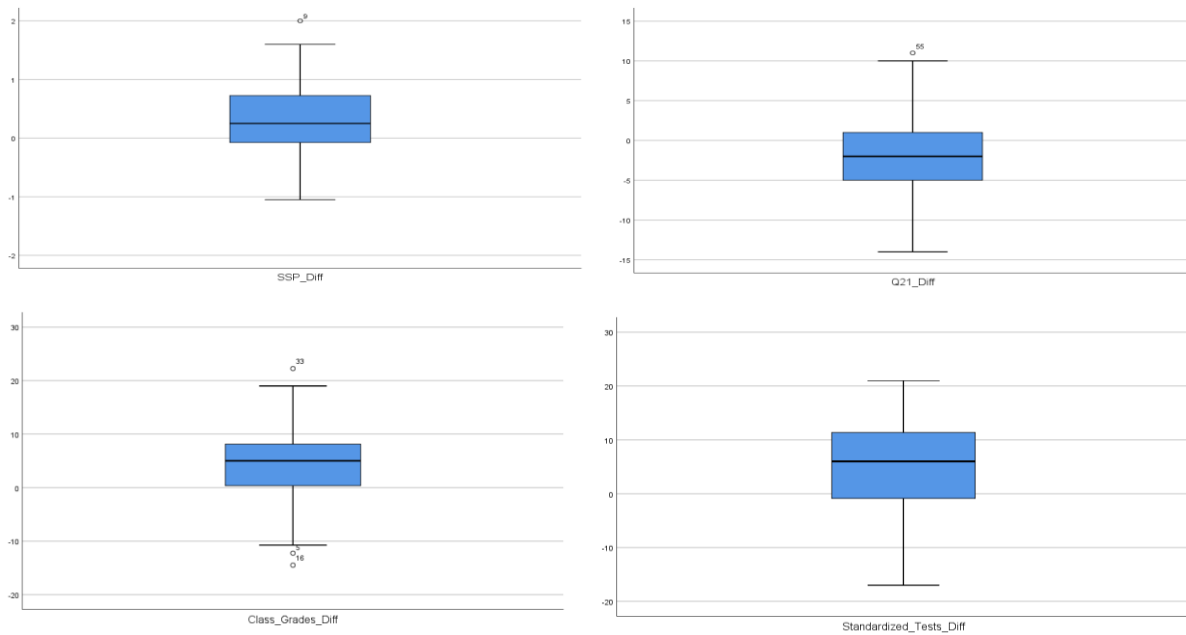
Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics are summarized in Table 2, including the mean, standard deviation, as well as skewness and kurtosis.

Research Question 1

The first study question sought to ascertain whether there was a difference in how students perceived their classroom and school after completing the Second Step social and emotional learning program. Preliminary investigations were performed to see whether the

assumptions of the presence of substantial outliers and data normality were met; no serious

violations were discovered. A paired samples *t*-test was conducted to determine the effect of

participating in the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum on how students felt

about their classroom and school. The results indicated a significant difference between how

students felt about their classroom and school before training (*M* = 3.439; *SD* = .516) and how

students felt about their classroom and school after training (*M* =3.777; *SD* = .552); *t*(59) = -

4.437, *p* < .001. Table 3 summarizes the results. The pretest mean of 3.439 increases to a post

mean of 3.777 concluded that the students' perceptions of their classroom and school changed

not agreeing or disagreeing to more of agreeing on the Likert scale. The students were not

indecisive or straddling the fence. The results of this study cannot be generalized or assumed to

produce the same results in a different setting or population.

Table 2

Descriptive Analysis

The Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)		*n*	Min	Max	*M*	*SD*	Mdn	Skew	Kurt
	Pre	60	2.450	4.650	3.439	.516	3.450	.321	-.489
	Post	60	2.750	4.850	3.777	.552	3.700	.129	-.782
	Total	*120*	*2.450*	*4.850*	*3.608*	*.559*	*3.589*	*.242*	*-.635*
Class Grade									
	Pre	60	50.50	91.75	74.585	9.851	74.750	-.244	-.440
	Post	60	61.50	90.25	79.141	5.714	79.500	-.589	.720
	Total	*120*	*50.50*	*91.75*	*76.863*	*8.343*	*78.000*	*-.670*	*.380*
Attendance									
	Pre	60	.000	21.00	7.423	5.664	7.000	.724	-.402
	Post	60	.000	27.00	5.197	5.416	3.000	1.642	3.083
	Total	*120*	*.000*	*27.00*	*6.310*	*5.633*	*4.500*	*1.100*	*.736*
Discipline									
	Pre	60	.400	7.600	2.282	1.938	1.400	1.274	.540
	Post	60	.000	7.000	1.944	1.284	1.600	1.173	2.237
	Total	*120*	*.000*	*7.600*	*2.113*	*1.647*	*1.600*	*1.408*	*1.607*
Standardized Tests									
	Pre	60	306.00	364.75	331.567	13.418	332.00	.164	-.686
	Post	60	315.50	363.50	336.592	11.170	337.00	.065	-.305
	Total	*120*	*306.00*	*364.75*	*334.079*	*12.557*	*334.50*	*.014*	*-.526*

Research Question 2

The second research question explored the difference in the number of office disciplinary referrals for middle school students after participating in the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum. The results from the pre-test ($M = 2.282$, $SD = 1.938$) and post-test ($M = 1.943$, $SD = 1.284$) disciplinary referrals indicated that participating in the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum resulted in a reduction in disciplinary referrals, but this reduction was not statistically significant, $t(59) = 1.438$, $p = .155$. The results of this study cannot be generalized or assumed to produce the same results in a different setting or population.

Table 3

Paired t-test Results

	Pre		Post			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*T* (59)	*p*
The Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)	3.439	.516	3.777	.552	-4.437	< .001
Class Grade	74.585	9.851	79.141	5.714	-5.454	< .001
Attendance	7.42	5.664	5.20	5.416	3.643	.001
Discipline	2.282	1.938	1.943	1.284	1.438	.155
Standardized Tests	331.567	13.418	336.592	11.170	-3.081	< .001

Research Question 3

The last research question investigated whether there was a difference in academic achievement as measured by course grades and the MAP standardized exam in middle school children who had participated in the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum. In terms of course grades, the average pre-test course grade score was 74.585, with a standard deviation of 9.851. The post-test mean course grade was 79.141, with a standard deviation of

5.714. To compare the means of the two periods, a paired-samples *t*-test was used, and the *t*-statistic was -5.454 with *df* =59 (p < .001).

A paired t-test was performed on a sample of 60 students to see if there was a statistically significant mean difference in MAP standardized exam results before and after participating in the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum. Students fared better after participating in Second Step (M = 336.592; SD =11.170) than before the intervention (M = 331.567; SD = 13.418); this showed a statistically significant improvement of 4.922, t(59) = -3.081, p<.001. The results of this study cannot be generalized or assumed to produce the same results in a different setting or population.

Summary of Quantitative Results

The researcher investigated whether participation in Second Step related to improved social and emotional functioning, improved classroom and school behavior, and improved academic performance in this chapter. According to the dependent paired *t*-test analysis, students who participated in the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum improved their social and emotional functioning as well as their academic performance as measured by course grades and the MAP standardized exam. Despite the drop in disciplinary cases, the intervention did not result in statistically significant improvements in classroom and school behavior as judged by disciplinary referrals. The results of this study cannot be generalized or assumed to produce the same results in a different setting or population.

Qualitative Results and Findings

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine whether the implementation of Second Step would affect students' social and emotional learning skills. In the qualitative component of the study, I sought to provide an answer to the research question: Is there a

difference in how students feel about their classroom and school after participating in the Second

Step social and emotional learning curriculum? I collected data from a questionnaire that I

administered to the 60 7th grade students at the beginning of the spring semester of 2023 before

Second Step was implemented and then at the end of the same semester after Second Step was

completed. Subsequently, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with five selected 7th

grade students. The purpose of the follow-up interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of

(a) the targeted students' reactions to and feedback about Second Step, and (b) the ways in which

the program influenced the participants' attitudes, emotions, achievement, and behavior.

Results

To provide answers to the research question, there were numerous themes that were

identified relating to feedback and ways that the SEL needs of the learners were addressed. The

themes were categorized into the five aspects of the SEL: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-

management, (c) social awareness, (d) responsible decision making, and (e) relationship skills.

Table 4 shows the themes under the five categories, the respective sum of participants who

indicated the themes were identified (sources), and the total number of instances where such

themes were evident from the different sources (references).

Table 4

Summary of Qualitative Analysis

Theme	Source	References
Self-awareness	5	16
Difficulty explaining the feeling	4	4
Focus on education and life goals	4	5
Reaction to stress	5	5
Sharing feelings and stress	1	2
Self-management	5	13

Theme	Source	References
Difficulty in following through responsibilities	3	3
Difficulty in setting goals	4	4
Healthy strategies to manage stress	3	3
Influence of others	2	3
Social Awareness	5	18
Celebrate with others	4	4
Empathize with others	4	4
Recognize other people and their emotions	5	10
Relationship Skills	5	11
Difficulties in making new friends	3	3
Skills and strategies in handling conflicts	4	5
Working in teams	2	3
Responsible Decision Making	5	14
Considerations of social norms	2	3
Understanding of different methods	5	5
Well thought out decisions	3	4

Self-Awareness

In this category, four themes emerged relating to the impact of the program. The four themes were: (a) focus on education and life goals, (b) difficulty explaining the feeling, (c) reaction to stress, and (d) sharing feelings and stress.

Focus on education and life goals. Four of the five interviewed students indicated that they felt hopeful for the future as they were able to focus on their education and life related goals. For instance, one participant said, "I value my future very much…for my education and sports wise." Participant 21064 also indicated, "I chose five because I am good at doing the work and have good grades so I can go to college." Participant 21813000 said, "I feel hopeful about my future because I have good grades, and if I keep my grades up and pass with a high B, I

will get accepted in any college in the state of Georgia." Participant 21813000 also showed self-awareness of the fact that she was happy with the grades, and the accomplishments that she made in the last three years. Participant 22134 was also happy because he felt that his dream would come true.

Difficulty explaining the feeling. From the interviews, some students indicated that they still did not have the ability to explain their feelings, even after the intervention program. This was evidenced from the analysis results indicating four of the five interviewed students had difficulties explaining their feelings. Participant 21064 said, "Sometimes I don´t know how to explain them. But most of the time I don't want to explain my feelings." Similarly, participant 21813000 indicated, "I don't work well with a lot of people and I'm not comfortable sharing my feelings." On the same note, participant 21948 said, " No, I suck at explain my feelings, but I'm trying and I'm getting better." Participant 22134 indicated that he has difficulties explaining the feelings since he has faced good and bad people; "because some people are good to me, some are bad to me because of who I am." This theme depicts that even after the intervention using the program, some participants are still not able to explain their feelings, which shows a low level of self-awareness.

Reaction to stress. This theme was identified by five participants, who indicated their self-awareness regarding how they reacted to stress. These participants had responded with scale ratings of 4 and 5 to the item "I can tell when I'm stressed out." From the responses, the participants showed how they reacted to stress. Participant 10004797 shared stress with his parents, saying "I tell my mother when I'm stressed." Participant 21064 ignored people when stressed, indicating "I chose five because when I'm stressed, I ignore most people." Participant 21813000 indicated, "I agree, because when I am stressed out, I don't eat well, and I shake."

46

Participant 21948 noted that he gets overwhelmed; "Yes, I can tell when I'm stressed out because when I'm stressed, I get overwhelmed." Participant 22134 shared with friends and family members when stressed. His theme indicated the self-awareness of the participants regarding how they handled stress.

Self-Management

Regarding self-management, students indicated how they reacted to their own emotions and behaviors after the intervention. Four themes emerged relating to the effect of the intervention: (a) healthy strategies to manage stress, (b) the influence of others in self-management, (c) difficulty in following through with responsibilities, and (d) difficulty in setting goals.

Healthy strategies to manage stress. Interviewed participants demonstrated a range of strategies and approaches on how they managed to self-manage by dealing with stress considering this, participant 21064 said, "I take deep breaths and try to talk with someone." Participant 21813000 said, "When I get stressed, I play soccer, or I count to 10 slowly." Similarly, participant 21948 noted, "I move away from what's making me upset or just be quiet." The interviewed participants were able to share some of the strategies that they used in managing stress. Some of the strategies that they applied included taking breaths, playing soccer, counting to 10 slowly, and just walking away. This theme represents the theme of self-management approaches and strategies used by students.

Influence of others in self-management. From the analysis, it emerged that some of the participants were influenced by others to self-manage. This pattern was identified by three of the five interviewed participants. Participant 10004797 indicated, "I value other people's feelings." In addition, the participant noted that he respected the teacher, by saying "I do my work, and

respect my teacher." Participant 21813000 noted, "I get rewarded when I make good choices, like my parents give me money or give me my game for the weekend." This theme represents the assertion that some of the students were influenced by other people to become better in self-management. Some students were influenced by teachers and others by parents.

Difficulty in following through responsibilities. Some of the students indicated that they faced difficulties in following through the responsibilities. This was evident from three of the interviewed participants. Participant 21064 said, "I chose four because I most of the time follow through on my responsibilities for school. Sometimes I forget what they are and do not do them." Participant 21813000 indicated, "I do my work, but I fall short of the standards for the assignment." Similarly, participant 21948 indicated, "Yes, I follow through my responsibilities for, like, turning in my work; it may be a little late sometime, but I get it done." This theme showed that after the intervention, some of the participants were not able to strictly follow through the responsibilities. In other words, some of the participants could still experience self-management challenges even after the program.

Difficulty in setting goals. Of the interviewed participants, a pattern was identified that some were still unable to set goals. This was exhibited by four of the five interviewed participants. For instance, participant 21064 said, "I chose three because I do set them, but they are not really goals." Similarly, participant 21948 shared, "I don't set goals that much, but when I do, I achieve them; but one main goal I have every year is to pass the grade." While participant 22134 did not clearly state to have set goals, but said, "Stop playing around in school and get my degree." However, some participants such as participant 21813000 suggested that they were good at setting goals, saying, "I set goals at the beginning of every term to get good grades and do all my work." This theme represented the indication from participants that there were

challenges in self-management among some of the learners, as they could not set specific goals.

Social Awareness

This category relates to the way participants relate with other people. The open-ended questions for the interviews sought to provide understanding on how the people acted when interacting with others. The intent was to determine whether there was a significant impact after the intervention. Three themes emerged in this category: (a) recognize other people and their emotions, (b) empathize with others, and (c) celebrate with others.

Recognize other people and their emotions. After the intervention, some of the participants indicated that they recognized that people are different, and they also valued their emotions. Participant 10004797 noted that "Others are born different." Participant 21064 also noted that people are different, and they deserve respect, saying "I chose five because to me, it doesn't matter who they are or if they are different from me. The only reason I will not respect them is if they do not respect me." On the same note, participant 1813000 noted, "I treat everyone I meet like they are my friends and like they have the same rights as me, no matter what he or she looks like." Participant 21948 indicated, "I respect others even if they are different from me." This was also evidenced from participant 22134, who suggested that he respected people for who they are. Regarding emotions, participant 21064 argued that "I chose five because when someone is upset about anything, I can tell really easily." Participant 21813000 said, "I can't really read people's body language." Similarly, participant 21948 was able to identify when someone is upset, saying, "Yes, I can tell when someone is upset because I pay attention to them and how they act." Similarly, participant 22134 also noted the ability to recognize others' emotions, by noting "if they are sad, depressed, or crying." This theme represents the feedback from the participant regarding the influence of social awareness after the

intervention.

Empathize with others. Some of the participants empathize with others, an indication that perhaps the SEL program had an impact on their social awareness. This theme was evidenced from a pattern of responses from participants who were interviewed. Participants who had positive responses from this dimension indicated that they supported their friends, they understood them, and offered help when they were struggling. Participant 10004797 indicated, "I support friends when they are at their lowest." Participant 21064 said, "I chose five because I do support people the best way I can when they are struggling." Participant 21813000 noted, "I try my best to understand what is wrong with the person and do my best to help." Participant 21948 said, "I do my best to support others when they are having a hard time because they need the help."

Celebrate the success of others. Celebrating the success of other people is an example of a social awareness activity. From the interviews, it was evident that some of the participants improved in this dimension. Participant 10004797 indicated, "I want my friends to succeed in any career they choose." Along the same vein, participant 21064 indicated, "I chose five because anytime someone does something successful, I tell them good job or clap for them." Participant 21813000 noted," I celebrate by bringing my friend chips or money when they score good on a test." Participant, 21948 indicated, "Yes, I can celebrate success for the others around me because I'm happy for them achieving something." This theme represents the assertions from the participants relating to the impact of SEL intervention program showing that they were able to celebrate the success of others as a form of social awareness.

Responsible Decision Making

This category encompassed themes that students were able to make their own choices in their academic or personal life. The analysis revealed three themes relating to the feedback of the SEL program on the ability of the students to make responsible decisions. The three themes were: (a) well thought out decisions, (b) understanding of different methods of decision making, and (c) considerations of social norms.

Well thought out decisions. Some of the participants indicated that they could make well thought out decisions after the SEL intervention program. This theme was evident from three of the five interviewed participants. Participant 10004797 stated, "Other students think differently, so I understand." Similarly, participant 21813000 noted, "I make sure my friends are prepared and respectful," which is an indication of a well thought out decision. This was also evidenced by participants' 21813000 indication that "I divert all my focus to doing my work and don't respond to people that aren't there to help me." Participant 21948 noted, "I don't have strategies that much, but I do have one I think about what makes me happy; I say to myself "happy place." Participant 21948 noted that despite lack of a strategy, he makes decisions through having a clear thought of the most appropriate decision. Making responsible decisions may entail having a clear thought to issues that one faces in academic or at personal level, a theme which was evidenced from the analysis.

Understanding of different methods of decision making. Making responsible decisions is a component of the SEL and can be attained if people can use different methods of and thinking in decision making. This theme was identified from this study from the interviewed participants. Participant 21064 indicated that he has a way of calming down when upset. The participant said, "I chose five because I have been upset a lot and I had to calm myself down."

Participant 21813000 indicated, "When I am upset, I take deep breaths and count to 10." This is another strategy that the participant uses to calm down. Participant 21948 noted that the approach in calming down depends on circumstances and the context; "It depends on who I'm with, but most of the time, yes I can." Participant 22134 stated that he listens to music to calm down. This theme represented the responses of the participants regarding the decisions that they make to calm down. Participants showed diverse methods and thinking that they use to make decisions, which is a component of responsible decision making. Listening to music and counting to ten were a few of the strategies taught in the curriculum to help students take time to think about a decision they have to make.

   Considerations of social norms. Participants also confirmed considering the social norms in making responsible decisions. This theme was evidenced from two participants who showed that they made responsible decisions by following the social norms. For instance, participant 10004797 noted that he chooses to be honest, which is in tandem with the social norms. Participant 10004797 argued, "It's better being honest." Similarly, participant 21064 noted, "I chose five because most of the time, I am responsible." In addition, participant 21064 further argued that it is better to be truthful. "I chose five because I think telling the truth would be better than lying."

Relationship Skills

   This category encompasses the way students learned to foster healthy relationships with others. This is an aspect of SEL that can be attained through various activities. From the analysis, on this category, three themes emerged: (a) skills and strategies in handling of conflicts, (b) working in teams, and (c) difficulties in making new friends.

Skills and strategies in handling conflicts. This theme encompassed the argument that there were numerous strategies that were applied by students to resolve conflicts and hence demonstrate their relationship skills. Participant 10004797 indicated that he gives hugs and apologizes, saying "[I] give a hug and say sorry." Participant 21064 said that he handles conflicts very well. Similarly, participant 21813000 indicated that he prefers to walk away. "Every time I get in an argument, I walk away or tell a teacher." Participant 21948 noted that he also handles conflict well, saying, "I like to be right, but I can handle a conflict with others well."

Working in teams. Some of the participants indicated that they had were good at working with others and in a team, an indication of relationship skills. For the participants whose mean response was above 4, regarding relationship skills, it was partly contributed by the ability to work as a team. When students are able to work as a team, they build relationships. This was evidenced by participant 21064 who indicated, "I choose five because I work with my friends most of the time and we get along." Participant 21813000 noted that he gets along with most of the students. Participant 21813000 said, "Most kids at school are pretty cool….I have many friends at school and my best friend." For the students who had an average rating of four and above regarding relationship skills, it could be due to the fact that they participated in teamwork activities.

Difficulty in making new friends. Some of the participants who had a score rating of 3 and below on aspects relating to relationship skills had various reasons. A pattern was identified that some were not able to get along with people who are not close friends. Concerning this, participant 21813000 indicated, "I disagree because I don't know many people at my school." Participant 21948 said, "It's not bad but like I'm shy and not gonna talk much." Similarly, participant 22134 indicated that he avoided getting along with some students to avoid being

exposed, as "They will go run their mouth." This theme represented the assertions from the participants relating to one of the major factors that may hinder the development of relationship skills among the students, even after SEL. Therefore, some of the participants could still find it difficult to get along with other students, which could depict low relationship skills.

Summary of Qualitative Results

The purpose of the qualitative component of this mixed study was to provide a response to research question one on whether there was a difference in how students feel about their classroom and school after participating in the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum. Qualitative data were collected from open-ended questions from five participants to understand whether there were differences. Thematic analysis of in-depth data regarding the feedback that was provided from questionnaires was conducted. The analysis result here was categorized into the five aspects of SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. From the analysis, several themes were identified from each component of the SEL. Regarding self-awareness, it emerged that students who experienced improvement in the SEL showed great focus on education and life goals, they reacted to stress using various approaches, and some shared feelings and stress to other people. However, some experienced difficulty explaining their feelings, an indication of low self-awareness.

Regarding self-management, some students indicated to using healthy strategies to manage stress, while some were influenced by others to self-manage. However, some could still experience difficulty in following through responsibilities and setting goals. Concerning social awareness, some students could exhibit this component through celebrating the success of others, empathizing with others, recognizing other people and their emotions, and showing respect.

From a relationship skills aspect of SEL, it was evident that some students had skills and strategies in handling conflicts and working in teams. However, some students also showed difficulties in making new friends. Regarding responsible decision making, several themes emerged, including that students understood different methods and thinking in decision making, they made well thought out decisions, and they considered social norms.

Chapter 5 will discuss the goal and scope of this investigation. The findings will be described, interpreted, and summarized in Chapter 5, and the study's limitations will be acknowledged. The study's benefits will also be examined in Chapter 5, along with recommendations for further research. The ramifications for the Second Step and the conclusion are also covered in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the data analysis indicated that students who participated in the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum showed statistically significant improvement in social and emotional functioning, and also showed some improvement in academic performance. These findings align with prior studies such as the ones by Carpio de los Pinos et al. (2020) and Coelho and Sousa (2018), that have highlighted the positive impact of SEL interventions on students' overall well-being and academic outcomes. However, it is worth noting that despite the observed decrease in disciplinary cases, the intervention did not yield statistically significant improvements in classroom and school behavior, as reflected by disciplinary referrals. This finding suggests that while the program effectively addressed specific aspects of students' social and emotional development and academic achievement, additional strategies or longer-term implementation may be necessary to impact classroom behavior significantly.

Interpretation of the Findings

This section will provide a more detailed discussion on the findings of the study. The interpretation of the findings is organized by research question. Each section will provide information on how the research questions were answered and how the findings relate back to the literature that was reviewed in an earlier chapter.

Research Question 1

The first research question was to investigate whether there were differences in perceptions among students regarding their classroom and school environment after completing the Second Step social and emotional learning program. The study's results revealed a significant disparity between students' pre-training and post-training perceptions of their classroom and school. While the existing literature did not specifically focus on pre-and post-training

perceptions, it consistently supported the positive benefits of social and emotional learning programs. Research conducted by Carpio de los Pinos et al. (2020) and other scholars has highlighted numerous short-term and long-term advantages for individuals engaging in SEL programs which was also revealed in this study. Middle and high school students, in particular, benefit from the introduction and instruction of SEL skills. This development phase is crucial, as students form personal relationships that can have lasting impacts throughout their lives (Arikan, 2020). Conversely, individuals who lack opportunities to develop social and emotional learning skills may face difficulties in social interactions during these formative years (Arikan, 2020). Cohen (2006) emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence, stating that it predicts success in various domains such as academic achievement, employment, marriage, and physical health. The students in this current study had different perceptions of their classroom and school post-training which may have also positively impacted their academic achievement. By incorporating social and emotional learning into a school's curriculum, students can cultivate self-management skills that aid them in effectively navigating the pressures and stresses they encounter daily (Arikan, 2020).

From the findings of this study, it can be inferred that the positive difference in students' perceptions of their classroom and school after participating in the Second Step indicates the program's efficacy in fostering a supportive and conducive learning environment. By equipping students with SEL skills, the program contributes to their overall social and emotional well-being, enhancing their abilities to manage relationships, handle challenges, and succeed academically.

Research Question 2

      The second research question aimed to investigate the impact of the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum on the number of office disciplinary referrals among middle school students. The study's results indicated a reduction in disciplinary referrals after students participated in the Second Step, although this reduction was not statistically significant. The findings from the study were consistent with the literature reviewed. Durlak et al. (2011) conducted a study on implementing SEL programs in schools and found that such programs increased students' social skills and decreased disciplinary issues. Moreover, research by Scarpaci (2006) indicated that students participating in SEL programs demonstrated improved social behaviors, increased self-awareness, and better academic performance than those who did not participate. However, it is essential to note that not all studies supported the positive effects of SEL programs on student behavior. For instance, a trial study conducted by the Social and Character Development Research Consortium (2010) examined the impact of various standard SEL programs used by schools nationwide and found no significant improvements in students' behavior or school climate.

      Addressing SEL in the classroom is widely believed to have the potential to decrease behavioral problems, thereby promoting a focused and conducive learning environment for both students and teachers. Coelho and Sousa (2018) noted that students participating in SEL programs generally exhibit a more vital ability to handle stress, build positive relationships with others, demonstrate improved school behavior, and show some increases in attendance and academic performance. Expanding on the implications of these findings, it is evident that while the specific study did not yield statistically significant results, the broader literature supports the potential benefits of SEL programs in reducing disciplinary issues and promoting positive

behavior among students. The variation in study outcomes may be attributed to differences in program implementation, duration, or contextual factors.

Research Question 3

The final research question examined the impact of the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum on academic achievement, measured by course grades and the MAP standardized exam, among middle school students. The study found significant improvements in course grades and MAP exam results following participation in the Second Step. Regarding course grades, the average (before participation in the SEL curriculum) was 74.58, while the post course grade mean score (after participation in the SEL curriculum) increased to 79.141. Results of the data analysis indicated that students showed some improvement in academic performance. Students in previous years did not show an increase in academic performance.

These findings align with the literature reviewed, which consistently supports the positive effects of SEL on academic performance. Studies, such as the one conducted by Aidman and Price (2018), have shown the positive impact of SEL interventions on student achievement. A meta-analysis by Durlak et al. (2011) also highlighted that comprehensive and effective implementation of SEL is associated with improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and student academic performance. The literature emphasizes addressing students' social-emotional needs to enhance their learning and academic outcomes. Neglecting these needs can hinder student progress and decrease academic performance (Zins et al., 2007). Adelman and Taylor (2000) also emphasized that schools must prioritize SEL to fulfill their primary goal of educating students.

Further support for the positive relationship between SEL and academic achievement that was revealed in this current study is provided by studies such as the one conducted by Durlak et

al. (2011), which reported an 11% increase in student academic performance. Another study by Espelage and Colbert (2016) focused on students with disabilities and revealed a half-grade increase in reports when they participated in SEL. Additionally, a quasi-experimental study by Brackett et al. (2012), conducted over 30 weeks, demonstrated increased year-end grades for students who engaged in SEL which was similar to this current study which found an improvement in grades between pre-training and post-training. Expanding on the implications of these findings, it is evident that integrating SEL programs, such as the Second Step curriculum, can positively impact students' academic achievement which was concluded in this study. SEL interventions foster social and emotional skills and create an environment that encourages learning and personal growth. The observed improvements in course grades and MAP exam results in this study suggest that addressing students' social and emotional well-being can enhance academic performance.

One significant finding in this study was that participation in the Second Step did not reveal a statistically significant reduction in disciplinary referrals. However, the study by Coelho and Sousa (2018) indicated that social and emotional learning in general improves student behavior.

Relationship of Findings to Theoretical Framework

The study's findings align with the goals and principles of the CASEL framework, which emphasizes integrating social and emotional learning into educational settings to promote students' academic, social, and emotional development (CASEL, 2017). The study's conclusion that students who participated in the Second Step curriculum demonstrated improvements in social and emotional functioning and academic performance supports the CASEL framework's effectiveness in achieving its objectives (CASEL, 2017). The CASEL framework identifies five

60

core competencies of social and emotional learning: relationship skills, responsible decision-making, self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness (CASEL, 2017). The study's findings of improved social and emotional functioning among students who participated in the social and emotional learning curriculum validate the importance of these core competencies in fostering positive social and emotional outcomes. This study's findings that the social and emotional learning intervention improved academic performance reinforces the CASEL framework's emphasis on the interconnection between social and emotional skills and academic success. The findings of this study also highlight the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses students' social and emotional needs alongside their academic growth, supporting the integration of SEL programs within the educational system. The findings also demonstrated the potential of social and emotional learning interventions, such as the Second Step, to positively impact multiple outcome domains. The program's effectiveness in improving social and emotional functioning and academic performance aligns with the CASEL framework's aim to address students' holistic development and well-being.

The findings from this study can inform the implementation and assessment strategies the CASEL framework recommends. By examining the specific outcomes of the social and emotional learning intervention, such as improvements in course grades and standardized exam scores, the study provided insight into the indicators that can be used to assess the effectiveness of social and emotional learning programs and inform continuous program improvement. The study's findings underscore the importance of evidence-based practices within the CASEL framework. The positive outcomes observed in the study support the use of social and emotional learning interventions like the Second Step, providing evidence to inform the selection and

implementation of effective social and emotional programs that align with the CASEL framework's guidelines.

The study's findings from the results from the interviews conducted with students post Second Step implementation showed that the students interviewed were more self-aware and socially aware than before participating in the program. Interviewed students stated that they developed more positive relationships with their peers and teachers. Many of these students were able to express empathy for others more easily.

The study's findings support and align with the goals and principles of the CASEL framework. They provide evidence for the effectiveness of social and emotional interventions in improving social and emotional functioning and academic performance, reinforcing the importance of a comprehensive approach to education. The study's findings can inform implementation strategies, assessment practices, and policy development within the CASEL framework, promoting positive social change in educational settings.

Limitations of the Study

In a mixed-method research design, limitations refer to external factors that are beyond the researcher's control and do not impact the outcome of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study encountered limitations, particularly concerning the sample. The focus of the study was solely on one school, which made it impossible to compare the findings with another middle school within the same district. The limited sample size posed challenges in determining the generalizability of specific outcomes, as a small sample may not accurately represent the larger population. The chosen school for this study was a rural Title I school where 100% of the students received free or reduced lunch. The limitation of one school further constrained the generalizability of the findings, as they could not be compared to other schools in different

geographic areas or settings. The findings could not provide insight into whether similar patterns or outcomes would emerge in diverse educational contexts.

Different schools may have unique characteristics, resources, and student populations, which could influence the outcomes and make it challenging to generalize the findings. The study could have provided a broader perspective on the topic by considering a more diverse range of rural and urban schools with varying socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, the reliance on a small sample size poses inherent limitations. A larger sample would have provided a broader range of perspectives, experiences, and responses, enhancing the findings' robustness. With a more extensive and diverse sample, patterns, trends, or variations that might exist across different schools could have been identified, increasing the study's external validity.

The lack of a control group was also a limitation in this study. Although there was a lack of a control group, test score differences were compared with those of three previous years and showed larger differences this year, which might be due to the implementation of the program. The results of the interviews provided additional insight into why the program might have contributed to the improvement of academic achievement. Most of the students who were interviewed showed an increase in academic performance in both academic grades and on the MAP assessment. Students interviewed expressed that they learned how to take more responsibility in the learning and also made better decisions in class when it came to completing their work.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several recommendations could be made as a result of the findings of this study and the study's limitations. Conducting the same study with a more extensive and diverse sample of middle school students in central Georgia would increase the generalizability of the findings.

Including students from different schools and varying demographic backgrounds would provide a broader understanding of the intervention's effectiveness. Long-term follow-up could also be conducted. The research could be extended by conducting follow-up assessments after a longer duration to determine the sustainability of the intervention's impact on students' feelings about their classroom and school. A long-term follow-up would help evaluate whether the positive changes observed immediately after the training endures over time. Another recommendation would be to incorporate qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, to gather in-depth insights from students, teachers, and parents about their experiences with the Second Step intervention program. Qualitative data could provide rich contextual information and provide more insight into the underlying mechanisms contributing to the observed perceptions changes.

Researchers could also conduct subgroup analyses to explore whether the effectiveness of the Second Step intervention program differs among specific student populations, such as students with different academic performance levels, socioeconomic backgrounds, or disciplinary histories. If specific subgroups benefit more or less from the intervention, that understanding can inform targeted strategies and interventions. Future research could also investigate contextual factors influencing the relationship between the Second Step intervention program and disciplinary referrals, and explore variables such as school climate, teacher-student relationships, or the availability of support services to identify potential moderating factors that may contribute to the effectiveness of the intervention.

Implications for Future Practice

The study's findings have several implications for positive social change, despite the lack of statistically significant improvements in classroom and school behavior as judged by disciplinary referrals. The study proved that implementing a social and emotional learning

curriculum, such as the Second Step, can positively impact students' social and emotional functioning and academic performance. These findings highlight the importance of incorporating social and emotional learning programs into school curricula to promote holistic student development. The study's results showed that students who participated in the social and emotional learning curriculum demonstrated improved academic scores as measured by course grades and the MAP standardized exam, which is encouraging. The finding suggests that social and emotional learning interventions can enhance students' learning outcomes, leading to positive social change by improving educational opportunities and preparing students for future success. The study's findings of improved social and emotional functioning among students who participated in the social and emotional learning curriculum are significant. Enhancing students' social-emotional skills and competencies can positively impact their interpersonal relationships, emotional well-being, and overall resilience. Improving these skills can promote positive social change by fostering healthier and more supportive school environments.

Despite the lack of statistical significance in classroom and school behavior improvements measured by disciplinary referrals, the study indicated a decrease in disciplinary cases. Even if not statistically significant, any reduction in disciplinary cases is a positive outcome. The finding suggests that the social and emotional learning intervention may have positively influenced students' behavior management and conflict resolution skills, leading to a more positive and respectful school climate. The study's findings emphasize the importance of a holistic approach to social change in educational settings. By addressing students' social and emotional needs through social and emotional learning interventions, schools can create a supportive and inclusive environment that nurtures students' overall development, including their academic, emotional, and behavioral well-being.

65

The study's findings have implications for educational policies and practices. The findings highlight the importance of integrating social and emotional learning curricula into educational systems and providing support and training for teachers in implementing these programs effectively. Policymakers and educators can use this evidence to prioritize social-emotional development alongside academic achievement, creating a more holistic and well-rounded education system. The study's conclusions can contribute to a more significant systemic change in education by advocating for including social and emotional learning programs in school policies and curriculum frameworks. By recognizing the value of social and emotional skills and investing in interventions that foster their development, educational systems can prioritize the overall well-being and success of students, leading to positive social change at a systemic level.

The findings may also identify areas for further exploration and research within the CASEL framework. For instance, the lack of statistically significant improvements in classroom and school behavior as measured by disciplinary referrals suggests the need for deeper investigations into the factors influencing behavior outcomes and the strategies to enhance their effectiveness. The study's findings can serve as a basis for advocating policy and systemic change in education to support integrating social and emotional learning programs aligned with the CASEL framework. By demonstrating the positive impact of SEL interventions on students' social, emotional, and academic outcomes, the study findings can contribute to promoting policies that prioritize and allocate resources to foster social and emotional learning in schools.

Conclusions

In light of the numerous challenges and distractions that teachers and students face in today's educational landscape, it is perplexing why social and emotional learning curricula or

programs are not mandatory in all schools throughout the United States. The consequences of neglecting social and emotional competencies have global implications, with research linking a lack of these skills to youth violence (Ahmed et al., 2020; McCormick et al., 2019). Given the current social and political climate characterized by significant events such as the Black Lives Matter movement, the 2020 presidential election, and protests following the tragic killing of George Floyd, it is more crucial than ever to address the social and emotional learning needs of children within school environments (Grossman & Duchesneau, 2021). These events have sparked meaningful discussions about how younger generations are processing and understanding these complex societal issues. By integrating social and emotional learning into the curriculum, schools can give students the tools and skills to navigate and engage with these significant events healthily and productively. The needed skills include developing empathy, fostering respectful dialogue, promoting critical thinking, and empowering students to become active and informed citizens.

Moreover, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the importance of social and emotional learning. The disruptions caused by remote learning, isolation, and uncertainty have affected students' mental health and well-being. By prioritizing social and emotional learning, schools can support students in building resilience, managing stress, and maintaining positive relationships, which are crucial during these challenging times.

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APPENDIX A

Site Permission Form

Baldwin County Board of Education

A Charter System of Georgia

John Jackson	P.O. Box 1188	**Board of Education**
Board Chair	110 N. ABC Street	Dr. Gloria Wicker, Vice Chair
	Milledgeville, GA 31059	John Jackson
Dr. Noris Price	Ph (478) 453-4176 Fax (478) 457-3327	Wes Cummings
Superintendent	www.baldwincountyschoolsga.org	Shannon D. Hill

October 21, 2022

Dear GC IRB,

Based on my review of the proposed research by Daymond Ray, I give permission for him to conduct the study entitled "The Effectiveness of a Social and Emotional Learning Intervention Program with Middle School Students in Central Georgia" within Oak Hill Middle School. As part of this study, I authorize the researcher to interview students who have been identified as enrolled in 7th-grade health education classes, students who participate in certain programs, and/or diagnostic information. The data will be collected through student surveys; with individual interviews with four or five of those students. The results will be presented in Mr. Ray's doctoral dissertation. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. Parents/Guardians will receive a parental consent form for their child to participate in the research study. The students will also receive a consent form for the research study.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: Daymond Ray meeting with four to five students enrolled in the 7th-grade health class. Mr. Ray will ask students questions to find out about their perception of how social and emotional learning pertains to them. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

We understand that the research will include Mr. Ray interviewing students in both one-on-one settings.

This authorization covers the time period of October 2022 to May 2023.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Georgia College IRB.

Sincerely,

Dr. Noris Price, Superintendent
110 N. ABC Street
Milledgeville, GA 31061
(478) 453-4176

APPENDIX B:

Parental Permission/Consent

PARENTAL PERMISSION/CONSENT

The Effectiveness of a Social and Emotional Learning Intervention Program with Middle School Students in Central Georgia

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am from the Department of Education at Georgia College & State University. My contact information is located at the bottom of this letter.

I am conducting a research study on the effectiveness of a social and emotional learning intervention program with middle school students. I would like to include your child in my research study. Your child was selected as a possible participant because they are enrolled in a 7th-grade health education class. The study will take place at your child's school during their health education class. If your child takes part in this project, it should take approximately 45 minutes on Mondays during their health education class for the next 15 weeks. Potentially another 15 minutes time frame will be used for a follow-up individual interview to complete the research study at the end of the 15 weeks.

If your child takes part in this project, they will be asked to do the following activities:
- Complete a pre surrey
- Complete post survey
- Potentially participate in the Second Step Program
- Potentially participate in a follow-up individual interview that will be audio recorded.

This research has the following risks:
There are no specific risks for student participants in this research. All interviews are consistent with the types of instructional support students would typically receive in a context to facilitate learning during or after school. The Second Step Program will be taught by a certified health teacher. The pre-survey, post-survey, and interview will be administered by the researcher. The interview will take place in a quiet, private area, and all participants will be assured that participation in no way will negatively impact their grades or course offerings.

The research has the following benefits: Many scholars, teachers, and legislators are engaged in conversations about ways to help students with social and emotional learning. This study has the potential to help your child understand their social and emotional learning and can help them become a better student and individual.

The information from interviews in this research will be kept confidential. All audio recordings will be transcribed for data analysis and saved on a secure, password-protected site. Any notes taken during interviews will be scanned and stored on the secure, password-protected site. Hard copies of research data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and locked office area. The data will be made available only to the persons conducting the research. All student participants will be kept confidential. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link your child to the research.

Your child's participation in this project is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow our child to participate will not affect your or your child's relationship with his or her school. In addition to your permission, your child will also be asked if he or she would like to take part in this project. Only those children who have parental permission and who want to participate will do so, and any child may stop taking part at any time. You are free to withdraw your permission for your child's participation at any time and for any reason without penalty.

79

You may keep a copy of this document for your records.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact us using the information below. If you have any questions about your or your child's rights as a participant, contact the Georgia College IRB at irb@gcsu.edu.

Sincerely,

Daymond Ray
478-290-7608
daymond.ray@bobcats.gcsu.edu

****

I DO / DO NOT (circle one) give permission for my child _____
                                                            (name of child)
to participate in the research project described above.

_____
(Print) Parent's name

_____   _____
Parent's signature   Date

•••
Research at Georgia College involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board. Address questions or problems regarding these activities to the GC IRB Chair, email: irb@gcsu.edu.

APPENDIX C

Minor Written Assent

MINOR WRITTEN ASSENT

Project Title: The Effectiveness of a Social and Emotional Learning Intervention Program

Investigator (Contact Information on Next Page):
Daymond Ray

1. What is this study about? What will I do in this study?

I am doing a research study about the effectiveness of a social and emotional learning intervention program. A research study is a way to learn more about people. If you decide that you want to be part of this study, you will be asked to participate in the Second Step Program. This will take place during your health education class. You might also be asked to share a bit more in an interview on your own at the end of the program. I will record the conversation to help remember and learn from you. No one will ever hear the recordings except myself.

2. Could anything bad happen to me?

There are no risks for you. The program will be taught on Mondays by your health education teacher. I will give you a pre and post-survey. The lesson will take 45 minutes or less. If you have an individual interview, it could take up to 15 minutes. There will be no negative impact on your grades, the classes you take now, or the classes you may take in the future. Your responses will only be used for the purposes of this study. You can also stop any part of the study after we start.

3. Can anything good happen to me?

I think this study has some benefits. A benefit means that something good happens to you. I think these benefits might be that you learn about yourself and your social and emotional well-being.

4. Will anyone know I am in the study?

When I am finished with this study, I will write a report about what I learned. However, this report will not include your name or that you were in the study. Your parents know about the study, too, and have given permission for you to participate if you want to.

5. What if I don't want to be in the study?
You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. If you decide to stop after we begin, that's okay too.

If you decide you DO want to be in this study, please write and sign your name in the blank below.

I, _____, want to be in this research study.
   (Write your name here)

_____   _____
   (Sign your name here)   (Date)

• •
Research at Georgia College involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board. Address questions or problems regarding these activities to the GC IRB Chair, email: irb@gcsu.edu.

Investigator Contact Information

Daymond Ray
478-363-5700
daymond.ray@bobcats.gcsu.edu

How I Feel About My Classroom and School Now Survey

	Competence	Question	Rating				
			1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1	Self-Awareness	I feel hopeful about my future.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
2	Self-Awareness	I know of 3 things I do well.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
3	Self-Awareness	I am happy with who I am.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
4	Self-Awareness	I can explain my feelings to others.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
5	Self-Awareness	I can tell when I'm stressed out.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
6	Self-Management	I can tell when I'm making good choices.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
7	Self-Management	I follow through on my responsibilities for school.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
8	Self-Management	I set academic goals for school.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
9	Self-Management	I have healthy strategies I know how to use when I feel stressed.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
10	Social Awareness	I respect others for who they are, even if they are different than me.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
11	Social Awareness	I can tell when someone is upset.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
12	Social Awareness	I try to support others when they are struggling.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
13	Social Awareness	I like to celebrate the success of those around me.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
14	Relationship Skills	I feel comfortable talking with students who are not my closest friends.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
15	Relationship Skills	I feel comfortable working in a team with other students.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
16	Relationship Skills	I have friends at school.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

17	Relationship Skills	I know how to appropriately handle a conflict with others.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
18	Responsible Decision-Making	I am able to make responsible decisions when I'm with other students.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
19	Responsible Decision-Making	I am able to wait for an appropriate time to share out my ideas in classes.	Almost never	Disagree	Half of the time	Most of the time	Almost always
20	Responsible Decision-Making	I think about how my choices impact others.	Almost never	Some of the time	Half of the time	Most of the time	Almost always
21	Responsible Decision-Making	I am able to pay attention in class.	Almost never	Some of the time	Half of the time	Most of the time	Almost always
22	Responsible Decision-Making	I am able to tell the truth even though it may be hard.	Almost never	Some of the time	Half of the time	Most of the time	Almost always
23	Responsible Decision-Making	I know strategies to calm myself down when upset.	Almost never	Some of the time	Half of the time	Most of the time	Almost always

Sample Second Step Daily Lesson

Second Step® **Practicing Positive Self-Talk**

Lesson Plan
GRADE 7 | Unit 3 | Lesson 18

Objective

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to practice using positive self-talk to reframe a challenging situation.

Prep

- 60-second timer
- Partners

🔑 **Bold**—Teacher's script
Italics—Anticipated student responses

Lesson Note

Have students save their written work. They'll need it to complete the Activity in Lesson 19.

Program Themes

Resilience, Staying Calm, Thoughts and Emotions

CASEL Core Competencies

Self-Awareness, Self-Management

Warm-Up (5 min.)

	Set the purpose for today's lesson.
	Review the last lesson. Give students time to think about the question on the screen. Then call on students at random to share their responses. Select the Review button for a summary of what was learned.
	Give students 60 seconds to write their responses to the prompt on the screen.
	Give students 60 seconds to write their responses to the prompt on the screen. **Now look at your lists and add up how many things went right, and how many things went wrong.** Give students time to count.
	Read the prompt on the screen aloud. Comment on how many students put their thumbs up. Read the definition on the screen aloud.

Video (4 min.)

	Introduce the video. **We're going to watch a video about why it's easier for us to focus on the negatives.** Play the video. **Now that you know it's natural to focus more on the negatives than on the positives, you can push yourself to learn and practice focusing more on the positives.**

Video (cont.)

Give students time to think about the question on the screen. Then call on students at random to share their responses. Select the Possible Answer button to show a sample answer.

Define (1 min.)

Positive self-talk is another strategy you can use to manage your emotions. Read the definition and description on the screen aloud.

It sounds simple, but it takes practice and time to build a habit.

Video (5 min.)

Introduce the video. **We're going to watch a video of students describing how they used positive frames and positive self-talk during stressful situations. As you watch, notice how using these strategies made a big difference in their stressful situations.**

Play the video.

Give students time to discuss the question on the screen. Then call on students at random to share their responses. Select the Possible Answer button to show an example answer.

Activity (5 min.)

Now you'll practice using a positive frame to notice good things in your life. Have students write their responses to the prompts on the screen.
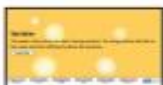
Read the prompt and instructions on the screen aloud and give students time to complete the activity.

Wrap-Up (5 min.)

Have students write their responses to the prompts on the screen. Call on volunteers to share their responses.

Remind students to save their written work.

Conclude the lesson by encouraging students to take action on what they learned.

Select the Sneak Peek button to introduce the next lesson's topic.

APPENDIX F

IRB Approval Notice

Institutional Review Board

Office of Academic Affairs

irb@gcsu.edu

http://www.gcsu.edu/irb

DATE: 2022-12-05

TO: Daymond Ray

FROM: Sallie Coke, Ph.D. - Chair of Georgia College Institutional Review Board

RE: Your IRB protocol 18295 is Approved for 2022-12-05 - 2023-12-05

Dear Daymond Ray,

The proposal you submitted, "D. Ray: Social and Emotional Learning Dissertation," has been granted approval by the Georgia College Institutional Review Board. You may proceed but are responsible for complying with all stipulations described under the Code of Federal Relationship 45 CFR 46 (Protection of Human Subjects). This document can be obtained from the following address:

http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.html

The approval period is for one year, starting from the date of approval. After that time, an extension may be requested. It is your responsibility to notify this committee of any changes to the study or any problems that occur. You are to provide the committee with a summary statement. Please use the IRB Portal (https://irb-portal.gcsu.edu/) to request an extension, report changes, or report the completion of your study.

Finally, on behalf of IRB, we wish you the best of luck with your study. Please contact GC IRB at any time for assistance.

Sincerely,

Sallie Coke, Ph.D.