

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL-
EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN TITLE I SCHOOLS

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This dissertation follows the format and style of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition* except where superseded by directions from the Director of the Doctor of Education in Executive Educational Leadership Program at Houston Baptist University.

DEDICATION

This study and all the hard work that went into its completion is dedicated to all of the students' lives I have touched during my 19-years of service as a special educator. It is especially dedicated to those seven individuals who call me tee-tee, auntie, or just Tricia. I love each and every one of you immensely and hope that this, my journey, encourages each of you to always dream big and seek to obtain every goal you've ever dreamt. As Langston Hughes questioned in his poem "Harlem," "What happens to a dream deferred?" Please don't allow yours to dry up like a raisin in the sun. Shoot for the moon and even if you don't make it, you are likely to land somewhere amongst the stars.

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional learning in Title I schools and its influence on student outcomes. The research design of this study used a qualitative phenomenological approach involving a school in an urban Texas school district. The study focused on teachers' responses to survey questions designed to gather expressed feelings and perceptions of the influence social-emotional learning has on student outcomes in Title I schools. The researcher chose to use the phenomenological methodology because it allowed insight into the perceptions and lived experiences of teachers experiencing the phenomena at the time of the study. The emergent themes for research question one were positive learning environment, positive peer-to-peer and student-teacher relationships, and lower suspension rate. The emergent themes from research question two were relationships and coping skills. The emergent themes for research question three were classroom discussions, check-ins and journal writing. Based on responses from participants in this study, the implementation of social-emotional learning in Title I schools has a positive outcome on student behavior and academic achievement. The participants also identified how teachers implement social-emotional learning in their classrooms on a daily basis, affecting positive change in student outcomes academically and behaviorally. The researcher hopes that the findings of this study

will serve as a guide to school and district leaders who are considering how to change exclusionary discipline practices and support the ‘*whole child*’.

KEY WORDS: Social-emotional learning, Student outcomes, Academic achievement, Title I schools

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Chapter I

Educating students has evolved from complete segregation, in the early years of the last century, to school choice in America's 21st century schools (Forman, 2005). In 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) was enacted by congress to ensure that children with disabilities could receive a free and public education like their nondisabled peers. In 1994, zero-tolerance policies were adopted in the United States dictating state policies to enforce a one-year expulsion of any student bringing a firearm on campus or lose state funding provided to support local school districts (Dickerson, 2014).

These policies have been greatly criticized for increasing bad behavior, increasing dropout rates in secondary students and indirectly punishing African-American students even more than Latinos (American Psychological Association, 2006). School districts were later charged with the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which forced a standards-based education reform. In 2015, it was replaced with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), whose focus is preparing students for college and careers (United States Department of Education, 2017).

In the past 20 years, the list of issues facing today's educators has become daunting; high-stakes test, substance abuse, suicide, academic standards, delinquency, dropouts, and social media are just a few (Zins and Elias, 2006). Whereas, schools were originally formed to teach the basics, reading and writing, they have now become a place of children with, not only academic needs, but also, social, emotional, and mental health needs that are not always supported by school and district leaders (Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich and Gullota, 2015). Research now supports the belief that students in today's classrooms are unprepared for learning

and teachers are ill-equipped to address all their needs, especially diverse low-income students and the trauma that can impact their learning (Mader, 2015). Yet, despite research proving the importance of nurturing social emotional wellness, the importance of both the academic and social dimensions of schooling and their complementary and interdependent nature remains poorly understood, as do the conditions necessary for educators to link them effectively in schools and classrooms (Rutledge, Cohen-Vogel, Osborne-Lampkin and Roberts, 2015).

While most stakeholders believe that academic achievement should be the focus of American schools, few recognize the social-emotional need that is the missing piece to schooling (Elias, et al, 1997). Beyond the way in which students' efforts to compensate for learning challenges drains their energy for nuanced social perception and self-controlled interaction, impairments in reading and language skills are directly linked to impaired social-emotional skills (Elias, 2004). This statement explains one of the reasons why social-emotional learning (SEL) is so important in the educational process for at-risk students (Elias et al., 1997).

Background of Study

Over a decade ago, then Secretary of State, General Colin L. Powell, helped to launch a national campaign to help put young people on the path to success in school, work, and life; becoming known as the GradNation campaign, the purpose was to increase the high school graduation rates in American public, private and charter schools (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Horning-Fox, and Moore, 2011). A framework, now known as the *Civic Marshall Plan* (CMP), was developed by a committee of vested advocates that highlighted three focus goals: "take action within low graduation rate communities; build and enable state and district capacity to improve graduation and college readiness rates; and accelerate graduation rates by strengthening the public education system" (Balfanz, et al., 2011). The report also listed

five action steps for the first focus goal, which describes the critical need of schools to harness the power of nonprofits to provide expanded supports to help students remain in school and become successful adults.

While progress has been made in the last 10 years, *Building a GradNation's* updates highlighted concerns that too many of the nation's most vulnerable students remain in the low-graduation rate schools (Civic Enterprise, 2016). The update further detailed that the CMP is an ever-evolving framework sharing research-based solutions to end the dropout crisis; however, due to the unique challenges of each community, the "10 Planks of the Civic Marshall Plan" was developed to be implemented in a variety of innovative ways to improve high school graduation rates (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Hornig Fox, DePaoli, Ingram, and Maushard, 2014). The 2014 update listed *dropout recovery* as plank 10 and stresses the importance of creating comprehensive recovery programs for disconnected youth.

The GradNation 2016 update pointed out that low-graduation rate high schools have declined since the launch of the campaign; however, the dropout numbers are still significantly too high in predominately Black, Latino and/or low-income schools. Obviously, students from diverse, minority, and low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to experience learning difficulties and dropout (Gubi, and Bocanegra, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative that schools identify and implement approaches that promote not only academic engagement, but also social-emotional needs (Payton, et al., 2008).

To address the emotional support need, a team of concerned researchers, educators and advocates convened in 1994 to discuss a solution, which launched the Collaborative for Academics, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL); the

Collaborative was established with a goal of establishing high-quality, evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) as an essential part of preschool through high school education (CASEL, 2016). CASEL (2015) stated in a guide created for programming that SEL should be considered a scientifically established, practical method that could improve social, emotional and academic outcomes for secondary students. When students are emotionally engaged, they feel a sense of belonging and connection with their school, teachers, and peers (Main and Whatman, 2016). In the last two decades, there has been a wealth of research conducted that documents how and why SEL is implemented in schools across the nation, suggesting that policy makers and educators can impact the healthy development of youth by implementing an evidenced-based SEL program into the educational setting (Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger and Weissberg, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Many of today's educators recognize the importance of "educating the whole child" (Kochhan-Bryant, and Heishman, 2012). Jones, Greenberg, and Crowley (2015) demonstrated how success in school involves both social-emotional and cognitive skills. While rigorous academic skills are needed for students to be prepared for college and/or the workforce, Jones et al. (2015) contended that social interactions, attention and self-control affect readiness for learning just as much as the cognitive ability to learn. Other advocates, educational pioneers and scientists are increasingly supporting this research (Weissberg et al., 2015). Brandman (2016) writes under the foretelling title, *The Most Important Conversation about Education in A Generation*:

Compelling education research and brain science now demonstrate what parents have always known: the success of young people in school and beyond is inextricably linked

to healthy social and emotional development. Yet the nation's predominant approach to K-12 education fails to fully take advantage of what we know about how people learn.

(para. 1)

While American schools now look very different from the early years of public education, what schools teach and how it's taught has not changed enough to meet the needs of today's average student (Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich and Gullota, 2015). Weissberg et al. noted that families are faced with increased economic and social pressures and, increasingly, children are exposed to a complex world through media and technology; however, many communities have less support for and involvement in organizations that foster a child's social emotional development and character. CASEL believed strongly that social emotional competencies are foundational for all learning, which have guided the conversation about the importance of learning standards for SEL and the need for them to guide instruction that supports social and emotional development (Dusenbury, Zadrazil-Newman, Weissberg, Goren, Domitrovich, and Mart, 2015).

Not only can social-emotional skills contribute to student achievement, but also, extensive research has demonstrated that school-based SEL promotes students' connection to school and positive behavior (Weissberg et al., 2015). Rutledge et al. (2015) asserted, in their year-long study of effective urban high schools, that addressing the social and emotional needs of students is a viable and promising approach to improving the outcome of high school students. CASEL has become the nation's leading organization for advancing the development of academic, social and emotional competence for all students (CASEL, 2016). However, in recent years, the topic has sparked a national conversation taking place by many stakeholders interested

in meeting the needs of all students. Very early on in educational history, an education pioneer stressed that character education was just as important as academics in American schools (The United States Department of Education, 2005). The United States Department of Education website noted:

Throughout time, societies have recognized the need to educate the coming generation of adults to pass on knowledge and skills. Recorded history from long before the present era emphasizes that education must also develop character. One of the great education reformers, Horace Mann, in the 1840s, helped to improve instruction in classrooms nationwide, advocating that character development was as important as academics in American Schools. (Para 1).

While the *Partnerships in Character Education Program* was adopted by Congress in 1994 and renewed with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), very few public schools can be found implementing any type of social skills or character education program today. According to Dickerson (2014), many students are introduced to the justice system due to a string of bad decisions, which lead them further into the criminal justice system instead of the school system. Implementing social emotional learning may offer schools an early warning indicator of at-risk students and school failure (Davis, Solberg, De Baca, and Gore, 2014).

Moreover, recent studies have concluded that factors other than great instruction matter as it relates to school effectiveness (Zins, Weissberg, Wang and Walberg, 2004). Rutledge et al. (2015) argued that social emotional learning and its role in student success is equally important as great instruction. The researchers suggested that learning is a social process where both students and adults benefit from environments that nurture emotional well-being. Some school districts across the nation have found that addressing school-aged children's social-emotional

needs has had tremendous impact on school climate and student academic achievement (Payton et al., 2008). In a meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions for 213 social-emotional programs, Durlak, Dymnicki, Weissberg, Taylor and Schellinger (2011) reported that, compared to the controlled group, students enriched with a social emotional program demonstrated enhanced SEL skills, attitudes, and positive social behaviors, as well as a decrease in conduct problems and an increase in academic performance during the implementation of the program.

The most compelling evidence of the need to address the social emotional needs of students occurred 20 years ago when CASEL formed a unique team to address some critical social areas for America's youth, while schools were inundated with several positive youth development programs for drug and violence prevention, sex education, and moral education, to name a few (CASEL, 2016). The collaborative continued by explaining that SEL was introduced as a framework to address the needs of young people while helping schools and districts, nationwide, coordinate programming. "The collaborative has been a leader, a catalyst, and a collaborator serving the field of social and emotional learning" (CASEL, History Section, 2016, para. 7). In 1997, CASEL began the work of collaborating with other vested organizations and community leaders. Now, almost 20 years later, CASEL continues to collaborate towards advancing policy related to SEL as the need is even greater; however, schools and districts across the nation still have a gap in knowledge on how to implement SEL without compromising academic expectations or extracting funds from other needed programs on campus (Price, 2015). According to Rutledge et al. (2015), while studies have identified the social side of schooling to be critically important, little empirical research has explored the mechanisms of social emotional practices in schools.

Statement of the Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional learning in Title I schools and its influence on student outcomes. At this stage in the research, social emotional learning will be generally defined as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2016). Conley (2015, Chapter 13) surmised that promoting the five competencies identified by CASEL would likely curb problems in emotional and social domains of students in higher education. Providing a study highlighting how some schools have been able to implement SEL effectively and document increased student success, could enable others to begin their own process for SEL programming and what works best for their population of students. The recent research on SEL and character education programs conducted in 483 schools across the state of New Jersey can possibly provide insight on making and sustaining change in historically troubled schools (Elias, White, and Stepney, 2014).

Whether a school is high performing or low performing, students are expected to leave high school with life-long skills that will optimally prepare them for work and life (Elias et al., 1997). Zins and Elias (2006) suggested that genuinely effective schools prepare students to not only pass the standardized test, but also the test of life. The authors, also, found that that social-emotional competence and academic achievement are interwoven. If students master writing, reading, mathematics and cultural arts, but fail at interpersonal and intrapersonal communication, they may not be prepared for life after high school. Studies have shown that successful students master content and building healthy relationships. For example, Durlak, et al. (2011) advised that

schools have an important role to play in raising healthy children by not only fostering the students' cognitive development, but also their social and emotional development.

The five social-emotional competencies defined by CASEL as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making are the best examples of what students, as well as adults, need to cope in society, according to experts and advocates in the field (Zins et al., 2004). In fact, a growing body of research on social emotional and character education programs shows that both can influence health behaviors and academic achievement among low-income minority youth, the population disproportionately affected by negative outcomes (Bavarian et al., 2013).

While social-emotional learning (SEL) is important to all students, it seems imperative for students in special populations. Gubi and Bocanegra (2015) stated that students from diverse backgrounds, including linguistically and socioeconomically, are more likely to experience academic difficulties and dropout. The researchers' study further documented that research is increasingly showing that implementing SEL interventions in schools and classrooms have improved both long-term social-emotional competencies and academic outcomes for students who are considered different from the average American youth. This is similarly important as it relates to immigrant students new to the country who are sometimes rejected by their peers due to their lack of social skills and what is acceptable when interacting with young Americans (Oppedal, Roysamb, and Heyerday, 2005). In addition, Elias (2004) documented that the principles of SEL and the principles by which they are learned are highly relevant to understanding a student's academic difficulties and why they are so often accompanied by social difficulties.

SEL appears to impact several factors as it relates to student success. Greenberg, Katz and Klien (2015) argued that while SEL interventions have gained wide-spread support for academic achievement, they also believe, due to psychobiological studies, that teaching children self-regulation skills may build biological resilience, preventing long-term effects of stress. Additional research demonstrates that evidence-based SEL interventions are associated with academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011; Zins and Elias, 2004).

Research Questions

The following qualitative questions guided this study:

1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of social-emotional programming and its influence on student behavior in Title I schools?
2. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of social-emotional programming and its influence on academic achievement in Title I schools?
3. What are teachers expressed feelings and opinions regarding the implementation of social-emotional learning in the classroom in Title I schools?

Definition of Terms

Social-Emotional Learning

The process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2017).

Student Outcomes

For this study, *student outcomes* will be defined as the results indicated on students' report card grades, discipline records, STAAR results, attendance, and school involvement.

Academic Achievement

“Academic achievement represents performance outcomes that indicate the extent to which a person has accomplished specific goals that were the focus of activities in instructional environments, specifically in school, college, and university” (Steinmayr, Meibner, Weidinger, and Wirthwein, 2019, introduction section, para. 1).

Title I Schools

” Schools with high numbers or high percentages of students from low-income families” (United States Department of Education, 2018, program description section para. 1)

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was based on research by Bandura (1971). With his *Social Learning Theory*, Bandura explained how children learn in social environments (Wheeler, 2014). Bandura (1971) explained that the theory assumes modeling influences produce learning, suggesting that observers respond to what they see being done versus just the present stimuli. Bandura, a social cognitive psychologist, was very influential in the transition between behaviorism and cognitive psychology (Learning Theories, n.d.). According to Learning Theories, Bandura's theory explains that human behavior is a continuous reciprocal interaction of behavioral, cognitive and

environmental influences. Bandura's research produced four principles of social learning:

1. Attention and focus matter.
2. Retention depends on context.
3. Reproduction occurs on demand
4. Motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic (Wheeler, 2014, para. 1)

Wheeler (2014) continued by explaining how powerful social modeling is in education, affording students the opportunity to witness positive consequences from certain behaviors, which are likely to cause repeat behavior of the same. According to the learning theory, behavior is learned before it's emulated, and observation of positive behavior produces positive configurations of like behavior (Bandura, 1971). However, Bandura changed the name from *Social Learning Theory* to *Social Cognitive Theory* in 1986 because of his belief that people have cognitive control over their behavior, and he believed the cognitive was a better description of how people learn from their social experiences, good or bad (McLeod, 2016).

Limitations

Lunenberg and Irby (2008) defined *limitations* as "factors that may have an impact on the interpretation of the findings or on the generalizability of the results." The study was limited by the following limitations:

1. The researcher did not work at the campus used in the research and cannot determine the fidelity and integrity of implementation.
2. Qualitative studies are not generalizable.

3. The researcher did not disseminate the surveys and, therefore, cannot determine who received them for completion.

Delimitations

Lunenberg and Irby (2008) defined *delimitations* as “self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study.” The study included the following delimitations:

1. Only one school district in Texas was used to conduct the study
2. Only Title I schools within the district were considered to conduct the study.
3. Only one Title I school was used to conduct the study.

Assumptions

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) defined *assumptions* as “postulates, premises, and propositions that are accepted as operational for purposes of the research.” There are a few essential assumptions in this study. The researcher assumed the following:

1. The teachers were honest in responding to questions during the survey portion of the study.
2. The administrator was honest in responding during the interview portion of the study.
3. Participants responded to all questions without personal biases.
4. Implementing SEL is a district initiative and all schools, in the district, were implementing with fidelity and integrity.
5. All students in the district were receiving SEL and progressed monitored for its affects.

Organization of the Study

This chapter reviewed past and current research on SEL programming and its effects on students and school climate. Various programs and diverse populations were highlighted to stress how impactful SEL has been for school-aged children. SEL and effective programming, which includes the five competencies identified by CASEL, were explored during the research as possible options for school leaders struggling with poor student outcomes. The issue of consistent implementation, how to manage it into the school day and budget, might be resolved and, ultimately, improve student outcomes in schools throughout the nation. In Chapter II, the researcher will provide a detailed review of the literature including: (a) introduction; (b) historical data; (c) overview of social intelligence and social-emotional learning; (d) supporting agencies; (e) best practices; (f) expected outcomes; and a summary. In Chapter III, the researcher will describe the proposed methodology for the study. The sections in the methodology chapter include purpose of the study, research design, context and setting, participants, instrumentation, data collection, research bias, data analysis, and a summary. In Chapter IV, the researcher will provide findings of the study. In Chapter V, the researcher will provide discussions, implications, recommendations, and conclusions.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional learning in Title I schools and its influence on student outcomes. At this stage in the research, social emotional learning will be generally defined as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2016). This chapter consists of the following components: historical data, school dynamics, emotional intelligence, and social-emotional learning.

Historical Data

While today's educational professionals expect a highly diverse population of students in their classrooms, many may not be prepared for the various nature of life experiences many students have faced that may, ultimately, have some negative impact on their future (Bryant and Heishman, 2012). While a growing number of concerns have changed the focus of academic learning to meeting the social-emotional needs of students as well, early educators documented why it was most important decades ago.

Education Pioneers

Although mental wellness and social emotional learning has become a huge discussion in the last 30 years as it relates to educating America's youth, the idea of how students develop best and what role social skills play has been around since the early

1900s (Isenberg and Jalongo, 2014). Two world renowned cognitive psychologists, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, conducted and completed research on cognitive development and learning among children and adolescents, each developing a theory on the topics, reaching several of the same conclusions (TheyDiffer.com, 2014). The website asserted that although there were distinct differences in both theories, both men's works are still used by educational psychologists today. The information on the website also noted that while they agree on several theories, it is Vygotsky who strongly believes in the role of social interaction on how students develop cognitively.

Jean Piaget. According to McLeod (2015), Piaget was the first psychologist to conduct systematic studies of cognitive development and is known as the author of "*the theory of cognitive observational learning*". McLeod asserted that Piaget's contributions include the stage theory of child cognitive development which proposes that children proceed through four stages based on maturation and experience and are still widely used in developing educational policies and teaching practices. McLeod (2015) listed the four stages proposed by Piaget:

1. 'Sensorimotor stage (birth to 2 years old) – the main achievement during this stage is object permanence...knowing that an object still exists even if it's hidden.
2. Preoperational stage (2-7 years of age) – during this stage young children begin to use symbolism.
3. Concrete operational stage (7-11 years of age) – turning point in a child's cognitive development as he/she begins to think logically.
4. Formal operational stage (11 years and over) – children begin to think about abstract concepts and logically test hypothesis".

McLeod (2015) pointed out that Piaget believed strongly in the idea of “readiness,” meaning a child should not be taught any new concepts until he or she has reached a certain stage of cognitive development. McLeod further explained that Piaget received massive support for his ideas on understanding and communicating with children, and although he never related his theory to education, proceeding researchers explained how his theory could be applied to teaching and learning. Although support has been ongoing throughout the decades, McLeod contended, Piaget did receive criticisms on failing to consider the effects that social setting and culture may have on cognitive development.

Lev Vygotsky. Known as the father of “social development theory,” Lev Vygotsky stressed the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition (McLeod, 2015). Unlike Piaget’s suggestion that children’s development precedes their learning, McLeod pointed out, Vygotsky believed strongly that social learning precedes development. Per Seth Chaiklin (2003), Vygotsky is probably most widely recognized for his well-known scientific production, “zone of proximal development (ZPD)”, which is “the concept that relates to the difference between what a child can achieve independently and what a child can achieve with guidance from a more knowledgeable individual.” Chaiklin pointed out that Vygotsky’s concept is not concerned with the development of a skill for any task but must be related to development.

While ZPD was one of Vygotsky’s greatest concepts, his belief in language being man’s greatest tool, was his most passionate argument, theorizing that “language plays two critical roles in cognitive development: the main means by which adults transmit

information to children” and how it “becomes a very powerful tool of intellectual adaptation” (McCleod, 2015). While Piaget believed strongly that children construct knowledge through actions in their environment, Vygotsky refuted that with his belief that “human inquiry is embedded in culture and culture is embedded within social history” (Pass, 2004). According to Derry (2013), Vygotsky argued a compelling case of conceiving the mind as social. In short, Derry pointed out, he believed, irrefutably, that human beings have the unique ability to mediate their existence creating stimuli to determine their own behavior.

Horace Mann. First a lawyer, then a senator for the state of Massachusetts, Horace Mann was invited to take an education advisory position for the state government (Baines, 2006). Realizing that schools were in disarray, Baines wrote that Mann resolved to conform public schools to reflect the best of private schools. Known for his belief that education was the antidote for many societal problems ranging from poverty to ignorance, Mann used his advisory position to persuade constituents that the future of the state was integrally tied to the education of all children, not just the top ten percent (Baines, 2006). Mann was known in Massachusetts as the politician who posited schools to unify and edify a nation, which led to his critical role in the establishment of Massachusetts’s first board of education, becoming its first secretary in 1837 (Peterson, 2011).

According to Peterson (2011), Mann was also very instrumental in winning the debate of free education in Massachusetts, where it became a reality in 1843. This caused great delight amongst some but, not so much, amongst others. Baines (2006) shared that requiring children to attend school earned Mann wrath from poor families who needed

the income of their children to survive; however, he never wavered from his belief that education should be a level playing field for all kids, whether rich or poor.

Baines pointed out that Mann had four fundamental beliefs about education:

- Instruction should be adapted to meet individual needs of students.
- Teachers should be well-prepared, knowledgeable leaders of impeccable virtue since teaching is the most difficult of all arts.
- Physical fitness should be rigorous and continuous.
- The most important purpose of the school is to teach students moral guidance – tolerance, generosity, respect for others, and diligence can be learned.

Mann suggested that the four moral qualities should be a part of a human's character and voiced why character education was vital to the curriculum (Baines, 2006).

Character Education

Smith (2013) surmised that Horace Mann argued the case for character education based on a religious emphasis on moral development, but it has since “transformed into more secular approaches, detailing the values clarification model; character word-of-the-month approach; performance approach, and social emotional learning” like a few of the transformative models currently used to address character development in today's schools. Smith suggested that these approaches are reflective of current changes in the social, cultural, and economic spheres of the country. While Mann believed that money should not separate students' schooling, Smith surmised that blurred lines between classes of people has done just that.

Contributors. Although there were many changes in the acceptance of character education throughout the decades, schooling in the 1950s into the 60s focused on

teaching children “right” and “wrong,” as well as love for their country (Smith, 2013). Lawrence Kohlberg’s theories of moral development, expressed Smith, shifted the thinking from moral absolutes to child-specific approaches. Kohlberg, a supporter of Piaget, became famous for his work at Harvard University in the early 1970s when he popularized his theory of moral development (Barger, 2000). Kohlberg demonstrated through his studies, Barger pointed out, that people progressed in their bases for ethical behavior in a series of stages. Barger listed the six identifiable stages as “social orientation; obedience and punishment; individualism, instrumentalism, and exchange; good boy/good girl; law and order; social contract; and principled conscience.” Much the same as his mentor Piaget, “Kohlberg believed that individuals could only progress through one stage at a time” (Barger, 2000).

Watz (2011) stated that much of America’s interest in character education stems from its roots to European education, which was the blueprint for American classrooms. Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher, was one of the first philosophers to influence character education in the mid-1800s with his focus on ethics and the idea that human beings are morally obligated to do what’s right (“Biography A.,” n.d.). Famously credited with coining the term “sociology,” French philosopher, Auguste Comte, also emphasized morality as the cornerstone of human political organization in the early 1800s, furthering the study of society and the development of sociology (“Biography B,” n.d.). Also, a French philosopher, Charles Bernard-Renouvier, accepted Kant’s “critical philosophy” when beginning his own research determining “human individuality as self-determination and free will, necessary principles for morality” (Britannica, n.d.).

Equally important to the contribution of character education are some American pioneers. Benjamin Franklin, a founding father of the United States, took a strong position on the need for teaching morality in public schools (Watz, 2011). Franklin believed as Horace Mann, said Watz, that morality and education were intricately connected. Watz continued by pointing out that Franklin went as far as to suggest that history lessons afforded the opportunity to extend the development of character within the student body. Watz also discussed William Holmes McGuffey, who was not unlike Franklin and Mann when it comes to the development of character in school-aged children. During the early 1800s, McGuffey designed a series of textbooks to help students learn to read while teaching character development, solidifying his belief that values and education were inter-connected (Watz, 2011).

The emergence. According to Smith (2013), character education saw a resurgence with a more traditional approach during the 1980s when then president, Ronald Reagan, supported schools in moral development for students. Smith noted that school-based programs began focusing on promoting ethical values and virtues and continued the interest in character education during the 1990s when partnerships began. One of the leading national organizations, The Character Education Partnership, was founded in 1993. Smith explained that President Bill Clinton hosted five conferences on character education during his two terms in office; President George W. Bush further expanded governmental support; and the Department of Education used competitive grants to fund school-based programs.

Due to increased pressures on American schools for accountability and concrete outcomes, the field of character education was impacted by a new focus aimed at

personal success and achievement, as well as post-secondary goals (Smith, 2013). In a position paper published in 2008, the Character Education Partnership (CEP), stated that although core ethical values are foundational in a life of character, “performance values such as effort, diligence, and perseverance promote academic learning; foster an ethic of excellence; and develop skills needed to use ethical judgement accordingly.” The partnership continues by documenting that the moral aspect of character enables individuals to treat each other with fairness, respect, and care, which ensures pursuing performance goals in ethical versus unethical ways. On the other hand, the partnership pointed out, the performance aspect of character enables individuals to act on their moral values and make positive differences in the world. According to Smith (2013), the addition of performance character, in the field of character education, aligned it more closely with the most recent influential approach to supporting healthy mental development – social emotional learning. Smith pointed out that the five SEL competencies and performance character cover much of the same ground.

School Dynamics

Although rural and urban school districts both face many challenges with funding, resources, and behavior problems, they still differ as rural schools tend to have smaller class sizes and less discipline problems (Knoblauch and Chase, 2015). According to their 2015 article documenting the impact of school setting, Knoblauch and Chase suggest that urban schools often face a number of problems and challenges, which all impact teacher and student efficacy, beliefs, and attributions.

Teacher Efficacy

While research shows varying definitions of teacher self-efficacy, Albert Bandura's work around self-efficacy is widely used as a catalyst for the range of meanings used today (Kelm and McIntosh, 2012). According to the authors, Bandura defined self-efficacy as "the belief in one's own ability to perform certain actions at different levels." The researchers continued by sharing that self-efficacy changes from environment to environment and is based on experience. Teachers having varying levels of perceived self-efficacy for academic instruction and classroom management was used as an example for the definition. Developing their own definition from the competing theories of teacher self-efficacy, Tschannen-Moran, A. Hoy, and W. Hoy (1998) defined it as "one's own perception of performance of a future task when the current level of functioning is considered in reference to the teaching task and its context."

Tschannen-Moran et al. included two processes in their definition: "a person's analysis of the teaching task and its context and an assessment of personal teaching competence."

The first process, stated Kelm and McIntosh (2012), may include motivation and ability of students being taught the school environment and the resources available to the teacher. While the second process, the researchers added, requires teachers to reflect on and evaluate their own abilities. Kelm and McIntosh also propose that with time and experiences, teachers can build a stable sense of efficacy; however, new challenges could cause teachers to reevaluate their own abilities to face new tasks. Protheroe (2008) suggested that principals should develop a sense of efficacy for individual staff members and the entire campus because teachers' abilities and confidence depend on past experiences and, possibly, school culture. The report also hinted at the fact that a

teacher's belief in his or her ability impacts student outcomes. Teachers with a strong sense of efficacy exhibit greater levels of planned organization, are more open to new ideas and methods to better meet the needs of students, are more understanding when things fall apart, are less critical of low-performing students, and are less inclined to refer struggling students for special education evaluation (Jerald, 2007). In a 2012 study of social emotional learning and its impact on school climate and teacher efficacy, Collie, Shapka and Perry surmised that SEL has the potential to influence those teachers, implementing it by improving their own skills as they teach the competencies. This study suggested that SEL is not only good for students, but also for those charged with implementing it.

School setting. In the United States, there are differences in rural, suburban, and urban schools. Knoblauch and Chase (2015) noted that rural and urban schools face more challenges related to funding, available resources, experienced teachers, and discipline problems. These problems, stressed Knoblauch and Chase, makes these schools difficult to staff while facing huge teacher turnover. Knoblauch and Chase also indicated the fact that most suburban schools are typically located in more affluent, higher-educated, predominately White communities with better funding. In addition, the authors state that achievement levels falling far below rural and suburban schools reflect the problems plaguing urban school settings. "Many teachers have low expectations for poor students of color, creating the 'expectation gap'" (Delpit, 2012, p. 10). This is a concern when most students of color are already attending school where the climate is institutionally, structurally, and personally racist. (Masko, 2014).

Rural schools face some of the same problems as urban schools; however, rural schools tend to have smaller class sizes with fewer discipline problems (Monk, 2007), making for better student/teacher relationships and a sense of community (Lomotey and Swanson, 2007). In contrast, urban schools are typically large, highly bureaucratic, and lack a sense of community (Delpit, 2012). Even with low student motivation caused by structural conditions of most urban schools, when provided intellectual support and resources, students can develop academically; however, critics need to realize that 64% of students, in urban school settings qualify for free or reduced lunch, indicating that their families are at or close to the federal poverty level (Hudley, 2013). Sociodemographic are not solely responsible for the challenges of urban schools, but they speak to broader social and economic inequities facing these populations (Ahram, Stenbridge, Fergus & Noguera, n.d.). Recent research lists three characteristics exhibited by successful teachers in urban schools as knowing themselves, knowing the setting, and maintaining high expectations regardless of the circumstances (Swanson-Gehrke, 2005). According to the author, these teachers set high standards believing that the environment is not an excuse to lower expectations since school setting can impact teacher efficacy and teacher efficacy can impact school climate.

School climate. Defined as “norms, values, and expectations that support the social, emotional and physical safety of the people in the environment” by the National School Climate Council (2007), school climate is a combination of relationships among students, school staff and community partners. Conceptually related, school culture refers to the “unwritten rules and expectations” amongst the staff (Gruenert, 2008). The

National School Climate Center (2017) has identified five elements of school climate: (1) safety as it relates to school-wide expectations, as well as physical and social emotional security; (2) teaching and learning; (3) interpersonal relationships with respect for diversity and social support; (4) institutional environment (e.g., sense of belonging, engagement, physical surroundings); and (5) staff relationships as they relate to professionalism and leadership. Loukas (2007) added, Feelings about school climate underlies individual attitudes, behaviors, and group norms of those persons engaged in the environment; however, the climate is not experienced the same by all stakeholders.

Not only does a positive school climate reduce a student's exposure to risk factors, but also, promotes positive youth development (O'Brennan and Bradshaw, 2013). Loukas (2007) reported that individual perceptions are so important that schools often assess how students feel about their school, using several instruments available for examining school climate perceptions.

A vast amount of research is increasingly showing students' perceptions of school climate affect student behavioral and emotional problems (Loukas, 2007). In addition, Loukas explained, while behavioral problems are external and therefore easy to recognize, emotional problems are more difficult to identify because of the internal nature; however, they could include sadness, loneliness, hopelessness, anxiety, and feelings of worthlessness. Durlak et al. (2011) argued that embedding social emotional learning into the traditional academic curriculum should foster thoughtful, socially responsible thoughts and actions among students. This, argued the researchers, combined with the research on positive school climate and its impact on positive student outcomes, compels school leaders to consider non-academic influences on a student's success.

O'Brennan and Catherine (2013) recommend that schools experiencing poor school climate consider changing their norms, values, and expectations, as well as implementing an evidence-based approach, like SEL, as a strategy for improving the campus to a more caring and supportive environment. Thapa, Cohen, Guffey and Higgins-D'Alessandro (2013) agreed with this recommendation, stating studies have shown how positive school climate is linked to academic achievement, reduced aggression, lower suspension, and motivation for learning, as well as other positive student outcomes.

Emotional Intelligence

Spanning over about 18 years, emotional intelligence (EI) expanded from brief articles and book chapters to a relevant area of research, which relates to both emotion and intelligence (Mayer, Roberts and Barsade, 2008). According to Mayer et al., emotional intelligence can be defined as the ability to carry out accurate reasoning about emotions and the ability to use emotions and emotional knowledge to enhance thought” (p. 507). However, Mayer et al. pointed out that some researchers defined EI as the ability to reason, while others connect the concept with traits such as achievement motivation, happiness, self-regard and flexibility. There were others who identified the addition of such traits to be troubling and wondered whether a theoretically sound conceptualization of EI could be identified (Locke, 2005).

Peter Salovey. One of two authors writing the groundbreaking emotional intelligence journal article in 1990, Salovey is considered a pioneer in this area of research. Goleman (2005) wrote in his book *Emotional Intelligence*, penned 15 years after the Salovey article, while there was virtually no scientific literature on the topic before the field has grown to legions of researchers in the years preceding. Goleman

continued by acknowledging that the growth in this area of scholarship is owed mostly to Salovey, Mayer and their colleague Caruso for the tireless efforts to gain scientific acceptance of EI. In their 1990 article, Salovey and Mayer defined EI as “the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s own thinking and actions” (p. 189).

A great deal of the article discussed the link between emotional intelligence and the meta-experiences of mood. Salovey and Mayer (1990) summarized that emotionally intelligent people use their skills to meet goals such as enhancing or managing their own moods and emotions to motivate others; however, when there is a deficit in these skills, antisocial and manipulative behaviors can lead to sociopathic endings. Salovey and Mayer concluded with a framework of sorts for healthy emotional intelligence using principles that connect mood regulation and EI, including flexible planning (using mood swings appropriately in various settings), creative thinking (being able to problem solve), mood redirected attention (attending to feelings assists with problem solving), and motivating emotions (moods may be used to motivate completing difficult tasks). They resolved that persons with EI can be thought of as having achieved at least a limited form of positive mental health.

Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2004) documented that emotionally intelligent people pay attention to and use management of their own behaviors, resulting in positive outcomes for themselves and others. Mayer and Salovey (1997) arranged these skills into a hierarchy of four branches: “(1) perceive emotions in oneself and others accurately, (2) use emotions to facilitate thinking, (3) understand emotions, emotional language, and the

signals conveyed by emotions, and (4) manage emotions so as to attain specific goals.”

Mayer and Salovey noted that the four processes will yield individual differences depending on the person, meaning responses will vary based on the level of emotional intelligence. Emotional Intelligence research has also shown that people with high EI tend to be more socially competent and having better quality relationships, as well as being viewed as more interpersonally sensitive than those with low EI (Lopes, Salovey and Straus, 2003).

Daniel Goleman. Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2008) suggested that Goleman’s 1994 best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence*, which began with the early version of their EI model, complicated the popular understanding of the concept. Lantieri and Nambiar (2012) documented Goleman’s belief that emotional intelligence is as important as intelligence quotient (IQ) in a child’s healthy development and future success. Lantieri and Nambiar also discussed Goleman’s connection of feelings and thinking, believing that the brain’s emotional and executive areas are interconnected. Goleman (1995) expressed a genuine appreciation for EI and how it has catapulted the implementation of SEL throughout the nation in his added introduction, released for the 10th anniversary of his 1995 groundbreaking book. “Most gratifying for me has been how ardently the concept has been embraced by educators, in the form of programs in “social and emotional learning,” or SEL.” (Goleman, 1995, p. x).

Outlining preliminary evidence in 1995, Goleman stated in the added introduction that there is now scientific evidence suggesting teaching children self-awareness and confidence, management of emotions and impulses, and increasing their empathy improves behavior and academic achievement. Goleman also proposed in his 1995

publication that effective SEL impacts the shaping of a child's developing neural circuitry, including executive functions of the prefrontal cortex which manages working memory and inhibits disruptive emotional impulses. Goleman completed his introduction with his vision of the day that emotional intelligence is widely understood and SEL has become a standard practice in schools everywhere.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

While it has gained much traction in the last ten years, SEL is still not regarded as a required portion of a student's (Dishion, 2011) educational curriculum in elementary and secondary schools. According to Espelage, Rose, and Polanin (2015), research support for SEL programs is growing and a meta-analysis found that if a school implements a quality program, it can expect more socially appropriate student behavior and some type of increase in academic test scores. Davis, Solberg, De Baca, and Gore (2014) documented that an increasingly depersonalized learning environment causes youth to disengage from middle and high school by not meeting academic expectations and being absent and/or causing major behavior disruptions, all of which culminates into leaving school altogether.

Smith (2013) surmised that just like academic skills, social-emotional skills require both teaching and frequent practice where students will be able to learn lessons and apply them to real-life situations during the school day. Elias, White, and Stepney (2014) suggested that it would be difficult to imagine any classroom or school that could be engaging and productive in the absence of students' possession of the five competencies.

Although all students may benefit from SEL programming, research shows that it is very impactful on students in low-income areas where students are more at risk for failing and/or dropping out of school (Bavarian et al., 2013). According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) (2016), a disturbing trend represents how children are being funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile system. The union also asserted that many of these children have learning disabilities or histories of poverty, abuse, or neglect, and would benefit from additional educational and counseling services. Civic Enterprises (2016) documented in its annual GradNation update, how high school graduation rates flatlined for 30 years until 2012 when they began to rise again. The report also pointed out that the numbers have continued to rise over the last five years, but the goal of 90 percent by 2020 probably will not be met.

While the 1994 Zero Tolerance Policy was enforced to make schools safer, it is contrary to the best educational practices (Dickerson, 2014). Dickerson also discussed the research pointing out the ongoing disproportionality in the application of and consequences relating to these practices. The five, critical, social emotional competencies: *self-awareness; self-management; social awareness; relationship skills; and responsible decision making*, identified by CASEL (2017), are widely used as the framework for what an SEL program should address.

CASEL (2016) defines social-emotional learning (SEL) as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. CASEL also defined the five competencies for SEL as follows:

- (a) Self-management: the ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations;
- (b) Self-awareness: the ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions and thoughts and how these influence behaviors;
- (c) Social awareness: the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures;
- (d) Relationship skills: the ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups; and
- (e) Responsible decision-making: the ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms.

The collaborative stressed that the proximal goals of SEL programs are to foster the development of these five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies (Durlak et al., 2011).

Lantieri and Nambiar (2012) documented that a major multi-year study found that students who received SEL in grades 1-6 had an 11% higher grade-point average and greater levels of school commitment, attachment and completion by the time they were 18 compared to students in a control group with no SEL programming. Completing a multi-year comparative case study on four racially and socioeconomically high schools, Rutledge et al. (2015) found that unlike the two lower performing schools, the two higher performing schools had strong and deliberate structures, programs and practices that attended to students' academic and social emotional needs.

This outcome may have supported Gubi and Bocanegra's (2015) claim that SEL interventions emphasize development of social skills through healthy, supportive relationships with peers, teachers and other school officials. The researchers also implied that the generalization of the five competencies should be promoted to have a positive impact on a child's ability to develop healthy relationships with peers, family members and others within a diverse society.

In research on low-income urban schools, Bavarian et al. (2013) discussed how positive behaviors resulted in less time on classroom management and more time devoted to interactive strategies that created an intellectually stimulating environment. Adults cannot simply tell children to calm down or pay attention without providing guidelines on how to do so and considering the focus of most SEL programs is universal prevention of behavior problems, it is understandable that schools see a decrease in inappropriate behavior once a program is implemented (Lantieri and Nambiar, 2012). Zins and Elias (2006) concluded that all children might benefit from social-emotional instruction, including those at risk, those exhibiting negative behaviors, and those displaying significant behavior problems already.

Although it is believed that SEL and academic learning are connected, when it comes to educating the "whole child," schools still struggle with full implementation or adopting a program at all (Daunic et al., 2013). Dishion (2011) hinted that program development is only the first step in the innovation process and could be short-sighted in that schools are left with a list of promising programs but no map of how to integrate approaches with a realistic and effective strategy. Dishion also reported that program

implementation is often fueled by the zeal and funding of program developers but often dies because of budget shortfalls and changing school leadership.

Still, back in October, the United States Department of Education released *Guidance on Encouraging Well-Rounded Education* and is providing grant money that will allow schools and districts to tailor their investments to meet the needs of their unique student populations (United States Department of Education, 2017). During Klein's (2016) question and answer session with him, Secretary of Education, John B. King stated that under the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), there is an opportunity to broaden the definition of an excellent education to strike the right balance in the nation's classrooms.

The SEL framework fosters competence promotion and youth development to help with reducing risk factors and foster protective mechanisms for positive outcomes (Guerra and Bradshaw, 2008). In guidelines published for educators, Elias et al. (1997) defined SEL as "the process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively" (p. 2). Goleman (1995) argued that while people have long thought that academic learning in school has nothing to do with one's emotions or social environment, neuroscience is proving just the opposite. Elias et al., (1997) agreed with this statement wholeheartedly, stating that schools will be more successful when they integrate efforts to promote a student's academic, social, and emotional learning, since schools are social environments and learning is a social process. Several research studies have shown that students don't learn alone, but in collaboration with family members,

teachers, and peers where the environment cultivates and encourages social emotional well-being (Rutledge et al., 2015).

Moreover, Weissberg et al. (2015) surmised the goal is to teach young people to interact in socially skilled and respectful ways with family members, peers, school staff, and community members, while practicing healthy behaviors and developing work habits for college, career, and life success. The researchers also stated there is broad agreement that today's schools must offer more than instruction to prepare students for life-long success because life conditions have drastically changed in the last century including the racial, ethnic, and economically diverse backgrounds of students. Zins and Elias (2008) touched on these changes discussing how integral SEL is in helping students cope with the uncertainty in their daily lives and their future due to a tech savvy 21st century, tarnished role models, commonplace unethical behavior, and many opportunities to engage in negative behaviors themselves.

Elbertson, Brackett, and Weissberg (2010) stated that it has become apparent over time how children who engage in positive social interactions with their teachers, peers, and family while participating actively and cooperatively in the learning process are more successful in their school community environments. These are some of the many reasons the Fetzer Institute hosted a conference in 1994, where researchers, advocates, and educators joined together to discuss the psychological, educational, and health needs of school-aged children. Out of this meeting, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was formed, along with the term

“*social and emotional learning*” (Elias et al. 1997). “These SEL pioneers came together to address a concern about ineffective school programming and a lack of coordination among programs at the school level” (CASEL, 2017, para. 2).

CASEL. “The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning was formed in 1994 with the goal of “establishing high-quality, evidence-based SEL as an essential part of preschool through high school education” (CASEL, 2017, para. 1). Elias et al. (1997) listed the four primary domains of SEL: “(1) life skills and social competencies, (2) health promotion and problem-solving skills, (3) coping skills and social support for transitions and crisis, and (4) positive, contributory service” (p. 1017). In addition, Elias et al. noted that the four skills are critical at every level but vary in application throughout life. Research on various school-based interventions confirms SEL’s impact on physical and mental health, moral judgement, citizenship, academics, and achievement motivation (Durlak et al., 2011).

Until recently the traditional emphasis in school has focused, not on SEL, but on academic instruction; however, the last few decades have shown growing efforts towards a more holistic approach to teaching (Elbertson et al., 2010). The researchers suggested that these changes may impact the sense of belonging that engages students more in the educational environment instead of the disconnectedness from school experienced by some students. Elbertson et al. also pointed out that students who report positive relationships with their teachers also tend to display better academic outcomes. CASEL (2003) discussed how establishing safe nurturing and productive learning environments promote greater attachment to school, which is linked to reducing risky behavior and greater academic success. Zins et al. (2004) argued that promoting social

emotional learning is not only no longer separate or parallel to the academic mission of schools, but also essential to students' positive outcomes and can be implemented in various ways. Recently, even parents have joined educators with promoting the influence of social emotional competence on academics and are holding schools responsible for not only preparing students for high school graduation, but also for life (Elbertson et al., 2010).

As far back as the beginning of the decade, a report issued by the United States Department of Labor identified skill traits necessary for the workforce. Many of the skill traits are linked to SEL, including interpersonal communication skills, decision making and problem-solving skills, self-esteem; integrity, self-management, the abilities to influence and negotiate, personal responsibility, and listening (United States Department of Labor, 2000). Furthermore, Zins et al. (2004) listed the five competencies and each of their components:

- Self-Awareness (i.e., identifying and recognizing emotions; accurate self-perception; recognizing strengths, needs and values; self-efficacy, and spirituality).
- Social-Awareness (i.e., perspective taking; empathy; appreciating diversity; and respect for others).
- Responsible Decision Making (i.e., problem identification and situation analysis; problem solving; evaluation and reflection; and personal, moral, and ethical responsibility).
- Self-Management (i.e., impulse control and stress management; self-motivation and discipline; goal setting and organizational skills).

- Relationship Management (i.e., communication, social engagement, and building relationships; working cooperatively; negotiation, refusal, and conflict management; and help seeking and providing. (p. 7)

Zins et al. also stated that these behavioral social skills can attach kids to school and their commitment to academics can be fostered, leading to effective school performance.

Therefore, Elias (2006) concluded, “SEL is sometimes called the “missing piece,” because it represents a part of education that links academic knowledge with a specific set of skills important to success in schools, families, communities, workplaces, and life in general.”

Weissberg et al. (2015) stated that in addition to parents, teachers and advocates, the past few years has soared with supporters of SEL, including members of Congress and the United States Department of Education. “Members of Congress from both parties have introduced or support pending legislation that support SEL. Also, the U. S. Department of Education has incorporated SEL in recent rounds of Race to The Top and Investing in Innovation competitive grants” (Weissberg et al., 2015, p. 10).

Children living in poverty are more at risk for a long list of negative outcomes (Committee for Children, 2014). In a 2014 white paper, the Committee for Children stated how powerless schools often feel when faced with the harmful impact of poverty on a child’s ability to achieve in school, knowing that the school can neither eradicate poverty for all children, nor eradicate it for all time. The committee pointed out, however, that schools can teach skills that can help students overcome the negative effects of poverty, like self-regulation skills to help students mitigate poverty’s impact. Equally as important as the academic link, CASEL (2015) discussed the early warning

system SEL offers and how it has the potential to create a more balanced system to detect whether students are on target to graduate. Social and emotional learning can serve as coordinating principles for a school's academic development and prevention programs (CASEL, 2015). CASEL continued by suggesting that SEL provides a common language needed to communicate about a wide range of programs and teaching practices typically provided in the school.

Believing in that common language, CASEL partnered with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) in 1997 to produce a groundbreaking book for educators interested in SEL programming. Never had there been such a resource for implementation, and the two decades following the release have found the collaborators advancing evidence-based programs and building a community of committed educators and scientists to continue the research on the impact of SEL, as well as the release of a social emotional handbook in 2015 (CASEL, 2017).

Expected Outcomes

While everyone accepts that reading, writing, and arithmetic are fundamental to school success, most don't question if students' relationships with peers are important for academic achievement (Flook, Repetti, and Ullman, 2005). The researchers surmised in their study that peer problems do affect a child's mental health, self-concept, and overall school performance. These peer problems could include bullying as it is regarded as a significant problem in American Schools, and students with disabilities are overrepresented (Espelage et al., 2015). The researchers discussed how research shows the overrepresentation may be attributed to social and communication skills deficits, which are foundational in SEL programs.

The article continued by suggesting that direct instruction in the areas of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, problem solving, and relationship management would serve as a vehicle to reducing bullying, for students with disabilities, when provided over a period. Elias (2004) documented how most students with learning disabilities have difficulties with social relationships, but the past decade had provided cognitive, behavioral, preventive and brain research with thorough ideas of the skills children need for positive social relationships. Elias continued by pointing out that there is a clear link between literacy-related learning disabilities and SEL. In a 2013 brief report, Daunic et al. appeared to agree with Elias' conclusion, writing, "...the study results provide preliminary evidence that integrating social-emotional learning and literacy instruction may be a viable strategy for promoting self-regulation in the service of positive social and academic outcomes for children at risk" (p. 43).

Moreover, many advocates of ecological reform models maintain that teaching and learning are inextricably linked to school climate and that school reform models must address the diverse transactions between children and their environment (Wiener, 2000). Elias et al. (2014) suggested that schools can't be productive if students are not exposed to the five SEL competencies. Culture and climate perceptions within the school may provide a partial explanation for achievement and discipline gaps across ethnicities (Elias et al., 2014). It is in the school that children develop a sense of themselves as social beings, and beliefs formed about their academic abilities impact classroom performance (Flook et al., 2005). It is an unreasonable expectation for ethnic minorities who do not feel safe or valued in their school to sustain a strong commitment to the learning process,

especially since they are aware of the decades long gap between themselves and their White counterparts (Elias et al., 2014).

Furthermore, questioned Elias et al. (2014), if the professional adults are not providing a welcoming and supportive environment, can students have reasonable expectations from society. There is reason to believe that the catalyst for a true turnaround process begins with a supportive school environment where students are learning core social, emotional, and academic skills (Zins et al., 2004). Social economic status and ethnicity has long played a role in education and the visible achievement gap between White students and their minority counterparts, and if there is even a possibility of countering this powerful convergence of social economic status and ethnicity on disadvantaged students, schools must support evidence-based interventions (Elias et al., 2015).

These interventions, suggested Elias et al. (2014), should work to improve the climate of schools, as well as address the social, emotional, and character competencies needed to expand opportunities presented to students. Thomas (2000) stated that, typically, when students perform poorly on standardized tests, schools are encouraged to raise academic standards without addressing the possible reasons for failure, which may cause students to disengage more from the learning process. Thus, simply raising academic standards without attending to social-emotional needs can be both unsuccessful and destructive (Thomas, 2000).

Supporting Agencies

Since CASEL was formed in 1994, many other agencies have dedicated their work to promoting social emotional wellness in school-aged children, as well as adults.

The Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2016) has united educational leaders to re-envision what constitutes success in today's schools. The commission also asserted that, along with stakeholders across the nation, they are exploring how schools can educate the whole student by fully integrating social, emotional and academic development. Formed in the fall of 2016, the commission consists of educators, researchers, practitioners, and policy makers whose primary focus is to make social and emotional development an essential component of K12 education by developing a roadmap with action steps of research, practice, and policy that addresses the needs of the whole child (Brandman, 2016).

The Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility began its work around peacemaking skills in 1982 as a response by educators to the threat of nuclear war; however, their work has since grown to include an array of programs that help young people and adults develop critical social and emotional skills (Morningside Center, 2016). The center noted that they work with CASEL and other vested organizations to bring SEL to every student throughout the country. SEL4MA is an alliance established in Massachusetts to help young people succeed socially, emotionally, and academically (SEL4MA, 2017).

The alliance has four strategic goals: to influence and advocate public SEL policies; to advocate and support implementation of research-based SEL programs; to establish an SEL resource for schools and communities; and to ensure sustainability and capacity-building by providing a framework (SEL4MA, 2017). The Committee for Children (CFC) is a child advocacy and support organization that has had a huge impact on SEL programs, developing a curriculum for students in grades K-8 (Elias, 2017).

CFC has become a creative force for curricula, expressed Elias, because it recognizes that not only do students need academic intelligence, but they also need emotional intelligence and the skills needed to navigate through life.

All three of these organizations have websites that assist with classroom implementation by offering access to free resources such as SEL lesson plans, SEL tips of the day, and links to latest research and other resource pages. Probably one of the most impactful agencies is the *Academy for Social-Emotional Learning in Schools*, created by a partnership between the College of Saint Elizabeth and Rutgers University. The academy offers a professional certificate in school leadership in social-emotional learning and character development, which is obtained through fully online coursework (College of Saint Elizabeth, 2017).

Research Based Practices

Creating safe and nurturing schools is a fundamental way to provide social and emotional support (McCombs, 2004). Another critical implication for practice, noted McCombs, is gaining the input and perception of the students. McCombs also pointed out that in order to build trusting relationships among students and teachers, strategies for promoting a positive school culture should be implemented gradually and be student centered. Klem and Connell documented in a 2004 journal article that parents prefer their children to experience a caring school environment, and research suggest that such an environment does influence students' academic performances.

Research also showed that higher levels of engagement in school improves student performance; however, students need to first feel that the adults in the school care about them (Klem and Connell, 2004). According to the self-determination theory,

children are motivated to engage in school because of their psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Williford and Sanger-Wolcott, 2015).

Undoubtedly, many SEL programs have been researched for effectiveness. Williford and Sanger-Wolcott (2015) suggested a variety for building student teacher relationships like: *The Incredible Years Training Program* designed for ages 4-8; *Chicago School Readiness Program* designed for pre-school and head start aged children; and *My Teacher Partner* (MTP) also designed for pre-school aged children. For middle school aged children, Jagers, Harris, and Skoog (2015) documented a variety of options for this complex time in a student's life, such as, *Life Skills Training Program* (LST) and *Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways* (RIPP). Sklad, Diekstra, De Ritter, and Ben (2012), found that the implementation of a program enhanced social and emotional skills, positive self-image, prosocial behavior, reduction or prevention of antisocial behavior, and promotion of academic achievement. Sklad et al. also record that in the short term of six months, the largest effects were found in social-emotional skills, attitudes toward self, and prosocial behavior, with academic achievement and reduction of antisocial behavior following as the next most impacted areas.

Perhaps one of the most popular universal classroom-based SEL programs, supported by CASEL, is Second Step developed by Committee for Children in 2008 (Committee for Children, 2014). The program, serving kids in K-5, was designed to teach children how to understand and manage their emotions, control their reactions, be aware of others' feelings, problem-solve, and make responsible decisions (Committee for Children, 2014). Well-designed SEL programs involve all stakeholders (Doikou-Avlidou and Dadatsi, 2013). The researchers also documented, during their study, that most target

pupils were engaged in and liked the activities, viewing the social occasion as an opportunity to spend part of the school day in more interactive ways. While a great majority of the target pupils exhibited symptoms of inattention/hyperactivity and/or conduct problems, they took initiative and made positive comments about themselves during the activities, expressing their assertiveness (Doikou-Avlidou and Dadatsi, 2013). In like manner of other research on SEL programs, Bavarian et al. (2013) conducted a study on Positive Action (PA) on low-income urban schools in the Chicago area to determine its effect on academic outcomes. Bavarian et al. found that the intervention had positive impacts on absenteeism and academic achievement, including reading and math scores on standardized testing for African-American boys and students receiving free or reduced-priced lunch. Previous research has long since documented socioeconomic status and ethnicity as known predictors of school dropout, which is associated with other negative outcomes (Bavarian et al., 2013). The program outcomes presented in this research reflect positive influences that could impact GradNation's 2020 goal to decrease the number of students dropping out of American schools each year. In addition to SEL programs, a recent buzz term has become a part of schools throughout the world in hopes of decreasing the number of out-of-school suspensions and punitive consequences for wrongdoing. Restorative practices, which is a philosophical approach to crime and wrongdoing that puts harm done, accountability for that harm by the wrongdoer, and repair of that harm at the center of the problem-solving, has been in schools since the mid-nineties (Thorsborne and Blood, 2013). Initiated in Canada during the 1970s, shared the authors, restorative justice is a different paradigm from retributive justice, and has since become a paradigm shift in schools as restorative discipline.

In the traditional approach to school discipline, the enquiry is one of blame and punishment, but a restorative approach is much more focused on relationships and repairing of harm (Thorsborne and Blood, 2013). Zaslow, Mackintosh, Mancoll, and Mandell (2015) discussed the large number of legislatures proposed between 2011 and 2014 that referred to the importance of and evidence for SEL programs, such as the 2011 Restorative Justice in Schools Act which amended the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) to allow local educational agencies to use specific funds to train school staff in conflict resolutions and restorative practices.

Summary and Organization of Study

This chapter discussed the supporting research on the impact of social emotional learning (SEL) on student outcomes and research-based programs previously and currently used to address the social and emotional needs of students. It detailed the historical context of building character in children by using moral development to ensure they learned to do “what’s right.” Early education pioneers, such as Vygotsky and Piaget were discussed to make the connection between learning and social development. Emotional Intelligence was introduced through Salovey and Mayer, who defined the term and presented its framework. Their work was praised in Daniel Goleman’s 1994 release of *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, which discussed in detail the impact social emotional learning has on student outcomes.

SEL was introduced with a thorough review of how the Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) was formed, and the endless research it has achieved in the last 20 years to support the positive impact SEL has on school-aged children, which had major influence on public policy and education reform. “On July 7,

2011, H. R. 2437, the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2011, was introduced in the House of Representatives as part of efforts toward reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)” (Zaslow et al., 2015). The authors also contended that increasing the program standards will be increasingly important for continued strengthening of evidence-based practices that support children’s academic achievement and their social emotional development.

In Chapter III, the researcher will describe the proposed methodology for the study. The sections in the methodology chapter include purpose of the study, research design, context and setting, participants, instrumentation, data collection, researcher bias, data analysis, and a summary. In Chapter IV, the researcher will provide findings of the study. In Chapter V, the researcher will provide discussions, implications, recommendations, and conclusions.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional learning in Title I schools and its influence on student outcomes. At this stage in the research, social emotional learning will be generally defined as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2016). This chapter is organized into the following sections: research design, context and setting, participants, instrumentation, data collection, researcher bias data analysis and summary.

Research Design

The research design of this study used a qualitative phenomenological approach involving a school in an urban Texas school district. Qualitative studies are most distinguishable from quantitative studies by its small purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013). The study focused on teachers' responses to survey questions designed to gather expressed feelings and perceptions of the influence social-emotional learning has on student outcomes in Title I schools. Qualitative research is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive data to gain insight into a phenomenon of interest (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006).

According to Creswell (2013), researchers conduct qualitative research when they want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the

power relationships sometimes shared between the researcher and participants of the study. It requires discipline, knowledge, training, practice, hard work, and creativity for the researcher to generate useful and credible qualitative findings through observation, interviewing and content analysis (Patton, 2002). Lunenburg and Irby (2008) stated that qualitative studies are conducted in natural settings where researchers build a complex, holistic picture, analyze words, and report detailed views of participants.

According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological study describes several individuals' common meaning of a lived experience of a phenomenon. Creswell continued by pointing out that a phenomenological researcher focuses on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. Lunenburg and Irby (2008) suggested that phenomenological research is one of the most basic forms of research as this type of inquiry focuses on basic information. The difference from other studies, Lunenburg and Irby shared, is the researcher is concerned with clarifying the specific and recognizing the phenomena through the eyes of the participants.

Through teacher surveys, the researcher gathered information on teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional learning and how it has influenced student outcomes on their Title I campus. An administrator was interviewed to determine his perception of how teachers perceive the implementation. The following qualitative questions guided this study:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional programming and its influence on student behavior in Title I schools?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional programming and its influence on student achievement in Title I schools?

3. What are teachers expressed feelings and opinions regarding the implementation of social-emotional learning in the classrooms in Title I schools?

Context and Setting

This study was conducted in an urban school district in central Texas with an enrollment of more than 82,000 students in Pre-K thru 12th grade. According to the 2017 district snapshot provided by the Texas Education Agency, the district has 130 schools and has an accountability rating of “met standards.” The snapshot also provided the district demographics as follows: 7.8% African American; 58.8% Hispanic; 26.6% White; 57.4% economically disadvantaged; 28% English language learners; 10% special education; and 29.2% bilingual and English as a second language. The school is located in a quaint working-class community where Latinos are the dominant residents.

The researcher chose this school district because it was a part of CASEL’s *Collaborating Districts Initiatives* (CDI), launched in 2011, to assist school districts with improving implementation and integrating social-emotional learning into the daily curriculum. Funded by the NoVo Foundation and the Einhorn Family Charitable Trust, the CDI affords each participating district a 250,000 grant for up to six years with the expectation that districts will focus on systems, an SEL vision, SEL standards, and professional learning (Kendziora and Yoder, 2016). As a part of the initiative, the chosen school district relied on a collaborative approach by providing training in many of the competencies to school personnel, aiming to create a common vocabulary and relationship building throughout the district so teachers, administrators, staff, and students could successfully articulate their thoughts and feelings (Bridgeland, Bruce, and Hariharan, 2013).

The district chosen to be studied is one of two school districts in Texas participating in the CDI. The initiative has nine other participating districts throughout the nation. The chosen school district began by implementing SEL in one feeder pattern of schools during the 2011-2012 school year and had full implementation by the 2015-2016 school year. It's for this reason the researcher assumed that every campus was implementing an SEL program with fidelity and integrity. Purposeful sampling was used to conduct this study. This type of sampling allowed the researcher to choose only individuals who had experienced the same phenomenon to accurately document the shared experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Participants

The participants for this study were purposefully selected from the teaching staff at a Title I school in a central Texas school district, where the district had mandated district-wide social-emotional learning programming for each campus. According to Creswell (2013), purposeful sampling should consist of individuals with diverse backgrounds. All teachers in the Title I school were asked to complete a survey since all of them had experienced the same phenomenon. The participants of this study have provided valuable information to the general audience about their experience, as a result, providing other interested parties with a better understanding of the phenomenon. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006), qualitative sampling uses a process that allows chosen individuals to help the researcher understand the phenomenon being researched.

Additionally, one administrator from the campus was asked to participate in an interview to gain insight on his/her perceptions of how teachers viewed the

implementation of social-emotional learning on their Title I campus. According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), interviews consist of open-ended questions where respondents are not provided answer choices, which allows the researcher the opportunity to probe deeper with follow-up questions.

Instrumentation

In reviewing the literature, the researcher identified and compared assessments previously used to collect data on school implementation of social-emotional learning. One instrument that aligns with the purpose of this study was created and used by American Institutes for Research (AIR) (2013) *CASEL-AIR Staff Survey of SEL Implementation* based on the theory of six constructs for schoolwide SEL implementation which are as follows: (1) develop a vision for SEL; (2) assess SEL needs and resources; (3) SEL professional learning; (4) implement evidence-based SEL programs; (5) schoolwide SEL integration; and (6) SEL continuous improvement (Education Policy Center, 2013). The participants in the AIR study were school staff, teachers, and administrators of the 10 participating school districts in the CDI. Education Week Research Center's (2015) *Social and Emotional Learning: Perspectives from America's Schools* was reviewed because it assessed multiple aspects of social-emotional learning, including educators' perspectives, professional experience and training, and school conditions. The study was conducted to gain a better understanding of how teachers and school-based administrators view social-emotional learning (Education Week Research Center, 2015).

The survey developed by the researcher for this study was *Teachers' Perceptions of Social-Emotional Learning in Title I Schools Survey*. The survey consisted of 15

questions divided into two parts, which included Part I – Demographical Data, Part II – 10 open-ended questions. Part I included five questions to determine school, the number of teaching years, ethnicity, gender, and subject taught. Part II included 10 open-ended questions, and consisted of questions about teachers' perceptions of how SEL influences behavioral and academic outcomes.

Reliability and Validity. After the modification of *CASEL-AIR Staff Survey of SEL Implementation* and *Social and Emotional Learning: Perspectives from America's Schools* to create *Teachers' Perceptions of Social-Emotional Learning in Title I Schools Questionnaire*, the researcher developed content validity for the instrument by having university professors review the content for accuracy and completion. In addition, the survey was reviewed by the researcher's dissertation chair and/or committee members who served as experts in instrument design and social-emotional learning. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006), validity is the degree to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure, allowing for appropriate interpretation of the results. Reliability, then, is the degree of consistency of an instrument (Gay, Mills, and Airasian, 2006). The content of the researcher's survey was taken from two previously approved instruments, where reliability and validity of the content were previously confirmed.

Data Collection

Approval was sought by Houston Baptist University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and granted before individuals were contacted for potential participation in the study. The primary purpose of this study was to gather information on teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional learning in Title I schools.

Surveys were the main data collection method used to gather pertinent personal opinions and feelings. Teachers employed in a Title I school, implementing social-emotional learning, provided the data for this study. Ethical considerations for this study included an anonymous survey, concealing participants' identities and obtaining their permission. A participation letter was sent with each survey to ensure that participants understood the expectations before deciding to participate in the study. Qualitative data collection requires the researcher to collect nonnumeric data to gain insight into a phenomenon (Gay, Mills, and Airasian, 2006).

Data was collected through two means: (a) survey containing demographics and open-ended questions and (b) and an interview with the campus administrator for his/her views on teachers' perceptions. The participants were notified by email, inviting them to participate in the study. The participants were asked to complete each question on the survey before submitting to the researcher. The one-on-one administrator interview was conducted via Skype.

Researcher Bias

Because of its importance, the researcher used reflexivity to minimize researcher bias. The researcher is a manager for autism & behavior services, who provides professional development on social-emotional learning. Therefore, the researcher was careful not to insert her own personal feelings into the responses of participants. For this reason, a recording of the interview was used for accurate documentation of the participant's responses. The researcher reviewed the participant's responses to gain insight into his or her perceptions, without adding her own opinions or feelings into the transcription. To be as objective as possible, the researcher remained open-minded while

gathering data for the study. Only with this level of professionalism and commitment could the researcher proceed with a low level of bias and influence on participants' responses during the study.

Data Analysis

In this section, the researcher describes the data analysis procedures that were used to analyze the following: (a) the surveys containing demographic questions and open-ended questions, and (b) the interview questions used to collect the administrator's feedback. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006), data analysis is an attempt by the researcher to accurately and undeniably summarize the data collected. The survey responses were analyzed to address the three research questions to determine teachers' perception of social-emotional learning implementation in Title I schools. In addition, the researcher explored teachers' perceptions of the influence social-emotional learning has had on student achievement and behavior on their campus. The surveys were coded by emergent themes. The open-ended responses were coded by emergent themes and number of guided protocol question. The researcher coded the responses to determine the teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional learning, using common themes and threads as a guiding factor.

The researcher used Creswell's (2013) six steps of data analysis in the treatment of the data by first organizing the data, reading all responses and notes before coding, describing the essence of the phenomenon, grouping statements into units, developing a textural description, and finally presenting the findings in chapter four. Codes were used to group responses for each guided question, further ensuring confidentiality of each participant as names were not included in the demographics of the survey. Additionally,

the specific site of the study was not revealed, being identified, instead, by state and region. Ensuring confidentiality, the researcher will keep all surveys and interview transcriptions on a password-protected computer file, and all consent forms in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home for at least five years.

Provisions of trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, validation and verification are used to describe the researcher's attempt to assess the data for accuracy when reporting participants' responses (Creswell, 2013). This was established by the researcher's time spent reviewing the surveys for common themes and detailed notes of the administrative interview, as well as reviewing the recording multiple times for accurate transcription. In accordance with enhancing credibility, the researcher used triangulation to establish a current theme or perspective. According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), triangulation is when a researcher uses a variety of data sources or subjects when collecting data for a study. The researcher used multiple participants from the campus and collected data using two different means to add variety to the data collected. In a final attempt to ensure provisions of trustworthiness, the researcher used member checking to confirm that the interview data had been interpreted correctly. The approach of member checking affords the participants the opportunity to check transcriptions for accuracy and credibility of the interview (Creswell, 2013). This process allowed the participant an opportunity to determine if the researcher captured his/her intended communication during the interview.

Summary and Organization of the Study

In this chapter, the researcher presented the specific methodology for the study. It included the purpose, research design, context and setting, participants, instrumentation, data collection, researcher bias, data analysis and summary. This chapter detailed who was included in the study and how data was collected. The participants were purposefully selected based on their position in the school district. The instrumentation section described the survey, which included demographics and 10 open-ended questions. Data collection and analysis procedures were discussed for two means of collection: (a) survey containing demographics and 10 open-ended questions, and (b) responses to interview questions provided by one campus administrator. The findings will be presented in Chapter IV. In Chapter V, the researcher will provide discussions, implications, recommendations, and conclusions.

Chapter IV

Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) in Title I schools and its influence on student outcomes. At this stage in the research, social emotional learning will be generally defined as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2016). With the increase of school districts responding to the need of more wrap-around services and supports for students' mental health, there is an increase in the implementation of socialemotional learning throughout the nation. This study sought to understand how teachers perceive this phenomenon and its impact on student outcomes. The findings in this study were guided by three research questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional programming and its influence on student behavior in Title I schools?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional programming and its influence on academic achievement in Title I schools?
3. What are teachers expressed feelings and opinions regarding implementation of social-emotional learning in the classroom in Title I schools?

Research Question One

Research question one explored teachers' perceptions of the influence the implementation of SEL has on student behavior in Title I schools. Emergent themes included, but weren't limited to, positive learning environment, positive peer-to-peer and teacher-student relationships, and lower suspension rate.

Positive Learning Environment

Seventy-three percent of teachers surveyed believed that the implementation of SEL has attributed to a positive learning environment where teachers and students are learning to manage their own emotions better. One teacher shared, "Social emotional learning has influenced the campus culture by creating a safe place for students to share without fear of judgement." Another teacher surmised that, "It has been beneficial overall, and I think we feel like a family sometimes." Additionally, one teacher expressed how nice it was to see students building love and compassion for others.

There were, however, about two percent of teachers surveyed who believed that it only works for some, and the campus still has a lot of work to do to affect change from the top down. Expressing during the administrator interview that there is still a lot of work to do in affecting change campus wide, the interviewee took ownership of leadership's role in leading this work by modeling and engaging. During a visit to the campus on a professional development day, the researcher witnessed the leaders providing a full day of team building and relationship building exercises to model the importance of SEL, not only for students, but also for the staff.

Positive Peer-to-Peer and Teacher-Student Relationships

In direct agreement with the positive learning environment, 73% of teachers surveyed felt that students were treating each other better and responding more positively to teacher directives and expectations. Teachers overwhelmingly felt that students were exhibiting more discipline when challenged with responsible decision making. One teacher expressed, “For the majority of students, SEL has given them the strategies to really consider situations that they are in, whether it be with other students or with teachers before they respond.” Feeling similarly, another teacher shared, “I have seen more positive behavior and I see students trying to change and make better choices.” Although the majority of teachers believed strongly that the implementation of SEL has improved relationships, about one percent shared that no change has been noticed. However, another 15% believed that while it hasn’t impacted all negative behaviors, the school is moving away from simply responding to the behavior and attempting to address the underlying causes.

Lower Suspension Rate

While less than two percent of teachers surveyed indicated that the suspensions or discipline referrals were down, the majority of teachers did believe that teachers were responding differently to students’ needs, and students were thinking before they react, which has led to more students being in the classroom instead of in-school or out-of-school suspension. One teacher mentioned that he or she noticed a decrease in discipline referrals but could not determine if it was campus-wide or just his or her class, since the data was limited to his or her own students. Sharing how behavior has changed, one teacher wrote, “We are now striving to recognize and promote positive behavior, use

restorative practices and decrease the number of in-school suspensions.” During the administrator interview, the interviewee expressed how the campus uses daily attendance, discipline referrals, and grades as an indirect approach to gauge how the implementation of SEL may be impacting the campus culture.

Research Question Two

Research question two explored teachers’ perceptions of the influence the implementation of SEL has on student achievement in Title I schools. Emergent themes included, but weren’t limited to, relationships and coping skills.

Relationships

An 81% majority of teachers surveyed believed strongly that student achievement has been influenced by the relationships that have been transformed due to the implementation of social-emotional learning. While no concrete data shows how much student achievement has improved, teachers agree that students are working harder and are more comfortable with seeking help from each other, as well as their teachers. One teacher stated, “Unclear without data, but I believe my positive classroom culture and the students feeling safe to express their feelings, benefits academic outcomes.” Another teacher expressed, “I have more students who have a growth mindset about their school work. They are also more likely to open up to me with issues outside of the classroom.” Confirming the belief that relationships matter, one teacher mentioned, “It has helped me to build relationships with my students. With better relationships, students are more responsive to instruction.”

Additionally, a few teachers just believe that students will be successful in whatever they do when they feel loved and accepted. Expressing this thought, one

teacher stated, “When they feel heard and understood, they respond better and, hence, perform better.” Another teacher mentioned, “If students realize I understand their feelings, they are more likely to come to me with problems in their learning and academic concerns.” Summing up the impact building relationships with students has, one teacher shared, “This builds trust, inquiry and motivation in my classroom. It has been extremely successful.”

Similarly, during the administrator interview, the interviewee stated: So, I saw once that teaching was defined as a relationship. So, I feel like if you don't have a relationship, there's no teaching that's going to happen. So, building relationships is important, and the content has to be organized and logical with lots of review and continuous feedback. In other words, have students take ownership of their learning with the teacher as a facilitator.

Coping Skills

While the majority of teachers agreed that relationships had a huge influence on student achievement, 33% believed that the coping skills learned through the SEL lessons have also played a major role. When asked to define social-emotional learning, 69% of teachers defined it as being in touch with or managing your own emotions. With that understanding, the 33% felt that the coping skills acquired through the SEL lessons, had a positive effect on how students responded to instruction and academic expectations. One teacher expressed, “It broadens their thinking skills and helps their ability to handle pressure.” Another teacher stated, “In many cases, students perform better because they can regulate their own emotions better.” Continuing this theme, one teacher expressed, “It helps them monitor and regulate their work ethic and emotions.”

In contrast to the majority, 19% of teachers surveyed expressed that they had not noticed a difference or couldn't determine the impact. However, about half of this group shared that it was too early to tell if there has been an impact. It is worth noting that all of these teachers have been in education over five years and, therefore, may have been a part of the implementation since the district wide initiative in 2015. However, the author had no way of determining how long the teachers were actually employed at the research site.

Research Question Three

Research question three explored teachers' expressed feelings and opinions regarding the implementation of SEL in the classroom. Emergent themes included, but weren't limited to, classroom discussions, one-on-one check-ins, and journal writing.

Classroom Discussions

Capturing the majority, 79% of teachers surveyed believed that SEL has opened up the opportunity for classroom discussions, leading to a more positive classroom environment where teachers show more empathy and students exhibit more discipline. Expressing how it's implemented, one teacher stated, "I implement social-emotional learning by showing empathy and building positive relationships with my students and their families." Highlighting how classroom discussions happen, one teacher mentioned, "I like to have circle discussions with my students and we talk about how they feel about certain situations in life and how they deal with various things like stress, trusting people, and how to overcome failures." Another teacher expressed, "I use SEL as warm-ups to start class off. This includes sharing out what students are up to after school is dismissed."

Check-Ins

While classroom discussions were the most emerging theme, 19% of teachers surveyed felt that checking in with their students was the best way to implement SEL on a daily basis. Although the campus provides a weekly SEL lesson, this group of teachers believed that a daily check-in was vital to determine how to accommodate students' needs for the duration of the class. Giving more detail, a teacher expressed, "I implement daily SEL components by doing a quick check-in on the student in the beginning of class or during a five-minute break time." Another teacher stated, "I implement SEL by connecting with students on a daily basis to gauge how they are feeling socially and emotionally, then adjusting instruction accordingly to effectively meet the class climate." Again, some teachers feel that the check-ins help with setting the tone for the class as this teacher expressed, "I check-in with students, and showing empathy, give them some options for dealing with challenging emotions before the work begins."

Journal Writing

While not as common as classroom discussions and check-ins, journal writing was expressed, by a number of teachers, as being an effective way to implement SEL in the classroom. One teacher stated, "I use journal writing for reflection time to think about emotions, how they affect others, and how they influence achieving their goals." Another teacher expressed:

It is important to me to always be doing some kind of social-emotional learning. In each lesson, I implement a warm up or journal entry that allows students to think about their feelings or thoughts on a certain topic. There is always an opportunity for students to speak to and work collaboratively with others.

In brief, it is important to note that the research site campus provides weekly lesson plans for SEL, and when asked how the campus implements SEL, 100% of teachers surveyed confirmed that the campus provides a weekly lesson to share during their FIT hour, an advisory of sorts. This sentiment was confirmed during the administrator interview when asked how the campus implements SEL, the interviewee responded, “I actually create SEL lesson plans once a week and teachers are asked to use during the FIT hour.” However, the research shows that teachers are, not only using weekly lessons to provide SEL, but also, they have established their own daily routines of SEL implementation to continue meeting the needs of their students.

Finally, the results did show an overwhelming sense of what SEL is and how it has impacted classroom culture, behavior, and academics on the research site campus. However, it was a central theme and consensus that implementing SEL is time consuming. Many of the teachers that stated they hadn’t noticed a change in behavior or student achievement, also stated that they didn’t have time to implement with all of the content expectations. During the administrator interview when asked what the expectations were around teacher implementation, the interviewee stated, “A lot of the teachers really like it, some teachers don't feel comfortable, and so it varies.”

Summary and Organization of the Study

In Chapter IV, an overview of the findings was presented using the emergent themes for each research question. The emergent themes for research question one were positive learning environment, positive peer-to-peer and student-teacher relationships, and lower suspension rate. The emergent themes from research question two were relationships and coping skills. The emergent themes for research question three were

classroom discussions, check-ins and journal writing. Quotes from the administrator's interview were included in the emergent themes to show a pattern of campus expectations of the implementation of SEL and teachers' perceptions of that implementation on their Title I campus. In Chapter V, the researcher will provide discussion, implications, recommendations, and conclusions for the findings of this study.

Chapter V

Discussion, Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional learning in Title I schools and its influence on student outcomes to provide further insight into why this practice should be adopted by more, if not all, public school settings. This chapter begins with a summary of the study, providing the overall problem, purpose statement and research questions, the study design including the participants, data collection and analysis, and a summary of the major findings of the study. This chapter includes the following sections: summary of the study, discussion of the findings, implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and conclusions.

Discussion

This section of Chapter V provides a summary of the purpose and design of the study and is followed by the major findings related to teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional learning in Title I schools. Conclusions of the findings are discussed in relation to the overwhelming need to address the whole child when educating students in today's public-school settings. Finally, implications for practice and recommendations for further research are presented and discussed.

Overview of the problem. Many of today's educators recognize the importance of "educating the whole child" (Kochhan-Bryant and Heishman, 2012). Some results from recent research have demonstrated how success in school involves both social-emotional and cognitive skills (Jones, Greenberg, and Crowley, 2015). While rigorous

academic skills are needed for students to be prepared for college and/or the workforce, Jones et al. (2015) contended that social interactions, attention, and self-control affect readiness for learning just as much as the cognitive ability to learn.

Purpose of the study and research questions. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) in Title I schools and its influence on student outcomes. At this stage in the research, social emotional learning will be generally defined as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2016). With the increase of school districts responding to the need of more wrap around services and supports for students' mental health, there is an increase in the implementation of social-emotional learning throughout the nation. This study sought to understand how teachers perceive this phenomenon and its impact on student outcomes. The findings in this study were guided by three research questions.

1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of social-emotional programming and its influence on student behavior in Title I schools?
2. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of social-emotional programming and its influence on academic achievement in Title I schools?
3. What are teachers expressed feelings and opinions regarding the implementation of social-emotional learning in the classroom in Title I schools?

Review of the study design. The research design of this study used a qualitative phenomenological approach involving a school in an urban Texas school district. Qualitative studies are most distinguishable from quantitative studies by its small purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013). The study focused on teachers' responses to survey questions designed to gather expressed feelings and perceptions of the influence social-emotional learning has on student outcomes in Title I schools. The researcher chose to use the phenomenological methodology because it allowed insight into the perceptions and lived experiences of teachers experiencing the phenomena at the time of the study.

Sample. The participants were randomly selected using purposeful sampling. According to Creswell (2013), purposeful sampling should consist of individuals with diverse backgrounds. The teachers were chosen based on the fact that the campus was implementing the CASEL framework for social-emotional learning as a part of a district initiative. The demographics of the campus represented a diverse population.

Data collection. Approval was gained from Houston Baptist University's Campus Institutional Research Board (IRB) prior to the researcher contacting individuals for potential participation in the study. The primary purpose of this study was to gather data on teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional learning in Title I schools. Surveys were the main data collection method used to gather the information. An administrative interview was used to allow the researcher to gain a perspective on campus expectations and views on teacher implementation. The researcher used ten prompts (see Appendix B) to guide the interview. Five prompts were used to gather

background information, while the other five were more specific about the implementation of social-emotional learning on the research campus site.

Summary of Major Findings

The major findings from the study are organized, discussed, and grouped in reference to each research question. The emergent themes for each research question will also be grouped by each question.

Research Question One

Research question one explored teachers' perceptions of the influence the implementation of SEL has on student behavior in Title I schools. Emergent themes included:

Positive learning environment. Seventy-three percent of teachers surveyed believed that the implementation of SEL has attributed to a positive learning environment where teachers and students are learning to manage their own emotions better. Both the administrator interview and the teacher surveys showed that the implementation of social-emotional learning has changed the way students interact with each other and how they respond to campus expectations in a positive manner.

Positive peer-to-peer & teacher-student relationships. In direct agreement with the positive learning environment, 73% of teachers surveyed felt that students were treating each other better and responding more positively to teacher directives and expectations. Teachers overwhelmingly felt that students were exhibiting more discipline when challenged with responsible decision making, which they attributed to the social skills students were learning during the SEL lessons provided on a weekly basis.

Lower suspension rate. While less than two percent of teachers surveyed indicated that the suspensions or discipline referrals were down, the majority of teachers did believe that teachers were responding differently to students' needs and students were thinking before they react, which has led to more students being in the classroom instead of in-school or out-of-school suspension.

Research Question Two

Research question two explored teachers' perceptions of the influence the implementation of SEL has on student achievement in Title I schools. Emergent themes included:

Relationships. An 81% majority of teachers surveyed believed strongly that student achievement has been influenced by the relationships that have been transformed due to the implementation of social-emotional learning. While no concrete data shows how much student achievement has improved, teachers agree that students are working harder and are more comfortable with seeking help from each other, as well as their teachers.

Coping skills. While the majority of teachers agreed that relationships had a huge influence on student achievement, 33% believed that the coping skills learned through the SEL lessons have also played a major role. When asked to define social-emotional learning, 69% of teachers defined it as being in touch with or managing your own emotions. With that understanding, the 33% felt that the coping skills acquired through the SEL lessons had a positive effect on how students responded to instruction and academic expectations.

Research Question Three

Research question three explored teachers' expressed feelings and opinions regarding the implementation of SEL in the classroom. Emergent themes included:

Classroom discussions. Capturing the majority, 79% of teachers surveyed believed that SEL has opened up the opportunity for classroom discussions, leading to a more positive classroom environment where teachers show more empathy and students exhibit more discipline.

One-on-one check-ins. While classroom discussions were the most emerging theme, 19% of teachers surveyed felt that checking in with their students was the best way to implement SEL on a daily basis. Although the campus provides a weekly SEL lesson, this group of teachers believed that a daily check-in was vital to determine how to accommodate students' needs for the duration of the class. Teachers expressed how once they knew where students were mentally, they could adjust the learning time to meet the needs of the students, leading to a more productive use of class time.

Journal writing. While not as common as classroom discussions and check-ins, journal writing was expressed by a number of teachers as being an effective way to implement SEL in the classroom. Whether it was classroom discussion, check-ins, or journal entries, the majority of the teachers felt that students needed an opportunity to speak and be heard without judgement, which led to students producing more classwork and less classroom disruptions.

Conclusions

This phenomenological study investigated the perceptions of teachers on the implementation of social-emotional learning in Title I schools and how it influences

student outcomes. It was quite apparent during this study that most teachers perceived the implementation as a positive influence on student academic and behavioral outcomes. Teachers desire to have good relationships with students and believe that those relationships cause students to treat each other with more kindness, while motivating students to engage in the learning environment. Based on the survey results, specific conclusions will be provided, accordingly, for each research question that guided this study.

Research Question One. What are teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional programming and its influence on student behavior in Title I schools? Based on the findings in this study, it can be concluded that teachers do feel that providing social-emotional learning impacts student behavior. Most teachers stressed that behavior had definitely improved over the years and they continue to see students trying to do better with each other and their teachers. The findings showed that most teachers took time out of their daily class routine to focus on how students were feeling and allowing them to manage those feeling in more positive ways.

The consensus among the majority of the group was this practice prevented discipline referrals, which could lead to in our out of school suspensions and have implications for the school-to-prison pipeline. The administrator interview supported this sentiment with a discussion on the district's tell survey that is administered on a yearly basis. According to the previous year's survey, the district had a decrease in discipline referrals. Previous research supports this finding according to Espelage, Rose, and Polanin (2015) meta-analysis that found if schools implement a quality SEL program, they can expect more socially appropriate behavior.

Research Question Two. What are teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional programming and its influence on academic achievement in Title I schools? Based on the findings in this study, the majority of teachers believe that the implementation of SEL has a positive impact on student achievement. Teachers repeatedly stressed that when students felt teachers cared about their well-being, they were more engaged in learning and more likely to ask for assistance when needed, leading to better academic performance. One teacher expressed, "Students have found ways to recognize their own patterns of behavior and process emotions in a healthier manner." Another teacher pointed out, "If students realize I understand their feelings, they are more likely to come to me with problems in their learning and academic success."

Some teachers stressed that when students are allowed to articulate their feelings before the lesson, they are ready for learning and focusing on instruction. Previous research supports this sentiment, including Durlak, Wiessberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011), whose meta-analysis comparing two schools reported that the implementation of SEL in one school demonstrated a decrease in conduct problems and an increase in academic performance.

Research Question Three. What are teachers expressed feelings and opinions regarding the implementation of social-emotional learning in the classroom in Title I schools? The findings from this study suggests that teachers not only believe in the implementation of SEL, but also believe that there is a benefit to implementing it in the classroom setting. While the research campus site has weekly SEL lessons provided for

use, a majority of the teachers stated that they used other methods to incorporate SEL on a daily basis.

Among those methods were classroom discussions, check-ins, and journal writing, all of which allow students to express their feelings. One teacher noted how important it was to allow students to express their feelings if academic achievement is expected. While some students may not require this accommodation, there are many who can't be successful without it. Weissberg et al. (2015) noted that not only can social-emotional skills contribute to student achievement, but also promotes students' connection to school and positive behavior. Rutledge et al. (2015) confirmed this with their year-long study of effective urban high schools, asserting that addressing the social-emotional needs of students is a viable and promising approach to improving the outcome of high school students. Gehrke (2005) stressed that successful urban city school teachers understand that different teacher behaviors may be required to meet the unique needs and lack of resources available to their students. The author goes on to point out how important urban city teachers feel it is to maintain high expectations for their students.

Implications for Practice

Although most schools struggle with inappropriate behavior, dropout rates, and many other daily student challenges, most school districts have not adopted a model or program to address the whole child, including the social-emotional needs of today's youth. With exclusionary practices being scrutinized and penalized due to the school-to-prison pipeline, it is imperative that school districts find a way to address the social-emotional needs of all students. If students don't feel connected to the learning

environment, they may continue to be truant, act out in aggressive manners, or dropout all together.

Dickerson (2014) asserted that many students are introduced to the justice system due to a string of bad decisions, which lead them further into the criminal justice system instead of the school system. Davis, De Baca, Gore, and Solberg (2014) noted that implementing social-emotional learning may offer schools an early warning indicator of at-risk students and school failure. The previous research and findings of this study have extensive implications for school administrators of Title I schools who want to affect change in their discipline practices and student outcomes.

Moreover, there are huge implications for classroom teachers who desire not to leave any children behind. Payton et al. (2008) surmised that school districts across the nation have found that addressing school-aged children's, social-emotional needs, has tremendous impact on school climate and student academic achievement. If students are unsuccessful, addressing their social-emotional needs are unlikely to make matters worse. If other research-based behavioral and/or instructional strategies have not proven to work, implementing some form of SEL might affect positive change in student outcomes as documented in this study. If students are to be successful, urban city school teachers must maintain high expectations for them regardless of their backgrounds or the school environment (Gehrke, 2005).

While it may be true that the implementation of SEL has proven to have positive impact on student outcomes, it is important to note the barriers. Time and teacher buy in were the two common themes in this study. This would imply that scheduling and setting expectations are key to ensuring the implementation is executed with fidelity and

integrity if there are to be success stories. As in previous research where teachers complained about not having time to implement, this study documented the same barrier. If school districts are expecting teachers to implement SEL in the classroom, they should be provided with a scheduled time, outside of academic instruction, where SEL is the focus. Elias, White, and Stepney (2014) surmise that with the powerful convergence of SES and ethnicity on disadvantaged learners, school leaders must support research-based interventions, which include social-emotional learning.

Recommendations for Future Research

Due to the growing number of students funneled into the school-to-prison pipeline due to exclusionary discipline practices, it is imperative to continue to investigate ways to meet all the needs of today's school-aged children. Additional research recommendations include the following:

1. Conduct a comparative analysis on a Title I school implementing SEL with one that is not;
2. Conduct a before and after implementation study in a Title I school to obtain quantitative data on academic and behavior outcomes;
3. Conduct a study on students' perceptions regarding the implementation of SEL in Title I schools;
4. Conduct a study on teachers' social-emotional skills and how that impacts their teaching style and student outcomes; and
5. Conduct a year-long study of the implementation of SEL and how it impacts the campus culture.

Concluding Remarks

In light of the current climate of society and the constant news stories of school shootings and/or violence, the need to address a student's social-emotional needs has never been greater. As pointed out in this study, allowing students to express themselves affects change in behavior. This change could very well prevent an aggressive act of violence or self-injury. Gone are the days of the three Rs – reading, writing, arithmetic. While academics will always be the main purpose for schooling, it cannot be the only. With students being fed into the school-to-prison pipeline and at-risk youth being the most vulnerable, society has to find a way to include all children in the learning process. As stated many, many years ago by Horace Mann, “The most important purpose of the school is to teach students moral guidance – tolerance, generosity, respect for others, and diligence can be learned” (Baines, 2006).

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Appendices

Appendix A Guided Interview Protocol

Appendix B Consent for Participation in Interview Research

Appendix C Participation Letter

Appendix D CITI Training

Appendix E IRB Approval Letter

Appendix F Instrument Approval

Appendix G Teacher Questionnaire

Vita

Appendix A

Guided Interview Protocol

Guided Interview Protocol Questions

For School Administrators

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore teachers' perceptions of the implementation of social-emotional learning in Title I schools and its influence on student outcomes. At this stage in the research, social emotional learning will be generally defined as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2016).

Introductory Questions

1. Tell me about your time as an educator.
2. How long have you been an administrator?
3. How long have you worked on this campus?
4. What group of teachers do you manage or appraise on campus?
5. What is your teaching philosophy?

Interview Questions

1. How does your campus implement social-emotional learning?
 - a. Tell me about programs, initiatives, time allotted weekly, locations, and campus expectations.

2. What are your expectations regarding teachers implementing social-emotional learning in the classroom?
 - a. Tell me about accountability and how administrators ensure that the implementation consists of fidelity and integrity.
3. How do you all progress monitor the effectiveness of the implementation?
 - a. Tell me how you assess students' level of growth as it relates to social-emotional competencies.
4. How do teachers feel about the implementation of social-emotional learning?
 - a. Tell me how you perceive their acceptance or resistance.
5. Describe your feelings on how the implementation of social-emotional learning has influenced academic achievement and behavior on your campus.
 - a. Tell me if the campus culture has changed, and if so, how has it changed.
 - b. Tell me if students have better outcomes, and if so, explain.

Thank the administrator for participating and explain how the remainder of the study will work.

Appendix B
Consent for Participation in Interview Research

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Latricia Borner from Houston Baptist University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of social-emotional learning in Title I schools. I will be the only administrator interviewed for this research. I agree to the following statements:

- My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on my campus will be told.
- I understand that the topic may be of interest to me. However, if I feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
- Participation involves being interviewed by a researcher from Houston Baptist University and will last approximately 30 minutes. Notes will be taken during the interview, as well as an audio tape being used to capture responses accurately and precisely.
- I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained during this interview, and that my confidentiality, as a participant in this study, will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
- Faculty and other administrators, from my campus, will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.
- I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects: Behavioral Sciences Committee at Houston Baptist University. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, the IRB may be contacted through the university.
- I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
- I have been given a copy of this consent form.

My Signature

Date

My Printed Name

Signature of the Researcher

Appendix C
Participation Letter

Dear Respondent,

I am a doctoral student in the Education Department at Houston Baptist University, completing my dissertation on teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of social-emotional learning in Title I schools. The purpose of this research is to explore how teachers perceive social-emotional learning implementation in Title I schools and how it influences student outcomes. Through your participation, I hope to gain knowledge in teachers' honest feelings about the benefits and/or challenges of implementing social-emotional learning into the curriculum.

Enclosed with this letter is a survey that asks a variety of questions about your attitudes toward the current collaboration with CASEL. I am asking you to look over the survey and, if you choose to do so, complete the survey and submit it for data collection.

If you choose to participate, do not write your name on the survey. I do not need to know who you are and no one will know whether you participated in this research. Your responses will not be identified with you personally, nor will anyone be able to determine who completed a survey. None of your answers, on the survey, will be shared individually. The purpose of the survey results is to find common perceptions and feelings, amongst teachers, about the implementation of social-emotional learning in Title I schools. There are no known risks if you decide to participate in this research, nor are there any costs for participating in the study.

I hope you will take a few minutes to complete this survey. Without the help of people like you, research in schools would not be possible. Your participation is voluntary and there is no penalty if you do not participate.

If you have any questions or concerns about completing the survey or about participating, you may contact me at (832) 646-3780 or at lborrower@hotmail.com. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Dr. Jennifer Butcher at Houston Baptist University by mail at 7502 Fondren Rd Houston, TX 77074, by phone at (281) 649-3000, or by e-mail at jbutcher@hbu.edu.

Sincerely,

Latricia Borner

Latricia Borner, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Education
Houston Baptist University

Appendix D



Completion Date 29-Nov-2016
Expiration Date 29-Nov-2019
Record ID 21297869

This is to certify that:

Latricia borner

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Human Subjects Research (HSR) (Curriculum Group)
COEBS Graduate Students (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Houston Baptist University

CITI

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w263b4d60-79a7-4034-b581-b0122494560e-21297869

Appendix E



Institutional Review Board Committee

Date: July 20, 2017
To: Latricia Borner
From: Institutional Review Board Committee
RE: Notification of IRB Action

Protocol Title: Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning in Title I Schools

This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed and APPROVED as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45CFR46.

PLEASE NOTE:

Upon Approval, the research team is responsible for conducting the research as stated in the exempt application reviewed by the IRB which shall include using the most recently submitted Informed Consent/Assent Forms (Information Sheet) and recruitment materials.

Any changes to the application may cause this project to require a different level of committee review.

Should any changes need to be made, please submit a Modification Form.

Taiya Fabre

Dr. Taiya Fabre

Chair, Institutional Review Board Committee

Appendix F

Katherine Romeo <Kromeo@casel.org>
Mon 4/3/2017 2:05 PM

☒

Hi Latricia:

You can absolutely use the survey and adjust however you like. Of course, remember that the psychometric properties are likely to vary with any changes you make but I'm sure you can run your own tests for reliability. Please do credit CASEL/ AIR for the original measure and let us know what you find!

☺

From: Latricia Borner [mailto:lborner@hotmail.com]
Sent: Friday, March 31, 2017 11:44 AM
To: Katherine Romeo <Kromeo@casel.org>
Subject: Re: Staff Survey

Greetings Katie,

I appreciate you sending the survey. I am wondering if I have permission to use this survey in my own research for my dissertation, and if it would be ok for me to eliminate questions or add some of my own. I do plan to use Austin ISD for my research, but I do not want to create a survey since yours is so aligned with the questions that I am seeking answers to. Please let me know if I have permission.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this matter.

From: Katherine Romeo <Kromeo@casel.org>
Sent: Monday, March 20, 2017 3:24 PM
To: lborner@hotmail.com
Subject: Staff Survey

Hi Latricia:

It was great chatting with you. I've attached the staff survey measuring implementation of systemic SEL based on our School level Theory of Action.

Please let me know if you have any questions!

Katie Romeo, PhD

Research Associate

CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

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Appendix G

The Teachers' Perceptions of Social-Emotional Learning in Title I Schools Questionnaire

School Name

Years of Teaching

Subject

Ethnicity

Gender:

1. Define social-emotional learning in your own words.

2. Describe how your campus implements social-emotional learning.

3. Describe how you implement social-emotional learning in your classroom.

4. How has the implementation of social-emotional learning influenced your students' academic outcomes?

5. How has the implementation of social-emotional learning influenced student behavior on your campus?

6. In what ways has the implementation of social-emotional learning influenced the school culture on your campus?

7. How important is the implementation of social-emotional learning for school-aged children?

8. Explain reasons why teachers might be hesitant to implement social-emotional learning in their classrooms.

9. Describe what makes the implementation of social-emotional learning successful.

10. What have you learned about educating others, since implementing social-emotional learning, which you didn't recognize before?

Vita

Latricia Borner is currently the program manager for autism and behavior services in the Office of Special Education Services in the Houston Independent School District (HISD), the seventh largest school district in the nation and the largest in Texas. She has been a part of the Office of Special Education Services for 10 years and, prior to the manager's role during the 2016-2017 school year, she was the behavior specialist which influenced her desire to study social-emotional learning. As the behavior specialist, Ms. Borner had the opportunity to train teachers on effective behavior strategies and interventions. In attending many trainings and conferences over the years, she learned about two very important resources for addressing the critical needs of most urban city students – restorative discipline and social-emotional learning programs. In addition to learning about these two great resources, Ms. Borner began developing and providing training for both resources through teacher orientation trainings, as well as the district's annual Special Education Conference, which she supports as a part of the planning committee. She currently manages a team of 11 individuals who support autism and behavior teachers in the district, and the passion for social-emotional learning is shared through their daily interaction with teachers and students in the classroom.

Ms. Borner began her teaching career after graduating, with a B.A., from Texas Southern University in 1997. Beginning, first, as a substitute teacher in her hometown of Memphis, Tennessee, she later returned to Houston and joined the alternative certification program in the Houston Independent School District. Upon her return to Houston, however, she became a case manager with Children's Protective Services where

she saw, firsthand, the trauma some students face in their communities. A year later, she began her career as a special educator at one of Houston ISD's most challenging middle schools, at the time. After spending three years there, she became a behavior support classroom teacher in a different middle school, where she learned just how socially diverse students were and how that impacted their future outcomes.

Ms. Borner pursued a Master of Education at Houston Baptist University, which she received in May 2007. During that coursework, she left HISD and went to work in neighboring Fortbend Independent School District (FBISD), where two years later, she became the special education department chairperson, learning the huge amount of state and federal compliance expectations that surround special education funding. She later returned to Houston ISD as a behavior program specialist in the Office of Special Education Services, where she is currently employed.

Contact Information: lborner@hotmail.com