

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING: BUILDING THE CAPACITY AND MORALE OF MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS

by

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(Under the Direction of Kaneshia Dorsan)

ABSTRACT

The stress and burnout of teachers before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic led to the need for additional social-emotional learning (SEL) support. While there is evidence of SEL support for students, this study specifically examined the design and implementation of social-emotional learning support for teachers to improve their morale while conducting an action research study for suburban middle school teachers. The purpose of this action research study was to examine the design and implementation of social-emotional learning support to build teacher morale. Data from perception and health and wellness surveys were used to build a structure for addressing teacher morale by providing professional learning for teachers using SEL competencies to help the teachers' social-emotional well-being. Findings from the study align with the literature and the need for SEL support for teachers: 1) SEL support helps increase teacher knowledge of SEL; 2) Teachers gain knowledge about SEL through professional development sessions, and 3) the learning impacts their own social and emotional competencies to help them implement practices that support SEL.

INDEX WORDS: Design team, Implementation team, Leadership team, Teacher morale, SEL

BUILDING THE EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE OF MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS: AN
ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to two phenomenal women in my life. Thank you for your guidance and love from a young age to my grandmother. Because of you, Grandma, I am the woman I am today. Thoughts and memories of you warm my heart each day. To my lifelong mentor, Dr. Eleanor Spratt, thank you for always believing in me and encouraging me to reach my goals in life. Although you are no longer here on earth, I feel your love and guiding arms daily. You are forever my educational angel and auntie. I love and miss you both dearly.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that teachers need support for social-emotional learning (SEL) (Katz et al., 2020; Schiepe-Taska et al., 2021; Zinsser, 2016). Teachers receive limited professional development opportunities in SEL but are still required to help students develop SEL skills. SEL skills will improve student behaviors and school climate (Center for American Progress, 2021). The skills and competencies in SEL recognize and manage emotions, care, and concern for others, establish positive relationships, help students manage challenging situations, and help students learn how to make responsible decisions. According to Brackett et al. (2012), SEL helps to educate the 'whole child' and has proven to improve students' mental and physical health and academic achievement. Therefore, this study provided SEL support for teachers to improve morale.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic provided another level of stress and pressure for many educators, as indicated by high absenteeism and teacher turnover. Schonert-Reichl (2017) discussed how teacher stress decreased job satisfaction, poor student outcomes, and poor instructional practices. In addition, high levels of chronic stress could lead to emotional exhaustion, low work accomplishments, and depersonalization. According to Summers (2020), “SEL is more important now more than ever to help educators, families, and students manage stress, develop resilience, and maintain a sense of optimism during challenging times” (p. 33).

SEL training for teachers is essential. Teachers who work in schools with SEL support develop more buy-in and confidence in implementing SEL skills. Providing SEL support for

teachers reduces stress, changes classroom behaviors, and promotes commitment to professional growth (Collie et al., 2015). Stickle et al. (2019) found that coaching support offered to teachers led to the school staff being mindful of how they interacted with students and each other. While there is evidence of SEL support for students, this study specifically examined the design and implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) support for teachers to improve their morale while conducting an action research study for all teachers at a suburban middle school.

The Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic was an additional stressor for teachers. The stress and burnout teachers experienced led to the need for additional SEL support for teachers. Teachers attended professional learning to gain the prerequisite SEL skills to model, teach, and support their students. Doing so could build self-efficacy and empower the teachers (Summers, 2020, p. 33). According to Schonert-Tecichl (2017), it is necessary to provide SEL training to increase teachers' knowledge, but their social and emotional competence and well-being are also critical.

Overview of the Research Site Context

Scholar Middle School (SMS, a pseudonym) is a suburban middle school located about 30 miles east of a major city in the south. The city's poverty rate was less than four points below the United States. At the time of this study, SMS was an International Baccalaureate school with a Middle Year Programme, a challenging and prestigious educational framework designed to enhance global awareness and rigorous assessment that was fully compatible with all district policies and processes. The school consisted of one hundred fifty teachers and approximately 1700 students. On some days, 30 teachers were absent from school. The turnover rate at the school was approximately 30% each year. With high absenteeism and a lack of substitutes opting to work at the school, students were split amongst classes in their grade level. Although some

teachers were absent due to emergencies or prescheduled appointments, the daily absences indicated a more significant issue. The COVID-19 pandemic increased teacher stress related to their personal and school lives and increased student behaviors, thus making teacher absences more commonplace. Multiple teachers were sometimes absent in a day, which led to students being assigned to other classes and increased the number of students in classrooms. Additional chairs and supplies were needed for those classrooms to accommodate the students and teachers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2020-2021 school year, 90% of the students at SMS were at their homes learning digitally. The following year, SMS welcomed 30 new teachers, with 97% of the students in the building. Therefore, teachers had to adapt to more than a few students. Many had 3-6 students in person during the 2020-2021 school year compared to 28-35 students in the 2021-2022 school year. In the 2022-2023 school year, sixty new teachers joined the faculty.

This study used the action research process to develop a system of SEL support co-developed by the researcher and Action Research Design Team (ARDT) for the six mathematics teacher participants. The design team also consulted with the district SEL coaches for topics and activities for session three in Cycle 1, during which they facilitated the session. As directed by the implementation team, professional learning was a way to improve the well-being of the teachers at Scholar Middle School.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the design and implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) support for middle school teachers in a large suburban public school as they received job-embedded professional development to build teacher morale. This study included the Action Research Design Team (ARDT), which consisted of the principal, three

assistant principals, and two school counselors. The ARDT administered survey results after each professional development session. The study used these data to build a structure for addressing teacher morale and providing professional learning for teachers using SEL competencies to help their social-emotional well-being.

This study was critical because many teachers suffered from burnout, depression, and stress, which impacted the morale and school climate. The information from the study offered insight into how to support teachers better socially and emotionally, which promotes positive student relationships, decreases student behaviors, and helps students overcome challenges. The researcher approached this study with the following questions: Can SEL support influence teacher morale? Can lessons be learned from the action research process to help teachers build their SEL knowledge? These questions helped frame the overall research questions to guide the purpose and focus of the study.

Research Questions

To address the purpose of this action research study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. How do teachers describe the implementation of schoolwide SEL on their morale?
2. How do school leaders support the impact of SEL implementation on teacher morale?
3. How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing SEL support for teachers?

This next section discusses the definitions of key terms specific to this action research study. While these terms are used in a large body of research, this section discussed the terms specifically related to this study at Scholar Middle School.

Definition of Terms

For this study, the following key terms are defined:

- “SEL” in the context of Scholar Middle School is social-emotional learning.
- “Teacher morale” in Scholar Middle School is job satisfaction directly related to teacher retention and student achievement. It impacts teacher dissatisfaction, absenteeism, turnover, and school climate.
- The “Leadership team” in the context of Scholar Middle School comprises the principal and six assistant principals.
- The “Design team” in Scholar Middle School is the principal, three assistant principals, and two school counselors.
- The “Implementation team” in the context of Scholar Middle School comprises six mathematics teachers.

Theoretical Framework

This action research study utilized the servant leadership theory to provide SEL support for teachers. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the emotional needs of teachers impacted attendance, teacher turnover, and their social and emotional health. The theory was developed in 1964 by Robert Greenleaf. In his first essay, *The Servant as Leader*, he modeled through his writing and presentations that leaders are motivated to serve and are sensitive to the needs of their followers. According to Frick (2004), Greenleaf stated that servants seek to help those in need, have an influence, nurture spirits, and change lives.

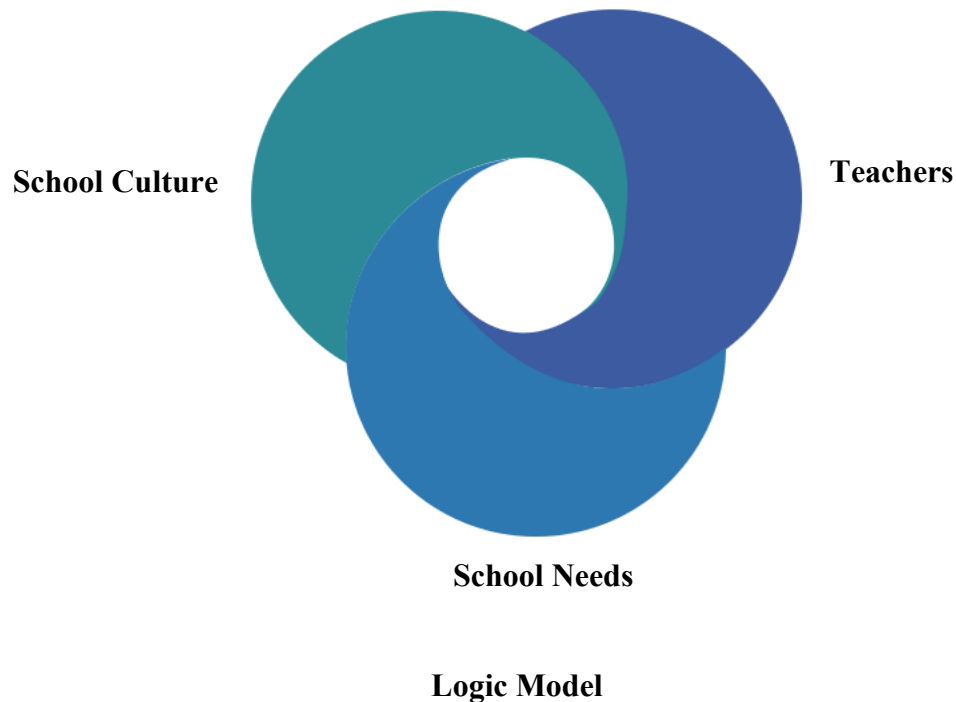
The primary concern of a servant leader is to serve. Al-Mahdy et al. (2016) indicated that “meeting the needs of their followers is a higher priority than achieving self-interest and material possession” (p. 544). In schools, the focus is on the teachers to help the students reach their full

potential and connect with them on an emotional level through positive relationships. The ability to communicate with the teachers and build strong relationships are also characteristics of servant leadership. Other factors, such as job satisfaction and personal feelings about a job, also impact well-being and servant leadership (Al-Mahdy et al., 2016). It is a predictor that affects all organizations, including schools. If teachers and employees are pleased with their jobs, the turnover rate will be low, decreasing the cost of retraining teachers and staff.

Servant leaders place the needs of others first. According to Black (2010), the servant leader focuses on equipping the follower with the tools to be successful in helping the organization and become less reliant on the leader. In this action research study, as the servant leader, the researcher aimed to provide social and emotional support for the teachers to use the knowledge they gained during the SEL professional development sessions to provide SEL support and increase their SEL knowledge. The social and emotional needs of the teachers were a priority due to the impact on attendance, school morale, and the teacher turnover rate. As shown in Figure 1.1, servant leadership, the theoretical framework for this action research study, focused on teachers, school needs, and school culture.

Figure 1.1

Servant Leadership Theoretical Framework



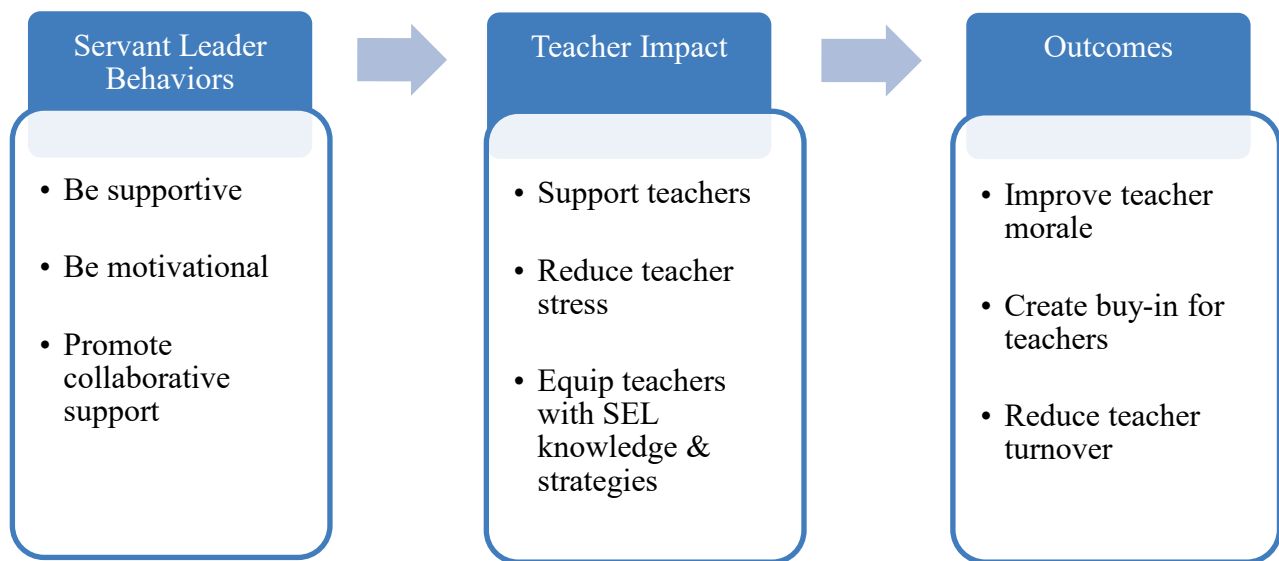
This action research study focused on the social and emotional support for teachers based on their experiences and school morale during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This study examined the design and implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) support for all teachers to build teacher morale. As shown in Figure 1.2, the logic model for this action research study provided a continuum of support indicating the behaviors of the servant leaders and design team.

The continuum of support consisted of the design team, which provided support through job-embedded professional development on three SEL competencies: self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills. The competencies were selected based on feedback from the lead school counselor, teacher observations, discipline data, and staff perception surveys. The researcher used data from those resources to choose the three competencies. After each SEL

professional development session, the ARDT administered surveys to teachers and the implementation team. The professional development sessions promoted collaboration among the teachers, implementation, and design teams. The teachers felt supported and learned SEL competencies to help them as teachers and increase their SEL awareness. The outcome of the professional learning sessions improved teacher morale and created buy-in with the teachers in providing SEL support.

Figure 1.2

Logic Model



Overview of the Methodology

The purpose of action research in an educational context is to improve education from the inside out by using the practitioner as the researcher and the participants in ways in which context and purpose matter (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009). Practitioner-researchers were situated to marry “thought and action” to bring about change (Elliott, 2015, p. 6). For this study, the researcher used several forms of qualitative data, including survey questions with a Likert scale and open response items. Interviews and other artifacts were also analyzed based on the

responses of teachers and members of the implementation team. The researcher also interviewed the design and implementation team members.

In the context of this study, the primary researcher and the action research team used the literature surrounding early career teachers and professional learning to create a small group of support for the teachers who served as the implementation team. The action research team sought to support teachers and provided SEL support for teachers to build teacher morale.

Action Research

The researcher applied action research to this study since it promoted collaboration and emotional support for teachers through job-embedded professional development. The teachers shared their concerns and anxieties and learned the SEL competencies they implemented in the classroom. Through check-ins throughout the sessions and in the middle of the cycles, the research team reflected on growth areas and gathered feedback. As Zepeda (2019) indicated, “Action research without follow-up is counterproductive” (p. 177).

Data Collection

Data collection for this study included several qualitative methods. These methods included:

1. Individual interviews with members of the design and implementation teams at the beginning of Cycle 1 and the end of the research process for Cycle 2.
2. A focus group with the implementation team will monitor progress, discuss areas of growth and concern, and determine the teachers' progress at the end of Cycle 2 in March 2024.
3. Observations of the professional development sessions conducted by the district SEL coaches during Cycle 1 in December 2023.

4. The design team researched the implementation of adult SEL strategies to support the teachers based on observations and feedback from the professional learning sessions at the beginning of Cycle 1 by the design team.
5. Documents such as questionnaires, surveys, and other artifacts based on observations were used as data for this study during Cycle 1 and Cycle 2.

The researcher analyzed the qualitative data from the interviews and artifacts to determine patterns and themes. The significance of the study will be discussed in the next section.

Significance of the Study

The findings from the study affected school culture, teacher turnover rates, teacher retention, school morale, job satisfaction, and student social-emotional learning. Job-embedded professional development for SEL support for teachers created buy-in for social-emotional learning and built teacher morale.

This study looked specifically at the needs of a suburban middle school to support teachers, with a teacher turnover rate of 57.6%, the highest in the school's history. This study added to the gap in research for social-emotional learning support for teachers. The organization of the dissertation will be discussed in the next section.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study and lays out an overview of the context, the problem of practice, and the methods for the study. Chapter 2 reviews the related literature for the research and discusses the background, need for social-emotional learning support for teachers, and benefits of job-embedded professional learning sessions. Chapter 3 describes the methodology involved in action research and the qualitative methods related to this study and amplifies the context of the study. Chapter 4 examines the findings from the action research case.

Chapter 5 details the action research case findings analysis based on the action research cycles related to the research questions that guided this study. This chapter also describes and analyzes the interventions the researcher and the action research team implemented. Chapter 6 summarizes the study, discusses the findings from the research questions, and offers implications for school leaders and implications for further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this action research study was to examine the design and implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) support for middle school teachers in a large suburban public school as they received job-embedded professional development to build teacher morale. This study included the action research design team, which consisted of the principal, three assistant principals, and two school counselors. Survey results were administered after each professional development session. The study used these data to build a structure for addressing teacher morale and providing professional learning for teachers using SEL competencies to help the teachers' social-emotional well-being.

The following research questions aligned with the purpose of the action research study and guided this investigation:

1. How do teachers describe the implementation of schoolwide SEL on their morale?
2. How do school leaders support the impact of SEL implementation on teacher morale?
3. How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing SEL support for teachers?

Chapter 2 includes a thorough review of current research on SEL, divided into three sections. The first section includes the definition and background of social-emotional learning (SEL). The second section describes the benefits of SEL for teachers and students. The third section explores the types of SEL support for teachers.

Building Emotional Resilience

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a process of developing and managing emotions to achieve goals and to establish and maintain positive relationships and decision-making skills (Center for American Progress, 2021). The literature on teachers' need for social and emotional learning support is extensive (Katz et al., 2020; Schiepe-Taska et al., 2021; Zinsser, 2016). Teachers receive limited professional development opportunities in SEL but are still required to help students with SEL skills. SEL skills will improve student behaviors and school climate (Center for American Progress, 2021).

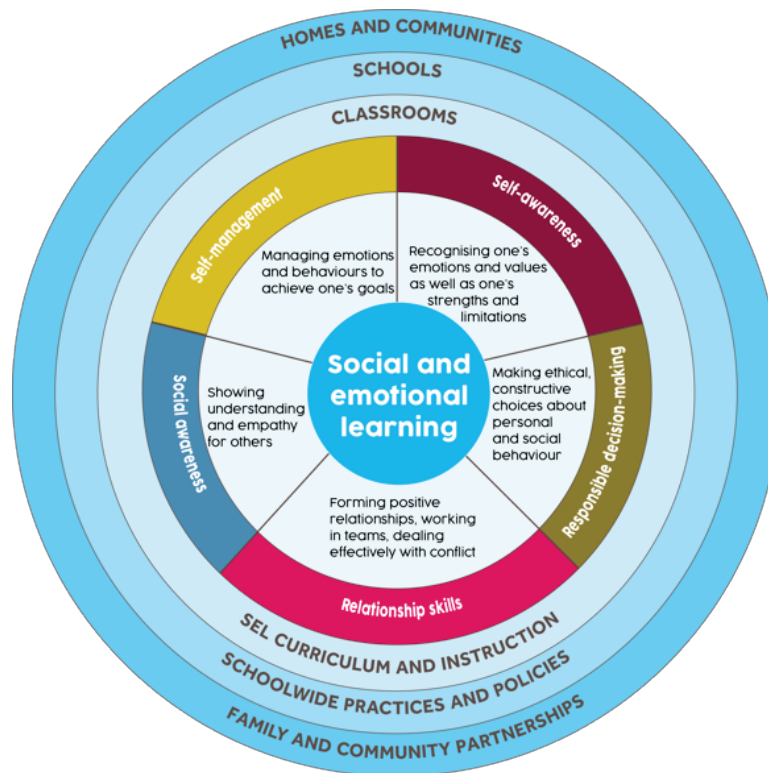
The skills and competencies in SEL recognize and manage the emotions, care, and concern for others, establish positive relationships, help students handle challenging situations, and help them learn how to make responsible decisions. According to Brackett et al. (2012), SEL helps educate the whole child and has proven to improve students' mental and physical health and academic achievement.

Definition and Background of SEL

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) invented social-emotional learning in 1994 to classify five competency groups: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, depicted in Figure 2.1 (Qayyum & Hussain, 2019, p. 85).

Figure 2.1

Social Emotional Learning Logic Model



Adapted from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), 2006.

The competencies found in the center of the figure are described in detail below:

1. **Self-Awareness:** The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions, thoughts, and limitations, as well as possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a growth mindset
2. **Self-Management:** The ability to effectively manage emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations and achieve goals and aspirations.
3. **Social Awareness:** The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

4. **Relationship Skills:** Establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help.
5. **Responsible Decision Making:** The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of various actions and the well-being of self and others.

As depicted in Figure 2.1, the five competencies are surrounded by larger circles representing homes and communities, schools, and classrooms, all of which students belong. The figure shows that social-emotional learning affects the entire school environment, and the framework was used to gather data on the teachers' perceptions of their social-emotional competencies (Dulwich et al., 2022).

Teachers experience a high level of stress daily due to their demanding jobs. The COVID-19 pandemic added a level of stress and pressure on many educators. When the Center for American Progress (2021) surveyed teachers, results indicated longer hours, learning to teach remotely, personal and school factors led to teachers quitting their jobs, and emotional stress. Additional issues included low absenteeism, depression, and turnover. The Center for American Progress (2021) provided SEL support through federal relief funds from the American Rescue Plan to help teachers with social and emotional needs. According to their study, school leaders with strong SEL skills had a higher school climate.

Building and school levels identified what supports would be helpful, and some school districts offered self-care and wellness programs for educators. Although the support is

encouraged, there are concerns that school leaders will not invest in the social and emotional health of the educators, and teachers will only learn SEL skills if they participate in ongoing professional learning. “SEL is important now more than ever to help educators, families, and students manage stress, develop resilience, and maintain a sense of optimism during challenging times” (Summers, 2020, p. 33).

Schools must promote social and emotional (SEL) learning for students. For this to occur, the practices should engage teachers who support SEL, depending on their well-being. Zinsser et al. (2016) presented a study in early childhood education, where teachers had poor working conditions, needed improvements in workplace relationships, and challenging student behaviors. Since students develop interaction and social skills at an early age at home and school, there is a significant relationship to the needs of the teachers.

The study results indicated that in the centers that provided more SEL support, teachers were less depressed, expressed job satisfaction, and felt supported for challenging behaviors. An unexpected outcome of the study by Zinsser et al. (2016) found that SEL support positively impacted child development and the adult workplace climate and, thus, positively affected teachers.

The Impact of Stress on Teachers

Since the early 1970s, many studies have stated that teaching is a highly stressful profession. According to Kyriacou (2001), teacher stress is an “experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher” (p. 28). Teacher stress has been identified as an international issue, and Kyriacou (2001) provided directions for future research. For example, in a 1972 study, schools gave salary enhancements to reduce teacher turnover, yet the teachers

called it a stress allowance. Data from questionnaire surveys and teacher interviews indicated that teaching is a 'high-stress' profession.

Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) shared that teacher stress was associated with decreased job satisfaction, poor student outcomes, and poor instructional practices. In addition, high levels of chronic stress could lead to emotional exhaustion, low accomplishment of work, and depersonalization. Her work found that many teachers who expressed high stress had students who displayed external behaviors such as arguing, fighting, impulsive behavior, and mental health challenges. Stress impacts a teacher's well-being and may also determine if the teacher will remain in the classroom and education field. According to a study by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future Report (2007), stress, poor management, and student behaviors lead to dissatisfied teachers who leave the profession (Policy Brief, 2007).

In March 2020, in-person instruction was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led teachers to quickly transition to remote learning (Zieher et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on education and teachers. Teacher stress existed before the pandemic but increased significantly due to technology use, dealing with the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, and balancing home and personal life. The literature review discusses teacher stress before, during, and after the pandemic and explores the benefits of social-emotional (SEL) support and mindfulness strategies.

Teacher Stress Before the COVID-19 Pandemic

Many studies have been done on teacher stress (Dicke et al., 2014; Gallup, 2014; Hakanen et al., 2006; Roeser et al., 2013). According to McIntyre et al. (2017),

Three factors are prominent in teachers' experiences of stress and well-being: (a) the provision of occupational support from leadership (with a focus on autonomy support),

(b) the relational context of teaching (with a focus on teachers' relations with students and colleagues, and (c) approaches to teaching and learning that are affected by educational policy (with a focus on standardized testing and education innovations) (p.4).

These factors are the primary sources of stress for teachers. The factors contribute to teacher stress and are associated with their well-being. Autonomy support includes the ability of the principal to seek input from teachers, which promotes a supportive work climate (Deci & Ryan, 2012; deCharms, 1968). As stated by McIntyre et al. (2017), "autonomy at work refers to the need to feel self-determined, that one acts as the origin of one's behaviors, and that one has a surge of choice over one's work tasks" (p. 6). In a study by Klassen et al. (2012), 409 Canadian K-12 teachers agreed that autonomy-supportive principals provided a sense of relatedness with the students and experienced less emotional burnout.

In work environments that were considered controlling and included a principal who dictated what and how lessons were taught, micromanaged the teachers, made them feel ashamed or guilty, and denied teacher input, these behaviors and actions impacted their well-being and increased their stress levels (Reeve & Cheon, 2014).

Teacher Stress During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Although teachers experienced stress before the COVID-19 pandemic, other factors, such as remote learning, added additional pressure. According to Chen (2022), during the COVID-19 pandemic, early childhood teachers struggled to help students with little to no technology experience, primarily due to their young age. Many teachers also experienced clinical depression, an increase from previous years (Chen, 2022). Teacher stress also impacted teacher efficacy as they navigated and managed their day. The stress required teachers to practice resilience as they focused on student success.

New demands on teachers led to increased stress levels. In March 2020, teachers switched abruptly from face-to-face learning to remote instruction. Education leaders often had to communicate with teachers to provide training on technology resources and how to adapt instructional activities (Santamaría et al. (2021). The sudden change in classes and the uncertainty of the length of time and distance learning were additional stressors for teachers (Santamaría et al., 2021).

Santamaría et al. (2021) conducted a study with 1633 teachers in northern Spain to analyze the stress, depression, and anxiety teachers experienced during the pandemic. Teaching online was difficult and contributed to stress, exhaustion, and sleep deprivation (Santamaría et al., 2021). Additionally, several studies during the pandemic indicated that other stress factors such as age, having children, or previously suffering from chronic illnesses impacted the stress, depression, and anxiety experienced by teachers.

As McCarthy et al. (2022) stated, “As schools reopened and variant proliferated, many felt their schools' masking and vaccination policies did not sufficiently protect them” (p. 12). Teachers also dealt with personal stressors, which included caring for their family members, anxiety about their health, and job security (McCarthy et al., 2022). Women comprised about 80% of the teaching profession. As McCarthy et al. (2022) indicated, this group faced additional outside pressures, such as caregiving.

In a meta-analysis study of the emotional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, 17% of teachers experienced anxiety, 19% experienced depression, and 33% experienced stress (Ozamiz-Etxebarria N. et al., 2021). Teaching is one of the most stressful occupations due to the workload, classroom conflict management, and regulating emotions (Abos et al., 2019; Lacomba et al., 2022; Schoeps et al., 2019). The research confirmed what the researcher witnessed in

classrooms and heard from teachers before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. When teachers experience stress, it impacts their job performance and teacher retention.

Symptoms of Teacher Stress

Stress can lead to another consequence—teacher burnout. Westphal et al. (2022) defined burnout as a “multidimensional syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment” (p. 2). Burnout consists of fatigue, the inability to finish tasks, and emotional depletion (Westphal et al., 2022). Triggers vary based on teacher characteristics, classroom disruptions, time pressure, and workload (Westphal et al., 2022). In two of the 17 studies completed by Westphal et al. (2022), findings, which included K-12 teachers worldwide, showed that stress increased for teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Emotional exhaustion is when someone is emotionally overwhelmed and has used all his internal and external resources. It is shown through a lack of energy and other behaviors, which vary by person and environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Maslach et al., 2001). Depending on the person, the outcome may lead to emotional exhaustion or a long-term effect, which is burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Changes in exhaustion varied by years of experience. A study by Voss and Kunter (2020) found that although the effect size was minor, emotional exhaustion increased at the beginning of new teacher orientation and decreased as they gained experience throughout the training.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a common concern for teachers was a feeling of uncertainty about the future (Bleck & Lopwsky, 2022). Teachers in Argentina were concerned about the consequences of the pandemic, while teachers in Germany felt uncertain. The teacher workload also increased in the United Kingdom, Italy, Vietnam, and elsewhere (Giovannella et al., 2020; Hansen et al., 2020). These concerns were evident globally. Teachers in the United

States, Spain, and England reported high-stress levels, burnout, and negative emotions (Chang et al., 2022; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021; Poysa et al., 2021). These factors were due to additional communication and organizational requirements and the need to become familiar with digital media, leading to teachers having higher stress levels and emotional exhaustion globally, including in Canada (Sokal et al., 2020b).

Impact of Stress on Teachers and Schools

Empirical research has shown the impact of stress on teachers and then, ultimately, the students (Westphal et al., 2022). Westphal (2022) found that discipline problems, caring for a loved one, or grieving a family member who passed away from COVID-19 contributed to teacher burnout. During the lockdown, many teachers were in isolation, away from their families, friends, and students (Lacomb et al., 2022). Teachers also had varying degrees of digital competency and instructional strategies during a remote learning experience (Lacomba et al., 2022; Westphal et al., 2022).

Technology-competent teachers could assist parents and students with difficulties (Westphal et al., 2022). Some teachers possessed this skill set, while others did not. Due to the technical and instructional challenges, some parents expressed concern about instruction, contributing to teacher stress and burnout (Lacomb et al., 2022; Westphal et al., 2022).

Two of the seventeen studies by Westphal et al. (2022) indicated that teachers experienced an increased sense of accomplishment and depersonalization during the pandemic. The increased workload, lack of resources such as technology, balancing school and home life, time management, and pressure to learn new methods and technology were matters teachers dealt with during this time. Five studies found that high teacher stress and burnout levels were associated with the following characteristics: neuroticism, self-efficacy, sense of control, and

resilience. Three studies showed that teachers feared contracting COVID-19 and the risk of infection (Pressley et al., 2021; Westphal et al., 2022). Other studies concluded that working from home with their children and other responsibilities also led to emotional exhaustion (Pressley et al., 2021; Westphal et al., 2022). According to Pressley et al. (2021), “School administrators should allow open communication with teachers and provide support when able to ease teacher anxiety. Support might include instructional technology or emotional support” (p.8).

Benefits of Social-Emotional Support for Teachers

Social support has an impact on teachers and helps them with stress resilience. According to Chen (2022), social support is a resource available through social relationships to improve mental and physical health. DiCarlo (2020) defined mindfulness as “awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally” (p. 486). DiCarlo (2020) also stated that the school climate increased while the stress levels experienced by teachers decreased when the Mindfulness Practices Intervention was implemented in the schools. The intervention consisted of yoga, breathing exercises, and meditation. These mindfulness strategies will help teachers reduce their emotional stress and burnout and provide them with strategies to build relationships with students (Taylor et al., 2021).

School leaders can provide a supportive school climate for teachers by reducing teacher demands and supporting the teachers in the classroom. Santamaría et al. (2021) indicated that teachers need professional help. “By considering how teachers are coping with the return to school during a pandemic, we might be in a better position to put the relevant support structures that may be needed” (Santamaría et al., 2021, p. 2). To reduce emotional exhaustion and stress, school leaders should identify those teachers and provide support so they will not experience impairments in motivation or objective health (Hakanen et al., 2006).

The success of SEL implementation in schools relies on school leaders (Zieher et al., 2021). Leaders must develop the knowledge and understanding of SEL competencies. Leaders should also be prepared to implement professional development to equip teachers with the tools to help students with their emotional needs. SEL competence can improve the teachers' well-being, reduce burnout and stress, and lead to a smooth SEL implementation process (Zieher et al., 2021). Several studies have shown that job-embedded learning and mindfulness strategies are beneficial in helping teachers reduce stress, support their well-being, and foster a positive classroom climate for students (Bonde et al., 2022; Dicarlo et al., 2020; Fabbro et al., 2020; Stewart & Rice, 2022; Taylor et al., 2021).

SEL Training in Teacher Preparation Programs

Not all teachers have received SEL training. Professional development has traditionally occurred in new teacher preparation programs. Katz et al. (2020) called for teacher education programs to offer courses for social-emotional learning. Based on survey responses from March 2020 by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), teachers experienced high-stress levels, burnout, and mental health issues. The COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning led to concerns for social-emotional resources for teachers and students. Only six states had high standards in all areas of SEL. Many teacher preparation programs did not have a set curriculum, guidelines, or ‘best strategies’ (Katz et al., 2020, p. 4). There needs to be more consistency in teacher certification standards across states.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic brought times of uncertainty and disruption. During the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020-21 school year, protests were an outcry against social injustices and personal traumatic experiences that impacted students, families, and

educators. A varied approach would provide educators with the tools to support students in understanding the world around them. Providing pre-service teachers with SEL knowledge would prepare teachers for the classrooms today and in the future. This multifaceted approach to SEL would begin with a foundation course and subsequent elective courses focused on additional competencies, including trauma, social justice, and personal, social, and emotional, to replace outdated practices.

While many educators support SEL in teacher education programs, others desire additional support for new teachers during their first year of teaching. Flushman et al. (2021) encouraged community building with other first-year teachers, communication abilities, and decision-making through problem-solving. The study consisted of twenty-one new K-12 teachers, and the participants completed a satisfaction survey and interviews. Participants stated that the transition from the preparation program to teaching was challenging.

The study allowed them to build relationships with other new teachers while focusing on practice problems. The participants also shared that the teacher education programs did not teach SEL skills.

Benefits of SEL Training for Teachers

According to Reinke et al. (2011), schools are great places for students to receive emotional help, reduce behavioral incidents, and increase relationships and academic performance. SEL support is beneficial for new and veteran teachers. “A commitment to SEL professional development from all stakeholders in the school, including the endorsement of a shared vision by school staff and administrators, is necessary for programmatic success” (Brackett, 2012, p. 220). Although the emphasis continues on academics and the core subjects, teachers must be committed to implementing SEL in their classrooms.

Through professional development, the teachers should learn about SEL competencies and skills. Professional development will impact teacher commitment and skill implementation to model in their classroom. Markowitz et al. (2018) discussed a university-district partnership to build social-emotional learning. “Social and emotional learning (SEL) is critical to the success of students from preschool through high school and for educators across all stages of the career continuum” (Markowitz et al., 2018, p.30). Many teachers stated they needed SEL training for effective classroom implementation. The Anchor Competencies Framework and Guide, created by the Center for Reaching & Teaching the Whole Child, provides culturally responsive strategies fundamental to SEL (Markowitz, 2020).

SEL Support and Teacher Perspectives

In a study with teachers, Reinke et al. (2011) sought to bridge the gap between research and school-based mental health concerns. Schools are expected to provide students with academic support and mental health. According to Reinke et al. (2011), with increased mental health concerns, schools are a great place to support students academically and with social and emotional concerns. According to the survey results, teachers indicated workshops and professional development are the places for them to learn about behavioral interventions. According to (Reinke et al., 2011), the top three areas for training the teachers desired were the following:

1. children who exhibited external behavior problems,
2. understanding mental health issues and.
3. classroom management training

Eighty-nine percent of the teachers felt their role was to support children's mental health needs and provide behavioral interventions. “Supporting teachers to integrate the evidence-based

social-emotional curriculum into their classroom could produce positive outcomes for children while bridging the gap between research and practice” (Reinke et al., 2011, p. 9).

Collie et al. (2015) believed teacher profiles related to their stress and job satisfaction. The study examined the teachers based on their beliefs about SEL. The three beliefs were (a) comfort with SEL, (b) commitment to improving SEL skills, and (c) perceptions of principal and schoolwide support for SEL. The three different profiles were (a) SEL thriver, (b) SEL striver, and (c) SEL advocate, which indicate the different levels of comfort and perceived support for SEL. The study results indicated that the SEL driver had the lowest stress and highest job satisfaction and comfort levels with SEL. According to Collie et al. (2015), “Supported and committed to professional growth can make work less stressful and more enjoyable “(p.155).

For teachers to be fully equipped with SEL skills to help students, Stickle et al. (2019) stated that school leaders must provide ongoing support for teachers. This guidance involves learning and modeling the SEL components and certifying that teachers implement the skills with fidelity. Many teachers reported needing more professional development for SEL to impact their confidence in implementing classroom strategies. Coaching models were used to emphasize helping teachers with their social-emotional well-being. Stickle et al. (2019) found that the coached teachers were more confident and motivated to incorporate the SEL skills they learned in their classrooms. In addition, teachers who consistently used the 10-minute 'kernels' from the SEL training stated they were effective 77% of the time in their classrooms (Stickle et al., 2019, p. 43).

Educators play a critical role in students' lives and provide many sources of support for students. According to Brackett (2012), SEL skills are necessary for a RULER developer due to life's ups and downs. Brackett created an evidence-based approach entitled RULER, which

includes five principles of emotional intelligence: recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating emotions. The approach is highly regarded by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning as CASEL's unique program and involves school leaders, teachers, students, and parents. As stated by Maughan (2020), “There is real anxiety around the coronavirus; there is real anger around racial injustice. Thus, now is when we have to put our emotional intelligence to the test to achieve the outcome that we want” (p. 40).

Chapter Summary

There have been studies about social-emotional learning focusing on students. The literature revealed the need for more research on the impact of SEL support on teachers. Professional development is also necessary for teachers to gain knowledge of SEL so that they can model for students. This opportunity will promote the implementation of SEL support for teachers. Research shows that learning SEL skills will improve student behaviors and school climate (Center for American Progress, 2021).

CHAPTER 3

ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Many research studies reflect the need for SEL support for teachers (Katz et al., 2020; Schiepe-Taska et al., 2021; Zinsser, 2016). Although they are required to help students with SEL skills, teachers receive limited professional development (Center for American Progress, 2021). Much work has been done to support the SEL needs of students, as, according to Brackett et al. (2012), SEL helps to educate the 'whole child' and has proven to improve mental and physical health and academic achievement. However, more research is needed on the benefits of providing SEL support for teachers. Kotowski et al. (2022) indicated that the study relied on teacher perceptions during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the results implied that teachers suffered extreme burnout, which could lead to higher turnover rates. Based on the study, Kotowski et al. (2022) stated, “School systems must start to deal with teachers' mental and physical health before a large portion of them leave the profession” (p. 414).

This study examined the design and implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) support for all teachers to build teacher morale. The researcher used data from perception surveys and health and wellness survey results to create a structure to address teacher morale and provide professional learning for teachers using SEL competencies to help their social-emotional well-being.

To address the purpose of this action research study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. How do teachers describe the implementation of schoolwide SEL on their morale?

2. How do school leaders support the impact of SEL implementation on teacher morale?
3. How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing SEL support for teachers?

Chapter 3 explores the logic model that guided the study, explains the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis, and discusses reliability, validity, and trustworthiness.

The Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research, as defined by Merriam & Tisdell (2016), is “based on the belief that people construct knowledge in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon” (p. 23). Bloomberg (2023) stated, “Qualitative researchers study people in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena and experiences in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (p. 74). This action research study examined the design and implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) support for all teachers to build teacher morale. Qualitative research was appropriate for this study since it occurred in a school setting during professional development sessions. According to Glanz (2014), qualitative research captures behavior occurring in naturalistic settings and does not involve purposeful manipulation of subjects for experimental purposes, as do many quantitative studies. The sessions occurred during regularly scheduled planning times, and the researcher observed participant behaviors and actions. The researcher analyzed survey data using an inductive process involving categories and patterns to determine themes. These are characteristics of qualitative research.

As stated by Stringer and Aragon (2021), “If quantitative research is research on people and qualitative research is about people, action research is with and for people in support of meaningful change” (p. 49). A qualitative research method was selected to capture teachers'

perspectives on SEL competencies and support them. The action research methods included interviews, a focus group, survey data results about the SEL competencies, and classroom walkthrough data.

Based on the survey results, it was evident that teachers felt supported and equipped with the knowledge they gained from the professional development. Learning coping strategies helped teachers manage their emotions and prepare them to implement them in their classrooms. In a study about the impact of stress and anxiety, Pressley et al. (2021) stated that future studies should include investigations of the research to provide detailed factors that contributed to teacher stress and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overview of Action Research Methods

Glanz (2014) described action research as “a type of research conducted by practitioners to improve practices in educational settings” (p.16). Action research is also different from other methods since the results are specific to the group that is being studied and cannot be generalized for other groups. It is also a form of applied research to “address a specific problem in a practice-based setting, such as a classroom, a workplace, a program, or an organization” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 4).

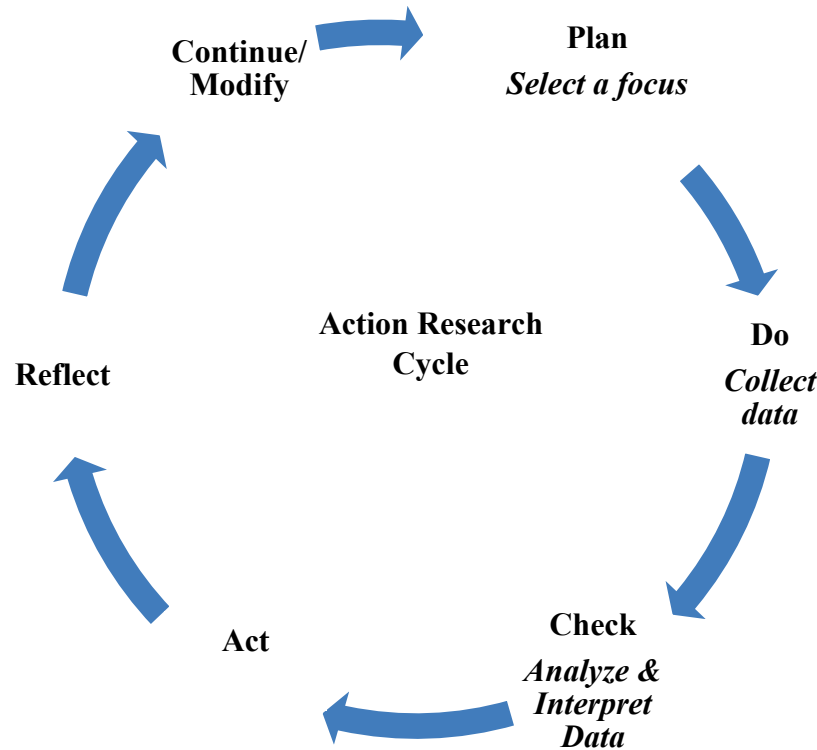
Action research is grounded in acquiring knowledge based on experiences and prior knowledge. Action research aims to clarify and answer questions (Stringer & Aragon, 2021). Action research is “conducted by people who are interested in facilitating change in their work, community, or family. They decide to “experiment” with the situation while documenting what happens when trying a new strategy or intervention. Typically, many interventions or strategies are implemented by participants over time” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 4). The benefits of

action research include opportunities for reflection and continuous improvement, promoting a positive school climate (Glanz, 2014).

This study adapted the action research steps Glanz (2014) provided, specifically including what occurred during the cyclical action research process at each phase. The study, design, and implementation emerged as participants engaged in job-embedded professional learning sessions. Figure 3.1 illustrates the action research process, which is cyclical. For the *Plan* phase, the focus was on providing SEL support for teachers and job-embedded professional development. After administering surveys and conducting interviews, the team collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data. This took place throughout the study. The results informed the team of the following steps to support the teachers and continue the action research process. After the sessions, the design team reviewed the results, and the implementation team reflected on the data to inform the next steps of the action research process.

Figure 3.1

Action Research Process



Note: Adapted from Glanz (2014)

Action research involves working as a team. According to Bloomberg (2023), the goal of action research is “through systematic questioning and feedback, to open new “communicative spaces” so that people may increase the effectiveness and meaningfulness of their work” (p. 103). The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perspectives on SEL, provide job-embedded professional development sessions about three of the five SEL competencies, and determine ways to offer SEL support for teachers to promote a positive school culture. Therefore, the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) selected action research as the methodology. The ARDT worked together to support the teachers by providing SEL support and job-embedded professional development in social-emotional learning for teachers.

Action Research Design

Throughout the study, the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) engaged in the Plan, Do, Check, Act, Reflect, and Continue/Modify cycles to provide SEL support for teachers at Scholar Middle School. Action research allowed the researcher and the participants to engage in job-embedded professional development to learn three SEL competencies, collaborate with their colleagues, and improve their knowledge of social-emotional skills. Providing a supportive environment with action research promotes collaboration. As stated by Elliot et al. (2021), “Collaboration enables research participants to build supportive communities, create safe spaces for risk-taking, and avoid researcher isolation” (p. 328).

The Spiraling and Iterative Nature of Action Research

Action research involves educators working in their schools, classrooms, or job-related locations to advance and improve practice (Efron & David, 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Efron and David (2020), the practitioner selects the action research process, and “it is a viable model for modifying, changing, and improving the teaching-learning process” (p. 2). The participants were active members of the research process, which allowed them to lead school improvement for teachers and students. The studies aimed to develop strategies and methods to improve the quality of education.

Action research also involves immediate concerns in the immediate context (Efron & David, 2020; Elliot et al., 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The goal is to improve practices or advocate for change. The action research process is “iterative, cyclical, and participative in nature and is intended to foster a deeper understanding of a given situation informing future action, starting with conceptualizing and particularizing the problem and moving through several interventions and evaluations” (Bloomberg, 2023, p. 101). Throughout this study, the research

team reviewed data and engaged in reflection to determine the strengths, areas of growth, and next steps. Action research is a process of planning and making modifications throughout the process. Figure 3.2 represents a cyclical model of the Plan, Do, Check, Act, Reflect, and Continue/Modify phases: the action research process. This model exemplifies the continuous improvement process that was implemented in this study.

Figure 3.2

Cyclical Model of the Action Research Process



Note: Adapted from Glanz, 2014

The researcher and participants engaged in the process of reflection. They sought modifications to understand three social-emotional competencies: self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills to support the teachers and improve the school culture at Scholar Middle School. By learning the competencies and adult SEL, teachers received job-embedded professional development, promoted collaboration, and built community. The logic model defined phases of the action research cycle and provided a framework for the researcher and participants.

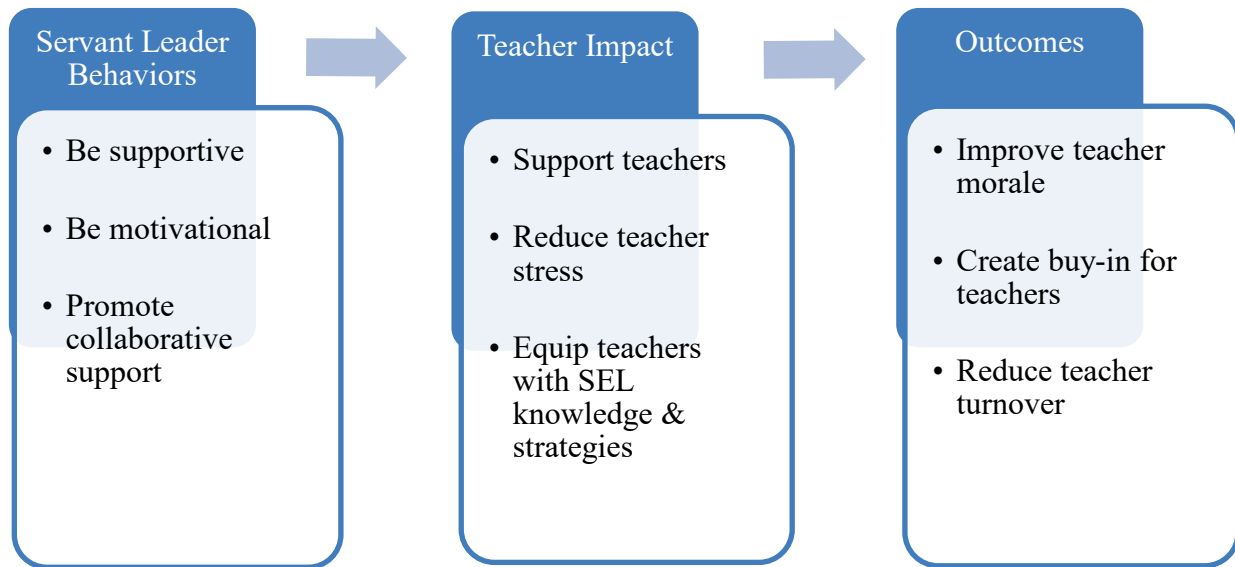
Logic Model

This study, which examined the action research work of a servant leadership team, was framed as a continuum of support that demonstrated the behaviors of the servant leaders and design team (Al-Mahdy et al., 2016; Black, 2010). According to Al-Mahdy et al. (2016), “In organizations like schools, servant-leader school principals achieve their priorities and objectives from the inside out, through creating a shared vision and empowering their followers/teachers to achieve that vision by using their full talents and potential” (p.2). With this in mind, the design team provided job-embedded professional development on three SEL competencies: self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills. The competencies were selected based on feedback from the lead school counselor, teacher observations, discipline data, and staff perception surveys.

The logic model depicted in Figure 3.3 provided a continuum of servant-leader behaviors, teacher impact, and outcomes. Leaders of Scholar Middle School sought to support, motivate, and promote collaboration during weekly content meetings. With the job-embedded professional development for social-emotional learning, the design and leadership teams wanted the teachers to feel supported. Adult SEL support reduces teacher stress and equips them with SEL knowledge to model and help the students in the classroom.

Figure 3.3

Logic Model



This action research study aimed to improve teacher morale and create buy-in for consistently implementing SEL lessons. The teacher turnover rate decreased when teachers felt supported, creating a positive school culture. The logic model provided a structure for the ARDT to plan the professional development sessions and make necessary adjustments through collaboration, reflection, modification, and other phases in the cyclical model.

Theory of Change

The study examined the design and implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) support for all teachers to build teacher morale. The foundation of the study was based on the high teacher turnover rate, low school morale, teacher stress, high absenteeism, and burnout. The design team used a servant leadership approach to support the teachers. The ARDT devoted time to planning job-embedded professional learning opportunities, listened to teacher concerns, and fostered a positive school culture to enhance and build teacher morale at Scholar Middle School (Katz et al., 2020; Schiepe-Taska et al., 2021; Zinsser, 2016).

In alignment with the purpose of the study and the research questions, the theory of change was situated in teaching SEL competencies to inform the teachers to help them socially and emotionally to enhance their well-being, which ultimately helped their students. The theory of change was grounded on the recognition that through job-embedded professional development sessions, teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge of SEL to address the needs of the students. SEL professional development sessions enable the teachers to improve themselves and model student behaviors (Katz et al., 2020; Schiepe-Taska et al., 2021; Zinsser, 2016).

The Case

Since high teacher turnover, elevated absenteeism, and teacher stress were frequent at Scholar Middle School, the ARDT collaborated with district SEL coaches to promote adult SEL support through job-embedded professional development sessions. The team comprised the principal, researcher, two assistant principals, the lead counselor, and the 6th-grade school counselor.

The Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) consisted of 6th through 8th-grade mathematics teachers who taught at the school for one to ten years. An email was sent to all mathematics teachers. Due to limited response, the researcher sent another email and held one-on-one conversations with teachers. As a result, six teachers, two from each grade level, agreed to participate. The case study, according to Bloomberg (2023), “affords significant interaction with research participants, providing an in-depth picture of the unit of study” (p. 84). Case studies explore various perspectives of a social phenomenon to gain an understanding and insight into professional practices (Bloomberg, 2023).

The research was based on the experiences of an ARDT as they fostered a culture of support to build teacher morale and SEL support. Investigating teacher stress and social-

emotional support for teachers allowed for a deeper understanding of the extent to which the high teacher turnover rate, lack of support from the administration, and the need for teachers to be trained on SEL were inherent in the Scholar Middle School culture.

The support the ARDT provided the teachers and the promotion of job-embedded professional development increased teacher perceptions of support from the administration team and teacher morale. The outcome of the case study led to an in-depth understanding of the need for teacher SEL support (Katz et al., 2020; Schiepe-Taska et al., 2021; Zinsser, 2016).

Action Research Design Team

Action research encourages educators to reflect on their practices and procedures and, as Glanz (2014) stated, “to make judgments about the appropriateness or effectiveness of these aspects so that improvements or refinements might be achieved” (p. 24). For this study, the design team included the principal, three assistant principals, and two school counselors.

The primary researcher served as an assistant principal at Scholar Middle School for Mathematics and was the SEL cohort lead for the school. She was vested in improving the school morale and culture to support the teachers. She brought 15 years of classroom experience and seven years of experience as an assistant principal. The principal, Mr. Christian Butler, brought 13 years of classroom experience and 10 years as an assistant principal. He served one year as principal at Scholar Middle School. Mr. Butler served on the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) because, as the instructional leader, he was charged with promoting a positive school culture and SEL support and wellness to build teacher morale and reduce the teacher turnover rate.

One of the assistant principals, Mrs. Ayana Morgan, held one year of assistant principal experience and three years of principal experience in a neighboring district. This was her first

year in Gatlin School District (GSD). She had 16 years of experience in education and a background in school data and language arts. Mrs. Sarah Hampton had 22 years of experience in education and a background in elementary education. She worked in GSD for 10 years.

The head counselor, Mrs. Nancy Chandler, had experience with social-emotional learning and was the school district liaison to promote social-emotional learning for students and teachers. She served as a counselor for ten years and was the chairperson for the PBIS committee and other school-wide culture and climate departments at SMS. Mr. Martin Cummings was a 6th-grade school counselor with over ten years of school counseling and private practice experience. He also taught Language Arts for 15 years and served as the PBIS Coordinator and on the SEL Committee. Table 3.1 lists the Action Research Design Team members and their subsequent roles in the study.

Table 3.1

Action Research Design Team

Team Member	Primary Role at Scholar Middle School	Action Research Role
Primary Researcher	Assistant Principal, SMS	Led and conducted all research with the ARDT for data analysis. Brought 15 years of classroom experience and seven years of experience as an assistant principal.
Mr. Christian Butler	Principal, SMS	Provided context and schoolwide instructional leadership. Brought 13 years of classroom experience, 10 years of experience as an assistant principal, and one year of experience as a principal.

Team Member	Primary Role at Scholar Middle School	Action Research Role
Mrs. Ayana Morgan	Assistant Principal	Provided experience with over 16 years as a Language Arts teacher, one year as an assistant principal, and three years as a principal at a charter school.
Mrs. Sarah Hampton	Assistant Principal	Provided experience with 22 years in education as a science teacher and six years as an assistant principal. She also served as the PBIS support.
Mrs. Nancy Chandler	Lead School Counselor	Provided experience with over ten years of school counseling and 15 years of teaching Language Arts. She also served as the PBIS Coordinator and Peer Leader instructor.
Mr. Martin Cummings	6 th Grade School Counselor	Provided experience with over ten years of school counseling, private practice, and 15 years of teaching Language Arts. He also served as the PBIS Coordinator and was on the SEL Committee.

The researcher selected ARDT members based on their leadership, desire to support the teachers using SEL and promote a positive school climate, and varied roles in the school. During the first monthly meeting, the ARDT participated in an initial orientation regarding the background of the study, action research, purpose of the study, research questions, their roles, and the roles of the Action Research Implementation Team.

The ARDT worked to create and implement job-embedded professional development for SEL to teachers to build teacher morale, promote adult SEL, and reduce teacher stress. The researcher and the ARDT worked with the Action Research Implementation Team.

Action Research Implementation Team

In August 2023, the researcher invited mathematics department members via letter to participate in this study, which occurred during the 2023-2024 school year. The researcher emailed all 6th-8th-grade mathematics teachers at Scholar Middle School. After receiving a limited response, the researcher sent another email for participation in the study, and after one-on-one conversations with teachers, six teachers agreed to participate. The Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) comprised six teachers in the Mathematics Department at SMS, two mathematics teachers from each grade level.

The mathematics department experienced many transitions due to the high teacher turnover. Several teachers were new to the teaching profession and the school. Table 3.2 lists the members of the ARIT members, the course teams on which they served, and their previous teaching experience.

Table 3.2

Action Research Implementation Team

Math Department Members	Course Team	Teaching Experience
Mrs. Donna Lawrence	6 th Grade Teacher	Provided three years of teaching experience; Number of years at SMS: 3
Mrs. Zhonda Williams	6 th Grade Co-Teacher & Math Team Lead	Provided ten years of teaching experience and had SPED experience; Number of years at SMS: 2

Math Department Members	Course Team	Teaching Experience
Mr. Thomas Palmore	7 th Grade Co-Teacher	Provided 15 years of teaching experience and SPED experience; Number of years at SMS:15.
Mr. Stephon Summers	7 th Grade Interrelated Teacher	Provided six years of teaching experience in SPED; Number of years at SMS:2.
Mrs. Ramona Atkinson	8 th Grade Interrelated Teacher	Provided 20 years of teaching experience in SPED; Number of years at SMS:10.
Mrs. Wyona Holmes	8 th Intro to Algebra & Content Lead	Provided 16 years of teaching experience in Mathematics; Number of years at SMS:2.

The design team created the timeline to plan job-embedded professional learning sessions and the next steps after each meeting for the ARTI.

Research Plan and Timeline

As stated by Glanz (2014), research-oriented leaders work hard to “collect and analyze data to inform their decisions better” (p. 24). The teachers actively participated in the learning process during each cycle, interview, and professional development session. As Coghlan (2019) stated, “Action learning involves engagement with real issues rather than with fabrications and is both scientifically rigorous in confronting the issue and critically subjective through managers learning-in-action” (p. 67). The action research timeline in Table 3.3 outlines the timeline of this study for Cycle 1.

Table 3.3*Action Research Timeline for Cycle 1 at Scholar Middle School*

Date	Action Research Activity	
	Action Research Design Team (ARDT)	Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT)
July/August 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emails were sent, and consent was secured to participate in the study. • ARDT Monthly meeting • Collected Artifacts • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emails were sent, and consent was secured to participate in the study. • Individual Interviews #1 • Artifact collection • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections
September/October 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ARDT Monthly meeting • Collected Artifacts • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback Survey #1 • Artifact collection • Self-Management SEL PD • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections
November 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ARDT Monthly meeting • Collected Artifacts • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artifact collection • Social Awareness SEL PD • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections
December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ARDT Monthly meeting • Collected Artifacts • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback Survey #2 • Artifact collection • SEL PD • Researcher's Journal-record data/reflections
January 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate follow-up activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate follow-up activities

The action research timeline in Table 3.4 outlines the timeline used in this study for Cycle 2.

Table 3.4*Action Research Timeline for Cycle 2 at Scholar Middle School*

Date	Action Research Activity	
	Action Research Design Team (ARDT)	Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT)
January 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ARDT Monthly meeting • Reviewed school data; Reviewed feedback and survey results from Session 3 in Cycle 1. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers attended and took part in Session 1 of Cycle 2. • Participated in interviews from Session 3 Cycle 1
February 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ARDT Monthly meeting • Reviewed school data; Reviewed feedback and survey results from Session 1 in Cycle 2 in January; Team planned Session 2 of Cycle 2. Conducted SEL classroom walkthroughs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers shared feedback from Session1 from Cycle 2
March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ARDT Monthly meeting • Reviewed feedback and survey results from Session 1 in Cycle 2; Team planned and implemented Session 2 of Cycle 2—conducted SEL classroom walkthroughs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers attended and took part in Session 2 of Cycle 2.

The following section will provide information about the history and background of Scholar Middle School, where this study took place.

Context of the Study

Overview of the School

Scholar Middle School (SMS) is located north of a major city in the southern United States. SMS is a suburban middle school located within Gatlin School District (GSD), 30 miles

east of a major city. The county poverty rate is 6.48% compared to 11.5% in the United States. SMS is an International Baccalaureate school with a Middle Year Programme, a challenging and prestigious educational framework designed to assure global awareness and rigorous assessment that is fully compatible with all district policies and processes.

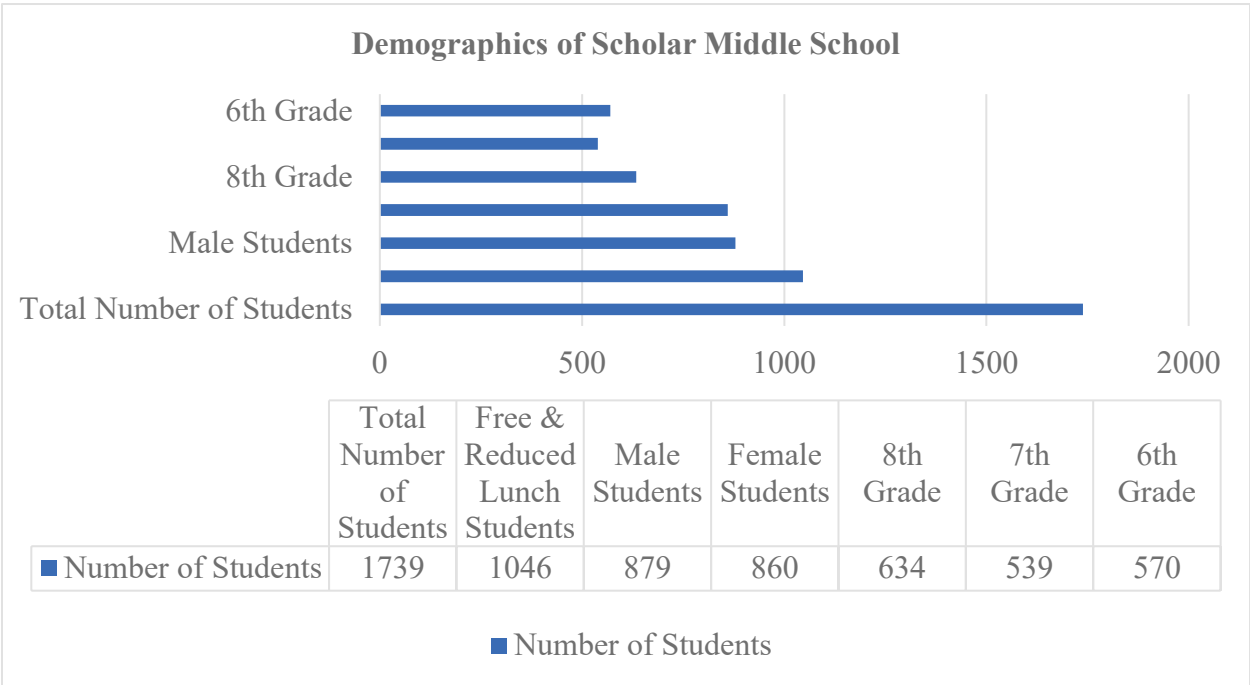
Scholar Middle School (SMS) is a suburban Title 1 public school that opened with approximately 860 students and 60 faculty members and staff. Due to overcrowding at neighboring middle schools and growth in the area, a new wing with approximately 13,500 square feet was added. Another addition was made in 1989 and consisted of 12 classrooms and music rooms. GSD divided its schools into clusters. SMS was the only middle school within the Scholar cluster and fed into one high school.

Student Body Characteristics

Scholar Middle School consisted of grades six through eight and had increased from a 40-classroom facility to 97 classrooms, indicative of the county's growth. Scholar Middle School continued to be committed to serving the students and the surrounding community. The Scholar Cluster consisted of 7,050 students. The demographics of Scholar Middle School are illustrated in Figure 3.4. Students receiving special education services comprised 15.69% of the school population, while the district comprised 14.04%. Limited English Proficient (LEP) students represented 10.38% of the school population compared to 18.02% for the county and 12.98% for the Scholar cluster.

Figure 3.4

Demographics of Scholar Middle School



Scholar Middle School consisted of predominately Black/African American students (1,025), with the next largest group being Hispanic students (437). American Indian/Alaska Native students (277) were the least represented of the student demographics. Students participated in clubs and other activities. Examples of some of the clubs include Art, the Debate Team, Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA), Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), Junior Beta, Lego League, and many others.

Impact of COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2020-2021 school year, 96% of the students at SMS were digital learners. The other four percent of students attended school in person. Teacher-to-student ratios were lower during the pandemic. Many students and teachers displayed anxiety and nervousness the following school year due to the crowded hallways and classes. Teachers expressed concern about their classrooms, PPE supplies, hand sanitizer, and cleaning products.

The physical arrangement of the classroom was reflective of concerns about physical safety. Most teachers taught from behind the plexiglass while sitting at their desks or a small group table. With high absenteeism and a need for substitutes to work at the school, students were divided between classes in their grade level. Although some teachers were absent due to emergencies, COVID-19 symptoms, or prescheduled appointments, the number of daily absences indicated a more significant issue.

Special Programs

In the 2014-15 school year, Scholar Middle School (SMS) qualified to be an International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Programme (MYP) Candidate School. The International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Programme (MYP) strives to develop active learners and internationally minded young people who can empathize with others and pursue lives of purpose and meaning. The Middle Year Programme, a challenging and prestigious educational framework, was designed to increase global awareness and rigorous assessments compatible with all district policies and processes. In 2020, the Dual Language Immersion or DLI program began for 6th-grade students who had participated in the program since elementary school. In the DLI program, the students learned about the Spanish language and culture at the middle school level.

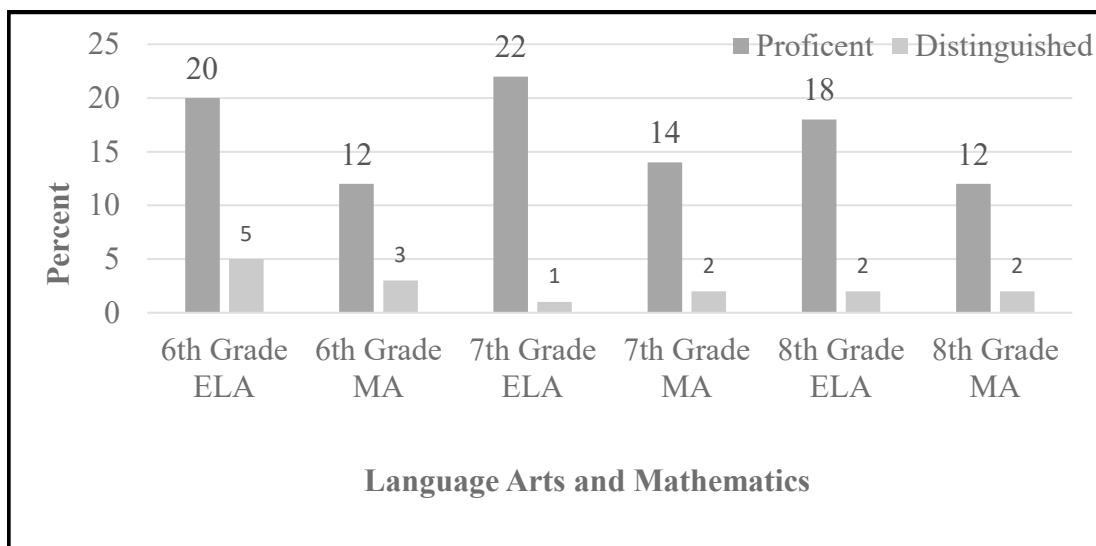
Academic Achievement

In 2019, Scholar Middle School received a College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) score of 76.0. The score was the highest, 72.5 in 2017 and 69.3 in 2018. In 2015, the CCRPI score was 72.9, and 72.3 in 2016. The long-term goal for the 2022-2023 Local School Plan for Improvement (LSPI) was for all Scholar Middle School students to score in the proficient or distinguished range on the English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies End of Grade and End of Course Milestones Assessments, by Spring 2023.

On the Milestones Assessments, eighth-grade students performed below the county and state for proficient and distinguished levels each school year. For the 2021-2022 school year, 23% of the Scholar Middle School students scored proficient and distinguished on the Language Arts and Math milestones assessments compared to 43% in the county and 39% in the state. This was based on the scores since the 2021-2022 school year. As shown in Figure 3.5, based on the state assessment results, the 6th through 8th-grade students scored below the Local School Plan of Improvement (LSPI) goal of 55%.

Figure 3.5

Percentage of Students Who Scored Proficient and Distinguished on the 2021-22 Milestones End of Grade (EOG) Test in Language Arts and Mathematics



In the 2019-2022 school year, students with disabilities for the past three years scored in the lower achievement and lower growth section of the growth model, while students with no disabilities performed midway between the higher achievement, lower growth section, and the higher achievement, higher growth area. This is evident in the Milestones for English Language

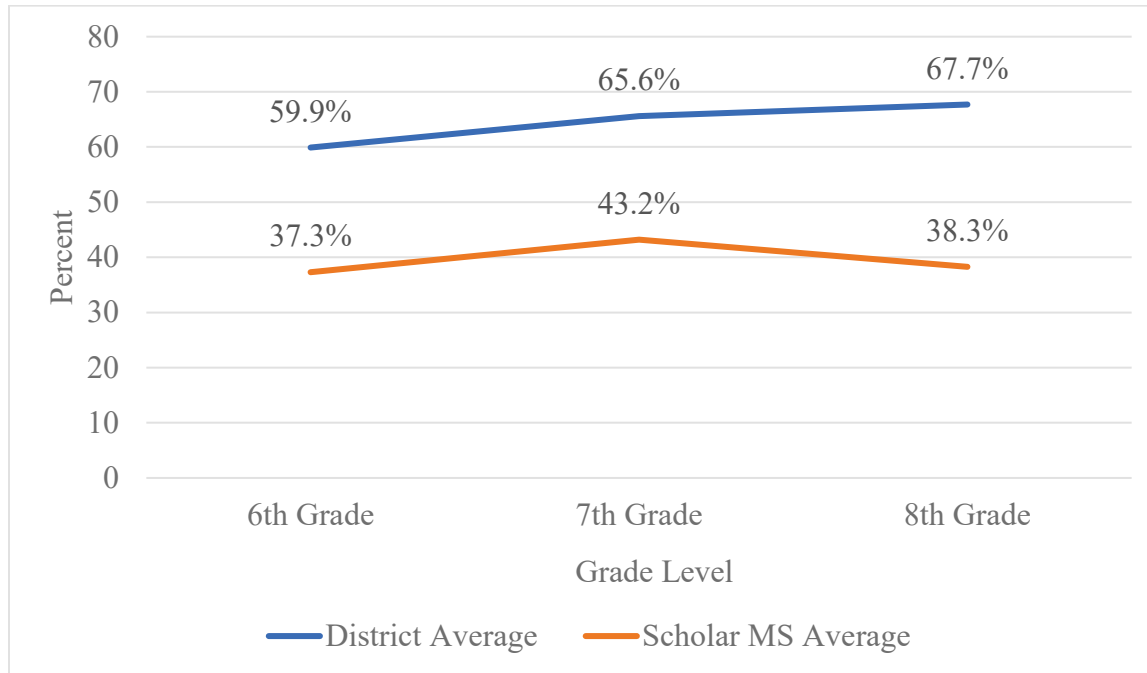
Arts and Mathematics, grades six through eight. In 2022, all students without disabilities performed in the higher Achievement, higher Growth section of the Growth Model.

Scholar Middle School administers district assessments called interims each quarter to assess the students' content knowledge for English Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science. SMS students scored below the district average. Seventh-grade science students scored 57.9% on the district assessment, while the district average was 71.2%. In the previous school year, the students scored 54.2%, while the district average was 69.2%.

As shown in Figure 3.6, the Semester 2 interim assessment average score for SMS students was 37.3% for 6th-grade students with disabilities, 43.2% for 7th-grade students with disabilities, and 38.3% for 8th-grade students with disabilities compared to the district average of 59.9%. The district average was 59.9% for 6th-grade students with disabilities, 65.6% for 7th-grade students with disabilities, and 67.7% for 8th-grade students with disabilities. Therefore, the students with disabilities consistently performed lower than the district.

Figure 3.6

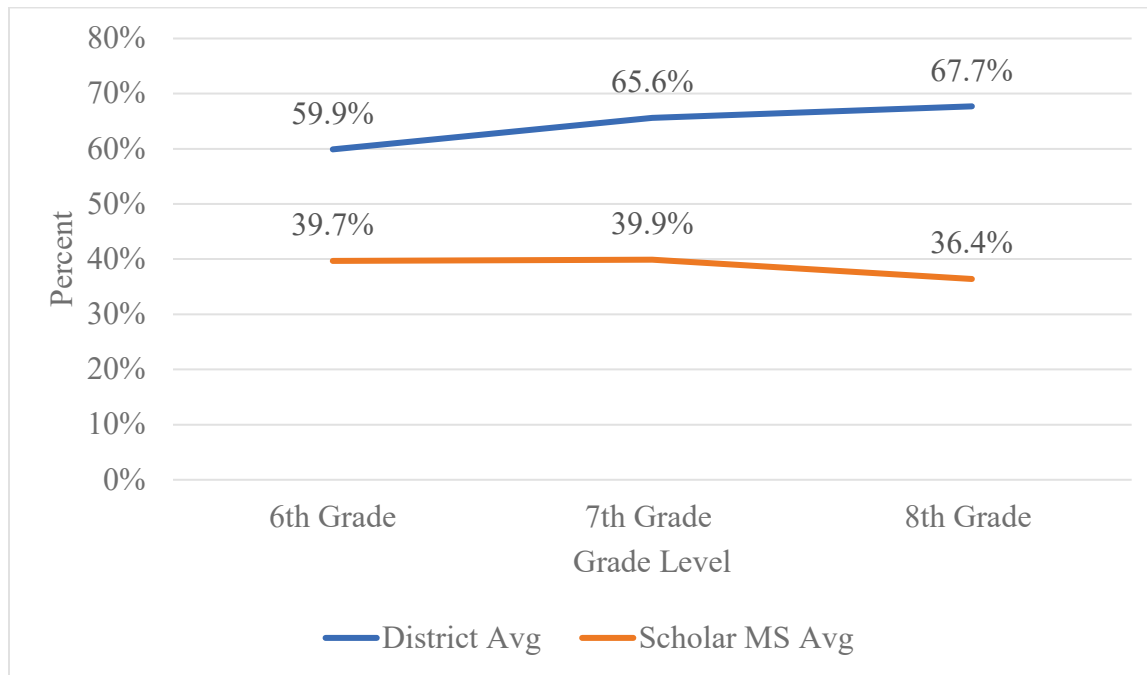
Semester 2 Interim Assessment Average Score for 6th through 8th Grade Students with Disabilities (SWD) at Scholar Middle School



As shown in Figure 3.7, the Semester 2 interim assessment average score for 6th-grade English Language Learners (ELL) across the school district was 59.9% compared to 39.7% for SMS students, 65.6% district 7th-graders compared to 43.2% for SMS students, and 67.7% district 8th graders compared to 38.3% for SMS students. Therefore, the ELL students consistently performed lower than the district.

Figure 3.7

Semester 2 Interim Assessment Average Score for 6th through 8th Grade English Language Learners (ELL) at Scholar Middle School



Characteristics of Staff

At the time of the study, Scholar Middle School consisted of one hundred twenty-five teachers, eight paraprofessionals, and approximately 1800 students. Table 3.5 shows the demographics of certified personnel data from 2021-2022. Most administrators and teachers held master's degrees and were Black female. Most staff also had one to twenty years of experience in education. During the 2022-2023 school year, at least 30 teachers were absent from school on some days, particularly Mondays and Fridays. The turnover rate at the school was approximately 30% each year. The teacher attrition rate for the 2021-2022 school year was 57.6%, significantly higher than the previous year. With high absenteeism and a lack of substitutes opting to work at the school, students were split amongst classes in their grade level during high absenteeism days.

Table 3.5*Certified Personnel Data 2021-2022*

Baseline characteristic	Administrators	PK-12 Teachers	Support Personnel
	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>
Certificate Level			
Bachelors	0	33	0
Master's	4	51	3
Specialist in	1	25	2
Doctoral	2	3	0
Gender			
Male	1	29	0
Female	6	83	5
Race/Ethnicity			
Black	5	74	5
White	1	32	0
Hispanic	1	5	0
Asian	0	1	0
Native	0	0	0
American	0	0	0
Multiracial			
Years Experience			
<1	0	12	0
2-10	0	51	1
11-20	4	33	3
21-30	3	13	1
>30	0	3	0

Note. This table demonstrates the characteristics of Scholar Middle School administrators, teachers, and support personnel.

Due to the number of new teachers, the school administration held additional staff development sessions and support for new teachers across all content areas. During exit interviews and conversations, many teachers stated student behaviors, lack of parental support, and leadership as reasons they left the school. Low morale, negative perceptions of the teachers, and perceptions of the administration significantly impacted the perceptions of all staff and contributed to turnover rates.

The leadership team consisted of an African American male principal with one year of experience as a new principal, two male assistant principals, one Caucasian and one African American, and four African American female assistant principals. The expertise of assistant principals ranged from zero to seven years since July of the study. The school had three principals in the 2022-2023 school year between July and October. The leadership team also experienced the movement of two assistant principals who received opportunities at other schools. These leaders were at SMS for three and four years, respectively.

In 2022, Scholar Middle School received a four-star rating for the state Climate Perception Survey, the same score since 2016. The Climate Perception average in 2019 was 67.4%, compared to the state average of 81.6%. That was the average survey response by students, parents, and personnel. According to the Gatlin School District (GSD) Student Discipline Dashboard- Cumulative Trends, as of May 31, 2022, at Scholar Middle School, the number of student incidents in the school year was the highest in two previous years at 21.3% compared to 17.8% in 2020 and 2.8% in 2021.

In 2022, SMS welcomed 30 new teachers, with 97% of the students in the building, requiring teachers to adapt to more than a few students. Many had three to six students in person during the 2020-2021 school year compared to 28-35 students in the 2021-2022 school year. This study used the action research process to develop a system of SEL support for teachers. This process included collaborating with the leadership team, school counselors, and district SEL coaches for teachers based on their needs.

The professional learning, as directed by the implementation team, sought to impact the well-being of the teachers at Scholar Middle School. This study looked specifically at the teacher

needs of a suburban middle school, which had a teacher turnover rate of 57.6%, the highest in school history.

Data Sources

The high turnover rate and additional stress teachers experienced at Scholar Middle School because of the COVID-19 pandemic increased the need for social-emotional learning teacher support. The study examined the design and implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) support for all teachers to build teacher morale. The researcher analyzed various data sources to assess SEL job-embedded professional development.

Participants

Six mathematics teachers from grades six through eight at Scholar Middle School participated in the study. Some taught at Scholar Middle School for one through twelve years, including during the 2020-21 school year. Many teachers also taught using the hybrid model of instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic and experienced technical, personal, and emotional struggles during that time. As a mathematics department, there was significant teacher turnover due to morale, personal issues, and other concerns.

Selection Criteria

The selection process for the study participants was purposeful and focused. The mathematics teachers had a range of teaching experience and taught all student subgroups: students with disabilities, English language learners, and general education students. They were all invited to participate in the study. As Bloomberg (2023) stated, “The qualitative researcher intentionally selects specific individuals and sites to understand the phenomenon” (p. 269). Including three grade-level content leaders allowed the teachers and instructional leaders to share

experiences. The sample size was determined based on those who qualified and desired to participate in the study.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2020-2021 school year, 96% of the students at SMS were at their homes learning digitally. Therefore, the teachers at SMS used a concurrent teaching model with a virtual platform. For face-to-face learning, many classes had a small teacher-student ratio, with as few as three students in a class. The following school year, the classroom sizes significantly increased, with less than twenty percent of the students learning virtually and up to thirty-five students in the classroom. Teachers began to experience anxiety as students returned to the school and adjusted to being in large groups in hallways and classes after months of isolation. The stress teachers experienced while managing their personal lives, and the lag in academics led to high teacher turnover and high absenteeism among teachers.

The next section of this chapter describes the data collection methods included in this action research study.

Data Collection Methods

For this study, the data collection methods included a qualitative approach. Most action research studies include multiple qualitative data methods such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and artifacts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As stated by Bloomberg (2023), “Qualitative research is suited to promoting a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants” (p. 70). Action research provides a way to develop an outcome for teachers and work with them to support a meaningful change, which in this study was the mathematics teachers. The source of the study began with the purpose, research questions, and theoretical framework (Stringer & Aragon, 2021).

Various qualitative methods were used for the data collection of this study. These methods included:

1. Observations of mathematic teachers during meetings and professional development sessions.
2. Interviews with mathematics teachers
3. A focus group to examine the impact of SEL support.
4. Survey results were used to determine patterns and themes of topics submitted by the mathematics teachers.
5. A researcher's journal with field notes was used to collect notes during observations, meetings, and discussions with the mathematics teachers.

Table 3.6 shows the qualitative methods that the researcher used in the action research study at Scholar Middle School.

Table 3.6

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative Method	Cycle (s)	Date
Observations	1 & 2 during SEL professional development sessions.	September 2023 through March 2024
Individual Interviews	1 & 2 These were done after consent was received in Cycle 1, at the end of Cycle 1, and the end of Cycle 2	For the ARDT members in 2024, December 2023, and March 2024 For the ARIT members- August 2023; January 2024
Focus Group	2	March 2024
Surveys	1 & 2	October 2023 November 2023 December 2023 January 2024

Qualitative Method	Cycle (s)	Date
		March 2024 Surveys were emailed to teachers after each professional development session.
Researcher's Journal	1 & 2	The researcher wrote in the researcher's journal during Cycles 1 and 2 during and after the SEL professional development sessions and during meetings. July 2023 through March 2024.
Coding Method	1 & 2	December 2023 January 2024 February 2024
Classroom Walkthroughs	2	February 2024 March 2024

The researcher used a coding method to analyze the qualitative data from the data collection methods to determine patterns, themes, and interventions to support the teachers.

Observations

The ARDT observed teachers during the meetings and professional development sessions. Focus behaviors included body language, participation level, and question responses. According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016), “observations make it possible to record behavior as it is happening” (p.139). The researcher recorded responses by the teachers in a journal and monitored and tracked the information. The observations provided information to determine patterns and themes.

Interviews

For this qualitative study, interviews were conducted to listen to the teachers share their stories, perspectives, and experiences. They provided first-hand accounts of their thoughts on the SEL professional learning sessions and the SEL competencies. According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016), “qualitative data consists of direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge” (p. 105). The interviews allowed the researcher to converse with the mathematics teachers to understand their feelings about what took place during the SEL professional development sessions and the support they received.

The researcher used semi-structured interviews, survey data, and collected artifacts to seek teachers' perspectives and determine SEL skills and support needs (Flushman et al., 2021). Semi-structured interviews created a supportive environment and increased discussion with the mathematics teachers. They also allowed the teachers to share honest thoughts. The mix of interview questions focused on their school experiences with SEL support and professional development. Table 3.7 includes a sample of the interview questions aligned with the research questions. The interview protocol is included and can be found in Appendix A.

Table 3.7

Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Question
Q1: How do you describe the implementation of schoolwide SEL on their morale?	How do you feel about the current SEL support offered in the school?
	How do you view the morale of the school?
	How can the leadership team support teachers in meeting their social-emotional needs?

Research Question	Interview Question
Q3: How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing SEL support for teachers?	How can the SEL professional development sessions be improved to maximize teacher engagement? What do you think are the needs of the teachers to provide SEL support?

Focus Groups

A focus group was used in the qualitative study at the end of the second professional development session in Cycle 2 to gain perspectives from the math teachers. As stated by Merriam & Tisdell (2023), “It is an interview on a topic with a group of people who know about the topic” (p. 114). The teachers were in the same school, grade level, and subject as they collaborated during weekly planning meetings. Teachers shared their experiences during the professional development sessions for social-emotional learning. Their interactions provided a constructivist approach to the data collection.

Survey Results

Although this was a qualitative study, quantitative data, and other methods were used to gather additional information. The researcher used the survey results from the qualitative study to determine patterns and themes from surveys administered to the teachers. The survey included open-ended and Likert scale-type questions. Survey results also provided additional data to support the qualitative study findings about teacher knowledge of SEL competencies and the support they received at the end of each professional development session in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2.

Researcher's Journal

The researcher used a journal to record observations and field notes to keep track of the study progression and the researcher's thoughts and ideas. Reflection and insight into the dissertation process also served as data and a source of information for the study. The field notes also included details such as the setting, location, and feelings about the observations. According to Bloomberg (2023), “A researcher's journal is a handy resource when you move to the analysis and interpretation of your study's findings” (p. 122).

Artifacts

The researcher used artifacts for the qualitative study to collect documents during the dissertation process. Specific documents included but were not limited to surveys, school rosters, and perception survey results by teachers. The ARDT developed and provided interventions to support the ARIT during the SEL professional development sessions and to meet their needs. The team used data collected to create interventions for the ARIT.

Interventions

The action research process is “iterative, cyclical, and participative in nature and is intended to foster a deeper understanding of a given situation informing future action, starting with conceptualizing and particularizing the problem and moving through several interventions and evaluations” (Bloomberg, 2023, p. 101). Glanz (2014) defined interventions, which are also known as treatments, as “any specific instructional practice, program, or procedure that is implemented by a researcher in order to investigate its effect on the behavior or achievement of an individual or a group” (p.316).

This study examined the design and implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) support to build teacher morale. Interventions were implemented to promote collaboration and

reflection for the teachers as they participated in a cycle of professional learning sessions focused on three SEL competencies: self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills. Session 1 occurred in October 2023 and focused on the self-management SEL competency. Session 2 took place in November 2023 and focused on the SEL competency social awareness. Session 3 occurred in December 2023, and relationship skills were addressed as the SEL competency. All three sessions took place during Cycle 1. Action research involves a collaborative and reflective approach. In a collaborative approach, the focus is on the individual and group members participating in the study.

According to Riel (2016), the goals of collaborative action research include:

- To improve professional practice through continual learning and progressive problem-solving.
- To achieve a deeper understanding of organizational change through collective actions.
- To improve the community where one's practice is embedded through participatory action learning or research. (p. 3)

Therefore, this action research promoted collaboration and provided SEL support for the teachers to improve school morale.

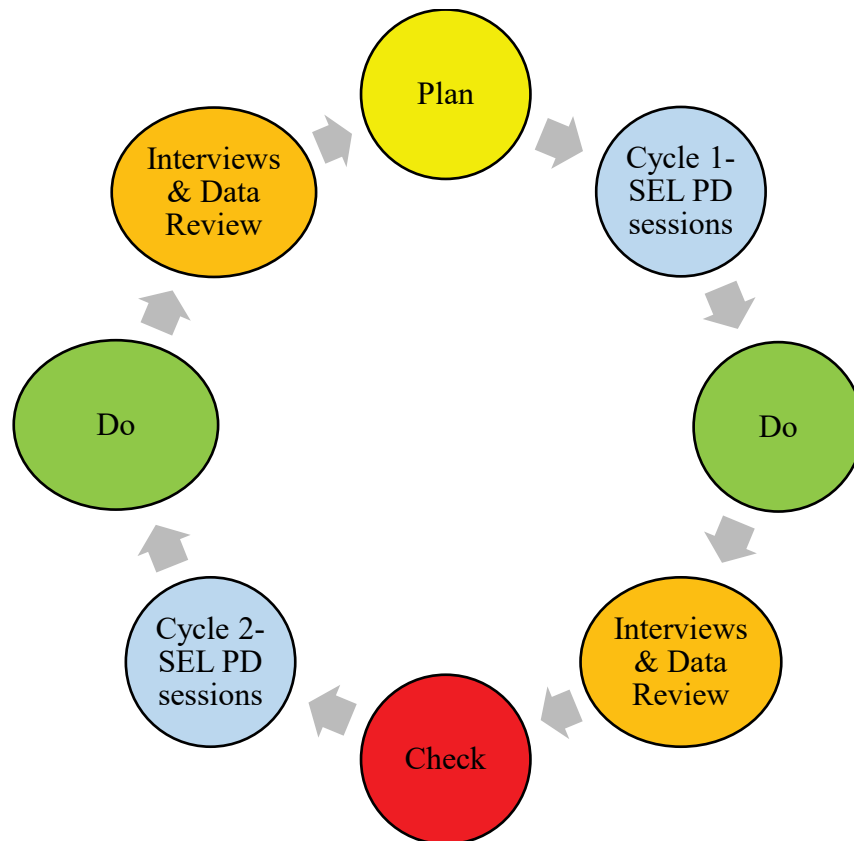
Collaboration involves supporting teachers as school leaders to build teacher capacity (Calvert, 2016; Zepeda, 2019; Zieher et al., 2021). The ARDT provided support for teachers at the beginning of the school year, equipping them with the SEL competencies to implement in their classrooms. Teachers felt supported, and the professional learning sessions improved their mental and physical health. School leaders can provide a supportive school climate for teachers (Westphal et al., 2022). Several studies have shown that job-embedded learning and mindfulness

strategies help teachers reduce stress, support the teachers' well-being, and foster a positive classroom climate for the students (Bonde et al., 2022; Dicarlo et al., 2020; Fabbro et al., 2020; Stewart & Rice, 2022; Taylor et al., 2021). As indicated in the study by Bonde et al. (2022), “It is possible to reduce the perceived stress level of secondary school teachers by offering mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR)” (p. 251).

The ARDT developed interventions based on modifications from the action research cycle Glanz (2014) designed. As indicated by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), “many interventions or strategies are implemented by participants over time” (p. 4). Figure 3.8 represents the intervention cycle incorporating the adapted Plan, Do, Check, and Act action research model

Figure 3.8

Intervention Cycle



Note: Adapted from Glanz (2014)

Plan & Cycle 1-SEL Professional Learning Session #1

During pre-planning, which took place at the beginning of the school year, teachers and members of the action research team completed a self-paced online course assigned by the school district as an introduction to social-emotional learning (SEL). The first SEL professional learning session focused on the self-management SEL competency. At the end of the session, teachers had an opportunity to share feedback. The information and input gathered helped the ARDT determine areas of improvement and growth in preparation for session two. The ARDT reviewed and analyzed data collected from session one.

Do & Cycle 1-SEL Professional Learning Session #2

The ARDT reflected on the feedback they observed during the first professional learning opportunity and observed teachers in their classrooms. Then, they adjusted and planned for Session 2, discussing the second SEL competency, social awareness. The ARDT reviewed and analyzed data collected from Session 2.

Check & Cycle 1-SEL Professional Learning Session #3

The third session in Cycle 1 focused on the third SEL competency, relationship skills. After the data review, the ARDT reflected on the session, prepared for Cycle 2, and continued to analyze the data. The researcher held individual interviews at the end of Session 3 in Cycle 1 in January 2024 with members of the ARDT and ARIT teams.

Plan & Cycle 2-SEL Hour #1

The first session of Cycle 2 was SEL hour, which the ARDT members planned as activities for the teachers and staff to engage in during the school digital day. The team selected activities and ideas based on the data review in the ARDT meeting in January 2024. The SEL

hour took place in January 2024 during Cycle 2. The ARDT provided paper copies of the surveys, which were sent electronically based on feedback during the meeting.

Do & Cycle 2-SEL Hour #2

The second SEL hour occurred in March 2024. The researcher assigned members of the ARDT roles to assist with setting up and implementing the SEL activities. The team sent surveys to the staff after the SEL hour. The ARDT met to review the survey results and discuss the next steps for SEL for the upcoming school year.

Interviews & Data Review

Data analysis followed cycle three. The researcher collected and analyzed the data throughout the study and after session three to determine the next steps for this qualitative study. Interviews used coding and other resources to capture the ARIT perspectives. Based on the analysis of the data collected, themes, patterns, and additional information developed for this case study.

Data Analysis Methods

The researcher intertwined data analysis and collection into the cyclical action research process. This action research study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of a concern for a community of participants (Bloomberg, 2023; Stringer & Aragon, 2021). As stated by Bloomberg (2023), "The purpose of data analysis in action research is very clearly twofold: to produce understanding or theory and to inform future action" (p.169). The study followed a cyclical process with interventions and observations and used a researcher's journal to review and analyze the data.

In qualitative action research, data analysis focuses on what is happening and how it is taking place during the cycles of the research process. As Merriam & Tisdell (2016) stated, "In the planning stage, researchers usually conduct individual or focus group interviews to find out

participants' initial views or experiences of the subject under study, and to make plans with them about the research process" (p. 235). The ARDT analyzed data during the collection for this study, making the process manageable.

Coding

The researcher organized, categorized, coded, and stored data in a manageable system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Coding is used in qualitative research to organize and sort data (Adu, 2019; Bloomberg, 2023; Center for Evaluation & Research; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stringer & Aragon, 2021; Younas et al., 2022). It is another form of analysis that involves labeling, sorting, and organizing data from participant perspectives. The study aimed to derive the themes, patterns, and other findings from the data collected from the interviews, observations, and the researcher's journal. As indicated by Stuckey (2015), "Codes are usually used to retrieve and categorize data that are similar in meaning so the researcher can quickly find and cluster the segments that relate to one another" (p. 7).

The types of codes can be predetermined or developed during the study based on the interviews, research questions, or other vital concepts (Stuckey, 2015). As indicated by Stuckey (2015), "the process of coding breaks the data into the parts so that the data are manageable, with the results of rebuilding the data to tell a storyline" (p. 10). Once this was completed, the data were analyzed deeply to determine themes and patterns.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a process used to identify, organize, and describe themes derived from the data. It assists the researcher during data analysis and is an essential qualitative research method (Nowell et al., 2017). The benefit of thematic analysis is that it can be used for different research participants and studies to determine similarities and differences within the study.

As Nowell et al. (2017) stated, "thematic analysis is also useful for summarizing key features of a large data set, as it forces the researcher to take a well-structured approach to handling data, helping to produce a clear and organized final report" (p. 2). Trustworthiness and insight about findings in a study can be established through a rigorous thematic analysis, and it promotes communication with researchers who use different research methods (Nowell et al., 2017).

Thematic analysis is a six-step process that develops over time through phases. Novell et al. (2017) stated, "Thematic analysis is a linear, six-phased method; it is an iterative and reflective process that develops over time and involves constantly moving back and forth between phases" (p. 4). The phases of thematic analysis to establish trustworthiness are illustrated in Table 3.7.

Table 3.8

Establishing Trustworthiness During Each Phase of Thematic Analysis

Phases of Thematic Analysis	Means of Establishing Trustworthiness
Phase 1: Familiarize yourself with the data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolong engagement with data. • Triangulate different data collection modes. • Document theoretical and reflective thoughts. • Document thoughts about potential codes/themes. • Store raw data in well-organized archives. • Keep records of all data field notes, transcripts, and reflexive journals.

Phases of Thematic Analysis	Means of Establishing Trustworthiness
Phase 2: Generating initial codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer debriefing. • Research triangulation. • Reflexive journaling. • Use of a coding framework. • Audit trail of code generation. • Documentation of all team meetings and peer debriefings.
Phase 3: Searching for themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher triangulation. • Diagramming to make sense of these connections. • Keep detailed notes about the development and hierarchies of concepts and themes.
Phase 4: Reviewing themes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research triangulation. • Team members vet themes and subthemes. • Test for referential adequacy by returning to raw data.
Phase 5: Defining and naming themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher triangulation. • Peer debriefing. • Team consensus on themes. • Documentation of team meetings regarding themes. • Documentation of theme naming.
Phase 6: Producing the report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member checking. • Peer debriefing. • Describe the process of coding and analysis in sufficient detail. • Thick descriptions of context. • Description of the audit trail. • Report on reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study.

Note: Adapted from Novel et al. (2017)

Table 3.7 describes how researchers use the trustworthiness criteria for the thematic analysis phases. In qualitative research, trustworthiness has four criteria: credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (Bloomberg, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016;

Novell et al., 2017). The following section will discuss the reliability, validity, and generalization of the action research study.

Reliability, Validity, and Generalization

Qualitative studies are action research with organizations and describe people acting in events (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As stated by Coghlan (2019), "The strengths of action research are that it contributes to both actions and knowledge" (p.186). In the 1980s, the state of qualitative inquiry changed to ensure studies had rigor to align with qualitative criteria of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Morse (2015) indicated that using the term trustworthiness instead of rigor means "to evaluate the credibility, transferability, dependability, and the trustworthiness of the completed product" (p. 1212). The criteria help to address concerns about the rigor and limitations of qualitative studies. As stated by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research involves investigating in an ethical manner" (p. 237).

Validity and credibility are essential qualities of qualitative research and ensure studies are done ethically (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Long & Johnson, 2000). According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016), "because qualitative research is based on assumptions about reality different from those of quantitative research, the standards for rigor in qualitative research necessarily differ from those of quantitative research" (p.237).

Researchers use triangulation to increase the credibility of qualitative studies, which involves multiple data sources, including observations, interviews, and possibly follow-up interviews with the participants (Efron & David, 2020; Long & Johnson, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reliability is the extent to which the research findings can be replicated, and there is consistency of practice (Long & Johnson, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In this action research study, various data sources were used to collect and analyze the data to ensure trustworthiness and credibility. The strategies that were used in this study include the following:

1. Triangulation: Data were collected from interviews, artifacts, observations, field notes, reflectivity, and a focus group (Efron & David, 2020; Long & Johnson, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
2. Member checks: The action research and design team reviewed the data to ensure the voices and perspectives of the participants were valid and accurate (Efron & David, 2020; Long & Johnson, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
3. Adequate engagement in data collection: The researcher facilitated and attended the SEL professional learning sessions with the participants, performed observations, and conducted the interviews (Efron & David, 2020; Long & Johnson, 2000).
4. Reflectivity/journaling: The researcher used a journal to reflect and brainstorm ideas, record observations, and next steps during the implementation phase. Specific details from observations and conversations were also written in the journal (Efron & David, 2020; Long & Johnson, 2000).
5. Audit Trail: To ensure the information presented in the study was accurate, the researcher kept a journal to record notes, take memos, ask questions, and share ideas and issues (Long & Johnson, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
6. Observations: The researcher observed the participants during the SEL professional development sessions and in the classroom. Body language, gestures, conversations, and other information were recorded in the researcher's journal (Efron & David, 2020; Long & Johnson, 2000).

Triangulation methods are also displayed in Table 3.8, which contains a sample of the research and interview questions, data collection methods, data analysis, and the timeline.

Table 3.9

Triangulation Methods

Research Question	Interview Question	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Timeline
Q1: How do teachers describe the implementation of schoolwide SEL to increase their morale?	How do you feel about the current SEL support offered in the school?	Interview	Coding	July 2023-March 2024
		Field notes	Reflection	
		Observations	Audit trail	
		Artifacts		
	How do you view the morale of the school?			July 2023-March 2024
		Artifacts	Member checks	
		Interview	Audit trail	
Q2: How do school leaders support implementing SEL support to impact teacher morale?	How would you describe the support you received as a teacher for SEL?	Interview	Reflection	July 2023-March 2024
		Field Notes	Coding	
		Artifacts	Audit trail	
	What do you feel will be beneficial to help teachers with SEL?	Interview	Reflection	
		Field notes	Coding	
			Audit trail	

Research Question	Interview Question	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Timeline
Q3: How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing SEL support for teachers?	How can the SEL professional development sessions be improved to maximize teacher engagement?	Interview	Coding	July 2023-March 2024
		Field notes	Reflection	
		Observations		
	What do you think are the needs of the teachers to provide SEL support?	Artifacts		July 2023-March 2024
		Interviews	Coding	
		Artifacts	Reflection	

The study was specific in context, but the researcher provided a thick description to address bias throughout the action research study. As indicated by Efron and David (2020), "reflexivity suggests that the researchers acknowledge and disclose their subjectivity and monitor its potential effect on their data collection and data interpretation" (p. 63). The subjectivity of the researcher is explored in the next section.

Subjectivity Statement

The primary researcher was an assistant principal at Scholar Middle School with twenty-five years of education experience. The researcher also served as the math administrator. Leading during a pandemic was a first for all educators, and the researcher sought ways to help teachers and students.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the educational system forever. Teachers and students were forced to quickly learn how to navigate technology and learning with little training using

the Zoom platform while balancing the loss of loved ones, mask restrictions, and additional hours of stress working from home and school.

Before and after the pandemic, there was a districtwide push for social-emotional support for students and little support for teachers. However, more was needed to provide SEL support for teachers. The researcher's passion for helping people led to this work. She had a vested interest in building morale and improving the school climate.

If educators can help the teachers with self-management, coping skills, and other components of SEL, they will feel empowered to help the students in their classrooms. SEL support made them feel supported and motivated to know that the school cared about them and their well-being. Over the years, the questions on the perception surveys, such as, "I have a friend at work. I feel supported by leadership," were reviewed, and the researcher wondered if SEL support would allow teachers to respond positively if the help was provided. The teachers were knowledgeable and cared for the students.

The professional development and study also reduced teacher turnover since teachers felt supported. Students and parents complained about the high turnover and the fact that there are different teachers annually. As an instructional leader, it was essential to help the teachers, and that was the goal of this study. Based on previous experience as a Mathematics teacher, instructional coach, and assistant principal, the researcher may bring bias but made every effort to be subjective.

Limitations

This action research study occurred at a suburban middle school in the southern United States. As a result, this data may be limited to similar school settings. The study consisted of ten

participants, including 6th- 8th-grade mathematics teachers who taught at the Title 1 school. The research participants were exclusive to the school and participated voluntarily.

A larger sample could have been used to allow transferability. The researcher was the interviewee, and the participant, as stated by Bloomberg (2023), may express a phenomenon called “participant reactivity” (p.312). In this case, participants may try to answer the questions based on what they think the interviewer wants to hear or may feel guarded in their responses.

Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on data collection for this action research study, which provided SEL support for teachers. The benefits of action research included opportunities for reflection and continuous improvement, and it promoted a positive school climate (Glanz, 2014). The action research and design teams collaborated with the researcher and planned, implemented, and revised SEL professional development sessions for the teachers. The participants were sixth through 8th-grade mathematics teachers who voluntarily participated in the study. Data were collected using triangulation and included interviews, observations, the researcher's journal, an audit trail, and member checks to ensure the study's trustworthiness.

In the next chapter, the findings from the action research study at Scholar Middle School can be found. The chapter will describe the study of providing SEL support to build teacher morale with mathematics teachers.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE

This study examined the design and implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) support to build teacher morale. This action research included design and implementation teams. The ARDT administered a survey to collect teachers' perspectives on SEL support and competencies, which provided a baseline for the work. The ARDT used these data to build a structure for addressing teacher morale by providing professional learning for teachers using SEL competencies to help teachers improve their social-emotional well-being. The purpose of this action research study was to examine the design and implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) support to build teacher morale. To address the purpose of this action research study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. How do teachers describe the implementation of schoolwide SEL on their morale?
2. How do school leaders support the impact of SEL implementation on teacher morale?
3. How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing SEL support for teachers?

This study was critical because many teachers suffered from burnout, depression, and stress, which impacted morale and school climate. The information from the study offered insight into how to support teachers better socially and emotionally, which promoted positive student relationships, decreased student behaviors, and helped students overcome challenges. The researcher approached this study with the following questions: Can SEL support influence teacher morale? Are there lessons that could be learned from the action research process to help teachers build their SEL knowledge? These questions helped frame the overall research

questions to guide the purpose and focus of the study. The context of the school where this action research study occurred is discussed in the next section.

Problem Framing in the Context

Scholar Middle School (SMS) was located in Gatlin School District (GSD), north of a major city in the southern United States. It was one of the largest school districts, with approximately 182,214 full-time students representing 191 countries and speaking 98 languages. The district consisted of 142 schools: 81 elementary schools, 29 middle schools, 24 high schools, seven specialty entities, and one charter school. The district demographics included 32.4% Black, 16.8% White, 34.5% Hispanic, 11.8% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4.2% Multiracial, and 0.2% American Indian.

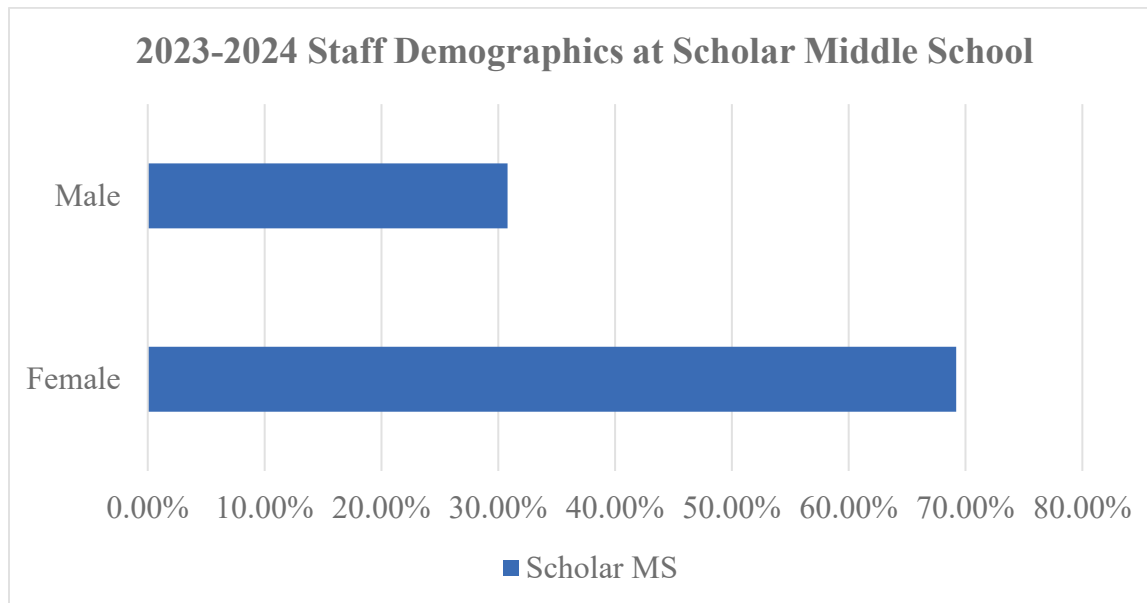
The county ranked among the best nationally and received local, state, and national honors. GSD had over 21,296 employees and appeared in a major magazine and other networks as one of the top employers in the southern United States.

Problem Framing Based on the Site

Scholar Middle School (SMS) is a suburban middle school located about 30 miles east of a major city in the south. The city's poverty rate was 6.48% compared to 11.5% for the United States. SMS is an International Baccalaureate School with a Middle Year Program, a challenging and prestigious educational framework designed to assure global awareness and rigorous assessment that is fully compatible with all district policies and processes. As shown in Figure 4.1, for the 2023-2024 school year, the percentage of male staff members at Scholar Middle School was 30.80%, and the rate of female staff members was 69.20%.

Figure 4.1

2023-2024 Staff Demographics at Scholar Middle School



Scholar Middle School is a Title 1 public school that opened on August 30, 1980, with approximately 860 students and 60 faculty members and staff. Due to overcrowding at neighboring middle schools and growth in the area, a new wing with approximately 13,500 square feet and twenty classrooms was added to the building. Another addition occurred in 1989 and consisted of twelve classrooms and music rooms. GSD divided its schools into clusters. SMS is the only middle school within the Scholar cluster and feeds into one high school.

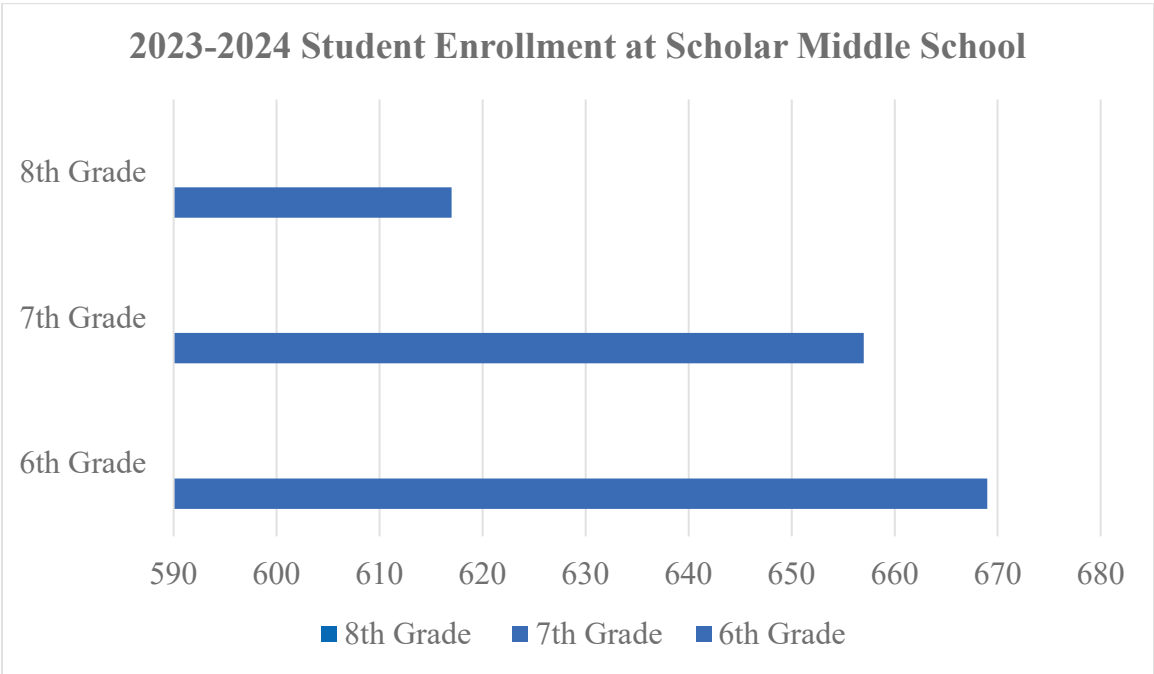
Student Body Characteristics

Scholar Middle School increased from a 40-classroom facility to ninety-seven classrooms between 2010 and 2019, indicative of the growth in Statesville. Scholar Middle School was committed to serving the students and the surrounding community. The school cluster consisted of 7,656 students, and as of February 2024. Scholar Middle School enrolled 1943 students.

Figure 4.2 shows the total of SMS students by grade level during the 2023-2024 school year: 669 in 6th grade, 657 in 7th grade, and 617 in 8th grade.

Figure 4.2

2023-2024 Student Enrollment at Scholar Middle School



As shown in Figure 4.3, the percentage of multilingual learners at Scholar Middle School was 20.8% compared to 24.9% for GSD. Special education students comprised 15% of the school population, while the overall county population for this demographic was 13.4%.

Figure 4.3

Specialty Programs at Scholar Middle School for the 2023-2024 SY

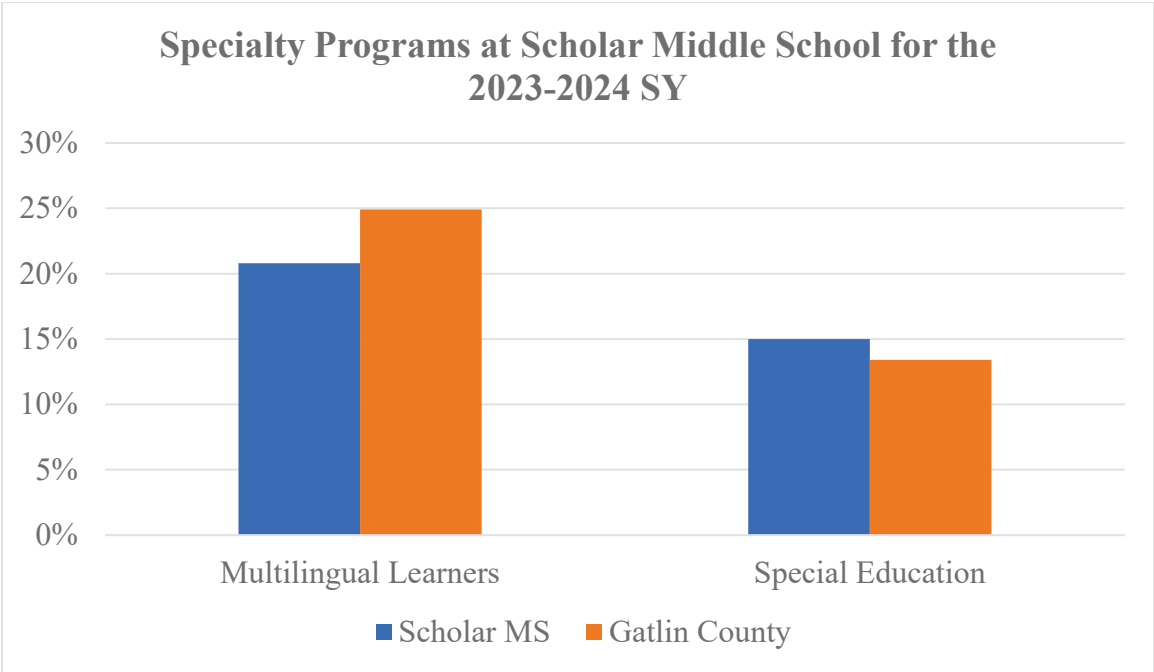


Figure 4.4 compares the number of SMS males to the female population during the 2023-2024 school year. There were 983 male students compared to 960 female students.

Figure 4.4

2023-2024 Student Demographics by Gender at Scholar Middle School

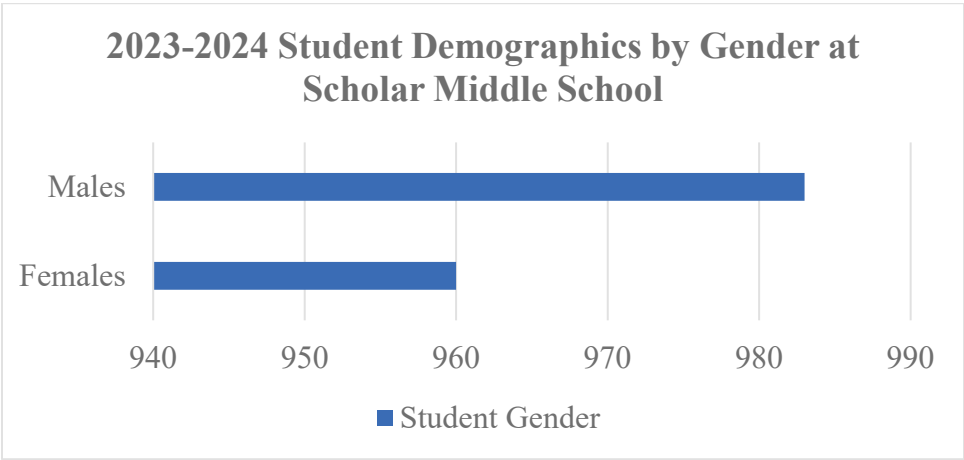
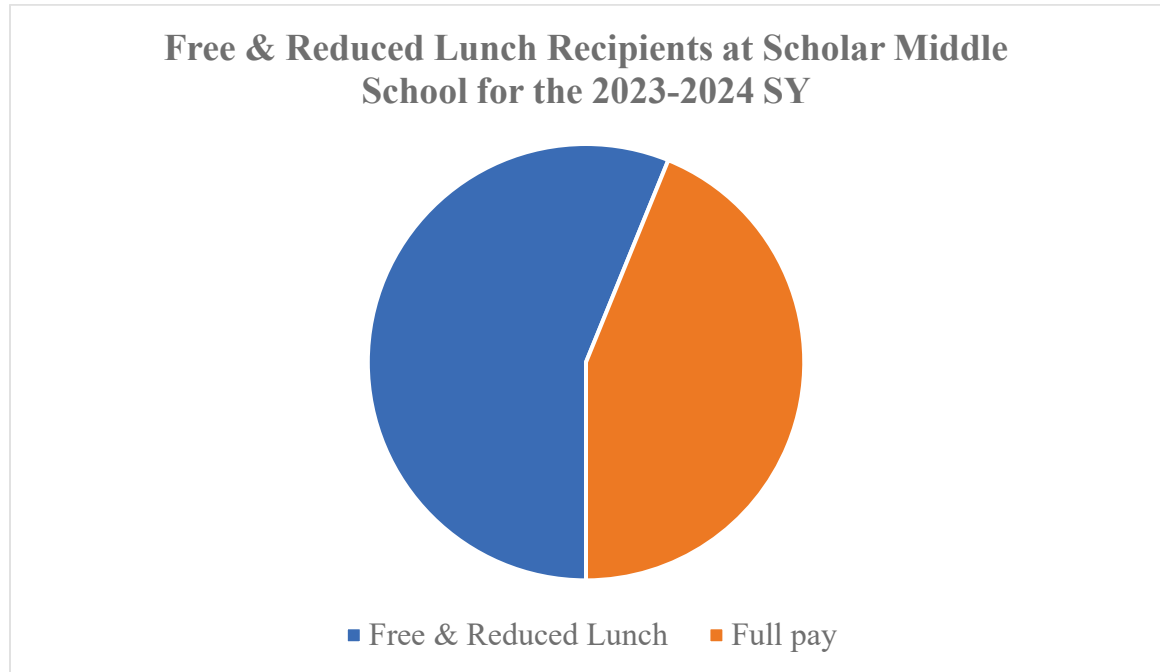


Figure 4.5 reflects the percentage of SMS students who received free and reduced lunches during the 2023-2024 school year, which was 53.8%. The remaining 897 students at Scholar Middle School paid the full price for breakfast and lunch.

Figure 4.5

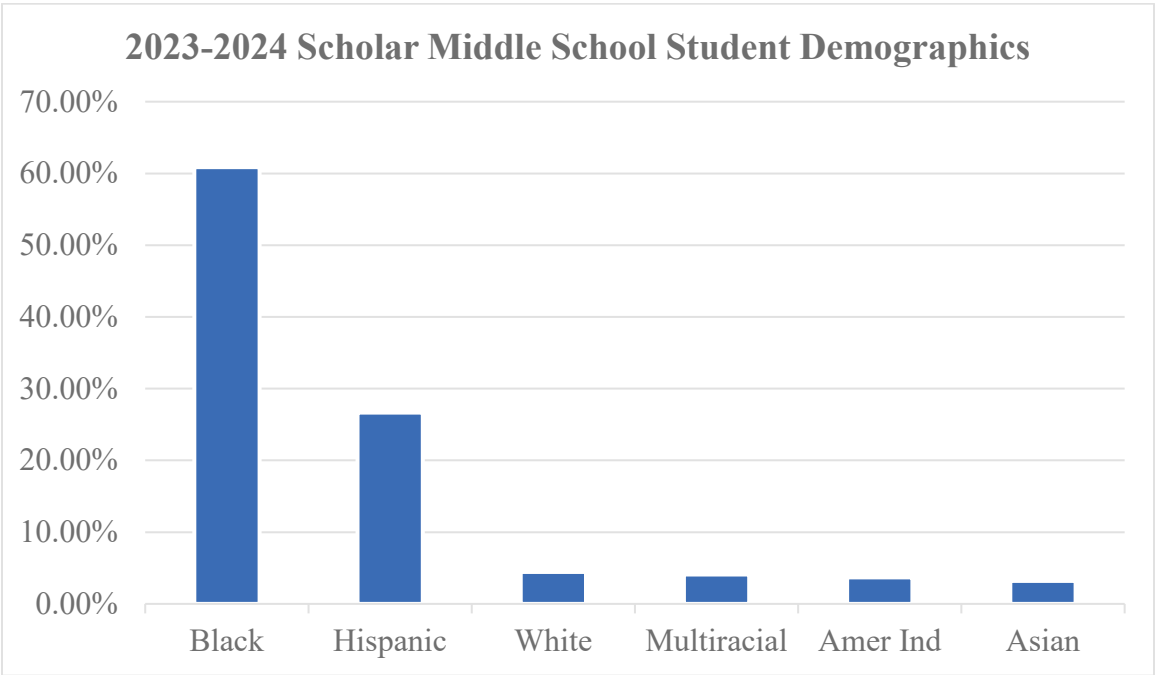
2023-2024 SY Free & Reduced Lunch Recipients



During the 2023-2024 school year, Scholar Middle School consisted of a diverse student population. Figure 4.6 illustrates the ethnic composition of the student population at Scholar Middle School during the 2023-2024 school year, including 60.85% Black or African American and 26.67% Hispanic; less than 13% of students identified as white, multiracial, American Indian, or Asian.

Figure 4.6

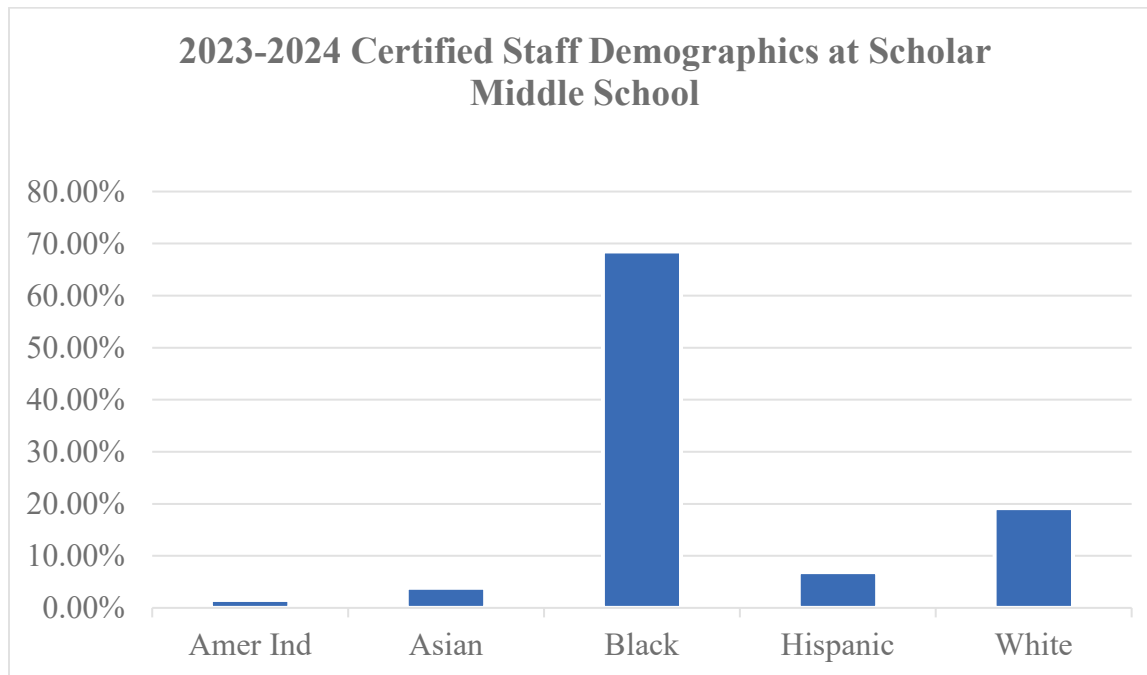
2023-2024 Scholar Middle School Student Demographics



As shown in Figure 4.7, the ethnic composition of the certified staff at Scholar Middle School during the 2023-2024 school year included 68.5% Black or African American, 19.20% White, and 6.90% Hispanic; less than six percent of the students identified as Asian or American Indian.

Figure 4.7

2023-2024 Demographics of Certified Staff at Scholar Middle School



Although the COVID-19 pandemic ended before the study, teacher absenteeism remained high during the 2022-2023 academic year. There was also a high turnover of teachers due to stress, increased student behaviors, and other personal matters. Figure 4.8 shows the total sick days used by teachers during the 2020-2021 school year. The total was 410.25 compared to 531.48 total sick days used by teachers during the 2021-2022 school year. The total number of sick days teachers used at Scholar Middle School in 2022-2023 was 481.44.

Figure 4.8

2020-2023 Total Sick Days by Scholar Middle School Teachers

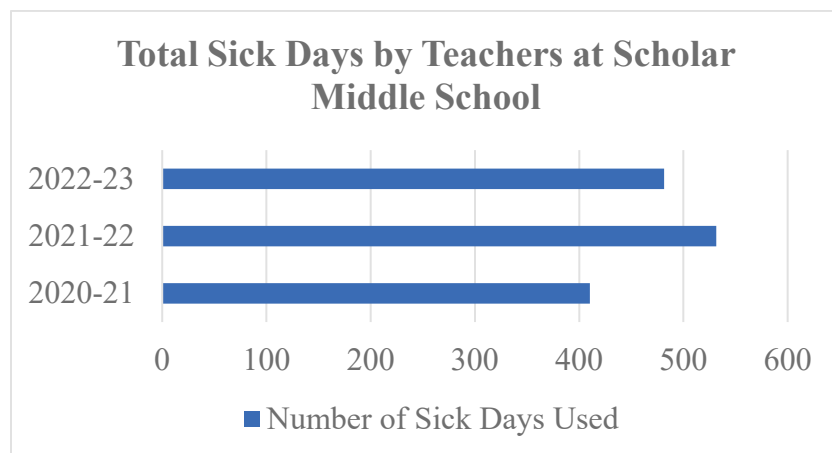
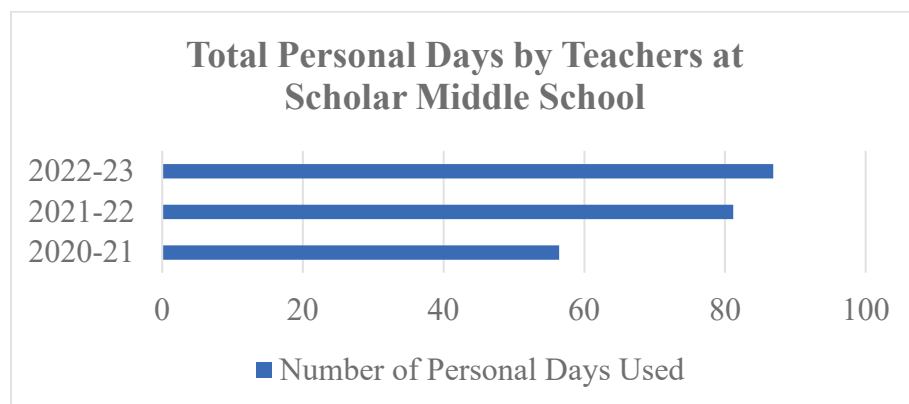


Figure 4.9 displays the number of personal days teachers used during the 2020-2021 school year. The totals were 56.44 compared to 81.19 personal days used by teachers during the 2021-2022 school year. The total number of personal days used by teachers at Scholar Middle School in 2022-2023 was 86.88.

Figure 4.9

Total Personal Days by Teachers at Scholar Middle School



There continued to be a challenge in securing substitute teachers when certified teachers called out after the set time to guarantee there was coverage for the class. Prospective substitutes canceled or chose not to work at the school, which created a shortage. There were also instances

when a teacher needed to leave the building during the day or class due to illness or personal reasons. The administrator and administrative assistant then created a plan to split the class among the grade-level teachers. These actions often stressed the other teachers, who had to manage additional students in their classrooms.

Action Research Design Team

For this action research study, the Action Research Design Team (ARDT) consisted of the principal, three assistant principals, and two school counselors. The researcher selected ARDT members based on their consent to participate, their impact on the study, and school needs. The principal had completed one year at SMS and had served as a high school assistant principal for 10 years. It was his first middle school experience. One of the associate principals was a former principal for three years in a neighboring county, and it was her first year in GSD. She had 16 years of experience in education and a background in school data, language arts, and universal screeners.

One of the counselors had been at the school for eight years and was the contact person for Positive Behavior Intervention Systems (PBIS), SEL, and the district counseling program. She was enthusiastic about SEL and advocated for supporting teachers and students. The male counselor worked at Scholar Middle School for two years and was new to the school district. He had experience supporting 6th grade the previous year but was moved to 7th grade to be with his former students. He was familiar with SEL and presented workshops to teachers in his former district.

The ARDT participated in weekly administrative and planning meetings. The team designed the professional sessions using teacher feedback, school perception survey data, and the staff wellness survey results. Due to scheduling conflicts with the district SEL office, a member

of the ARDT facilitated the first two sessions. The ARDT collaboratively developed the topics for the professional development sessions and used two cycles to collect data. The ARDT collected data in two cycles.

Action Research Implementation Team

The Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT) comprised two mathematics teachers in grades six through eight. The researcher selected participants based on their grade level, content area, years of experience at Scholar Middle School, and willingness to participate in the survey. The researcher emailed all SMS Mathematics teachers. After receiving very little response, the researcher sent another email requesting participation in the study, and after one-on-one conversations with teachers, six teachers agreed to participate. One of the ARDT members met with several participants privately to answer their questions and concerns. They inquired about the commitment requirements, whether their responses would be confidential, and if their participation would extend too long after their workday. The ARDT members explained to the participants how they were valued and appreciated and that their input was invaluable. The teachers enjoyed the sense of belonging.

Mrs. Lawrence was a 6th-grade mathematics teacher with three years of teaching experience, all at SMS. She was the former content lead at the school for three years. Due to her enrollment in graduate school and family obligations, she was always willing to serve and grow as a teacher. She asked to step down as content lead for the year of this action research study. Mrs. Williams was a 6th-grade co-teacher paired with Mrs. Lawrence. She was at SMS for two years but possessed ten years of teaching with a special education background and was in her fourth year as a co-taught teacher. She served as the sixth-grade content lead. Mrs. Williams

facilitated and attended weekly collaborative planning and monthly special education meetings. She was a hardworking collaborator who strived to help students.

Mr. Palmore was a 7th-grade mathematics teacher with 15 years of experience in special education, all at SMS. Mr. Summers worked as the resource teacher for 7th grade, with six years of experience, and he worked at SMS for two years. For 8th grade, Mrs. Atkinson provided 20 years of teaching experience in special education and was at SMS for 10 years. Mrs. Holmes was an 8th-grade teacher with 16 years of teaching experience and was at SMS for 2 years.

Designing the Interventions

The ARDT consisted of school counselors, three assistant principals, and the principal. The design team participated in one-on-one interviews before the first ARDT meeting. The team reviewed school data, including the health and wellness survey results, precisely the SEL questions, perception survey results, the Local School Plan of Improvement (LSPI) goal, teacher turnover data, teacher absenteeism, and staff perception data to design the interventions. The team examined data to determine strategies to improve the school and considered input from teacher leaders. The LSPI goals were the main driver in creating the professional development session. The ARDT worked closely to analyze data and review the district initiatives to promote SEL and a positive and supportive school culture. The team developed an agenda and met with the district SEL coaches to plan the professional development sessions for the three SEL competencies.

With the support of the principal, the team implemented the intervention of creating a wellness room for teachers and staff. This space was created for staff to visit during planning or non-instructional periods. A team implemented the SEL professional development session as the second intervention for teachers to learn SEL competencies to promote a growth mindset and

build capacity. The third intervention was classroom walkthroughs, which the ARDT did to view the implementation of SEL lessons during the weekly SEL time. The team reviewed discipline data bi-weekly and discussed frequent behaviors and incidents between teachers and students. The team noticed a decrease in Rule 4 violations compared to the previous year.

The fourth intervention was an SEL check-in for teachers with the school counselors. When teachers had questions about locating the SEL resources, Character Strong, or the information shared during the SEL professional development, teachers scheduled a time to do so with the grade-level counselor. In the PLC room where the weekly collaborative meetings were held, the ARDT created an SEL resource bulletin board and placed the resources, including the SEL wellness calendar and recommendations on how to implement SEL in their personal lives, in envelopes on the board for teachers to take at their leisure. Lastly, teachers were encouraged to join the SEL team to create and promote buy-in to support their colleagues in implementing SEL strategies and lessons with fidelity while promoting a positive and supportive school climate. The teachers and ARDT members collaborated to share ideas and prepare ongoing SEL training and events for the upcoming school year during pre-planning and welcome new teachers to the school.

The Story and Outcomes

Preview to Cycle 1-June 2023

This action research study took place over nine months, from June 2023 through March 2024. Beginning in June 2023, leadership team members reviewed the Local School Plan of Improvement (LSPI) at the district Summer Leadership Conference. The LSPI consisted of several strategic priorities, goals, rationales, and action steps; two goals applied to this action research study. The LSPI was a tool that held schools accountable to ensure each school

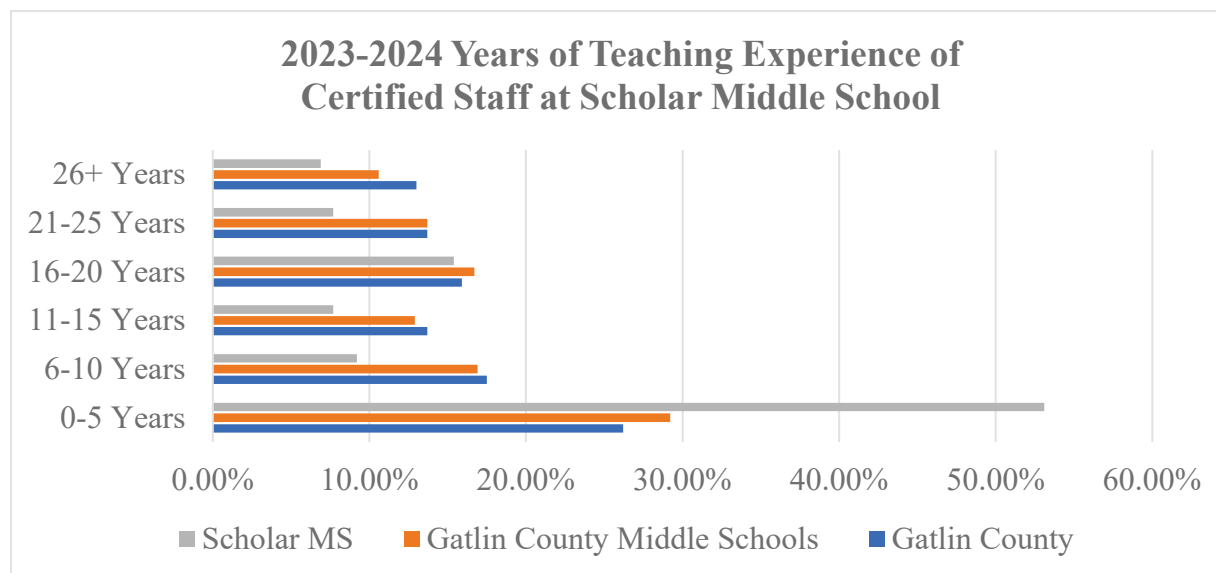
community understood the school progress made and the plans that drove improvement. At each local school, leadership team members collaborated to increase student achievement with targeted goals based on four strategic priorities within the district: empathy, equity, effectiveness, and excellence. All schools focused on two goals: multi-tiered support systems, opportunity, and access.

Schools were required to select one goal from each of the strategic priorities. The goals reflected changes at the local schools. Data points used to determine improvement included years of teaching experience, staff perception survey results about cultural proficiency and staff support, and discipline rule violations that students did against employees and teachers.

Figure 4.10 shows that most SMS certified staff were new teachers with five years or less of teaching during the 2023-2024 school year. The percentage of new teachers with five years or less of teaching in all Gatlin School District (GSD) middle schools was 29.20%. For all schools in GSD, the percentage of teachers with five years or less of teaching experience was 26.20%. Therefore, the data shows that Scholar Middle School had the most significant number of new teachers with five or fewer years of teaching experience compared to all the schools in GSD.

Figure 4.10

2023-2024 Years of Teaching Experience of Certified Staff at Scholar Middle School



The Scholar Middle School leadership team selected empathy for staff and student well-being as a strategic priority. The local school plan of improvement (LSPI) goal was to continue building an intentional, well-established, exemplary social and emotional learning (SEL) program that strategically provided cross-divisional support and robust professional development and resources for staff, students, and families. The researcher served as the SEL lead for the school and recommended SEL professional development for the teachers. The leadership team discussed the school climate and referred to the following topics and data: high teacher turnover, teacher absenteeism, and lack of substitute coverage. The team used discipline, health and wellness surveys, and staff perception surveys data as the baseline and, for discussion purposes, included.

Figure 4.11 provides the breakdown of SMS staff perception results. Most staff members (55.6%) indicated they were culturally proficient during the 2022-2023 school year. The county rate was 76.3%. The SMS staff members who indicated they received staff support was 68.7%.

The county percentage was 82.70%. Therefore, the staff at SMSs during the 2022-2023 school year scored below the county for cultural proficiency and staff support.

Figure 4.11

2022-2023 Staff Perception Survey Results for Scholar Middle School

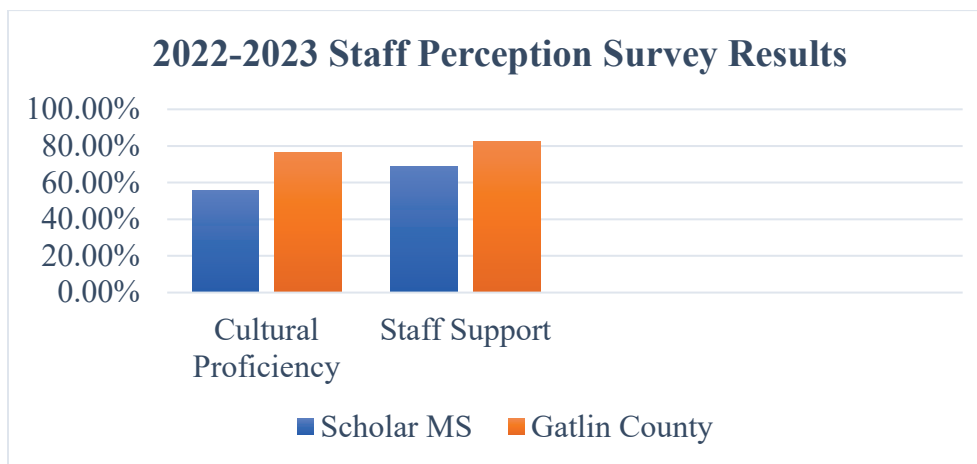


Figure 4.12 shows that based on the 2021-2022 SMS staff perceptions survey results, 52.4% indicated they were culturally proficient. The county percentage was 73.8%. The rate of SMS staff members who indicated they received staff support was 53.8%. The county percentage was 78.4%. Therefore, the staff at Scholar Middle School during the 2021-2022 school year scored below the county for the topics of cultural proficiency and staff support.

Figure 4.12

2021-2022 Staff Perception Survey Results for Scholar Middle School

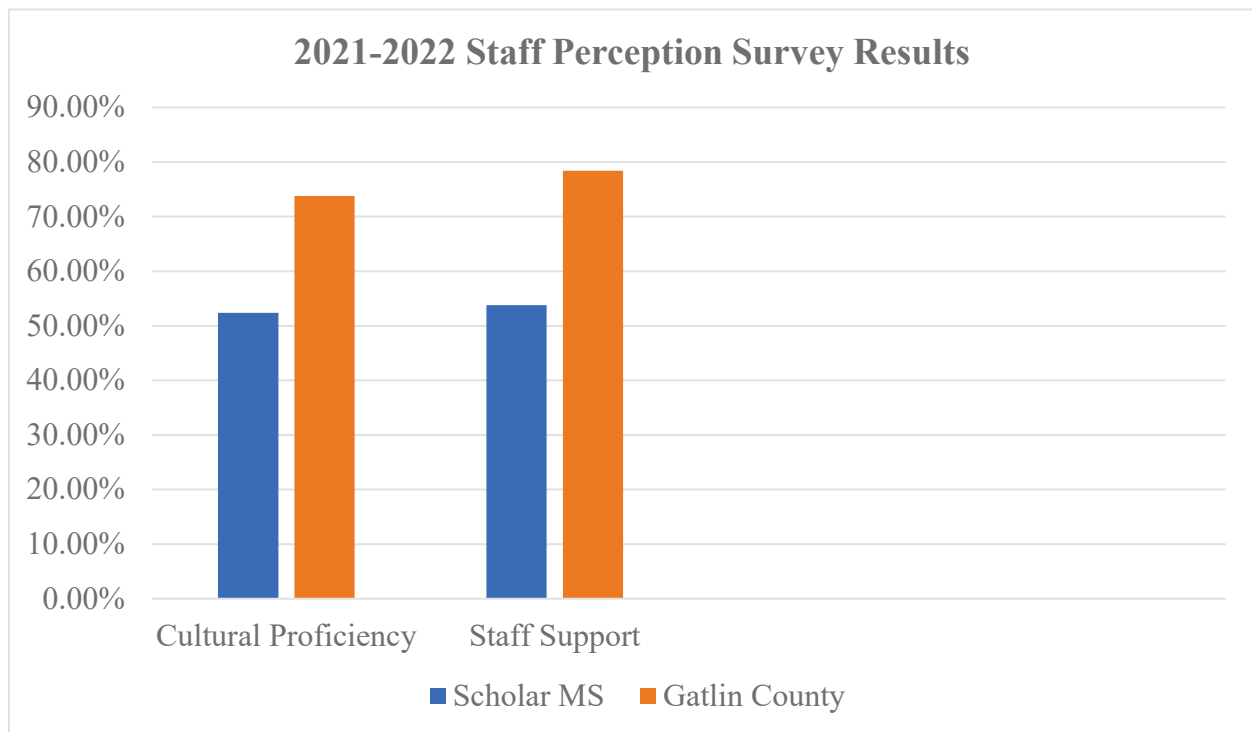
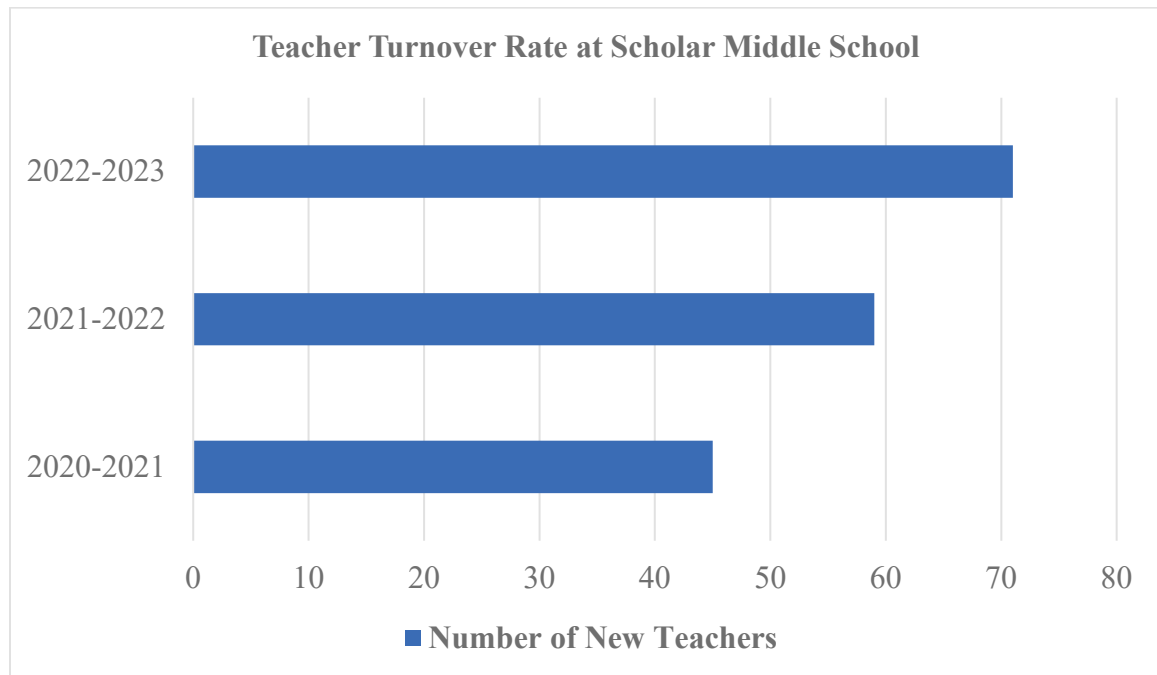


Figure 4.13 compares the total number of new SMS teachers over three years. The number trended upward, with the 2022-2023 school year having 71 new teachers compared with 45 during the 2020-2021 school year and 59 during the 2021-2022 school year.

Figure 4.13

Teacher Turnover Rate at Scholar Middle School



The leadership team at Scholar Middle School discussed the LSPI goal and measured its effectiveness using the Results-Based Evaluation System (RBES). RBES defined accountability at the district, division, school, and classroom levels and measured achievement performance in system goals. The system promoted continuous improvement by identifying strengths and weaknesses and communicating school performance. The rationale for this goal was to value the input of the students and staff. Scholar Middle School values continuous improvement. The district required teachers to do a Results-Based Evaluation System (RBES) goal, and they selected SEL as a professional goal.

Data indicated the need to focus on student perceptions of safety, proper staff training, and providing an environment where staff felt valued and heard. The data points were from the school improvement survey and included a baseline of 45% for the 2022-2023 school year and a

target goal of 50% for the 2023-2024 school year. After reviewing the responses to the health and wellness staff surveys, the ARDT discussed two responses that received the lowest percentages and were related to the school's goals. The responses were as follows:

- I receive training on instruction to support social-emotional learning. (41%)
- Staff at all levels are treated reasonably here. (45%)
- My principal facilitates systems/processes to support school improvement. (20%)
- Support from my principal/supervisor leads to progress in instructional improvement (or professional growth). (30%)

During the first ARDT meeting, the principal and assistant principals shared and redelivered the information, including the data discussed with the leadership team. The ARDT discussed these topics in greater detail and incorporated SEL professional development sessions. The sessions took place during teacher planning periods. The sessions aimed to improve the school climate, support teachers, and reinforce the GSD SEL implementation goal. The leadership team agreed to offer the professional development sessions and included the ideas on the LSPI tool. In addition, the leadership team created the pre-planning agenda for the staff and discussed how to incorporate the topic of SEL professional development for teachers for the upcoming school year in conjunction with the counselors. One of the artifacts used during the meetings was the staff roster, which included new teachers highlighted in bold print. Other artifacts included the LSPI goals, staff perception survey, student discipline data, and health and wellness survey results. The team also referred to specific teacher behaviors that affected student/teacher relationships.

As shown in Table 4.1, SMS students violated rule 4AC, which was rude conduct to teachers and employees during the 2022-2023 school year. In 6th grade, eight students violated

rule 4AC; in 7th grade, 34 students violated rule 4AC; and in 8th grade, thirty students violated rule 4AC at Scholar Middle School.

Table 4.1

Rule 4 Student Code Violations during the 2022-2023 SY at Scholar Middle School

Rule Violation	# of students	% of students	#of students with ISS incidents	# of students with OSS incidents	Student Enrollment	# of tribunals
<u>6th Grade</u>			6	9	590	1
4AC-Rude Conduct	8	1.4				
4AA- Oral Threat-Staff	2	0.3				
4AE- Cyberbullying-Staff	1	0.2				
4AZ-Other-Staff Verbal	1	0.2				
<u>7th Grade</u>			40	38	575	8
4AC- Rude Conduct	34	5.9				
4AF-Profanity to employee	18	3.1				
<u>8th Grade</u>			34	27	668	4
4AC Rude Conduct	30	4.5				
4AF-Profanity to employee	16	2.4				
4AO- Posture Physical Harm	6	0.9				
4BC- Intentional Physical Contact	2	0.3				

Rule Violation	# of students	% of students	#of students with ISS incidents	# of students with OSS incidents	Student Enrollment	# of tribunals
4AA-Oral Threat-Staff	1	0.1				
4AB-Wrtten Threat-Staff	1	0.1				
4BB-Physical Injury to employee	1	0.1				

As shown in Table 4.2, SMS students violated rule 4AC, which was rude conduct to teachers and employees during the 2023-2024 school year from August through December 2023. In 6th grade, nine students violated rule 4AC; in 7th grade, fourteen students violated rule 4AC; and in 8th grade, twenty-eight students violated rule 4AC.

Table 4.2

Rule 4 Student Code Violations for 2023-2024 as of December 2023 at Scholar Middle School

Rule Violation	# of students	% of students	#of students with ISS incidents	# of students with OSS incidents	Student Enrollment	# of tribunals
<u>6th Grade</u>			8	8	551	0
4AC-Rude Conduct	9	1.6				
4AA- Oral Threat-Staff	2	0.4				
4AF- Profanity to the employee	1	0.2				
<u>7th Grade</u>			18	6	556	0
4AC- Rude Conduct	14	2.5				
	5	0.9				

Rule Violation	# of students	% of students	#of students with ISS incidents	# of students with OSS incidents	Student Enrollment	# of tribunals
4AZ- Other- Staff Verbal						
<u>8th Grade</u>						
4AC- Rude Conduct	28	5.4	24	16	514	4
4AF-Profanity to employee	4	0.8				
4AA- Oral Threat- Staff	2	0.4				
4AO- Posturing Physical Contact	2	0.4				

The discipline data were reviewed monthly during the leadership and ARDT meetings to discuss ways to promote positive student/teacher relationships, incorporate conflict resolution lessons from Character Strong, and increase positive behaviors between students and teachers.

Action Research Cycles

This action research study had two cycles. Cycle 1 took place from July 2023 through December 2023. Cycle 2 took place from January 2024 through March 2024. Table 4.3 provides a research timeline that includes the date, activities, and data collected, such as interviews, documents, and data reviewed. Interviews were held in July, August, December, and March for the ARDT and ARIT teams.

Table 4.3*Research Cycle 1 Timeline at Scholar Middle School-2023-2024 SY*

Date	ARDT Activities	ARIT Activities	Data Collection
July 2023	Emails and consent were sent to the team meeting; LSPI and school data were reviewed and analyzed.	Teachers began the district SEL course; Emails and consent were sent	Interviews Document and data review
August 2023	Team meeting: LSPI, school data reviewed and analyzed	Teachers completed district SEL PD & E-course; Emails and consent sent.	Interviews Document and data review
September 2023	Team meeting. Discipline and perception survey data were reviewed, and SEL session one was planned and developed.	Consent forms were reviewed, and signatures were obtained.	Document and data review
October 2023	Team meetings; Reviewed agenda for SEL Session One; Prepared for Session Two; Discussed perceptions of Session One; Reviewed August and September discipline and school data	Teachers attended and took part in SEL Session 1	Observations Document review
November 2023	Team meeting. Reviewed monthly discipline and school data; Reviewed feedback and survey results from SEL session two; Collaborated with district SEL	Teachers attended and took part in SEL Session 2	Survey results and feedback Observations Document review

Date	ARDT Activities	ARIT Activities	Data Collection
	facilitators; and shared feedback at Local School Council Meeting with parents and other stakeholders; Reviewed October discipline data.		
December 2023	Team meeting. Reviewed November and December data; Reviewed school data; Reviewed feedback and survey results from the third SEL session.	Teachers attended and took part in SEL Session 3.	Survey results and feedback Interviews Observations

Cycle 1-July-December 2023

After the summer break, when the leadership team returned in late July 2023, the researcher invited leadership team members to participate in this study during the 2023-2024 school year. Four members of the seven-member leadership team agreed to participate in the survey: the principal and three assistant principals. Once the team members decided to participate and signed the consent forms, the researcher conducted Cycle 1 in-person interviews before and after school in July.

The ARDT team members shared their responses to the questions in the Interview Protocol (See Appendix B). Their responses included reflections from the previous school year and their current views, perspectives, and recommendations from the SEL sessions. They also discussed what they looked forward to implementing for Cycle 2 and the next school year. The interview questions were aligned with each of the research questions. Common themes from the

interviews indicated that SEL implementation was not with fidelity during the previous year and needed to be more consistent across the school. The ARDT members also expressed the need to create a wellness room since items were received from grants written by teachers, but the leadership team needed to determine the location and setup.

The first ARDT meeting took place during the first week of August. The ARDT reviewed the LSPI staff and student well-being survey results. The ARDT also examined the results of the 2023 Staff Educational Effectiveness Survey (EES) about cultural proficiency and staff support, teacher turnover rate, and teacher absenteeism. Next, they discussed ideas about professional development sessions that aligned with the SEL competencies. The district provided access to Character Strong lessons, and the counselors developed a calendar of weekly topics and lessons for teachers to implement during the weekly SEL time. The resource supplied research-based lessons for pre-K through 12th-grade students for social-emotional learning and character building.

During each professional development session, the ARDT modeled how to access the SEL resources and review the contents of the Character Strong curriculum by using SEL competency lessons and activities, such as brain breaks, warm-ups, and reflection exercises. The activities from Character Strong promoted community, a sense of belonging, building relationships, and reflection. This information was helpful for new and veteran teachers to access the activities in their classrooms. During Friday SEL time, the team provided all teachers an SEL calendar based on the Character Strong weekly topic.

The ARDT reviewed information from the CASEL framework and the five SEL competencies. The ARDT referred to rule four behavior violations from 2022-2023 for Scholar Middle School. ARDT members were concerned about the number of students who violated the

rule and the specific rule violations. The ARDT aimed to reduce the negative behaviors and provide the necessary support for the teachers during their planning periods.

At the second meeting, which took place the third week of August, the ARDT reviewed the student conduct code for rule four violations against employees to decide which SEL competencies to review at each session. The ARDT also reviewed the school calendar to select the SEL professional development session dates. After reviewing the description of each competency, the ARDT determined the competencies relevant to discipline data and perception survey results. The ARDT selected self-management for Session 1, social awareness for Session 2, and relationship skills for Session 3. Based on the data, the ARDT confirmed that the SEL competencies appropriate for the professional development sessions were self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills.

The discipline data and incidents were critical determinants in selecting the SEL competencies for the SEL professional learning sessions. The ARDT shared examples of teacher behaviors and teacher-student actions, which led to their decisions on the competency selections. The counselors shared the advisement calendar they created for the school year and the weekly topics from the Character Strong lesson the teachers presented to the students each Friday during the 30-minute advisement time.

By modeling how to access the resources, providing job-embedded professional development sessions, and aligning the lessons and competencies to school needs, the teachers received support for facilitation with students. When a student presented a negative behavior in a classroom, the teacher referred to the SEL activity and competency from the SEL professional development. Then, the teacher modeled for the student how to regulate emotions and respond

appropriately. As a schoolwide initiative, the SEL professional development impacted teacher confidence and reduced classroom behaviors, leading to fewer student discipline incidents.

The ARDT selected self-management due to discussions during the previous year about incidents when teachers and students verbally or physically contacted each other. This competency was also chosen due to the discipline data, illustrating a high percentage of oral threats, fights, and other physical contact. During pre-planning and the first 20 days of school, the leadership team, ARDT members, and teachers shared discipline expectations and the school discipline flowchart with students during the first eight days of school. The flowchart outlined the steps teachers could take to decide if the teacher managed classroom behavior or if they completed a referral given to the assistant principal for the respective grade level.

The lead counselor, Mrs. Chandler, shared during the ARDT meeting that not all teachers taught the lessons during the advisement time. The information was shared at the weekly leadership meetings. The following week, the leadership team visited classrooms for each grade level on two consecutive Fridays and recorded the classrooms where the lessons did not occur. Meetings were held with those teachers individually to review the required expectations for teaching the lessons during advisement time.

The leadership team and ARDT discussed the need for professional development sessions based on the LSPI goals and teacher demands. The ARDT reviewed the completion rate of the SEL professional development classes on the district online platform and sent reminders to teachers who still needed to complete the course. The ARDT collaborated during one of the counseling presentations and discussed the importance of SEL for teachers and students.

Action Research Implementation Team (ARIT)

The researcher emailed all 6th -8th-grade Mathematics teachers at Scholar Middle School to participate in the study. Three teachers initially responded. After receiving very little response, the researcher sent another email to all Mathematics teachers, and after one-on-one conversations with teachers, six teachers agreed to participate in the study.

Teachers expressed concern about the time commitment and interruption to their personal lives. They also wondered if their responses would remain anonymous. The researcher reminded teachers that their time would be respected, there would be flexibility in the format of the interviews, and the length of time for the professional development sessions would be considered. After these conversations, three additional participants willingly agreed to participate in the study. Of all of the mathematics teachers who received the email, six committed to participate in the study. The participants signed and returned consent letters.

The researcher conducted ARIT in-person interviews or via Microsoft Teams to accommodate schedules. The interviews took place in August and December during Cycle 1 and in March 2024 in Cycle 2, and all six members of the ARIT participated in the interviews. The ARIT responded to interview questions from the Interview Protocol (See Appendix B). They reflected on their experiences from the previous year and shared their experiences and needs with the leadership team regarding how to support them through SEL. Common themes from the interviews included SEL focused on the students and that the teachers felt they needed more support. The teachers also desired recognition and support from the school leadership team. They requested time to complete their tasks instead of attending meetings most days of the week.

All teachers attended the SEL professional development sessions during Cycle 1. The ARDT offered each session four times at 60-70 minutes each. The topic for the first session was

self-management. Based on the school schedule, teachers attended each session during their planning time. Therefore, the six implementation team members participated in the sessions based on their grade level.

The sessions were held in the Professional Learning Room (PLC), which included movable tables and chairs to provide flexibility in seating arrangements. The ARDT selected the location based on the proximity to where teachers dismissed the students to go to their classes. The teachers asked questions about the format and length of the session and if the session focused on students. They appeared hesitant to attend since it was the first SEL session, and the target audience was the teachers.

The ARDT discussed the purpose of the session, the LSPI goal, and SEL competency self-management, along with the history and characteristics of the competency. One slide reviewed data provided by CASEL and the background about SEL and academic learning. The teachers then shared their thoughts about what they read in the PowerPoint slides or what came to mind. Teachers said they had to manage their emotions before they helped students and that it was essential for them to learn ways to do so. Next, the researcher discussed the importance of self-care and its impact on personal and mental health.

After sharing the location of the SEL and wellness resources for the teachers to access, the researcher distributed a double-sided sheet of light green paper for teachers to reference after the SEL session. The sheet consisted of a staff wellness SEL calendar and self-care tips. Lastly, the teachers participated in a whole-group Brain Break activity entitled True or False. They responded to trivia questions while engaging in a physical activity based on the responses to the trivia questions.

At the end of the session, the teachers walked around the outdoor track while listening to music as a self-care exercise or returned to their classrooms for the rest of their planning period. The ARDT sent a survey to the participants to complete and provide feedback from the session. The ARDT received no survey responses, even after emailing it three times. After the session, the ARDT met and discussed their perspectives about the session and the steps for the second professional development session. The handouts that the teachers received at the end of each session served as reminders of the session and for them to implement self-care activities in their daily lives. In all, fifty teachers, including the six members of the ARIT, took part in Session 1 during Cycle 1 for the SEL professional learning session. The ARDT also attended Session 1 during Cycle 1.

October 2023

In October 2023, the ARDT team reviewed the agenda for the first SEL session. The team collected data such as document reviews and observations. The researcher contacted the GSD SEL facilitators to check their availability based on the team-selected dates. An ARDT member shared the format of the SEL lead contact meetings with the ARDT team and recommended the same format for the teachers, hoping they would model the activities and structures in their classrooms when they teach the SEL lessons to their students. The format promoted active participation and physical engagement during the professional development sessions, which differed from the sit-and-get format typical for professional development sessions with the teachers. After confirmation of the dates, the team placed professional development sessions on the school professional development calendar to inform teachers and staff.

The district SEL facilitators informed the ARDT of scheduling conflicts one week before the second session. The changes affected professional development sessions with content areas and technology training at the school. To ensure the professional development sessions would occur, the researcher volunteered to facilitate the sessions to provide continuity. The ARDT adjusted the dates of the sessions based on the school's professional development calendar. The researcher shared feedback from the ARIT interviews with the ARDT members, who were hesitant to participate due to their time commitment and desire for the sessions. The ARDT considered the ARIT feedback when planning, preparing, and reviewing the agendas and presentations for the second SEL session.

The Session 2 topic was social awareness, one of the five SEL competencies. Forty-one teachers participated in Session 2, including the six ARIT members. One of the assistant principals and two school counselors from the ARDT team attended. Before the session, teachers expressed excitement about the next session and told other teachers how much they enjoyed the first session. After welcoming the teachers to the second session, the researcher explained the purpose of the session, and the teachers engaged in a five-minute mindfulness moment guided by a YouTube video on breathing techniques. This was a segment from the Character Strong lesson sponsored by the district. Unlike the first session, where there were looks of confusion, teachers closed their laptops and their eyes to engage in the activity.

Teachers said the mindfulness moment was very relaxing, and they needed it due to what they dealt with during the school day and their personal lives. After the mindfulness moment, the research introduced the social awareness competency, the CASEL wheel, its history, and its importance in education and human development. Next, teachers shared their responses to what the SEL competency meant.

After sharing the location of SEL and wellness resources for the teachers, the researcher led the teachers through a self-awareness circle, distributed pencils, and a sheet divided into four quadrants. The sheet included a quadrant with the following headings in each box: mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional. The teachers had three minutes to write what they did last month, and then they wrote a goal of how they could do something for themselves based on the topics in the quadrants. The researchers asked teachers to share. Teachers shared a variety of activities that they would like to participate. Through sharing, the teachers learned about each other throughout the session. The researcher shared an example and reminded the teachers to pour into themselves as the holiday approached. The researcher distributed a double-sided sheet of self-care activities. As that occurred, teachers giggled and called out activities such as sleep, a puzzle, a nap, a massage, and others who shared more ideas.

When the researcher mentioned the closing activity, which was the brain break, teachers said, "Jog in place, fist bump." Based on responses to the trivia questions for Never Have I Ever (i.e., flown on a plane), the researcher asked where the teachers flew, and they responded. At the same time, they took part in exercises such as squats, jumping jacks, lunges, burpees, or runs in place. At the end of the session, teachers walked around the outdoor track for the rest of their planning period while listening to their favorite music to exercise self-care or returned to their classrooms. Twelve of the forty-one teachers who attended Session 2 completed the digital survey. The researcher emailed a survey to the staff three times. All members of the ARIT participated in the sessions, and the assistant principals and counselors from the ARDT attended.

At the October 2023 ARDT meeting, the team discussed the survey results and perceptions from Session 2 and discipline data for the month. The ARDT used the information from the survey results from Session 2 to create the agenda for Session 3. Participants also supplied verbal

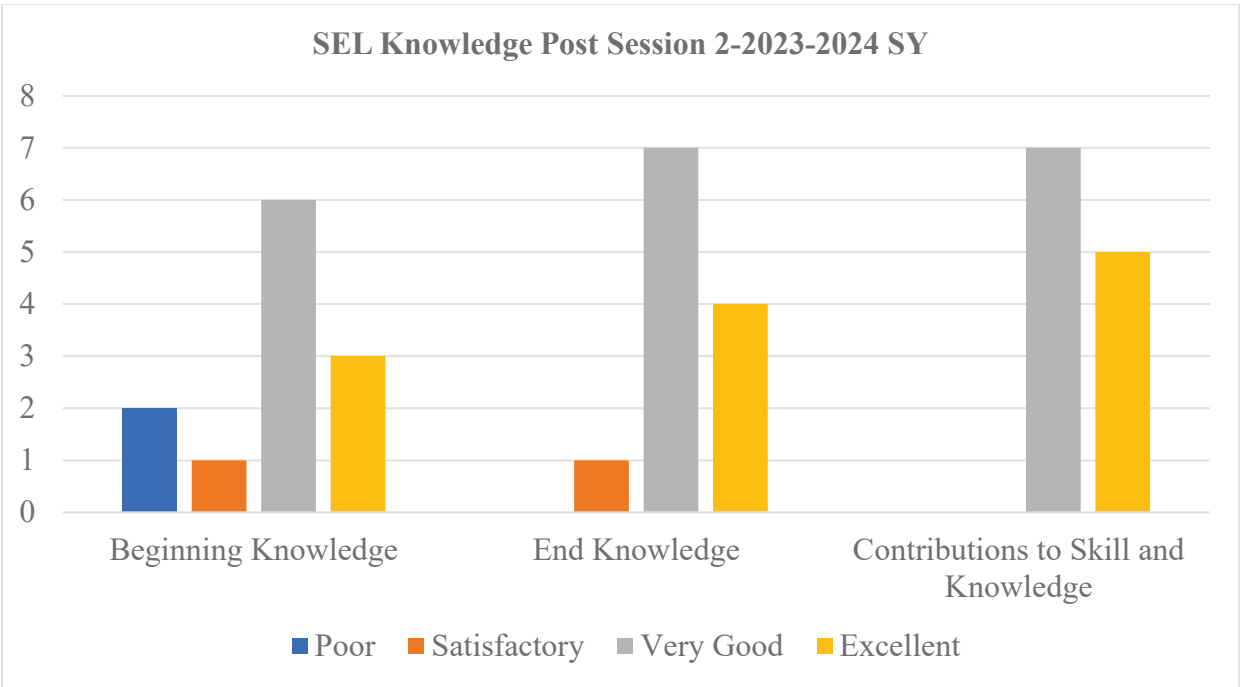
responses to ARDT members after Session 2. The participants completed 14 open response and rating scale items for Session 2 in Cycle 1 (See Appendix C). Four of the 12 attendees who completed the survey stated that the self-care activities were most valuable to them during Session 2 at Scholar Middle School.

As shown in Figure 4.14, six of the twelve teachers who attended Session 2 rated the level of knowledge at the start of Session 2 at Scholar Middle School during the 2023-2024 school year as poor; one participant rated it satisfactory; six participants rated their level of knowledge at the start of the course as very good; and three participants rated their level of expertise as excellent after Session 2. Seven of the twelve teachers rated their level of knowledge at the end of the course as very good. Seven teachers rated the course well and felt it contributed to their skills and knowledge at the end of Session 2 at Scholar Middle School.

Five teachers rated the course as excellent and felt it contributed to their skills and knowledge at the end of Session 2 during the 2023-2024 school year at Scholar Middle School. The survey results indicated increased SEL knowledge for the teachers who attended the session. They noted that those who did not have any prior understanding learned information during Session 2. To the ARDT, this information indicated that knowledge growth took place, and the team decided to continue with the same format for Session 3 to promote SEL knowledge growth for the teachers.

Figure 4.14

SEL Knowledge of Participants at Scholar Middle School-Post Session 2-2023-2024 SY



November and December 2023

After the professional development session, the ARDT reviewed the Session 1 agenda and discussed the survey results, notices, wonderings, and next steps. The ARDT members also met with the district SEL facilitators via Microsoft Teams to discuss Sessions 1 and 2 and created the agenda for Session 3. Based on the information from the earlier sessions, the district SEL facilitators changed the topic of Session 3 from relationship skills to Building Scholar Middle School Teachers’ SEL Competencies. The team also reviewed the discipline data and the teacher turnover rate compared to last year. Mr. Cummings shared that he felt calmer in the seventh-grade hallway compared to the previous year, and Mrs. Chandler shared that the number of teacher/student conflicts appeared to be lower than last year.

In November 2023, the ARDT provided updates about the SEL professional development sessions at the 45-day review and local school council meetings. The area superintendent was

excited to learn about teacher engagement and participation in the professional development sessions. Two parents shared that they wished similar sessions were offered to parents during the local school council meeting.

Session 3 of the SEL professional development sessions was entitled Building Scholar Middle School Teachers' SEL Competencies, and the researcher observed the teachers as the district SEL team facilitated the professional development sessions. A meeting took place via Microsoft Teams a month before the session to discuss the agenda and needs based on the feedback from the ARDT and earlier sessions. Thirty-nine teachers participated in Session 3, including all of the ARIT members and two ARDT members; the teachers participated in a connection activity entitled This or That. The facilitators discussed the working agreements, the definition of each of the five SEL competencies, the benefits of SEL, and the implications for their role as teachers. Next, for each of the five competencies, the facilitator showed a short video to the teachers, and they responded to the questions presented at the end of each video, such as

- What triggers my emotions, and how does this impact my behavior towards myself and others? How do you cope with events and behaviors that stress you?
- What can you do to appreciate the diversity of others?
- What type of relationships can you build with the students you interact with daily?
- If you were in this situation, what would be your next steps?
- How can you reduce stress and increase your well-being?

Teachers also received SEL resources and de-escalation strategies from online resources. Twelve participants out of the Thirty-nine teachers completed the survey after the SEL professional development session three. The survey was included in the presentation and was

sent via email two times. The ARDT met to discuss the survey results from session three, review the discipline data for December, and discuss staff perception survey results. Appendix D includes the complete survey and responses from Session 3. The participants completed four survey questions for Session 3 in Cycle 1. The participants' responses include comments and numbers on a Likert scale. Nine of the twelve participants who completed the survey rated the session a ten, which meant the session exceeded their purpose/goal for Session 3 at Scholar Middle School. This led to the creation and planning for Cycle 2, which occurred from January 2024 through March 2024.

The researcher held a second interview in December. The questions focused on the progress at each session, areas of growth, and the impact of the session on their roles as teachers. Teachers indicated they felt heard and compared the previous year's morale to the current year when they responded to the interview questions. During the ARDT meeting, the members reviewed the survey results and set the dates to conduct bi-weekly 30-minute walkthroughs on Fridays during SEL time. The counselors asked if implementing ideas from the surveys created buy-in. Each member, except the principal, conducted them.

Cycle 2- January through March 2024

The ARDT developed Cycle 2 based on the survey results and teacher feedback during Cycle 1. The team set goals to promote well-being, support the implementation of learned SEL practices, and build teacher morale. The ARDT team planned, developed, and scheduled time for the teachers to engage in SEL activities during professional and digital learning days.

The purpose of Cycle 2 was to build a positive and supportive environment where the teachers felt comfortable collaborating and meeting other colleagues. The ARDT used Gallup and perception survey results to prepare the SEL hours in Cycle 2. Responses to questions like “I

have a friend at work.”; “I feel supported by my leaders.”; or “My input matters” were considered since the percentage of teachers who agreed with the statements was low in previous years—the SEL hours provided an opportunity for teachers to interact and share ideas.

During Cycle 1, the teachers attended SEL professional development sessions and learned about three SEL competencies: self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills. The teachers completed surveys asking about their SEL needs to support them in the classroom, and they modeled what they learned as they interacted with their colleagues. The SEL hours promoted positive school morale and modeled buy-in and teacher input from the ARDT based on the survey responses. They encouraged positive and professional interactions with the teachers. Based on their responses to the surveys during the SEL hours, the ARDT assisted, such as SEL check-ins with counselors to access resources or to help students.

The discussion of the digital day in February arose during the last leadership meeting in December, after Session 3. The researcher asked if an SEL hour could be built in to support the LSPI goal. The principal said, “Sure. Plan it.” The researcher said it would be discussed during the next ARDT meeting. For the ARDT meeting in January 2024, four team members, including two counselors and two assistant principals, attended the meeting. While the ARDT reviewed the survey results from Cycle 1, Session 3, one of the associate principals recalled requests from the counselor on the team made at a previous meeting for a fun SEL activity during the next digital day. The lead counselor referred to survey results from Cycle 1, Session 3, in which the teachers requested time to release and unwind during the next digital day. Next, the setup and structure of Cycle 2, Session 1, was developed based on the discussion during the ARDT meeting, prior survey results, and comments during interviews conducted in December 2023 at the end of Cycle 1. Two meetings were held in preparation for Cycle 2 Session 1.

During the ARDT meeting, team members reviewed examples of activities that promoted SEL and met the needs of the staff. The researcher assigned each ARDT member duties to prepare and set up for the digital day. The members shared ideas and determined which resources they needed. The goal of Cycle 2, Session 1 was to message the teachers that their voices were heard by implementing a recommendation based on their responses from the Cycle 1, Session 3 survey. Four teachers from the implementation team from both seventh and eighth grades shared during the second interview after Cycle 1, Session 3 in December, that they would like to do SEL activities during the digital day. Members of the ARDT agreed to the SEL hour and added the event to the digital day agenda.

The ARDT accepted an invitation to collaborate with the leadership team to plan and coordinate Cycle 2, Session 1. The ARDT shared activities and materials available for the teachers on the first digital day, and the team decided what other items needed to be included. After the meeting, the ARDT went to the gym to account for the available materials to transform the gym into stations for SEL activities. They incorporated those listed in the SEL wellness and self-care calendars and other recommendations from the earlier sessions. The researcher considered feedback from the teachers and the ARDT discussions, feedback, survey results, and hallway conversations.

The researcher shared with the ARDT the items available for teachers, and the team set up the gym on the morning of the digital day. The following is a list of items located around the gym in stations: four basketballs, a badminton set, a ping pong table, long tables with coloring books, crayons, decks of Uno, and playing cards. Two elliptical machines, a rowing machine, two Peloton bicycles, four jump ropes, and four hula hoops were placed around the gym's perimeter. The ARDT Members helped during the SEL hour. One of the members of the ARDT

served as the DJ, playing songs from various music genres to promote the community. The bleachers were expanded so teachers and staff could sit, relax, or talk to their colleagues. Bowling pins with a ball were available for teachers and staff to bowl.

The SEL hour took place from 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. Seventy-five staff members attended the SEL hour, including three ARDT members and four ARIT members. Two ARIT members were unable to attend. The event promoted camaraderie as faculty engaged with one another and in the many activities available. These included ping pong, dancing, and basketball. Teachers from across grade levels and staff from various departments were in attendance.

After meeting with the ARDT and implementation team, there was an overwhelmingly positive response from the teachers for the SEL hour to take place during each digital day, and many inquired when the next one would take place, with suggestions for these to be scheduled on early release days after parent/teacher conferences. Teachers on the implementation team and from all grade levels shared how much they enjoyed the activities. A survey was sent twice, and twenty-six attendees completed it. The ARDT reviewed the calendar and the survey results and discussed planning the next SEL hour. The ARDT created an agenda for Session 2.

The participants completed five survey questions for Session 1 during Cycle 2 in January 2024 at Scholar Middle School (See Appendix E), 1. The participants' responses included comments from the open response items and numbers from the Likert scale. Twenty-one of the twenty-six participants who completed the survey rated the session a 10, which meant they saw the benefits of Session 1 of Cycle 2 at Scholar Middle School. Table 4.4 provides a research timeline for Cycle 2, which occurred from January 2024 through March 2024.

Table 4.4*Research Cycle 2 Timeline at Scholar Middle School*

Date	ARDT Activities	ARIT Activities	Data Collection
January 2024	Team meeting. Reviewed school data; Reviewed feedback and survey results from Cycle 1, Session 3.	Teachers attended and took part in Cycle 2, Session 1.	Survey results and feedback Interviews
February 2024	Team meeting.; Reviewed school data; Reviewed feedback and survey results from Cycle 2, Session 1 in January; Team planned Cycle 2, Session 2.	Teachers shared feedback from Cycle 2, Session 1.	Survey results and feedback Classroom Walkthroughs
March 2024	Team meeting. Reviewed feedback and survey results from Cycle 2, Session 1; Team planned and implemented Cycle 2, Session 2.	Teachers attended and took part in Cycle 2, Session 2.	Survey results and feedback Interviews Classroom Walkthroughs

In February 2024, the ARDT met and discussed the survey results from Session 1. All ARDT members attended the meeting, and after they reviewed the survey results, the team stated the need for classroom walkthroughs during the 30-minute advisement time on Fridays. The counselors shared concerns that many teachers needed to conduct the Character Strong and SEL lessons with fidelity during that time. One of the assistant principals recommended that the ARDT create an SEL walkthrough form for ARDT members to record the information from the walkthroughs. The ARDT determined the criteria and made a schedule to conduct classroom

walkthroughs during advisement time. Next, the ARDT created a plan and a list of items needed for Session 2 in March during the final digital day of the school year. The ARDT agreed to use the setup used at Session 1 Cycle 2, and based on the survey responses, the team decided to provide snacks and water for the participants. The ARDT discussed the quantity of snacks based on the number of staff members at Scholar Middle School.

March 2024

During Cycle 2, Session 2, the second SEL hour, was added to the agenda for the digital day in March, and the researcher sent an email to the faculty and staff to promote the time on the schedule. After the ARDT meeting in February 2024, the team reviewed and discussed content, and they shared the information with the school leadership team during the weekly administrative meetings on the first Friday of the month. The team added the time and locations of Session 2 to the Digital Day agenda and additional meetings to the weekly Digital Day schedule. The team adjusted the time for the second session several times during the leadership meetings because other meetings occurred during the initially scheduled time. All members of the ARDT attended both planning meetings in March before Session 2 at Scholar Middle School.

The ARDT members reminded the leadership team of the survey results from Cycle 2, Session 1, which included requests for meetings to take place before the SEL hour to end the day in a positive tone. On the morning of the digital day, the ARDT team collaborated with school staff to prepare the space for the event.

Thirty minutes before the assigned time, a 7th-grade teacher played basketball in the gym. When asked if he was ok and reminded of the official time of the SEL hour, the teacher responded, "I needed to relieve some stress." This statement resonated with several teachers since the day included intense meetings, including a grade-level restorative circle with teachers

and staff. The circles lasted longer than the assigned 30 minutes, and emotions were high due to daily demands and a state testing meeting. The following items were located around the gym in stations: four basketballs, a badminton set, a ping pong table, long tables with coloring books, crayons, decks of Uno, Monopoly, and Phase Ten. Two elliptical machines, a rowing machine, two Peloton bicycles, four jump ropes, and four hula hoops were placed around the gym's perimeter.

The SEL hour took place from 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Two members of the ARDT team attended, while the others conducted interviews and attended other meetings that were scheduled simultaneously. Some teachers played rounds of Uno, Monopoly, and Phase Ten, while another group used crayons to color. Teachers performed line dance songs, took pictures, and recorded videos of the SEL hour on their cell phones. A female teacher and her son played ping pong, and other teachers played badminton. Two school resource officers attended for a few minutes and admired engagement and activities.

Attendees included teachers, clerks, and other staff members. An ARDT member used the microphone to welcome everyone to SEL hour and announced that surveys were available on the clipboard for them to complete to share their input and experience at the SEL hour. It was also stated that snacks, water bottles, and soda were available in the cooler next to the tables.

One 7th-grade teacher took the microphone and celebrated teachers as they walked in and cheered the basketball players when they made the basketball shot. Teachers danced through the SEL hour, happy to hear different genres of music based on the diversity of the faculty and staff. At 1:50 p.m., one of the ARDT members asked the front desk receptionist to announce on the intercom for teachers to go to the gym for the second session. This was done since fewer staff members attended SEL hour two compared to the first one in January. Teachers and staff shared

that they enjoyed Session 2, and the announcer continuously reminded the attendees to complete the survey, so their voices were heard. Future events could occur based on their responses to the surveys.

Forty-two staff members attended Cycle 2, Session 2. Attendees included twenty-five teachers, four clerical team members, two parent center coordinators, and two school resource officers. Four ARDT members attended, including two counselors and two assistant principals. Five of the six ARIT members attended Session 2. The ARIT team member who could not participate had a previous engagement and could not attend. Paper copies of the survey were available on six clipboards along with pens. Additionally, the researcher emailed the survey twice to the staff. Twenty-four paper copies of the surveys were completed by staff members in the gym during Session 2.

Four days after Session 2, the ARDT met, and four team members attended. The counselors and assistant principals discussed the survey results from Session 2, and the team highlighted the recommendation to have paper copies of the surveys since it was adequately based on the significant increase in the number of participants who completed the study compared to the previous sessions in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2. The team quietly read the survey responses from Cycle 2, Session 2, and shared common themes and trends. The patterns indicated that the teachers desired time to plan and prepare for the lessons and needed appreciation, support, and respect from the leadership team. Next, the ARDT shared recommendations for implementing activities between mid-March and the end of the school year in May to promote community. Based on the survey results, participants desired opportunities for the staff to commune to encourage community. Lastly, the ARDT met to reflect on how the SEL

hours and professional development sessions went and discussed steps for SEL support for the next school year.

The participants completed five survey questions for the second SEL hour in March 2024 at Scholar Middle School (See Appendix F). The participants' responses included comments from the open response items and numbers from the Likert scale. Thirty-six of the thirty-eight participants who completed the survey rated the second SEL hour a 10.

Three members of the ARDT team conducted three classroom walkthroughs in March 2024, the counselors, and one of the assistant principals to monitor SEL implementation. Each grade level consisted of twelve classrooms. The walkthroughs occurred during a thirty-minute SEL time each Friday when teachers taught Character Strong lessons. The form used to monitor progress is shown in Figure 4.14 as the SEL classroom walkthrough form (See Appendix G).

Teachers facilitated SEL lessons during the first walkthrough in the eighth of the twelve sixth-grade classrooms. Six of the twelve classrooms had teachers implementing the Character Strong lessons for the second walkthrough in seventh-grade classrooms, while three of the eighth-grade classrooms did so. On the final classroom walkthrough, two seventh-grade and none of the eighth-grade classrooms implemented the SEL lessons. The ARDT shared this information with the school leadership team at the administrative meeting four days after the ARDT meeting. The assistant principals agreed to conduct walkthroughs in April and make weekly announcements, which reminded teachers to implement the Character Strong and SEL lessons. At the end of the research project, teachers and staff participated in the SEL hour activities. Four implementation team members participated in a focus group in March 2024. Interviews were the final activities for the ARDT team, which were held in March 2024, the end of Cycle 2.

Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the action research study by describing the context of the site. Although the COVID-19 pandemic ended, there continued to be high teacher absenteeism at Scholar Middle School, which led to the need for SEL support. The action research team prepared and facilitated three professional development sessions focusing on SEL support for teachers using the SEL competencies and two SEL hours. A description of the researcher and action research team roles was discussed. A timeline for each of the action research cycles was provided. Data collection included classroom walkthroughs, survey results, and interviews. Chapter 5 will discuss the actual findings and themes from this action research study.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE

This action research study aimed to examine the design and implementation of social-emotional (SEL) support for teachers to build teacher morale in a suburban school in Georgia. The study focused on teachers and included the leadership team and counselors on the implementation design team. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do teachers describe the implementation of schoolwide SEL on their morale?
2. How do school leaders support the impact of SEL implementation on teacher morale?
3. How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing SEL support for teachers?

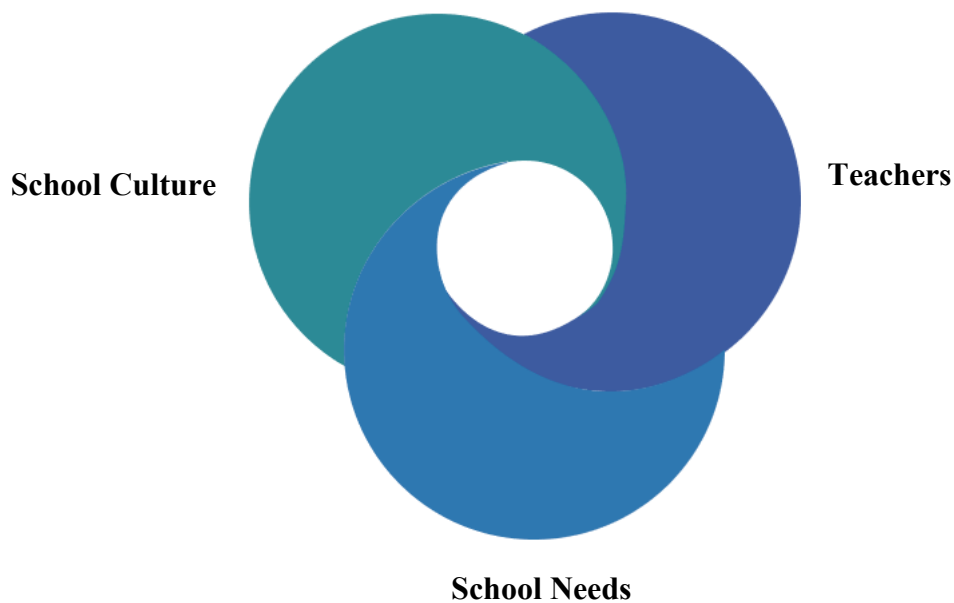
This chapter includes the outcomes of interviews and observations made during each research cycle. This chapter also includes data collection connected to the research questions, establishing the findings for each research question. The quantitative data were derived from the survey questionnaires administered after the professional development sessions and interviews during cycles one and two. The data provided evidence of growth in SEL competencies knowledge and their perceptions about the support they received from the professional development sessions at Scholar Middle School during the 2023-2024 school year. This chapter outlines the themes for each of the research questions. The responses from survey data and interview questions aligned with the research questions. This chapter includes the findings and analysis of the data collected in this action research study.

The researcher used a theoretical framework for servant leadership to focus on teachers, school needs, and school culture. In Figure 5.1, the servant leadership theoretical framework

illustrates how school culture, teachers, and school needs were the basis of the framework. This action research study at Scholar Middle School aimed to provide job-embedded support for teachers to reduce teacher turnover, improve the school's morale, and equip them with the SEL tools to help themselves, which ultimately helped the students.

Figure 5.1

Servant Leadership Theoretical Framework



This study was critical because many teachers suffered from burnout, depression, and stress, impacting morale and school climate. The information from the study offered insight into how to support teachers better socially and emotionally, which promoted positive student interactions and self-care for the teachers.

Interviews

The researcher used semi-structured interview protocols for this action research study. According to Bloomberg (2023):

Interviews for qualitative research are in-depth to capture the participants' perceptions, attitudes, and emotions. Interviews aim to elicit participants' views of their lives, as portrayed in their stories, and gain access to their experiences, feelings, and social world. (p.281)

The researcher interviewed the ARDT in July, December, and March. The interviews with implementation team members took place in August, January, and March, either in person or via Microsoft Teams, to accommodate the participants in the study. Some participants expressed concern before the interviews and questioned if their identity and responses would be disclosed and if the school administration would have repercussions based on their responses. The researcher reassured members of both teams that the information outlined in the consent form regarding pseudonyms and anonymity would be upheld. Once the researcher shared that information and answered their questions, the participants provided insightful information regarding social and emotional support for teachers.

In addition, the researcher reminded participants of how their input and opinions mattered. Once participants agreed to participate, the researcher collected the consent forms. The researcher was flexible with scheduling the interviews based on the availability of the participants. The research also conducted observations during interviews and professional learning sessions to monitor the participant's interactions in the environment.

Three interviews were held, and the allotted time was 30-60 minutes each. The second set of interviews happened in January 2024. The third set of interviews took place in March 2024 after Cycle 1, Session 2. The researcher used an interview protocol with open-ended questions to guide the interview and a third-party software, Otter, to transcribe the interviews.

Focus Group

The researcher used an in-person focus group session to gain feedback and perspectives from the ARDT and implementation teams to determine the impact of the SEL professional development sessions as support for the teachers. The ARDT served as a focus group in March 2024 to reflect on Cycles 1 and 2. ARDT members recommended beginning the school year with an introductory activity for new teachers to meet teachers in all grade levels during pre-planning. One of the counselors shared, *“That would be a good introduction to the new staff, and we could have a communal lunch.”*

Mr. Cummings recommended an SEL brain break for teachers and staff to engage in a circle. He suggested that the SEL circle take place early during pre-planning. Mr. Cummings shared, *“If we do it before some negative people influence the new people, it will be effective.”* During the focus group with counselors and two of the assistant principals of the ARDT, the members reviewed the survey results from Session 2, Cycle 2. During the discussion, the team members indicated that the common theme they viewed from the survey results was that teachers want the leadership team to listen since they feel heard and appreciated. Several team members also referred to the survey results as they shared their responses during the meeting. As with the interviews, the researcher used Otter, a third-party software, to transcribe the interviews. The focus group for the implementation team took place in October, after Cycle 1.

Researcher Notes of Participant Observations

Throughout the action research study, the researcher recorded notes from classroom walkthroughs and observations from the SEL professional development sessions in Cycle 1 and the classroom walkthrough in Cycle 2. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016):

Observation is a significant means of collecting data in qualitative research. It offers a firsthand account of the situation under study and, combined with interviewing and document analysis, allows for a holistic interpretation of the investigated phenomenon. It is the technique of choice when behavior can be observed firsthand or when people cannot or will not discuss the research topic. (p.160)

The researcher facilitated Sessions 1 and 2 in Cycle 1 with teachers at each grade level in the PLC room. The researcher observed Sessions 1 and 2, Cycle 2, and Session 3, Cycle 1. The classroom walkthroughs took place in March 2024, and the ARDT used a checklist to indicate teacher and student actions observed by the team. They also collected data to show the number of classrooms that implemented the Character Strong lessons compared to those in the grade level. The data illustrated the grade level that implemented the most SEL on the day of the classroom walkthrough and the grade level that did not have any classrooms that implemented SEL on the given date.

The ARDT Members shared the data with the grade-level assistant principals, who emailed reminders to the teachers and verbally reminded them during subsequent CLT meetings in which all teachers for each grade level were present. On Fridays, the assistant principals conducted classroom walkthroughs before the leadership meeting and 30 minutes after advisement. At 9:30 a.m., an administrator made a schoolwide announcement as a friendly reminder.

Throughout each session, teachers and staff commented about their SEL experience and its impact on them. During Cycle 1 Session 1, a teacher said, *"That was relaxing. I needed that."* More comments from session one by a male teacher and a female teacher, respectively: *"Wow. This was better than I expected,"* and *"Thank you for thinking about us as teachers. I can tell you care."*

Between the first and second professional development sessions, teachers shared how they enjoyed the first session and looked forward to the next session. Twelve teachers responded to the survey. The number of eighth-grade teachers who attended the second session was less than that of session one due to the need for them to attend IEP and parent/teacher conferences. The researcher recalled what occurred during the first session and asked participants what SEL strategies they had implemented since the first session. During each session, the researcher was mindful of respecting silence when a question was asked, and there was no response. The health teacher shared, *"Where I come from, they tell you to take care of yourself before you care for someone because that is the secret to a long life. So, this is very helpful; thank you."* He was pointing to the SEL handout sheets the researcher distributed.

Action Research Team Artifacts

The action research team referred to the 2023-2024 Local School Plan of Improvement (LSPI) goal; survey results from the professional learning sessions (see Appendix C & Appendix D); survey results from the SEL hours (see Appendix E & Appendix F) discipline data, specifically rule 4AC student code violations (see Table 4.1 & Table 4.2); and the PowerPoint presentations from the SEL sessions. The artifacts included meeting agendas, meeting notes, the researcher's journal, and verbal feedback from participants, teachers, and staff members. During the Local School Council meeting, input from parents who attended the meeting was also reviewed by the ARDT, including a request to have SEL professional learning opportunities for parents.

Data Collection Connected to Research Questions

The researcher collected data during the 2023-2024 school year and derived themes, patterns, and other findings from the interviews, observations, and the researcher's journal data.

The researcher then used analysis that involved labeling, sorting, and organizing data such as participants' perspectives.

The researcher organized, categorized, coded, and stored survey results in a manageable system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher used a Google form to collect survey responses and saved the results to an Excel spreadsheet. Each question used a filter to create a tally of the responses. The researcher recorded the number of responses to each question following the appropriate question and used systematic coding to organize and sort data (Adu, 2019; Bloomberg, 2023; Center for Evaluation & Research; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stringer & Aragon, 2021; Younas et al., 2022). As indicated by Stuckey (2015), "Codes are usually used to retrieve and categorize data that are similar in meaning so the researcher can quickly find and cluster the segments that relate to one another" (p. 7). The researcher sorted the results by similar topics for the open-response questions to develop the themes. Themes related to each research question emerged due to the coding and analysis of the responses.

The researcher determined codes based on the interviews, research questions, responses to survey results, and comments made during the observations. As indicated by Stuckey (2015), "The process of coding breaks the data into the parts so that the data are manageable, with the results of rebuilding the data to tell a storyline" (p. 10). Once this was completed, the researcher deeply analyzed the data to determine themes and patterns.

Thematic analysis is a process that is used to identify, organize, and describe themes derived from the data. It assisted the researcher during data analysis and is an essential qualitative research method (Nowell et al., 2017). The benefit of thematic analysis is that it was used for different research participants and studies to determine similarities and differences within the study. "Thematic analysis is also useful for summarizing key features of a large data

set, as it forces the researcher to take a well-structured approach to handling data, helping to produce a clear and organized final report “(Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2).

Table 5.1 illustrates the themes for each research question for this action research study at Scholar Middle School during the 2023-2024 school year. The following themes developed from this action research study:

1. Increased knowledge of SEL
2. Positive impact on teachers
3. Teachers want a space to reflect during their planning period
4. Listen to and respect the teachers’ opinions
5. Data review is essential
6. Allow input from teachers who want to be heard

Table 5.1

Summary of Research Question Findings Through Thematic Analysis

Research Question	Theme
RQ1: How do teachers describe the implementation of schoolwide SEL on their morale?	Theme 1: Increased knowledge of SEL.
	Theme 2: Positive impact on teachers
	Theme 3: Create space for reflection
RQ 2: How do school leaders support the impact of SEL implementation on teacher morale?	Theme 4: Listen to and respect the teachers’ opinions
RQ 3: How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing SEL support for teachers?	Theme 5: Data review is essential.
	Theme 6: Allow input from teachers who want to be heard.

Research Question 1: How do teachers describe the implementation of schoolwide SEL on their morale?

Theme 1: Increased Knowledge of SEL

Teachers learned about the SEL competencies during each SEL professional development session. One of the teachers stated, *“Learning about the SEL strategies gave me a better understanding of the importance of SEL.”* The teacher shared that he felt he was not prepared to teach the students the SEL competencies because he had no prior knowledge as the teacher. He learned about the competencies at the professional development sessions. After the session about self-management, a teacher noted, *“I will certainly try to incorporate this into my daily life.”*

The teacher then shared that she must manage her emotions to help her students. Several teachers agreed since they admitted they had difficulty balancing their personal lives and work. Mr. Campbell noted that to take care of the students, he must take care of himself first. Therefore, he said he would incorporate self-care *“by adding it to my calendar and try to implement it gradually in my daily life.”* This theme resonated with the participants.

Theme 2: Positive Impact on Teachers

Several participants stated that learning about an SEL competency made them aware of how to interact with the students and reminded them to show empathy. They made these comments after the mindfulness moments and the facilitated activities. One of the teachers said after the second session, *“It does help calm me down.”* Additional comments that were made by teachers about the mindfulness moments and brain breaks included, *“It was very calming and much needed to start the day before I interact with the students,” “It adds value to my day a lot, and “It supplied the relaxation that I needed.”* During the second session, an 8th-grade Social Studies teacher noted:

Looking at the self-awareness list, I feel stressed because I have a lot going on in my personal life, and I am worried about what the students deal with at home. I need to keep their challenges in mind as well, but not excuse their behavior if they act out based on what took place at the house this morning before they came to school.

There was a sigh in the room, sounds of “*You are right,*” “*I agree,*” and “*That is a lot.*” His comments and the sounds acknowledged that the teachers agreed with his statement and showed empathy for the students.

Based on observing the teachers during the professional development sessions, there was a difference in their comfort level between the first and last sessions. During the first session, teachers were hesitant and needed to be eased into either closing their eyes or doing the breathing exercises. Some teachers looked around the PLC room to see what their colleagues were doing, while others were wholly engaged in the five-minute exercise. By the third session, in each grade level, more teachers in each of the grade level sessions participated, focused on themselves, and appeared more relaxed and at ease with the mindfulness moments and activities.

Theme 3: Create Space for Teacher Reflection

The next theme from the action research study was the need to create space for teachers to reflect during their planning period. One of the connections stated in the survey is “*Do SEL sessions instead of Connections CLT meetings.*” This response indicated that the teachers preferred time to reflect and learn the SEL competencies to help the students. Another survey response from a 7th-grade teacher was, “*Teachers need time to engage in activities such as courses that will help bring awareness to certain challenges within the school setting, home, etc. (a wellness room would be good for students and teachers).*” Several teachers inquired about the

location of a wellness room and its contents. The ARDT discussed questions and concerns at the meeting, and progress was made to secure one of the trailers for the wellness room.

Research Question 2: How do school leaders support the impact of SEL implementation on teacher morale?

The first theme for the second research question was for leadership to continue providing SEL support for the teachers. The following are responses from the surveys by teachers: *“Have more of this for teachers,”*; *“Understanding the importance of SEL self-care,”*; *“I would love more things like this,”* and *“To receive more encouragement and support.”* Teacher responses drastically differed from when the researcher first asked the action research team members during Cycle 1. Several participants stated that teacher support for SEL was non-existent, and everything focused on the students. They were also surprised to go into the first professional development session to learn that the focus was on them as teachers and that they were provided with the tools and resources to help them grow personally as teachers. After Session 1 in Cycle 2, the teachers shared in the surveys what they would like from the administration to be successful:

- *The gift of time to plan and prepare for the student*
- *For leaders to lead by example*
- *Provide brain breaks*
- *Ask if teachers need help, provide encouragement, and treat them as professionals*
- *Support all teachers, not just newbies*
- *Say hello and do check-in sessions.*

Theme 4: Listen to the Teachers and Respect their Opinions; Provide Input

The following developed theme was for the leadership team to listen to the teachers, respect their opinions, and allow them to provide input. The following are survey responses by participants in sessions one and two of the professional development sessions for SEL. These are responses to the question of what the leadership could do to support them as a teacher for SEL.

One teacher responded, *“Space and trust in me as a capable individual. Release the chains sometimes; we are not slaves or kids.”*. This response indicated that the teacher wanted to be heard and respected as an adult to help the students be successful in the classroom. Three teachers cited “time” as an essential factor that would show support for the teachers from the leadership team. Teachers wanted time to plan and prepare for their classes since these acts would reduce the stress they experienced as teachers.

Another recommendation by a teacher was *“More ways to have self-care. Understanding when things are not going well for us personally or physically.”* A sixth-grade teacher noted, *“Continue giving us this time to self-reflect.”* These comments indicated that the teacher desired to have time to think about how things went in the classroom, to have the opportunity to create new ideas, and to reflect on areas for growth.

Research Question 3: How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing SEL support for teachers?

The first theme for the third research question was that data review was necessary. The teachers completed surveys to assess their SEL knowledge before the sessions, what they learned after the sessions, and how it impacted them as teachers.

Theme 5: Data Review is a Necessary Tool for Change

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) met before Cycle 1 and after each professional development session to discuss and review the survey results and the Likert scale ratings. In addition, information they reviewed the teacher preference process and the number of teachers who requested to transfer to other schools for the upcoming school year. The data informed the ARDT of the needs of the teachers and supported preparation for the subsequent sessions and other activities for teachers. The data showed that teachers enjoyed attending the SEL sessions and felt supported. After the first session, the 7th-grade counselor stated,

Wow, the teachers enjoyed the first session. Walking down the hallway, I heard them laughing and smiling. When I asked Mr. Combs what happened, he said he enjoyed the session, and they had a great time doing the brain break exercises at the end.

During the planning meeting for the second session, the lead counselor commented, “*I heard some teachers say I am not going to miss the next SEL session because I heard how good the first one was, and I do not wanna miss it.*” The researcher received an email from two 7th-grade teachers who apologized that they could not attend the second session due to an IEP meeting and a parent/teacher conference, respectively. Although there was verbal feedback, the participants still needed to complete the survey for session one. For the subsequent sessions, many participants attended the sessions, yet very few participants completed the surveys. The researcher emailed two or three times after the first session to receive feedback from the participants about the sessions.

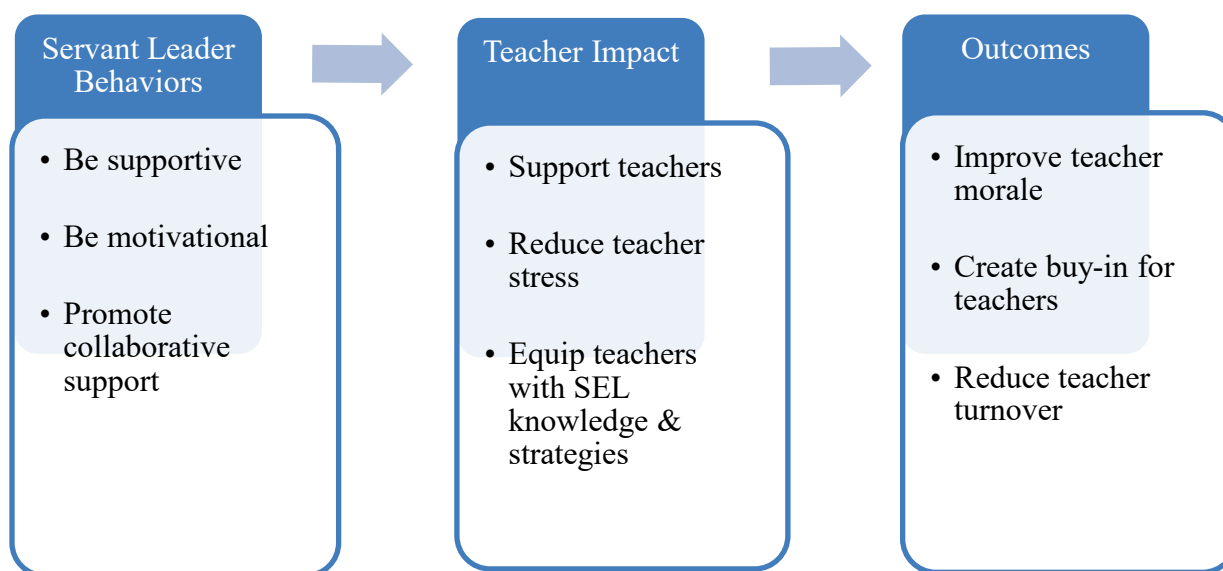
Theme 6: Allow Teacher Input to Create Buy-in

Some teachers hesitated to learn about SEL and complete the district course from the beginning. As a 6th-grade participant commented, “*It is another thing to check off the box*

during pre-planning,” as a 6th-grade teacher shared. Another teacher stated, “SEL is always focused on the students. What about us? I am struggling, too.” With the focus of the professional development sessions on teachers, the teachers learned about the SEL competencies and discovered their meaning on a personal level. Many referred to the meaning and impact the competency had on students and what it looked like in their classrooms. This occurred several times, requiring the researcher to remind the teachers that the focus of the professional development sessions was on them as teachers. The sessions created SEL buy-in for the teachers through collaboration and engagement. For this action research, the researcher used a logic model that provided a continuum of support that indicated the behaviors of the servant leaders and design team. The continuum of the logic model is illustrated in Figure 5.2 and includes servant-leader behaviors, teacher impact, and outcomes.

Figure 5.2

Logic Model



One of the goals of the ARDT was to impact teachers by equipping them with SEL knowledge and strategies. By doing so, the teachers would have buy-in on the benefits of SEL.

Chapter Summary

Three themes resonated with the first research question and two from the second and third research questions. The first research question reviewed how the teachers described the implementation of SEL support. The ARDT members reflected on the previous school year and then shared their goals regarding SEL support for the teachers. Teachers shared that support was non-existent during the last year and that the focus was on the students. At the beginning of the first session, the teachers were shocked when the researcher stated they were the focus of the SEL support sessions.

The teachers demonstrated appreciation for the support through positive feedback. The teachers also agreed that the SEL professional development session increased their knowledge of SEL, positively impacted them, and prepared them to interact with students. The sessions also led the teachers to request a wellness room for them to reflect during their planning period.

The second research question focused on how school leaders implemented SEL support to impact teacher morale. During the session and through the survey responses, the teachers acknowledged that the leadership team provided SEL support to assist them, and they felt heard by the leadership team and desired their opinions to be heard as well.

The third research question focused on how the ARDT described the process of designing and implementing SEL support for teachers. The leadership team members reviewed survey data and gathered verbal responses and observations from the sessions. They used data to determine the school and teacher needs based on what took place at the first and subsequent sessions. Adjustments were made to meet the needs of the teachers. The teachers shared feedback, which

allowed them to have input and create buy-in. Teacher input and buy-in provided clarity and understanding of the SEL competencies and the need for SEL for the students.

Chapter 6 provides the conclusions, implications, and connections to leadership practices based on this action research study.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONNECTIONS TO LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

The purpose of this action research study was to examine the design and implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) support for all teachers to build teacher morale. Data from perception surveys and health and wellness survey results were used to build a structure to address teacher morale and provide professional learning for teachers using SEL competencies to help the teachers' social-emotional well-being. The information from the study offered insight into how to support teachers better socially and emotionally.

The following research aligned with the purpose of the action research study and guided this inquiry:

1. How do teachers describe the implementation of schoolwide SEL to increase their morale?
2. How do school leaders support the impact of SEL implementation on teacher morale?
3. How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing SEL support for teachers?

This chapter presents a background of the study and describes the key themes related to the literature reviewed and the research questions. In addition, the limitations of the study are described, and implications and recommendations for school and district leaders, researchers, and policymakers are included.

Background

This action research study aimed to examine the design and implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) support for all teachers to build teacher morale in a suburban school in a southern state. This study included a design and implementation team that used data from perception surveys and health and wellness survey results. The team used these data to build a structure for addressing teacher morale by providing professional learning for teachers using SEL competencies to help their social-emotional well-being.

In the context of this study, the primary researcher and the action research team used literature about early career teachers and professional learning to create a small group of support for the teachers who served as the implementation team. The action research team sought to support teachers by providing SEL support to build morale (Katz et al., 2020; Schiepe-Taska et al., 2021; Zinsser, 2016).

Action Research

The researcher chose action research for this study since it promoted collaboration and emotional support for the teachers through job-embedded professional development. It allowed teachers to share their concerns and anxieties and learn SEL competencies they could implement in the classroom. During session check-ins and cycle mid-points, the research team reflected on growth areas and gathered feedback. As Zepeda (2019) indicated, “Action research without follow-up is counterproductive” (p. 177).

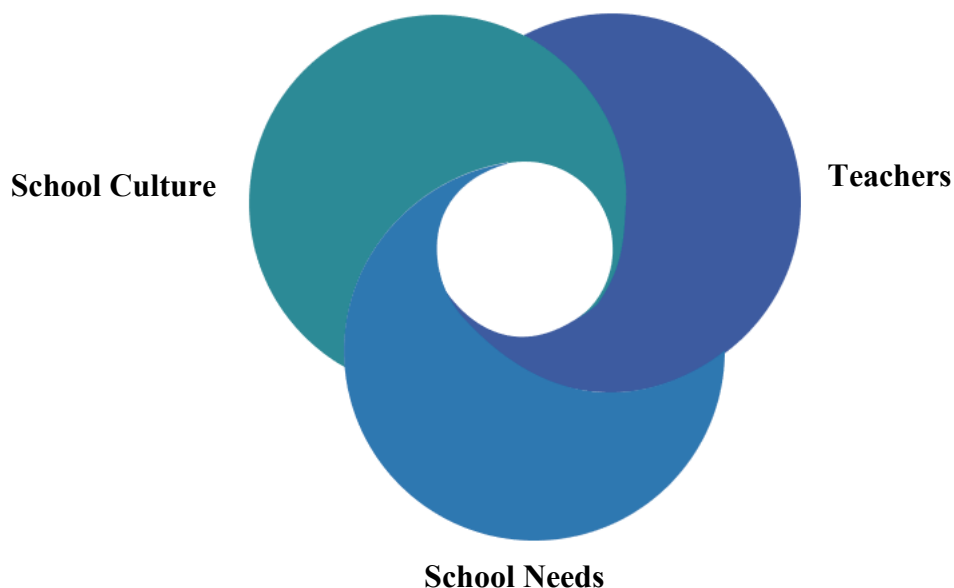
Theoretical Framework and Logical Model

This study was critical because many teachers suffered from burnout, depression, and stress, impacting morale and school climate. The information from the study offered insight into how to support teachers better socially and emotionally, which promoted positive student

interactions and self-care for the teachers. The researcher used a theoretical framework for servant leadership to focus on teachers, school needs, and school culture. In Figure 6.1, the servant leadership theoretical framework illustrates how school culture, teachers, and school needs are the basis of the framework. This action research study aimed to provide job-embedded support for teachers to reduce teacher turnover, improve morale, and equip them with the SEL tools to help themselves, which ultimately helped the students.

Figure 6.1

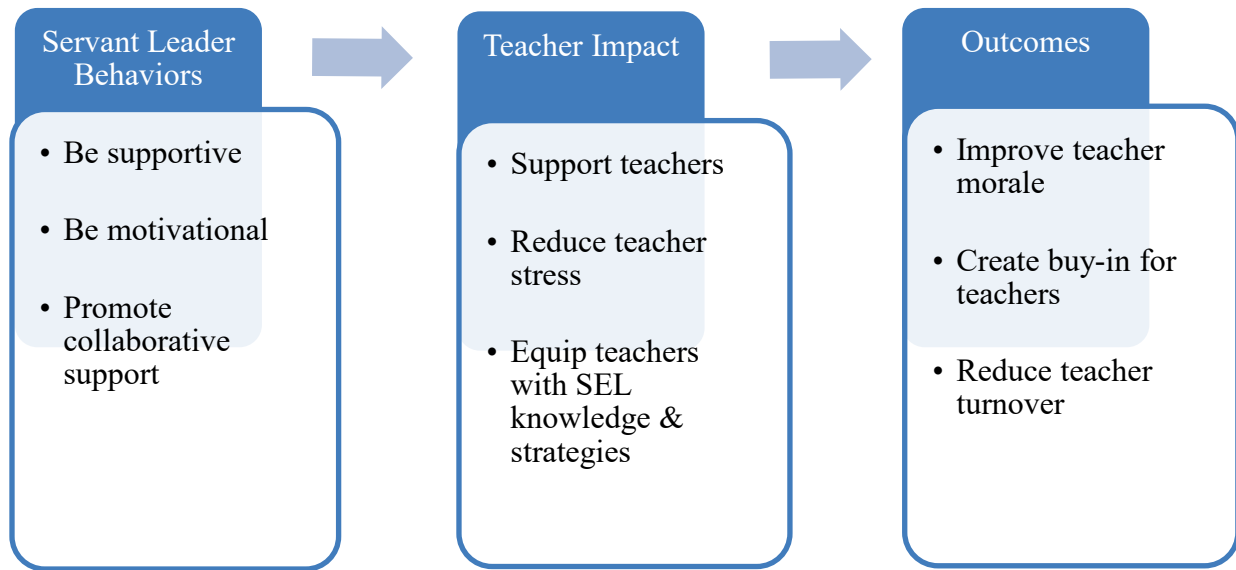
Servant Leadership Theoretical Framework



For this action research, the researcher used a logic model that provided a continuum of support that indicated the behaviors of the servant leaders and design team. The continuum of the logic model is illustrated in Figure 6.2 and includes the servant leader behaviors, teacher impact, and outcomes.

Figure 6.2

Logic Model



The following section discusses the significant findings from the action research study and their relation to the reviewed literature.

Major Findings Related to the Literature Reviewed

Many studies about social-emotional learning have focused on students, not teachers. Literature showed the need for more research on the impact of SEL teacher support. Teachers are on the frontline for students. Implementing SEL support impacted teachers and students and was more critical during this study. As stated by Huck et al. (2023):

SEL is not just a program or lessons in a curriculum; it is also how educators and students interact with one another in a supportive and equitable learning environment.

Incorporating SEL interventions and embedding them into the school curriculum provides opportunities for students to strengthen these skills and behaviors when faced with tasks and challenges (p. 26.)

Teachers must also be equipped with SEL knowledge to model and address student behaviors in the classroom (Summers, 2020). Studies have found a positive impact in schools where teachers receive support and SEL professional development (Zinsser et al., 2016). Stress also significantly affects how teachers interact with students and their job performance (Pressley et al., 2021; Westphal et al., 2022).

During each SEL professional development session, teachers engaged in mindfulness moment strategies to promote support for their social-emotional health. Teacher survey feedback led to the creation of a wellness room to provide positive interventions. As confirmed by research, these mindfulness strategies reduce stress and build teacher morale (Taylor et al., 2021). The ARDT provided three SEL professional development sessions for the teachers in this action research study. These sessions focused on three SEL competencies: self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills. School leaders must support the teachers to gain knowledge in SEL (Zieher et al., 2021). The ARDT equipped teachers with resources, including Character Strong lessons, mindfulness strategies, brain break activities, and intensive training with explanations and descriptions of each competency. They also engaged in activities in which they collaborated and shared how they would approach scenarios based on each competency.

One of the Cycle 2 interventions the ARDT provided was SEL classroom walkthroughs to monitor the weekly implementation of SEL during an allotted time. These walkthroughs supported monitoring the Cycle 1 SEL professional development sessions. The ARDT and teachers from the SEL team collaborated to plan and create ongoing SEL training for the upcoming school year to continue the learning process. Stickle et al. (2019) encouraged school leaders to provide ongoing support for teachers to ensure SEL learning is implemented with fidelity.

Major Findings Related to the Research Questions

Three research questions guided this action research study. The first research question focused on implementing schoolwide SEL support to increase teacher morale. The second question discussed how leaders support the impact of SEL implementation on teacher morale. The third question reviewed the process of designing and implementing SEL support for teachers. Table 6.1 summarizes the findings that are aligned with each research question.

Table 6.1

Summary of Findings Connected to Research Questions

Research Question	Finding
RQ1: How do teachers describe the implementation of schoolwide SEL on their morale?	Finding 1: Teachers felt empowered after participating in the SEL professional development sessions.
	Finding 2: Teachers felt prepared and gained knowledge to teach the students after learning about the SEL competencies.
	Finding 3: Teachers learned how to build positive relationships with the students and regulate their emotions, which decreased student discipline.
RQ 2: How do school leaders support the impact of SEL implementation on teacher morale?	Finding 4: Teacher engagement increased during SEL professional development sessions.
	Finding 5: There was a reduction in classroom discipline.
	Finding 6: Positive relationships developed between teachers throughout the school.
RQ 3: How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing SEL support for teachers?	Finding 7: Provide training for the teachers to support the implementation of SEL in the classroom.

Research Question	Finding
	Finding 8: Analyze and review data from surveys and evaluations.
	Finding 9: School leaders should participate and engage in professional development sessions with the teachers.

Findings of Research Question 1

Research Question 1: How do teachers describe the implementation of schoolwide SEL on their morale?

After each SEL professional development session, the teachers completed a survey and often shared their experiences at the end of the session. Based on the comments and survey results, the teachers felt empowered to participate in a professional development session about the SEL competencies since they were unfamiliar with the concepts. Some teachers shared the challenges they faced in teaching the curriculum without having prior training on the SEL competencies. Time was also a concern for teachers, as the sessions were during their planning periods.

Many teachers stated that after learning about the SEL competencies, they reflected on the impact the information would have on their students and how they must be prepared to model the expected behaviors as the teachers and for the students. The knowledge they learned benefitted the teachers and the students. Some teachers learned how to build positive relationships with the students and regulate their emotions, which decreased student discipline. Todd et al. (2022) stated, “SEL practices increase teacher morale as well as improve their ability to identify and manage their own emotions” (p.20).

Findings of Research Question 2

Research Question 2: How do school leaders support the impact of SEL implementation on teacher morale?

The level of engagement during the SEL professional development sessions, reduction in classroom discipline, and implementation of SEL lessons in classrooms indicated that the teachers benefitted from the SEL professional development sessions. Teachers collaborated and built relationships with colleagues from other grade levels, and there was a reduction in teacher/student conflicts. Teachers shared a feeling of community and a positive impact on the morale. While walking in the hallways and during meetings, teachers discussed strategies and ideas they learned from the SEL professional sessions and the resources to help them with their personal lives and interactions with students in their classrooms.

The ARDT members shared the information during subsequent meetings and ideas for the upcoming school year to continue building morale. The counselors reminded teachers during the faculty meetings to join the SEL committee to plan activities to build on the support they desire from the leadership and design teams. While preparing for the upcoming school year, the ARDT shared recommendations and comments from the SEL professional development sessions survey results and SEL hours to promote buy-in and voice equity to support the teachers.

The ARDT commented that teacher behaviors were more positive and changed their interaction approach with students by considering the whole child and regulating their emotions. Similar to findings from Morgan et al. (2022), teachers at SMS demonstrated the benefits of attending the SEL professional development sessions. “Teachers reported benefits to themselves, including increased job satisfaction, retention, joy, excitement, and confidence” (Morgan, 2022, p.49). This action research study revealed the need for school leaders to review data to determine

the needs of the teachers and identify the necessary job-embedded professional development sessions for the teachers.

Findings of Research Question 3

Research Question 3: How does the action research team describe the process of designing and implementing SEL support for teachers?

The goal of the ARDT was to provide SEL support to build teacher morale. The teachers are role models to develop relationships and demonstrate appropriate behavior. The survey results, comments made during interviews, and other discussions confirm that teachers require proper training to fully support them in implementing SEL strategies with fidelity. As stated by Todd et al. (2022), “Any successful SEL initiative will require a shared understanding of SEL, evidence-based resources, school-wide support, and ongoing training” (p.38). SEL impacts students' academic achievements, behaviors, decision-making, school, and classroom environment. The teachers must receive training on SEL competencies and strategies to improve their morale, ultimately impacting the classroom and school environment.

The ARDT discussed the importance of analyzing and reviewing school data. Planning before the school year began and collaborating with various departments within the school and the district benefited the team. The team discussed the importance of professional development and scheduling the sessions in advance to avoid scheduling conflicts, standardized assessments, or other meetings. They also recognized that school leaders should attend professional development sessions with the teachers and engage with them.

Limitations of the Study

The specific context of this study was providing social-emotional support for teachers in a suburban school in a southern state; therefore, the findings and conclusions may differ. However, this study has implications at the local school, district, state, and national levels for supporting teachers through professional development for social-emotional learning. As O'Connor (2008) stated:

It may be time to draw further attention to the social and emotional aspects of teaching, not only concerning mental health prevention but also on a broader, more general level, by recognizing that they make up an important component of being a teacher. (p.31)

Implications and Recommendations for School and District Leaders

The findings of the study reflect the literature and provide clear steps for school and district leaders to take. Providing SEL support for teachers benefits the teachers and the students. Huck et al. (2023) described the benefits of SEL for students and school staff:

In addition, students are more likely to benefit from SEL when staff receives training, and the practices are embedded in everyday teaching and learning. SEL programs involve how students and adults interact in society, whether in the classroom or the community (p.28).

At the time of this study, as negative behaviors and incidents continued to increase with teacher shortages, providing support for teachers became increasingly more critical. In this action research study, the school culture promoted collaboration and continuous learning, building teacher efficacy and self-reflection. Not only did the teachers benefit from the SEL training, but their views also changed.

Based on the observations and verbal feedback from the teachers in this study, the SEL professional development sessions promoted self-care and provided knowledge of SEL competencies. The sessions allowed teachers to create a sense of belonging while promoting community with their colleagues, and friendships were also made between teachers from different grade levels. The survey results indicated that the participants enjoyed the sessions and learned about the SEL competencies. Huck et al. (2023) stated, “Educators knowledgeable about supportive SEL practices and attuned to their own social and emotional competencies will be better equipped to implement practices that support SEL.” (p. 28)

Teachers impact students by helping them manage their emotions, develop coping strategies, and learn interpersonal skills and social responsibility (Melnick et al., 2017). Training will allow the teachers to facilitate meaningful and engaging conversations with students, teachers, and parents (Morgan et al., 2022). According to Gregory & Fergus (2017), one school district showed that social-emotional learning incorporates equity and that it is crucial for students and teachers to learn SEL competencies. Although the study is still in the beginning stages, it would be beneficial for future studies to determine if SEL implementation can reduce discipline and racial incidents. State and local districts should continue to review education policies and laws to promote SEL (Muñiz, 2020).

Implications and Recommendations for Researchers

Research supports the implementation of social-emotional learning in the classroom for students and the need for effective SEL interventions that may be sustained in a school setting. (Bonde et al., 2022; Center for American Progress, 2021; Dicarlo et al., 2020; Fabbro et al., 2020; Stewart & Rice, 2022; Taylor et al., 2021) As stated by Barnes (2019), “There is a need for future research on the influence of individual and contextual factors on moving SEL

interventions from research to practice” (p. 631). This action research study highlighted the need for SEL interventions to be conducted with fidelity in schools. Professional development sessions have primarily focused on implementing social-emotional support for students.

The teachers are the first line of defense for students and interact directly with them. According to Gregory & Fergus (2017), “research shows that educators' own social and emotional competencies strongly influence students' motivation to learn and the school climate in general” (p. 117). Therefore, based on this study, schools should include SEL professional development sessions during new teacher orientation and throughout the school year so that teachers can learn the SEL competencies. More research should be done to highlight the benefits of SEL professional development and its impact on school culture and teachers (Morgan et al., 2022; Todd et al., 2022).

Implications and Recommendations for Policy Makers

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2016 was developed to support students and school success in the public education system in America. Under ESSA, states could include measures of school climate and culture and social-emotional competencies connected to student academic, health, and long-term progress as part of the accountability system.

According to Melnick et al. (2017), “As students and school personnel develop their social and emotional competence, school climate improves; a positive school climate creates the atmosphere within which social, emotional, and academic learning can take place” (p.7). Melnick et al. (2017) made four conclusions based on their research for policymakers to support schools. First, states should support schools at the local level to become more informed about teaching, learning, and ways to support the programs.

Second, resources for school climate, SEL support, and other areas related to federal and state accountability systems should be considered since they can impact the school and SEL data. The data could be used to determine the needs of students and not penalize schools as a form of scrutiny. Third, tools to measure SEL can inform educators of strategic decisions and provide insight into the programs. Finally, Melnick et al. (2017) recommended that state agencies and districts offer resources and other technical assistance to make the necessary improvements to promote social and emotional learning for students and teachers.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

Three recurring themes emerged in this study: the need for SEL professional development, the positive impact the sessions had on the teachers, and the need for school leaders to allow teachers to have input to create buy-in. The literature shows the increased need for teachers to train in SEL to impact students. This study was limited to six teachers. Therefore, it is recommended that future research be delivered by the school counselors along with the district SEL coaches.

Chapter Summary and Final Thoughts

This study aimed to examine the design and implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) support for all teachers to build teacher morale in a suburban school in a southern state. Supporting teachers and providing job-embedded staff development for SEL is vital to a positive school climate and increases teacher knowledge of the SEL competencies. The learning and training teachers receive has a direct impact on students. With the increased demands on teachers from work and their personal lives, SEL impacts teachers on an individual and professional level, and they are equipped with the knowledge to support the students and provide them with the

skills to support their SEL needs. New and veteran teachers need time and support to grow professionally to help students.

Time is also needed for teachers to provide feedback about what they need to support their growth as teachers. When teachers feel supported and know their voices are heard, this creates buy-in to implement SEL with fidelity and consistency. These actions also promote a positive school climate, which could lead to a reduction in teacher turnover and an increase in school morale.

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Appendix A

Empirical Findings

Author and Year	Title	Purpose	Method(s)	Sample	Result(s)	Conclusions	Implication(s)
Brackett, M. A., Reyes, M. R., Rivers, S. E., Elbertson, N. A., & Salovey, P. (2012)	Assessing teachers' beliefs about social and emotional learning.	The purpose of the study was to measure teachers' beliefs about SEL.	The participants were 88 fifth and sixth-grade teachers from 62 schools in the study.	The research analyzed data from a psychometric property of a scale and determined if the responses would affect program delivery and outcomes of an SEL program.	"A commitment to SEL professional development from all stakeholders in the school, including the endorsement of a shared vision by school staff and administrators, is necessary for programmatic success" (Brackett, 2012, p. 220).	Teachers and their personal beliefs about SEL may shape the learning environment and impact the students' developmental outcomes.	Scales can be used to determine teacher comfort with SEL and their commitment. This can impact the schools' readiness to implement SEL practices in the school.
Center for American Progress	Social and emotional support for educators during and after the pandemic.	The purpose of the article was to promote the need for social and emotional support for educators.	A review of legal policy and federal funds	The organization provided recommendations and resources to help educators manage stress during remote learning and promoted the use of federal funds to support emotional and social for educators.	"SEL is more important now more than ever to help educators, families, and students manage stress, develop resilience, and maintain a sense of optimism	"In order to ensure that the education system is able to fully recover from the impacts of the pandemic, it is critical that schools and districts invest in their educators,	School districts and local schools should invest federal relief funds to provide resources to support educators for their social and emotional needs.

					during challenging times." (Summers, 2020, p. 33)	especially in their social and emotional health." p.7	
Collie, R. J., Shapka, J. D., Perry, N. E., & Martin, A. J. (2015).	Teachers' beliefs about social-emotional learning: Identifying teacher profiles and their relations with job stress and satisfaction.	The study examined the teachers based on their beliefs about SEL. Collie et al. (2015) believed that teachers' profiles related to the teachers' stress and job satisfaction.	A questionnaire was presented with socio-demographic items, and items about stress, job satisfaction, and SEL belief items.	1267 teachers from two Canadian provinces Sample 1 included 664 teachers from British Columbia and Ontario Sample 2 included 603 teachers from British Columbia Average age 44.9 years; 16.2 average years of teaching experience	"The findings here also indicate that male teachers may not be as comfortable supporting SEL as female teachers and that as students move through the school system, they may have teachers who are less comfortable supporting SEL and less supported in this area of their practice. Thus, the importance of teachers' SEL beliefs appear to have implications for teachers and may be associated with	The three beliefs are (a) comfort with SEL, (b) commitment to improving SEL skills, and (c) perceptions of principal and schoolwide support for SEL.	The teachers' beliefs about SEL may shape how the teacher acts, conducts SEL lessons, and interacts with the students in the classroom. These beliefs may also impact the implementation of SEL in the classroom.

					important student outcomes as well.” p.156		
Flushman, T., Guise, M., & Hegg, S. (2021).	Partnership to support the social and emotional learning of teachers: A new teacher learning community.	The purpose of this study was to examine the impact SEL competencies had on the support of new teachers during their first year of teaching.	Literature review; Mixed Methods approach; survey data	Forty-three new teachers	“Furthermore, new teachers engaged in developing relational skills fostered through communication and connection with colleagues. Feelings of affirmation and care align with the research on SEL that argues for the importance of focusing on and developing the SEL competencies of teachers to reduce stress and improve job satisfaction.” p. 98	Participants stated that the transition from the preparation program to teaching was challenging. The study allowed them to build relationships with other new teachers while focusing on practice problems.	It is necessary for schools to provide SEL support for new teachers.
Kyriacou, C. (2001).	Teacher Stress: directions for future research.	To provide research on teacher stress, its impact on	Literature review	K-12 international teachers	There is a vast amount of research about teacher stress.	Teacher stress is an "experience by a teacher of	Teacher stress is an international concern and further research

		the classroom, and future research. The author also discussed the sources and techniques to cope with stress.			Provide effective teacher stress workshops.	unpleasant, negative emotions, anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher.” (Kyriacou, 2001, p. 28)	is required to support teachers.
Reinke, W. M., Stormont, M., Herman, K. C., Puri, R., & Goel, N. (2011).	Supporting children’s mental health in schools: Teacher perceptions of needs, roles, and barriers.	The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions of current mental health needs in their schools.	Surveys; Likert scale; open-ended items; paired t-tests	292 teachers from 5 school districts (rural, urban, and suburban); Mostly European American and female	Teachers viewed school psychologists as having a primary role with mental health matters. Teachers also felt lack of experience and training to support students with mental health needs.	“Additionally, providing training to preservice and in-service teachers that promotes the use of evidence-based practice and programs is needed. Teachers understand that they can play a role in supporting students with behavioral, emotional, and social difficulties, but need the	On the local level, school psychologists can provide effective practices to support teachers.

						training and support to implement effective practices.” p.11	
Summers, L. L. (2020).	The right blend: SEL skills support teacher learning in person and online.	This article provided the framework for creating professional SEL learning sessions using self-efficacy and preparing for the future.	Virtual and in-person professional learning;	K-12 teachers	Pay attention to the adult needs, prioritize social-emotional learning, and empower teachers through self-efficacy.	“SEL is more important now more than ever to help educators, families, and students manage stress, develop resilience, and maintain a sense of optimism during challenging times.” (Summers, 2020, p. 33)	“SEL matters regardless of whether teaching and learning occur in a face-to-face, virtual, or blended environment.” p.33
Stickle, L., Bailey, R., Brion-Meisels, G., & Jones, S.M. (2019).	Toolbox for SEL: Coaching builds teachers’ social and emotional strategies.	The purpose of the study was to examine the importance of coaching in building teachers’ capacities to implement social and emotional strategies in	Pilot study: a hybrid of two categories: models that support the delivery of formal SEL programming and models that provide coaching to support	SEL coaching model with an urban elementary school on the East Coast; interviews were conducted	Coaching increased teacher knowledge and use of SEL practices of social-emotional learning. Teachers also found that SEL coaching was	For teachers to be fully equipped with SEL skills to help students, Stickle et al. (2019) stated that school leaders must provide ongoing support for the	School leaders should create and prioritize policies and practices to promote coaching for social-emotional learning.

		their classrooms effectively.	teachers' social-emotional competence.		beneficial for them and the students' social and emotional growth.	teachers. This guidance involves learning and modeling the components of SEL and ensuring the teachers implement the skills with fidelity. Many teachers reported they lack professional development for SEL, impacting their confidence level in implementing classroom strategies.	
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Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Questions for Mathematics Teachers-Pre-Planning-Interview 1

1. What do you think of the current SEL supports that were in place last year? RQ1
2. How would you describe the support you received as a teacher for SEL? RQ1, RQ2
3. How do you view the morale of the school? RQ1
4. What do you feel will be beneficial to help teachers? RQ2
5. What types of supports do you feel the teachers would benefit from for social-emotional learning? RQ2
6. How can the leadership team provide social-emotional (SEL) support for you? RQ2, RQ3

Questions for members of the Action Research Team-Pre-Planning-Interview 1

1. As you reflect on the previous school year, what types of support do you feel were provided to teachers for SEL? RQ3
2. Describe the morale of the teachers.
3. What support(s) do you feel will have the most impact on improving the school morale?
4. What supports do you feel would benefit teachers with social-emotional learning?

Questions for Mathematics Teachers-Interview 2

1. How do you feel about the current SEL support offered in the school? RQ1
2. How do you view the morale of the school? RQ1
3. How can the leadership team provide support for teachers to help their social-emotional needs? RQ1
4. What have you seen as the benefits of the SEL professional learning sessions? RQ1
5. How have you grown as a teacher? RQ1
6. How has the leadership team supported you during the professional learning session? RQ3
7. What challenges have you faced during the SEL professional learning sessions? RQ1

Questions for members of the Action Research Team-Interview 2

1. How can the SEL professional development sessions be improved to maximize engagement by the teachers? RQ3

2. What do you feel are the needs of the teachers to provide SEL support? RQ3
3. What have you noticed since the implementation of SEL support for teachers? RQ3
4. What can be done to increase participation during the SEL professional development sessions?

Questions for Mathematics Teachers-Interview 3

1. What is your view of teacher morale among teachers since the implementation of the SEL professional development sessions?
2. How can the school continue to provide SEL support for the teachers?
3. How have you grown as a teacher since the SEL professional development sessions began?

Focus Group Interview

1. What would you say have been the benefits of the SEL professional development sessions this semester? RQ3
2. What were some barriers you faced during the semester as a participant during the SEL professional development sessions? RQ3
3. What impact do you think it has had on teachers? RQ3
4. How have the professional development sessions impacted your interactions in the classroom? RQ3

Appendix C

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
How did the session benefit you as a teacher?	<p>It does help calm down.</p> <p>It was very calming and much needed to start the day.</p> <p>It reminded me that I need self-care to be more effective with my kiddos.</p> <p>It helps me a lot. I did not realize how much I needed.</p> <p>I appreciate the worksheet reminder of types of self-care.</p> <p>Relaxing</p> <p>It adds value to my day a lot.</p> <p>It was Peaceful.</p> <p>It was peaceful.</p> <p>This session showed me the importance of committing myself.</p> <p>It made me aware of the various ways I can have self-care.</p> <p>It supplied the relaxation that I needed.</p>
What can the leadership team do to support you in the future as a teacher for your social-emotional well-being?	<p>Most of all, if leadership wants to help, time is of the essence. We need time.</p> <p>Have more of this for teachers.</p> <p>More ways to have self-care. Understanding when things are not going well for us personally or physically.</p> <p>I guess providing me real time for planning will reduce my stress.</p>

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
	<p>Do SEL sessions instead of Connections CLT meetings.</p> <p>Understand the current trends in classroom teaching that teachers experience that may be quite different and more difficult than the trends that the average administrator experienced 5-10 years or even more ago. Teachers need emotional support like the students now but not treated like kids.</p> <p>Continue this and let other teachers be part of it.</p> <p>Continue offering sessions like this but during DLD.</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>Invite speakers and experts to help us explore realistic techniques we can apply daily to target SEL self-care.</p> <p>Continue giving us this time to self-reflect. Provide more time to grade and plan so that we are relaxed about being behind in our grade books.</p>
Contribution to learning [Level of skill/knowledge at start of course]	<p>Poor-2</p> <p>Satisfactory-1</p> <p>Very Good-6</p> <p>Excellent-3</p>
Contribution to learning [Level of skill/knowledge at end of course]	<p>Poor-0</p> <p>Satisfactory-1</p> <p>Very Good-7</p> <p>Excellent-4</p>
Contribution to learning [Contribution of Course to your skill/knowledge]	<p>Poor-0</p> <p>Satisfactory-0</p> <p>Very Good-7</p> <p>Excellent-5</p>

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
Skill and responsiveness of the instructor [Instructor was an effective lecturer/demonstrator]	Agree-3 Strongly Agree-9
Skill and responsiveness of the instructor [Presentations were clear and organized]	Agree-3 Strongly Agree-9
Course content [Learning objectives were clear]	Agree-5 Strongly Agree-7
Course content [Course content was organized and well planned]	Agree-4 Strongly Agree-8
Course content [Course organized to allow all teachers to participate fully]	Agree-4 Strongly Agree-8
What aspects of this course were most useful or valuable?	Self-Care Activities The list of self-care items to do. I had not even thought of some of them; suggestions are great! I allowed thinking how badly I needed time for myself. Movement game Options to relax. Exercising my body using Everything Self-care worksheet, Understanding the importance of SEL self-care She is giving us time to think about ourselves conscientiously without interruption.
What support do you need as a teacher to meet your social-emotional needs?	I noticed that I need to take more care of myself. Teachers need time to engage in activities such as courses that will help bring awareness to specific challenges within the school

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
	setting, home, etc. (a wellness room would be suitable for students and teachers)
	I would love more things like this.
	Time.
	Space and trust in me as a capable individual.
	Release the chains sometimes; we are not enslaved people or kids.
	To receive more encouragement and support
	N/A
	by not giving us last-minute tasks
	Time to grade.
How will you use this information in the future?	Take more time for yourself.
	I plan to put the list on my refrigerator to look at when I need ideas.
	To try to relax during stressful school hours.
	Repeat with my students.
	Relaxation
	To help my students
	I will take more time for myself.
	I will certainly try to incorporate this into my daily life.
	I am adding it to my calendar and implementing it gradually in my daily life.
	I know what I need to destress.
	Thank you so much for doing this! I left the session feeling happy and generally lighter about school and life. :)

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
	I (we) need time to plan. Please. I do not take my family time to do it.
Additional comments, questions, etc.	Thank you.
	Awesome.
	The researcher cares about teachers and our well-being, and that is good. She always has a good spirit and always tries to assist in any way she can. She has always displayed a great attitude.

Appendix C. November 2023 SEL Session Survey Results

Appendix D

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
The learning from today's session will be applied at my local school.	Nine participants said they would apply what they learned during Session 3 at Scholar Middle School. by the end of the 2023-2024 school year participants
On a scale from 0-10, how well did today's session meet its stated purpose/goal?	0-7- None of the participants rated the session at these levels. Three participants rated the session an 8. 10 (exceptionally well)-Nine of the twelve participants who completed the survey rated session 10 exceptionally well.
How can we best support you moving forward from this session?	Teacher wellness check-ins. Are they simply asking 'how are you doing today? It is an excellent way to open the door to meaningful conversations. They were reminding us often to take care of ourselves first. Thank you! More support on behavior. Continue providing these types of sessions. Check-ins now and then Continued resources. Continue to have the facilitators.
Questions, comments, ideas, or what topics would you like to learn more about?	To learn more about finding the work-life balance we discussed during the lesson. How do we structure our days to address all our job needs? Mindfulness Stress coping mechanisms How to help and support the family

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
	None at this time
	Thank you.
	How to engage students better

Appendix D. December 2023 SEL Session Survey Results

Appendix E

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
How did the session help you as a teacher or staff member?	<p>It was OK.</p> <p>NA</p> <p>The session allowed me to have fun and relax. It is a great way to decompress.</p> <p>The SEL session allowed me to step out of the classroom, engage in physical activity, and spend time conversing with others, deepening my connections and understanding of them.</p> <p>I got to see other talents.</p> <p>It allowed me to interact differently and to see my coworkers in a new light.</p> <p>It was great to connect with my coworkers outside of a work session.</p> <p>Relaxation</p> <p>This session was very beneficial for me.</p> <p>It was informative.</p> <p>SEL hours helped us take a break from work for some time and acted as a stress buster.</p> <p>I was not present for this event due to a pre-arranged day off for a medical procedure; however, previous staff SELs have helped me by hearing how other staff members deal with their SE needs and the tips and experiences offered by the researcher during the session.</p> <p>Help me take my mind off work.</p> <p>The SEL Hour on the February 2 Digital Day helped me relax and relieve stress.</p> <p>Bonding with other teachers, letting loose, and enjoying camaraderie was fun.</p>

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
What can the leadership team do to support you in the future as a teacher or staff member for your social-emotional well-being?	<p data-bbox="824 235 1409 302">It was fun watching all of my coworkers relax and have fun together.</p> <p data-bbox="824 344 1127 373">Have a real break daily.</p> <p data-bbox="824 415 1393 483">More time to work in school so we have less to do at home.</p> <p data-bbox="824 525 1360 554">Continue to provide these types of events.</p> <p data-bbox="824 596 1101 625">Have more SEL days.</p> <p data-bbox="824 667 1370 848">Please ensure that the integration of social-emotional learning (SEL) practices occurs consistently and expansively, akin to the recent comprehensive implementation we have seen.</p> <p data-bbox="824 890 1380 957">Do more activities like that, Beat the bomb, top golf, group bowling, or escape room.</p> <p data-bbox="824 999 1360 1066">Be aware that we need outlets just like the kids.</p> <p data-bbox="824 1108 1386 1247">We all need release, and teachers get overlooked easily, with others thinking they are kids too and sometimes get treated like kids.</p> <p data-bbox="824 1289 1403 1507">Trapped and locked up. It makes it feel like a prison when we have no types of releases or fun times. It is a school, and the dynamics of that should allow for a form of fun for all. If you cannot have fun or release at a school, then where can you?</p> <p data-bbox="824 1549 1370 1617">Next time, take it outside, but inside is still fun.</p> <p data-bbox="824 1659 1403 1726">Create more spaces or times for us to connect socially.</p> <p data-bbox="824 1768 1117 1797">More moments of SEL</p>

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
	<p>Continue to provide opportunities and moments like this where I can escape mentally.</p> <p>The school leadership team can work toward supporting teachers by, for example, building relationships to help create a schoolwide friendly/supportive work environment.</p> <p>Create opportunities for us to come together for circle time and activity time at least once a month.</p> <p>I would love to have dedicated days where we do not have a meeting during planning, during which we are encouraged to engage in our own personal SE acts, within reason, as for some of us, they are very personal and require solo time. Some of us slip those in here and there already, and let me tell you, it is helpful, but we also feel guilty when we do because we are not sure the admin would agree with how our planning was spent. It is very much needed sometimes, though, as many of us have a whirlwind life even after work hours. I am not saying every week, but designated days would be fantastic. It would make me feel supported for sure.</p> <p>Listen to our problems/ concerns and take action to solve them. Also, being upfront about certain things and communication is very important.</p> <p>I want our leadership team to continue providing opportunities like the February 2 Digital Day. The one-hour session made a difference in my attitude - positive interactions!</p> <p>Schedule more of these days and additional circles like we had last DLD.</p> <p>More planning time on planning days.</p>

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
On a scale from 0-10, how well did the session meet your expectations?	<p>5- Two participants rated the session 5.</p> <p>9- Three participants rated the session 9.</p> <p>10-Twenty-one participants rated the session 10.</p>
What support do you need as a teacher or staff member to meet your social-emotional needs?	<p>Planning is meetings and planning, prepping for the class, and no break all day.</p> <p>Fewer meetings</p> <p>Welcoming events at the beginning of the school year and when returning from long breaks.</p> <p>I was just allowed to unwind from the stresses of the week.</p> <p>Enhance opportunities for Peer Support.</p> <p>Networks to foster a sense of community and camaraderie among colleagues.</p> <p>More social activities with the staff. We do nothing together as a school, like a staff dinner night or reserving a large social venue for staff to come out and mingle in a different way away from the walls of work—more social events and activities. Try a BBQ with families and friends invited. Bowling or game nights at the actual places. Pic Nic on the lawn at work with a movie screen. I did these things at another school; the staff loved it and bonded.</p> <p>They have more moments like the SEL hour, mental SEL room, and support staff (permanent subs, life coaches, therapists, etc.) for teachers' mental moments or days.</p> <p>This is precisely what I need from time to time.</p> <p>Empathy, respect, and support provided the opportunity to teach Saturday and summer school.</p>

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
	It is time to pause, reflect, and feel optimistic about our actions.
	Embed some staff solo or personal SE planning periods (activities to be determined by staff).
	More time to get work done.
	I would like more time at work to complete my lesson plans and grades during my planning time to provide me with a better work-life balance. Thank you!
	The wellness room is completed and available each day.
	More duty-free lunches, planning time.
Questions, comments, ideas, or what topics would you like to learn more about?	Teaching in extremes, A students to non-English speaking
	Could you please share additional strategies for promoting a sense of belonging, connectedness, and mutual respect among staff across different grade levels?
	Social events for the staff away from the work setting. They make a difference.
	To be included in the vision or plans for what Scholar will look like for the 2024-25 School year.
	Thank you for providing this space and opportunity to regroup.
	New technology
	Restorative practices
	None at this time.
	Thank you for all that you are doing!

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
	You are amazing!

Appendix E. Cycle 2 January 2024 Survey Results

Appendix F

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
How did the session benefit you as a teacher or staff member?	<p>Helped me take my mind off work and unwind.</p> <p>Great</p> <p>It helped me to take a break from the schedule.</p> <p>Pressure was released to some extent.</p> <p>The session allowed honesty with no judgment.</p> <p>Bonding</p> <p>It was a way for staff to come together in a recreational way.</p> <p>It helps me bond with team members I usually don't get to bond with.</p> <p>It allowed me to be in a relaxed environment with my co-workers.</p> <p>It helped me to get a better understanding of what is going on in the school from a mental standpoint.</p> <p>It allowed me to use my voice.</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>It was a way for staff to come together in a recreational way.</p> <p>It was a time to relax.</p> <p>It benefitted me greatly.</p> <p>Shows administration support for teachers and staff.</p>

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
	Relaxation.
	It was refreshing. I came late but I had a good time with colleagues.
	It benefitted me by giving me the mental break I truly needed.
	Comradery.
What can the leadership team do to support you in the future as a teacher or staff member for your social-emotional well-being?	Take time to listen to our needs.
	Give most support you never know it will help.
	N/A
	Reflective sessions consistently spread out throughout the year backed up with some action as a result.
	If all possible, come by and say hey how are you doing? Can I help you with something?
	Lead by example
	Lunch once a month.
	Provide more opportunities for competition.
	Continue to have CLUB GYM as an outlet for us to relax and have a great time.
	Listen to understand and be proactive instead of being reactive.
	Continue with gifting us with the gift of time to take brain brakes and allowing us to be able to re-set mentally by providing these activities.
	Disciplining of students
	TIME

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
	We need more of SEL. Don't make it during DLD day only. Spread it out.
	N/A
	Karaoke, dance contest, trivia, scavenger hunt
	Be consistent with communicating with staff-manner of communication matters.
	The gift of time
	A listening coach
	Continue to listen to our needs.
	Just give us more time to grade and plan independently.
	Nothing! Thank you for everything.
	Just make sure there is consistency with all directives.
	Just listen
	Less micromanaging
	Classroom time on teacher workdays
	To do monthly check ins with staff members
	Opportunities to catch up on grades, prepare lessons, and breath without meetings
	Show us more respect as professionals
	Support in needs and praises sometimes
	Always be there to us-put in more fun days/afternoons. Maybe a Saturday fun day
	N/A

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
	We can be more visible in visiting classrooms.
	Time, academies, within Scholar
On a scale from 0-10, how well did the session meet your expectations?	One participant rated the session a 7 Eight participants rated the session an 8. Nine participants rated the session a 9. Twenty-three participants rated the session a 10.
	One participant rated the session 12 out of 10.
What support do you need as a teacher or staff member to meet your social-emotional needs?	N/A
	Give me a classroom break.
	Being more open to others' ideas
	Un-occasional brain brakes which allow me to be to re-set mentally
	Motivation and encouragement always
	To be treated as a professional and respected as one. To be allowed time (on my own) to plan powerful lessons, allow new information to saturate, and get myself in a good mental space.
	Having someone to listen to us without judging strengthening mentor-teams for all staff not just new.
	Check-in, check out with admin with support.
	The gift of time
	More time
	More time to plan/grade-individually.
	N/A

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
	Do not overwhelm me with so many new initiatives.
	Time/grace-2x
	Wellness room
	Free time if we can
	More planning time and less meetings on digital day
	Expectations must be expected from all teachers, staff.
Questions, comments, ideas, or what topics would you like to learn more about?	Food Truck
	Thank you kindly for your constant support of our mental wellbeing.
	I am ok.
	Loved the food (snacks) and drinks. It was great. Thank you Dr. Researcher.
	Involving non-profits in teaching kids' character/choices/beliefs-what teachers sometimes feel their hands are tied coaching (career development)
	Amazing!! Dr. Researcher. love it!
	How can we get more teachers buy-in
	How to professionally deal with others
	This was fun! we had a great time!
	Relaxation techniques
	Why social-emotional things are important.

Appendix F. Cycle 2 March 2024 Survey Results

Appendix G

SEL Classroom Walkthrough Form-SMS Teacher Name _____ Grade Level _____					Classroom/Subject Observed								
	4	3	2	1	Component Score/Notes								
2a. Expectations and Learning Goals	Teacher effectively engages students about purpose, expectations, and SEL I Can statements throughout the entire lesson. Both the teacher & students clearly connect lesson to prior learning and personal experience.	Teacher communicates purpose, expectations, or SEL I Can statements for the lesson. Teacher effectively connects lesson to either prior learning or personal experience.	Expectations for lesson could be inferred from teacher. Teacher may attempt to connect lesson to prior learning or personal experience.	Teacher does not clearly communicate expectations of lesson. No evidence of lesson connecting to prior learning or personal experience.									
2b. Explicit Teaching of SEL Skills	SEL skills are directly taught with explicit reference to their value and when/how to apply them. Teacher explicitly models, discusses, and reinforces SEL I Can Statements, competencies and skills. Evidence that most students are receptive.	Evidence that some SEL I Can Statements and competencies have been taught or communicated; Teacher encourages students to practice SEL skills with one another and some are receptive.	Limited evidence that some SEL I Can Statements and competencies have been taught or communicated. Teacher may encourage students to practice SEL skills, but few students are receptive.	No evidence that SEL I Can Statements and competencies have been explicitly taught or teacher is unsuccessful in engaging students to develop and practice SEL skills.									
2c. SEL Integrated into Instructional Content	Clear evidence that SEL is effectively embedded into content of academic lessons; relevance of SEL to that content is highlighted and discussed.	Some evidence that teacher teaches or has taught SEL skills development in academic lessons.	Limited evidence of integration of SEL with academics	No integration of SEL into academic content.									
2d. Use of Interactive Pedagogies	Teacher uses lesson-appropriate interactive or collaborative pedagogies that enable students to develop & practice SEL skills.	Some evidence that teacher uses interactive or collaborative pedagogies that enable students to develop SEL skills.	Limited evidence that teacher uses interactive pedagogies that enable students to develop SEL skills.	Interactive pedagogies are not effectively and appropriately introduced or supported.									
2e. Teacher Feedback and Monitoring	Teacher teaches for conceptual understanding and provides tailored feedback. Teacher actively monitors students' engagement and understanding throughout lesson.	Teacher provides generalized feedback to most students; attempts to monitor students' engagement and understanding throughout lesson.	Teacher provides generalized feedback to a few students; makes at least one attempt to monitor student engagement or understanding.	Teacher provides minimal or no feedback to students; does not monitor student engagement or understanding.									
2f. Student Engagement	Most students are engaged in the lesson with interest, curiosity, motivation, and passion. Electronic devices are only used for classwork (if applicable).	Some students are engaged in the lesson with interest, curiosity, motivation, and passion. Electronic devices are mostly used for classwork (if applicable).	Few students are engaged in the lesson with interest, curiosity, motivation, or passion; some are easily distracted. Electronic devices are used for something other than classwork (if applicable).	Students are not engaged with interest, curiosity, motivation, or passion or are distracted/disruptive during the lesson. Electronic devices are distracting and not used appropriately (if applicable).									
2g. Student Collaboration	Students collaborate efficiently & respectfully with each other throughout most of the lesson.	Students collaborate with efficiency.	Students may be collaborating but with little efficiency.	No evidence of student collaboration.									
2h. Teacher as a Facilitator	Teacher is highly effective in facilitating student learning; uses open-ended questioning & "wait time;" lesson is student-centered while teacher acts as a guide; all students participate in the learning environment.	Teacher uses strategies to encourage learning and most students participate; teacher prompts students to join in discussion.	Teacher encourages learning and some students participate, majority of the lesson is teacher directed.	Teacher is unsuccessful in facilitating learning. Teacher talk time highly outweighs student talk time; few students participate.									

2i. Student Reflection	Teacher allows time for individual and collective student reflection by encouraging critical thinking to debrief academic & social-emotional learning.	Teacher allots some time for either individual or collective student reflection by encouraging critical thinking to debrief academic or social-emotional learning.	Teacher may encourage students to reflect on the lesson but doesn't allow time for it during class or the reflection does not encourage critical thinking.	Teacher does not engage student reflection.											
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Appendix G. SEL Classroom Walkthrough Form

Appendix H

Date of SEL Classroom Walkthrough	Grade Level	Number of Classrooms that Facilitated SEL/Character Strong Lessons
3/1/2024	6 th Grade	8/12-On this day, eight 6 th grade classrooms conducted SEL/Character Strong lessons.
	7 th Grade	4/12- On this day, four 6 th grade classrooms conducted SEL/Character Strong lessons.
	8 th Grade	3/12- On this day, three 8 th grade classrooms conducted SEL/Character Strong lessons.
3/8/2024	6 th Grade	10/12- On this day, ten 6 th grade classrooms conducted SEL/Character Strong lessons.
	7 th Grade	6/12- On this day, six 7 th grade classrooms conducted SEL/Character Strong lessons.
	8 th Grade	3/12- On this day, three 8 th grade classrooms conducted SEL/Character Strong lessons.
3/22/2024	6 th Grade	9/12- On this day, nine 6 th grade classrooms conducted SEL/Character Strong lessons.
	7 th Grade	2/12- On this day, two 7 th grade classrooms conducted SEL/Character Strong lessons.
	8 th Grade	0/12- On this day, none of the 8 th grade classrooms conducted SEL/Character Strong lessons.

Appendix H. SEL Classroom Walkthroughs Cycle 2 March 2024