

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING STRATEGIES ON THE
EFFICACY AND RESILIENCE OF TWELFTH-GRADE STUDENTS IN AN INNER-CITY
HIGH SCHOOL

by

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(Under the Direction of Jami Royal Berry)

ABSTRACT

This case study addressed the correlation between the implementation of social-emotional learning aimed at improving the academic success of high school seniors. Research questions focused on teachers' beliefs and attitudes about the academic success of twelfth-grade students when implementing social-emotional learning strategies in the classroom, how social-emotional learning strategies influenced student outcomes, and the learning acquired by the action research team when implementing social-emotional learning strategies. Studies reveal that social-emotional learning has a great influence on academic outcomes, especially in high-poverty schools. Schools where students feel safe, encouraged, and championed are found to have students with higher academic performance in class and on standardized tests. The study employed action research using focus groups, Likert-Scale surveys, interviews, and an analysis of academic and graduation trends. An analysis of school-wide interpersonal relationships, learning environments, and decision-making processes helped frame the literature and served as the themes in this study. Findings indicate the following: teacher beliefs about the importance of SEL practices and their own instructional capacity influence implementation, student outcomes are determined by the presence of student-teacher relationships and leadership expectations, and a schoolwide vision and an explicit, engaging curriculum are essential components of effective

SEL implementation. Future research studies should consider conducting a long-term study, replicating this study with an entire grade level or in a whole-school setting using a face-to-face instructional model.

INDEX WORDS: Action Research, High School Seniors, Inner-City Schools, Social-Emotional Learning, Teacher Perceptions

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DEDICATION

To

My three beautiful daughters, Raven, Ashley, and Jordan

You are my biggest cheerleaders and I strive to be the role model that you deserve. Thank you

for filling my life with joy and for your unwavering support throughout this journey

and

My Mom, Linda Moore

You are constant source of strength and wisdom. Thank you for your prayers and the many sacrifices along the way. You always believed in me and refused to let me give up. I would not

be here without you.

and

My Grandparents, Hazel and the late Fleetwood Perry

Thank you for the strong foundation and providing a closet space for me to study when I was

growing up. You always valued education and you taught me to go after my dreams. You

introduced me to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I am eternally grateful

and

My Sisters, Tarina and Michelle, and my family

Thank you for being there and cheering me on. I love each and every one of you! This is for us!

and

To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I am nothing without You

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm

you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Brandon A. Morris High School¹ (BAM) is a public high school in the Area School District (ASD) serving more than 1100 students. Once known as a premier school in the city, receiving state and national notoriety for more than thirty years, Morris currently serves as a neighborhood school struggling to regain its status in the district and the state. The school recently transformed its structure from a small learning community model to a traditional high school setting due to recent declines in achievement on the state EOC milestones. The principal used restructuring as a way to increase the focus on content teams and provide immediate support for student mastery of the standards using real-time interventions. As such, the school now operates as a traditional high school subdivided by content halls. A content administrator leads each content hall and each administrator is supported by a grade level counselor and an instructional coach. The staff of Morris includes one principal, five assistant principals, 108 full-time teachers, and one itinerant teacher. Support staff includes four instructional coaches, four counselors, one media specialist, one social worker, one parent liaison, and one Response to Intervention specialist who work collaboratively to support teaching and learning.

The superintendent of the Area School District made social and emotional learning a priority for teaching and learning. In addition to focusing on the academic curriculum, the district recognizes the need to focus on the whole child to help combat the ills of poverty-stricken

¹ All proper nouns related to the context are pseudonyms

communities and malfunctioned social support systems (Leaning Forward, 2018). As such, social-emotional learning is included as the first of five key domains in the district’s model of teaching excellence. In this model, teachers are expected to exhibit SEL competencies.

They are also expected to build SEL skills and capitalize on teachable moments to strengthen the students social-emotional core competencies for life in and beyond school. All instructional and noninstructional support staff members receive professional learning aligned to the tenets of social-emotional learning to learn how to build relationships and reinforce behavioral expectations. In line with this expectation, the district also revised the student discipline plan to support, model, and reinforce SEL competencies and restorative practices (Leaning Forward, 2018). To further support the work, the district allocated funds to hire a Social-emotional Learning team including a director and three coordinators to support elementary, middle, and high schools. Some school leaders also used funds to hire a school based SEL Coach. At Morris High School, SEL is currently implemented during advisory using the district-funded curriculum, School Connect, however, implementation is fragmented and inconsistent.

Table 1

Morris High School Demographics Data

Demographic	Percent (%)
African American	97
Hispanic	3
Free-Reduced Lunch (Community Eligibility Program)	100
Economically Disadvantaged (Directly Certified)	60
SWD	12
ELL	2

Characteristics of Teachers

Morris High School does an excellent job of retaining teachers for multiple years. The teacher attrition rate is among the lowest in the district and the school was recently recognized for maintaining the staff. On average, teachers have twelve years of teaching experience and more than half of the teachers have a degree beyond the bachelor's degree (Georgia Office of Student Achievement, 2018). Along the same lines, nearly half of the teachers have ten or more years of teaching experience. Duncan and Murnane (2011) believe that teacher quality plays a significant role in the performance of high needs schools as these schools have a difficult time attracting and retaining high-quality teachers. Although high teacher turnover is not an issue at Morris, student achievement continues to be a focus for the school. A review of teacher profile data is outlined in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 1

Teaching Experience

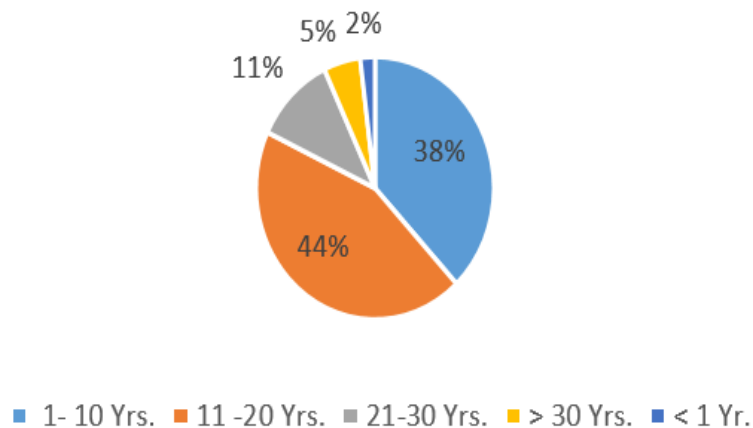
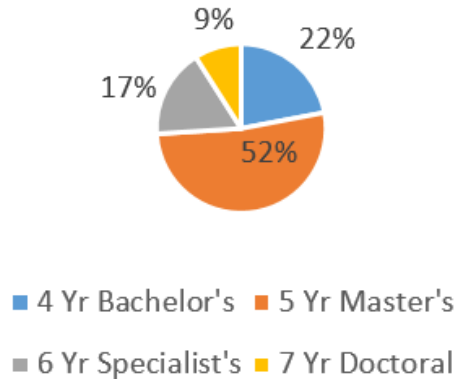


Figure 2*Teachers' Education Level*

Note. Adapted from Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2018.

The Problem

At Brandon Morris High School, 71% of incoming freshmen graduate from high school in four years. The graduation rate trails slightly below the district's 78% graduation rate and it falls below schools with similar demographics (Georgia Department of Education, 2019). It is important to note that in 2005, states across the nation developed a new method for calculating the graduation rate. The new process, known as the adjusted cohort rate, ensures uniformity and consistency when comparing the graduation rates across the nation.

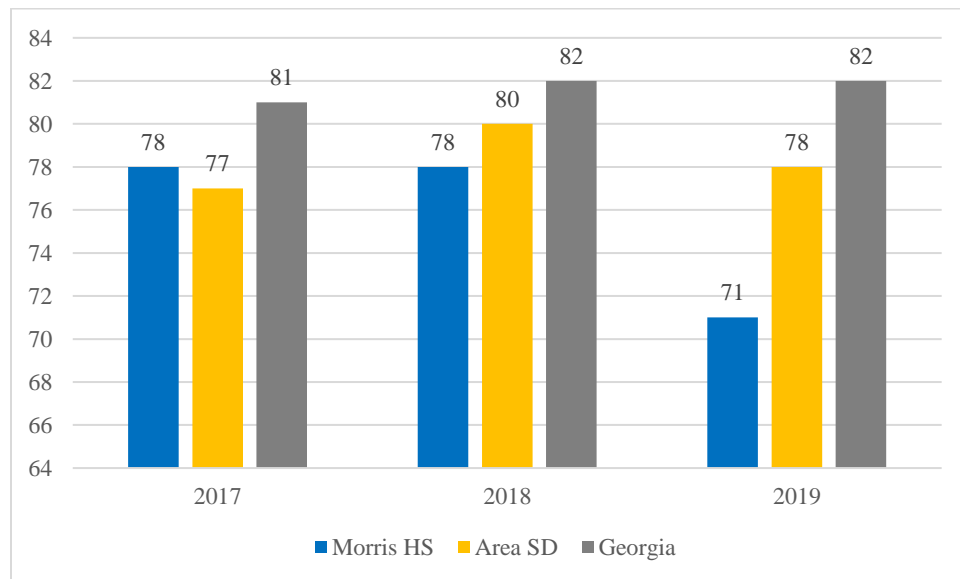
In 2018, about 25% of ninth grade students failed to earn six of eight Carnegie units required for promotion to 10th grade. Three years later leading into the senior year, 22% of the same cohort of students struggled to meet the requirements necessary to graduate high school in four years. Teachers at Morris High School lacked the skill and training necessary to address the social-emotional needs of students that are directly related to academic success. Failure to teach social-emotional skills to students has a direct impact on academic attainment, graduation rate, and the overall culture and climate of the school.

Students who are unproductive in 12th-grade exhibit poor high school attendance, failure in core classes, low grade-point-average, and grade retention, which mirror the conditions at Morris High School (Jimerson et al., 2002).

Course failures and grade retention showed an upward trend while the graduation rate continued to decrease. Data from the 2019 spring semester at Morris High School revealed that about 20% of 12th-graders failed at least one class core academic class and jeopardizing the likelihood of on-time graduation as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Four-Year Graduation Rate



Note. State Department of Education, 2020)

In addition to course failures and discipline matters, climate perception was also of immediate concern at Morris. Research shows that there is a strong correlation between climate rating and student discipline and school culture and behavior problems (Leaning Forward, 2018; Thapa et al., 2013). School climate is defined as the quality of school life based on experiences, norms, values, relationships, and instructional practices (Cohen et al., 2009). According to Thapa

et al. (2013), a positive school climate fosters the academic, disciplinary, and emotional needs of students through mutual respect, trust, and caring relationships. The quality of school life at Morris High School is of concern as evident by the school’s two-star climate rating. School climate is broken down into four domains: Climate Perception, Student Discipline, Safe and Substance-Free Learning, and Attendance (Georgia Department of Education, 2018). A closer analysis of the survey results for Morris High revealed that the school scored lower in every domain when compared to Area School District and the state as shown in Table 2 (Georgia Department of Education, 2018). Researchers maintain that an intentional focus on social-emotional learning using a research-based curriculum help to improve school climate by promoting an environment of learning (Cohen et al., 2009).

Table 2

Morris High School Climate Subscores

	Climate perception	Student discipline*	Safe and substance-free learning	Attendance
Morris High School	68.0	68.2	86.3	84.1
State	73.6	77.5	88.8	93.4

Note. * = higher scores = fewer disciplinary actions. Source: “Georgia Insights,” by Georgia State Department of Education, 2018. <http://www.georgiainsights.com>

Furthermore, data from the State Department of Education (2018) align the relationship between the School Climate Rating and the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). Schools with two-star climate rating score have an average of 62 on CCRPI. Morris High School’s score falls slightly below this mark at 56.7 (Georgia Department of Education, 2018).

For the past three years from 2017-2019, Morris High School achieved a below average rating of 60.3 on the CCRPI and the 3-year average was 1.1 points below the average of similar schools (Georgia Department of Education, 2018). In part, the score came as a result of performance in the content mastery indicator, which outlined performance on the End of Course Milestones and predicted readiness for the next level. At Morris, there was a social competency gap with fostering a supportive environment based on student needs. This action research study examined the impact of using proactive strategies to respond to and address the academic challenges of 12th-grade students.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to analyze and describe teacher perceptions of the impact of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors in an inner-city high school. The study focused on teaching strategies that support a culture of learning by explicitly teaching social-emotional learning competencies.

Research Questions

There were three focused research questions that guided this study:

1. How are teachers' attitudes about the academic success of 12th-grade students affected by the implementation of social-emotional learning strategies?
2. What are the outcomes of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors?
3. What does an action research team learn from implementing social-emotional learning strategies?

Theoretical Framework

The study was conducted using the Theory of Action framework. Established by Marx Weber and later refined by Talcott Parsons, this theory defines learning through a series of constructing, testing, and reconstructing of knowledge (Parsons, 1937). The work of Parsons is strongly aligned to the work of Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy (Munch, 1982). The critical philosophy of Kant, an ethical and social thinker, supports the interconnectedness of the external world to human experiences (Caird, 1968). Parsons expounds on this theory by suggesting an integrative approach when studying structures and organizations.

The Theory of Action provides details about the layout and implementation of a project using a series of logical steps to connect goals and objectives. The goals and objectives are linked to specific actions and measurable outcomes and according to Coffey (n.d.), it describes the program design in order to activate change.

The University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership further expounded on the theory and developed a theory of action tool specifically for the school setting. It is known as the School Theory of Action. The School Theory of Action toolkit poses three leading questions to affect change. The questions, which prioritize student outcomes, focused on leader actions, teacher actions, and student actions using a backwards design format:

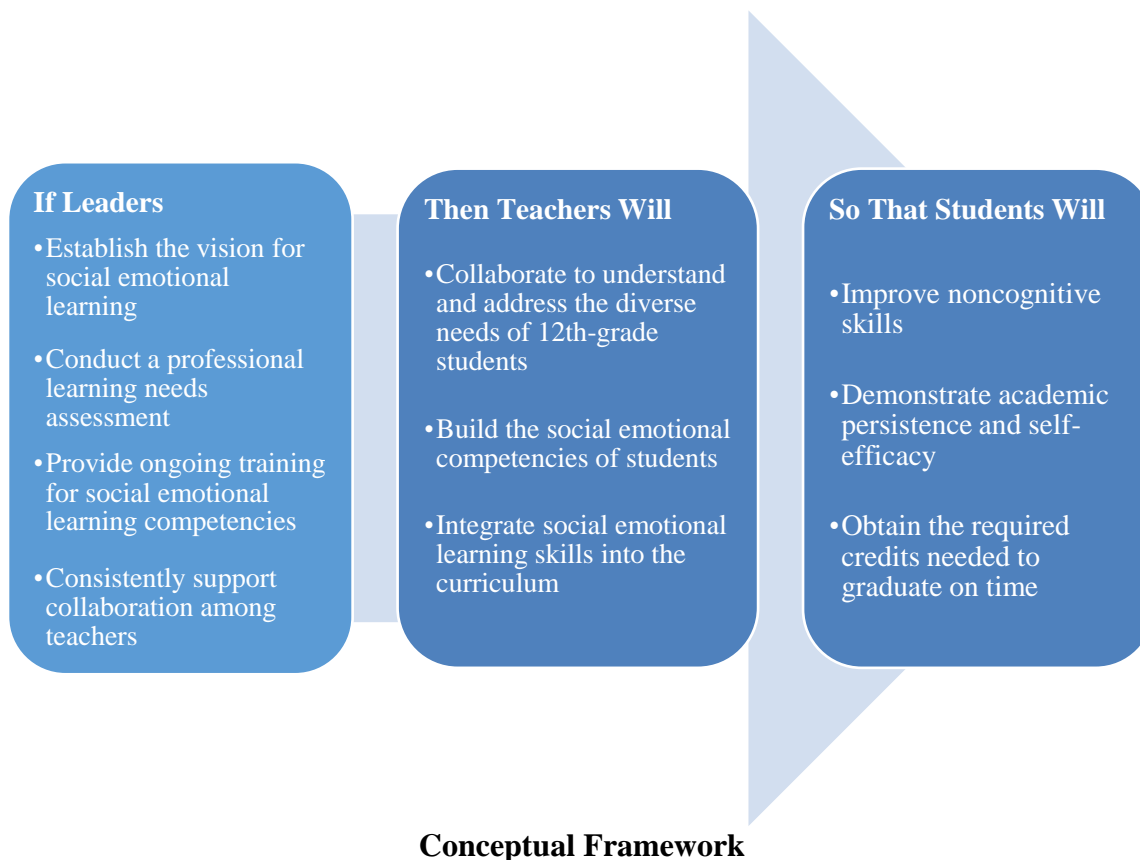
Question 3 (Leader) - What are principals doing (or not doing) as instructional leaders to help or hinder the teachers' instructional performance?

Question 2 (Teacher) - How is teachers' instruction affecting student learning?

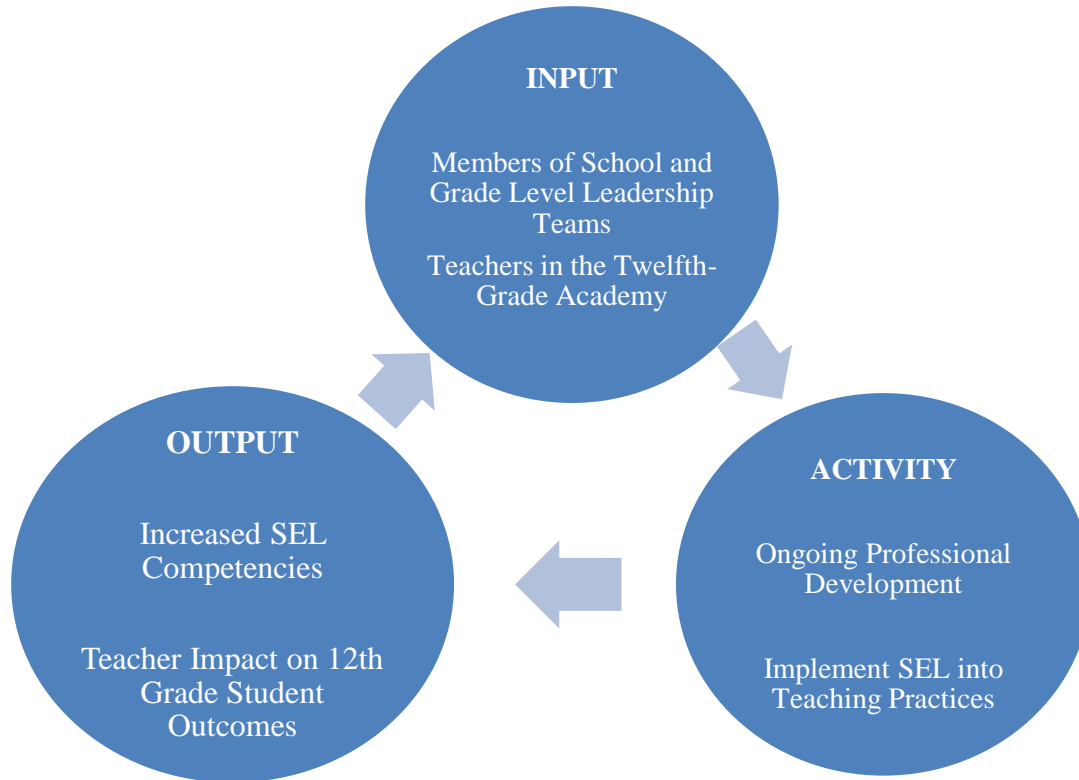
Question 1 (Student) - What aspects of student learning do we need to work on?

The Theory of Action framework is widely used in school districts to help all students learn at a higher level. Working through the answers to the leading questions provide context for

the problem and promotes accountability for all stakeholders. There are limited studies that use the Theory of Action framework for social-emotional learning research. The most common theoretical framework in this area is emotional competence. In those studies, implementing social-emotional learning demonstrated varying results including positive effects for enhancement of social competence skills, but limited results for academic achievement. A review of select studies by Jennings and Greenberg (2009), found a positive correlation between student-teacher relationships and fewer behavior problems. Another study by Cohen et al. (2009) revealed that a positive school climate influences youth development. However, the gap in the literature on social-emotional learning in high school provides the rationale to incorporate the Theory of Action framework as outlined in Figure 4.

Figure 4*Theoretical Framework*

Social-emotional learning began with the administrative team establishing a clear vision. The Action Research (AR) team provided training and support to 12th-grade teams during professional learning time. The team obtained feedback from teachers about successes and challenges of integrating SEL in the curriculum and the data were used to differentiate training opportunities to teachers. The team also conducted classroom visits to observe, assess, and provide feedback on implementation strategies. Teachers used the information to refine classroom practices to determine the impact of SEL strategies on the efficacy of 12th-grade students. Figure 5 shows an outline of the process.

Figure 5*Conceptual Framework***Overview of the Methodology**

The research team consisted of teachers, administrators, and support staff. The research design team developed interventions to guide the research study. It included the Curriculum Assistant Principal, Social-Emotional Learning facilitator, IB Coordinator, and the College and Career Advisor. The Action Research Team included teachers of 12th-grade students and the Social-Emotional Learning facilitator. For this study, the terms 12th-grade students and seniors are used interchangeably. The action research team implemented strategies to support social-emotional learning in the classroom.

Members of the design team developed a vision for the school-based social-emotional learning initiative. The team also developed the action plan and timeline for implementation, as

well as the monitoring and assessment tools needed for successful implementation. Participants of the action research team completed a social-emotional learning comprehensive needs assessment (CNA) which was used to design professional development and allocate appropriate resources. The participants received training from school-based SEL facilitator and the design team on the five competencies of social-emotional learning. The training was aligned to the responses on the CNA.

Participants implemented the strategies during the first quarter of the school year in August, September, and October. Classroom observations were conducted and participants discussed strategies and reflective practices during collaborative planning meetings. Teachers received training on effective ways to address the social-emotional needs of 12th grade students during class instruction. Teachers taught the strategies by introducing students to the tenets of social-emotional learning to prepare them to meet graduation requirements on time as required by the school and the district. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected using teacher interviews, focus groups, surveys, and 12th-grade academic data. Behavior data were not collected because of remote learning.

A review of academic data, retention rates, and academic attainment data were analyzed to determine progress towards on-time graduation. Teacher instructional practices were also examined using observations, lesson plans, and collaborative planning sessions to assess intentional planning to support students' nonacademic needs.

The action research team began by reviewing the purpose of the research study and developing norms for the meetings. The team also learned about the action research process and the cyclical nature of each research cycle. A review of the literature guided the conversation and led into a discussion about the research questions to guide the study. There were questions about

roles and responsibilities of each participant. The researcher provided an outline of the collaboration needed to support the work of setting goals and strategies for implementation.

Significance

Social-emotional learning is connected to academic attainment and achievement for students in high-poverty schools. By providing an intentional focus on acquisition of social-emotional learning strategies, teachers worked to strengthen the probability of student success. The findings of this study can guide schools and districts to teach social-emotional learning as the foundation skills necessary to engage with the curriculum and to acquire academic content.

The poverty area for the Brandon Morris attendance zone was of great interest. It revealed that students residing in the attendance zone were from varied socioeconomic backgrounds. In fact, the income levels were polar opposites, with students coming from both impoverished and affluent homes, sparking major implications of the effects on student achievement (PolicyMap, n.d.). As income is the scale often used to predict student achievement and educational outcomes, the question of how to predict the performance for schools with such conflicting poverty levels was a key area of concern.

The logical implication of low achievement of poor children relative to more prosperous peers is that average test scores are likely to be lower in schools, districts, or states with high proportions of poor children (Rothstein, 2017). However, the Morris High School area has not experienced persistent poverty as evident in the lack of intergenerational poverty during the past 20 years. In fact, the area is surrounded by single family homes with a median value of \$150,000. Within the last 10 years, however, adjoining neighborhoods were comprised of subsidized, low-rent apartments for low-income families; the area is mixed with wealth and poverty.

Research suggests that effective social-emotional learning can have positive effects on student achievement when implemented school-wide. Not only can the interventions improve performance, but it can also impact teacher-student relationships and strengthen the students' academic and behavioral experiences (Blount 2012). Ladson-Billings (2006) believes for this to happen, educators must engage in teaching practices that systematically address social and cultural differences using the curriculum to promote self-awareness and to increase academic achievement for all learners.

An important part of a positive school climate includes making sure that students feel safe and supported in school. Students who feel safe in school are more apt to learn and exhibit high standardized test scores (Davis & Warner, 2018; Kwong & Davis, 2015). Schools must consider ways to promote a positive learning environment and to address the social-emotional needs of students. According to Warner and Heindel (2017), schools with an intentional focus on teaching social and emotional skills alongside traditional academics experience fewer discipline problems and higher student achievement. Warner and Heindel further avow that the greatest predictors of student success in school and beyond include feelings of connectedness, hope for the future, and a healthy sense of well-being. These three components outweigh SAT scores or high school grade point averages. The presence of a supportive environment impact student success and “students who feel supported and encouraged to excel by their peers, teachers, and parents are more likely to enjoy school and succeed academically” (Kwong & Davis, 2015, p. 10).

Teacher perceptions and their belief in students play a significant role in building a supportive climate (Davis & Warner, 2018). Leaders who invest in teachers have teachers who, in turn, invest in students (McCarley et al., 2016). This level of engagement between leaders and

teachers encourages all stakeholders to take collective responsibility for student learning. As school leaders develop teachers and manage the instruction program, they understand the effect of teacher perceptions and beliefs on the school climate in high-needs schools. Since the mid-1980s, research support the claim that teachers in high performing schools take ownership of student learning. In these schools, teachers view student failures as an opportunity to revisit teaching practices (Dembo & Gibson, 1985). It is rare for the blame to be placed on students, parent input, or lack of resources. Rather, they take responsibility for learning by viewing student failure as an opportunity to refine teaching practices.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study of this dissertation and presents the research questions, statement of the problem, and the methods used in the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature relevant to the context of the study and discusses social-emotional learning strategies, curriculum integration, and the impact of school climate on student outcomes. The methodology for action research and how the study was conducted are described in chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents a description of the participants and describes the case study in context. Chapter 5 details the findings of the case study and reveals a thematic analysis related to the research questions and literature reviewed. Finally, chapter 6 provides a summary of the major findings and discusses the implications for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to analyze and describe teacher perceptions of the impact of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors in an inner-city high school. The study focused on teaching strategies that support a culture of learning by explicitly teaching social-emotional learning competencies.

Research Questions

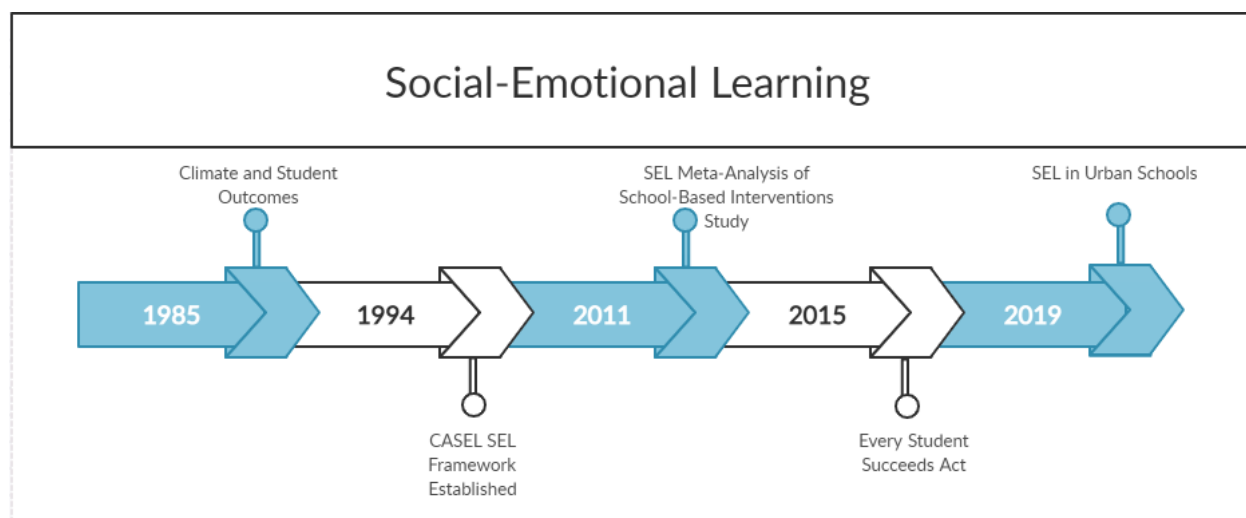
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The literature on social-emotional learning stresses the importance of a caring community to meet the needs of all students. Research findings suggest that the most effective approach to help students succeed is to “surround them with high expectations and positive reinforcement coupled with a continual set of learning success” (Barr, 2013, p. 86). Barr (2013) combines the concepts of social-emotional learning and academic support with a positive school climate by contending that all students can and will learn if given the opportunity, resources, and encouragement to do so. Hence, students must acquire the skills necessary to manage emotions,

set and achieve positive goals, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2017). The concept, known as social-emotional learning helps students build healthy, positive relationships with adults and with other students. These social risk factors, which include family income and structure, are aligned to future success and therefore become critical for students in school (McKee & Caldarella, 2018). Students with multiple social risk factors are more susceptible to academic risks and as risk factors accumulate, students experience greater difficulties in academic performance.

Studies reveal that school climate has a great influence on academic outcomes, especially in high-poverty schools (Hopson & Lee, 2011). Schools where students feel safe, encouraged, and championed are found to have students with higher academic performance in class and on standardized tests (Kwong & Davis, 2015). These students also feel more connected to school (Cohen et al., 2009; Davis & Warner, 2018)). For this reason, Warner and Heindel (2017) maintain that school climate serves as the biggest predictor of student success, not scores on the SAT exam or grades achieved in school, as some people believe. However, schools must be intentional about implementing social supports for students and district leaders should introduce policies that support the whole child. The federal government made great strides in this area through the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, which helped states gain flexibility in improving student achievement and social competencies (Saultz et al., 2017).

Figure 6.*Major Areas in the Literature Review***Social-Emotional Instructional Strategies**

Social-emotional learning (SEL) strategies are designed to provide students with the skills and knowledge to improve self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-image and beliefs for self, school, and others (Eklund et al., 2018). As part of a larger unit of student success, the skills help foster positive outcomes in academic and nonacademic areas that help students reach their maximum potential (Jones & Kahn, 2017; Zins et al., 2004). Instruction for SEL must be intentional and targeted to meet the needs of students and studies show that acquiring social and emotional skills tend to be beneficial for students (Eklund et al., 2018). Moreover, social-emotional learning instructional practices must be integrated throughout the school day rather than confined to a class or period in order to have a significant effect on achievement.

Conversely, teaching SEL skills in isolation has minimal impact on shaping behavior and creating academic and social success (Zins et al., 2004). Jones and Bouffard (2012) emphasized a framework of SEL skills to include emotional processes, social and interpersonal skills, and cognitive regulation and the structure aligns with the SEL framework by CASEL, a leading organization in the work of social-emotional learning. CASEL defined five components of SEL as follows:

1. Self-awareness - to understand the way in which positive and negative thoughts influence behavior
2. Self-management - to exhibit self-control through adverse situations and to set and achieve goals
3. Social awareness - to show empathy towards others
4. Relationship skills - to maintain healthy, supportive relationships with others
5. Responsible decision-making - to make choices that positively impact self and others.

(Durlak et al., 2015, p. 6)

Quality Instruction

Educators advocate for key instructional strategies that have a high probability of achievement for all students and research shows that social-emotional learning strategies are grounded in elements of high-quality instruction and are linked to positive student outcomes (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Components of high-quality instruction as asserted by Early et al. (2014), include student engagement, curriculum alignment, and academic rigor. Student engagement consists of academic, behavioral, and cognitive functioning that support student learning. Elias et al. (2017) state that SEL strategies are defined as “high-quality strategies that lead to measurable and significant improvements in students’ skills and behaviors and that they

provide a sustainable framework for instruction and support services” (p. 65). The Institute for Research and Reform in Education conducted a study of more than 1000 students across four high schools using the Engagement, Rigor, and Alignment (EAR) quality instruction protocol. (Early et al., 2014) During classroom observations, the instructional protocol was used to predict student test scores on standardized assessments in math and language arts (Early et al., 2014). The results denoted a strong correlation between the instructional rigor in math and language arts classes and achievement on standardized tests, respectively. Active classroom engagement, curriculum alignment, and academic rigor are indicators of quality of instruction and are directly linked to positive student outcomes.

With an increased focus on academic achievement, the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) requires that state and local schools promote high-quality instruction for all students regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or ability (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). ESSA gives autonomy to the state education agency with the hopes of reducing the federal footprints while empowering states to reward and focus on innovative approaches to learning (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In Georgia, ESSA places a strong emphasis on social-emotional learning in order to promote teaching and learning and to provide support for “students most at risk of school failure” (Georgia Department of Education, 2018).

Personalization

According to research by Roybal et al. (2014), creating a sense of belonging and personalization within the school and community may help students feel connected to school. Rutledge and Cannata (2015) report that students derive a sense of belonging within school cultures that have strong behavior management systems that make them feel safe and respected.

Effective SEL school-based programs increase the sense of belonging using personalized student support systems. Students receive student advocates who provide supplemental services to assist with self-sufficiency and academic success (Zeller et al., 2013). School-based programs also bolster student confidence and academic performance by addressing the academic and social concerns of the student. While schools are very intentional about addressing the academic concerns of students, social and emotional trepidations are sometimes overlooked or ignored altogether (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). As Zins et al. (2004) affirm:

Intrinsically, schools are social places and learning is a social process. Students do not learn alone but rather in collaboration with their teachers, in the company of their peers, and with the support of their families. Emotions can facilitate or hamper their learning and their ultimate success in school. (p. 3)

An effective personalization system, as defined by Cauley and Jovanovich (2006), is multifaceted and designed to improve student attendance, academic achievement, and student retention. In addition, they also include other support systems to foster engagement. Engaging personalized support systems in school matters yield higher grades, better attendance, and improved student behavior (Burnette & Mitchell, 2018).

Seminal research performed by Sinclair et al. (1998) used the Check & Connect intervention to re-engage at risk students in the school setting. The participants included over 90 ninth grade African American males with learning and behavioral challenges. The study was designed to offer a personalized approach to school performance, but the results indicated that there were no discernable effects for students to complete school. However, the results did show positive effects for students progressing and staying in school. Similarly, the Reconnecting Youth study attempted to reengage 110 middle and high school students in school by analyzing

the relationship between social-emotional support and academic achievement. This study also failed to forecast achievement nor did it increase emotional competence for participating students.

The findings from these two studies suggest the use of a different setting to teach emotional competence in order to impact school completion and improve student achievement. Two ways are via individualized sessions or integration across the schoolwide curriculum (Dougherty & Sharkey, 2017; Sinclair & Christenson, 1998).

Curriculum Integration

Social-emotional learning is not separate from the traditional curriculum. Jones and Bouffard (2012) highlight that the strategies can be integrated into the school day and in all facets of student and teacher interactions. Although this is the recommendation, Dougherty and Sharkey (2017) further document that this is rarely the case. Social-emotional learning strategies are often taught as a separate curriculum and given the intense focus of academic demands, educators are forced to make priority decisions that they believe impact student outcomes (Durlak, 2015; Lane, 2012). Hence, integration for SEL becomes fragmented and unsubstantiated (Lane, 2012). There are four key principles of social-emotional learning that promote curriculum integration. They are:

1. Continuity and consistency are essential for SEL skill development
2. Social, emotional, and academic skills are interdependent
3. SEL skills develop in social contexts
4. Classrooms and schools operate as systems (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Nonetheless, Lane (2012) believes that more research must be conducted to strengthen the claim for SEL school-wide implementation. The use of a multi-system SEL approach, similar to the

tiered approach for Response to Intervention, to address diverse student needs as well as a well-defined focus on the SEL students need to learn is highly recommended (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Lane, 2012).

Climate and Student Outcomes

There is a correlation between school climate and students' academic success in high-needs schools. High-needs schools are defined as schools that receive federal Title I funding. Studies reveal that school climate has a great influence on academic outcomes, especially in high-poverty schools (Hopson & Lee, 2011). Schools where students feel safe, encouraged, and championed are found to have students with higher academic performance in class and on standardized tests (Kwong & Davis, 2015). Community engagement, learning environments, and decision-making processes are important components in school and help shape the overall school climate in high-needs schools.

The impact of school climate was first studied by Arthur Perry in 1908 (Cohen et al., 2014). Perry analyzed the concerns of city school principals and the effects on student outcomes. Later in the mid-1980s, more formal research surrounding school climate and achievement emerged (Kwong & Davis, 2015). There are many factors that make up school climate including relationships, learning environment, safety, and teaching and learning (Davis & Warner, 2018). Inasmuch, school climate is defined as the quality of school life that affects the behavior and experiences for students and teachers.

Research by Davis and Warner (2018) finds that when students feel encouraged to learn, their academic achievement will increase. This encouragement forms the basis of authentic relationships between students and teachers and helps shape students' perceptions of school

climate (Auerbach, 2010). As stated by Davis and Warner, positive climates are characterized by supportive relationships, such that students and school personnel feel cared for as individuals. Research shows that when students feel cared for and have a sense of belonging with the school and community, student achievement increases (Roybal et al., 2014). Juvonen (2006) further reports that the quality of school affects personalization and the students' sense of belonging.

Climate and School Leadership

Principals are responsible for setting the tone of the school and the expectations for teaching and learning (MacNeil et al., 2009). Leadership in this area is important as it affects student achievement and staff morale. According to Shindler et al., (2016), school climate is the biggest predictor of student achievement. However, sometimes climate becomes secondary to more pressing needs of the school. The research shows that there is a small number of schools with a strategic focus on improving school climate and many fail to understand the impact of culture and achievement. In fact, many view climate as a separate part of schooling and not intertwined with instructional practices, achievement goals, and teacher development. For this reason, it is not viewed as a component to impact change.

Contrary to this belief, research by Sheras and Bradshaw (2016) identify practices that directly impact school climate in high-needs schools. They advocate for research-based practices that impact discipline, structure, and teacher behavior. Aligned with this belief, Klar and Brewer (2013) affirm that leaders who adopt leadership practices that set clear directions, develop teachers, manage and lead instruction, and redesign organizational practices produce a supportive school culture for all stakeholders. In essence, school leaders provide the conditions for learning to occur in a safe, secure, and accepting environment (Harris & Lowery, 2002).

Warner and Heindel (2017) further avow that the greatest predictors of student success in school and beyond include feelings of connectedness, hope for the future, and a healthy sense of well-being. These three components outweigh SAT scores or high school grade point averages. “Students who feel supported and encouraged to excel by their peers, teachers, and parents are more likely to enjoy school and succeed academically” (Kwong & Davis, 2015 p. 10).

Teacher perceptions and their belief in students play a significant role in building a supportive climate (Davis & Warner, 2018). Leaders who invest in teachers have teachers who, in turn, invest in students (McCarley et al., 2016). This level of engagement between leaders and teachers encourages all stakeholders to take collective responsibility for student learning. As school leaders develop teachers and manage the instruction program, they understand the effect of teacher perceptions and beliefs on the school climate in high-needs schools. School leaders must also support SEL implementation in order for it to be effective in schools. Since the mid-1980s, research supports the claim that teachers in high-performing schools take ownership of student learning. In these schools, teachers view student failures as an opportunity to revisit teaching practices (Dembo & Gibson, 1985). It is rare for the blame to be placed on students, parent input, or lack of resources. Rather, they take responsibility for learning by viewing student failure as an opportunity to refine teaching practices.

Climate and Community Engagement

Effective school leaders build strong relationships with families and communities (Epstein et al., 2009). Community and family engagement promote a positive climate and serves as a key component in successful schools (Auerbach, 2010). Engagement is designed to foster positive interactions between families and communities in order to improve home-school relationships and the overall school climate. Schools that are intentional about school climate

work in conjunction with district, school, and community leaders to review comprehensive data, analyze processes, establish goals, refine practices, and develop the best possible plan to achieve the intended outcomes (James et al., 2018). Engaging the community in this manner strengthens the home-school relationship and it embraces the idea of parents as committed partners as defined in the Collaborating with Community framework by Epstein et al. (2009).

As noted by Aucherbach (2010), there is a positive correlation between family and community engagement and student achievement. Furthermore, the National Education Association (2014) establishes that communities with supportive schools and families experience a higher level of student achievement, regular attendance, and enrollment in advanced classes. When this connection is absent from schools, educators work to fill the gaps alone, often without success or by experiencing extreme burnout.

Research indicates that there is a direct connection between school climate and achievement when measured by the School Climate Assessment Instrument. As school climate scores increase, achievement increases (James et al., 2018). Conversely, student achievement is stagnant or nonexistent in schools where climate scores are low (Schlinder et al, 2016). The research of Ladd (2012) found that student achievement scores are likely to be lower in schools with a high concentration of students in poverty. Schools can work to improve achievement by setting high expectations for all learners and by collaborating with families and communities to place climate at the center of academic and nonacademic learning experiences. A positive school climate fosters the academic, disciplinary, and emotional needs of students through mutual respect, trust, and caring relationships. To this end, the National School Climate Center (2016) outlined four key practices that support the development of a positive school climate which include: the promotion of a shared vision, policies and practices that promote the development of

students, an environment where all stakeholders feel welcome, safe, and a sense of social responsibility. These four practices act as critical components of a healthy school environment needed to propel student achievement.

Using social-emotional learning as a vehicle to promote a positive school culture, increases the probability of student success and keeps the students connected to school (Paolini, 2019). To this end, teachers, counselors, and administrators must integrate social-emotional learning into the curriculum and provide a supportive environment for teachers and students. A positive school environment fosters the academic, disciplinary, and emotional needs of students through mutual respect, trust, and caring relationships. To this end, the National School Climate Center (2016) outlined four key practices that support the development of a positive school climate which include the promotion of a shared vision, policies and practices that promote the development of students, an environment where all stakeholders feel welcome, safe, and socially responsible. These four practices act as critical components of a healthy school environment needed to propel student achievement.

Teacher Practices

Many SEL interventions are conducted in inner-city schools as a way to repair the social ills of the students (McCallops et al., 2019). SEL is not a new idea, its roots are grounded in the works of character education, service-learning, citizenship and emotional intelligence (Elias & Arnold, 2006). Though teachers realize the importance of social-emotional learning skills, few believe that they have the time or pedagogical skills required to provide sufficient instruction in the classroom as the trainings are sporadic or nonexistent (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; McCallops et al, 2019).

Effective SEL teacher practices include eight essential elements:

1. Link SEL to school services
2. Use goal setting to focus daily instruction
3. Incorporate differentiated instruction in the classroom
4. Promote community service to show care for others
5. Involve parents and the community
6. Build SEL gradually and systematically
7. Prepare and support staff well
8. Evaluate what you do

By using the eight elements, teachers will help students become academically, socially, and emotionally responsible for learning in school, home, and noneducational settings. Teachers will also gain the skills needed to manage stress and handle the social-emotional demands of teaching to maintain a healthy well-being and positive relationships with students (Elias & Arnold, 2006). Jones et al. (2019) affirm that teachers who model and apply these skills in their own lives model are more equipped to promote SEL in the classroom.

Leader Practices

To support the intentionality of social-emotional learning in the classroom, Osher (2012) explains the importance of teachers receiving ongoing assistance and support. He states that support involves “providing teachers with the resources and time to collaborate and learn to learn and unlearn together” (p. 24) and he aligns his explanation with high-functioning professional learning communities. Professional learning communities exist to support a collaborative culture focused on student outcomes (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016). In order for this to happen, “school leaders must focus on increasing teachers’ collaborative professional learning and self-reflection to improve classroom instruction for enhanced student gains” (Pirtle & Tobia, 2014).

The support provided in the PLC allows teachers to collaborate and share ideas and barriers to effective implementation. Guskey (2014) affirms that “the effectiveness of any professional learning activity, regardless of its content, structure, or format, depends mainly on how well it is planned.” Rather than merely exposing teachers to a new concept, professional development must be both intentional and purposeful. One method for providing support, as outlined by Durlak et al. (2011), includes the SAFE approach, or learning that is sequential, active, focused, and explicit. Other methods, which are not as precise, cite the skills needed for effective implementation, namely skills that “enhance personal development, social relationships, ethical behavior, and effective, productive work” (Taylor et al., 2017). The absence of a consistent, systemized approach to SEL also leads to the lack of a systemized way to measure and assess outcomes (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Post-Secondary Readiness

The enhancement of personal development skills can be obtained through post-secondary readiness. National initiatives to increase opportunities for underrepresented students are critical to populations with limited knowledge about college awareness or navigating the college-going process. Supports are provided to increase access, persistence, and success in college. The economic return on a college investment provides students with an enhanced quality of life. Research by Brand and Xie (2010) assert that students who are least likely to attend college benefit the most from a college education. Despite this fact, many minority students and students with social risk factors fail to attend or apply to college due to limited access to resources at home. Oftentimes, these students have high-needs and are assigned to counselors with high student ratios approximately 400:1 limited opportunity for personalization. Furthermore, school cultures and family background impact how students process, make sense of, and navigate

through college applications and financial aid (De La Rosa, 2006). Students living in these families are less likely to attend college or have access to educational opportunities that enhance the quality of life. The policy map for the surrounding attendance zone of Morris High School shows that more than 35% of school-age people live in poverty and similarly, about only about 30% of the residents have earned a college degree.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Teacher surveys, focus groups, classroom observations, teacher interviews, and academic data were used to collect data for this study. The action research team consisted of teachers, support staff, and administrators who provided instruction, support, or counsel to 12th-grade students. This action research study used the Theory of Action framework to analyze and describe teacher perceptions of the impact of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors in an inner-city high school. The study focused on teaching strategies that support a culture of learning by explicitly teaching social-emotional learning competencies. inform the implementation of social-emotional learning strategies in the classroom. There were three research questions for this study:

1. How are teachers' attitudes about the academic success of 12th-grade students affected by the implementation of social-emotional learning strategies?
2. What are the outcomes of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors?
3. What does an action research team learn from implementing social-emotional learning strategies?

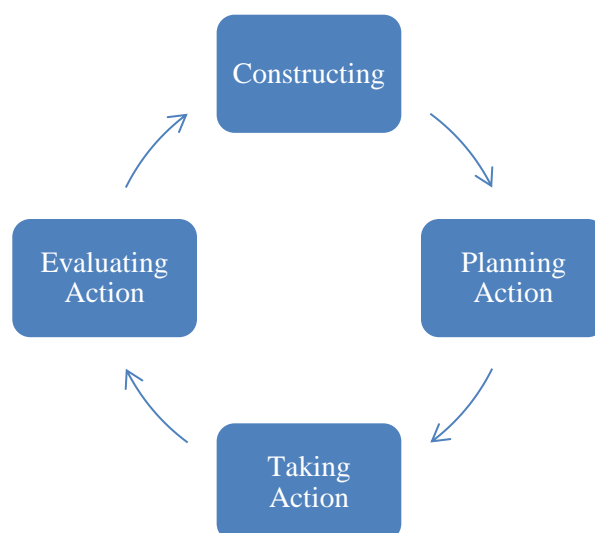
Action Research

Action research design refers to the process of evaluating, investigating, and analyzing areas of improvement within an organization to develop practical solutions to address them. Action research engages the participants in systematic inquiry in one's own practice using

collaboration and iteration (Creswell, 2014). Unlike traditional experimental research where the researcher traces causation to make generalizations beyond the research situation, action research is more specialized and uses an open ended, reflective approach with practical solutions in a natural setting and it does not involve the manipulation or control of variables (Mills, 2011). Action research, as stated by Stringer (2014, p. 1), “is a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives.” It is performed by educators and for educators to generate knowledge about instructional practices and to improve overall effectiveness using an inquiry-based approach (Mills, 2011). Action research examines educational concerns and provides evidence-based solutions to address them. The graphic in Figure 7 depicts the action research cyclical process of constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Rowley, 2002).

Figure 7

Action Research Cycle



Note. Adapted from *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, D. Coghlan and T. Brannick, 2014. Copyright 2014 by SAGE Publications.

Action research was the preferred methodology to address teacher perceptions of social-emotional learning strategies at Brandon Morris High School as it helped participants generate knowledge and understanding through a series of self-reflective cycles. The research participants performed the same task under the same conditions by planning, acting, developing, and reflecting as illustrated in Figure 7. Each iteration of the cyclical process included steps to implement changes required for improvement. Mertler (2012) explains that the planning stage focuses on the research design to include data collection from multiple sources. Next the researcher develops the study and it ends in the reflecting stage which offers participants an opportunity to explore action steps and make adjustments to improve outcomes. Action research, in its design, is collaborative, participatory, and nonlinear from beginning to end. This study involved a combination of novice and veteran teachers who implemented strategies to improve social-emotional learning practices in classroom instruction to influence the academic outcomes of high school seniors.

Case Study

This action research case study analyzed teacher implementation of social-emotional learning strategies at Brandon Morris High School to gain a deeper knowledge about instructional practices. According to Simons (2009), “case study research explores the particularity, the uniqueness, of the single case” (p. 4). It is grounded in inquiry-based methodologies and should not to be misconstrued as an experiment or survey, but rather, it is defined as a small-scaled, holistic research strategy designed to reveal the complexities of a single case in a real-life environment (Tight, 2017). Case studies are widely used and adaptable in qualitative research and by definition, must be particular, bounded, complex, and studied in context. Answering the inquiry-based questions that begin with how, who, and why, case study

research is experimental based on knowledge, experience, data collection, and analysis (Rowley, 2002).

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) further explain that a bounded case study analyzes a single unit within a time and space and the researcher clearly outlines the goals and focal points of the research. The underpinnings of a bounded case study explore how the case is bound and what is being analyzed. A bounded case study clearly delineates the objectives of the research, the focus, and the extent of the research findings.

Action Research Design Team

There were four members on the research design which included administrators, support staff, and a teacher. The team was comprised of the Curriculum Assistant Principal, International Baccalaureate Coordinator, College and Career Advisor, and one teacher who also served as the Social-emotional Learning Facilitator. The research design team developed interventions to guide the research study. The advisor supported the implementation by collaborating with teachers about student post-secondary plans.

Action Research Implementation Team

The Action Research Team included seven teachers of 12th-grade students. One of the seven teachers also served as the Social-Emotional Learning facilitator. The seven teachers consisted of two social studies teachers, one language arts teacher, two Spanish teachers, one French teacher, and one career technology teacher/social-emotional learning facilitator. The action research team implemented SEL strategies during class instruction to support social-emotional learning in the classroom.

Research Timeline and Intervention

Data collection included interviews, surveys, and observations. The researcher interviewed the school-based social-emotional learning facilitator and all teachers on the action research team. The researcher also used a CASEL survey instrument to survey the teachers. Classroom and collaborative planning sessions were observed during each phase of the research cycle. The action research began in August 2020 and ended in January 2021.

Implementation of Social-emotional Learning Strategies

The design team developed social-emotional learning strategies for implementation in the classroom. The strategies were aligned to feedback from research participants and were designed to improve instructional practices on SEL competencies and to develop the students' SEL competencies. The research team analyzed the reasons for social-emotional skill deficits to frame the instructional strategies and found that some deficits were due to lack of exposure or knowledge while other deficits were primarily due to motivation. The intervention strategies were targeted to address both deficits.

Continuous Improvement Data Sessions

The design team participated in a continuous review and analysis of data trends, grading practices and real time student performance data to facilitate discussions among the team and to provide targeted support to teachers. Targeted support utilized classroom observations, coaching feedback, and student data as mechanisms to inform instructional practices. Bi-monthly data discussions promoted accountability and self-reflections to determine the impact of the interventions on teaching practices and student outcomes. The design team adjusted supports to teachers as students moved toward mastery.

Grade Level Professional Learning Community

The research team functioned as a grade level professional learning community. A member of the design team developed the meeting agenda for the professional learning community. The implementation team used the time to collaborate about the use of social-emotional learning strategies and student responses to the intervention strategies. Teachers modeled and shared instructional practices to increase comfortability with teaching SEL skills in the classroom. Based on the feedback from teacher, the design team developed and facilitated the professional development sessions. One session was led by the school's Emotional Learning Coordinator. The implementation team gained strategies and resources to implement in the classroom and build a supportive classroom environment for student academic success and attainment. A summary of the process and the interventions and team activities is shared in Table 3.

Table 3*Action Research Team Interventions*

Intervention	Action research team activities	Outcomes/connection to problem, theoretical framework	Timeline	Data collected to evaluate the intervention
Implementation of social-emotional learning strategies	The design team developed social-emotional learning strategies for implementation in the classroom.	Teachers improved instructional strategies on SEL competencies. Teachers promoted SEL and developed students' SEL competencies.	Cycle 1: August 24 through September 30, 2020. Cycle 2: October 2 through November 6, 2020. Cycle 3: November 9 through January 5, 2021	Teacher feedback

Intervention	Action research team activities	Outcomes/connection to problem, theoretical framework	Timeline	Data collected to evaluate the intervention
Continuous improvement data sessions	The design team conducted data analysis of student grades and teacher grade distributions to facilitate discussions about grading practices, instructional strategies, and student outcomes to provide targeted support to teachers.	Targeted support to teachers influenced teaching and grading practices. Teachers gained an understanding of how teaching and grading practices student outcomes.	Cycle 2: September 28 through November 6, 2020 Cycle 3: November 9 through January 5, 2021	Classroom observations Student progress and transcript grades Teacher grade distribution
Grade level professional learning community	The design team developed the meeting agendas and facilitated professional development sessions. The implementation team collaborated about the use of social-emotional learning strategies and student responses to the intervention strategies. .	Teachers modeled and shared instructional practices to increase comfortability with teaching SEL skills in the classroom. Participants obtained a greater understanding of how to implement social-emotional learning strategies into the classroom and build a supportive classroom environment.	Cycle 1: August 24 through September 30, 2020. Cycle 2: October 2 through November 6, 2020. Cycle 3: November 9 through January 5, 2021	Survey data - Teacher feedback on SEL lesson implementation Student progress and transcript grades

Research Design

The researcher met with the Action Research Design Team to discuss and analyze the instructional needs of teachers and the nonacademic needs of students needed to promote on-time graduation for all seniors. We assessed how student and teacher needs may or may not have changed before and during the global pandemic. The team determined the needs of the school and the next steps to implement professional development based on the results of the Pre-Social-emotional Learning Survey.

All members of the action design team were involved in this process. The team met to discuss implementation of social-emotional learning into the classroom curriculum. It was led by the SEL facilitator, the College Advisor, and the Curriculum Assistant Principal. The researcher provided the structure to support instructional planning and collaboration during the school day as the designer of the master schedule. The researcher also assisted the advisor with identifying students in need of targeted support to meet graduation requirements.

The Social-emotional Learning Facilitator provided the framework for teachers to use as they implemented SEL strategies into the classroom. The facilitator also led professional development for teachers, provided resources for teachers to use in the classroom, and modeled effective SEL strategies as part of the intervention plan. The research team completed a pre-SEL survey and an individual interview to determine their knowledge about social-emotional learning competencies.

The researcher examined survey data and transcribed interviews to gain a deeper understanding of teacher knowledge and beliefs about SEL strategies in the classroom. The researcher also examined classroom and collaborative planning practices during each iteration of

the research cycle and interviewed 1 Language Arts teacher, 2 Social Studies teachers, 3 World Language teachers, 1 Career Technology teacher, and 1 College Advisor.

Table 4

Research Plan

Research question	Data collected and reviewed	Analysis approach	Timeline
1. How are teachers' attitudes about the academic success of 12th-grade students affected by the implementation of social-emotional learning strategies?	Teacher survey data were collected to gain a deeper understanding of their knowledge and beliefs about social-emotional learning strategies in the classroom. An examination of classroom and collaborative planning practices were observed for implementation.	Interview and survey data were analyzed for teacher beliefs about social-emotional learning.	August 2020 – January 2021
2. What are the outcomes of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors?	First and second quarter senior grades provided quantitative data about the academic progress of students. College readiness data was also analyzed to determine student persistence beyond high school. Teacher perception data using short response surveys and teacher interviews were collected during each phase of the research cycle.	Student academic reports were analyzed using grade audit forms, current grades spreadsheet, and failing grades matrix report in district-defined tableau platform. A review of data trends were examined based and compared to the academic records of seniors in previous school year. The academic progress were reviewed in July, August, September, and October. Also, an analysis of teacher instructional strategies were analyzed using classroom observations and feedback was obtained using teacher interviews.	October 2020 – January 2021

Research question	Data collected and reviewed	Analysis approach	Timeline
3. What does an action research team learn from implementing social-emotional learning strategies in 12th-grade classes?	The participants' self-reflection feedback responses were used to record perception of social-emotional learning and student success. The team also completed individual interviews regarding their perception of the action research strategies. Collaborative planning notes agendas were analyzed after each team meeting. At the end of the third research cycle, the participants completed a post-SEL survey. The results were compared to the answers recorded in the pre-social-emotional learning survey.	Anecdotal notes of meeting minutes and agendas. Coding of feedback from design team.	August 2020 – January 2021

Contextual Setting

Since the start of the action research study in 2019, the world was impacted by a global pandemic, COVID-19, also known as the coronavirus. The pandemic caused schools to close its doors and transition to virtual learning. In my district, schools closed on March 13, 2020, for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. As the school transitioned to online learning, there was a decrease in student engagement. Student engagement was defined by the number of students logging online. At Morris High School, less than 50% of students logged into the learning platform. At the start of the 2020-2021 school year, the district reopened online in a virtual model with 100% of classes online. Teachers were given the option of working remotely from the classroom or working from home. About 90% of our teachers chose to work remotely from home and the other 10% decided to teach virtually from their classroom. During this time,

student engagement increased to 97% but at the same time, the percent of students experiencing academic success decreased.

The demands of virtual learning took its toll on education. Teachers expressed feelings of mental exhaustion and longed for the return to in person teaching and learning. At the same time, teachers voiced concerns about limited student engagement and connectedness. The virtual learning environment compounded academic issues in a school struggling to overcome the social ills of underrepresented students. Nearly 85% of students lacked the technology sufficient to handle the bandwidth of video calls and with distance learning sessions occurring through the first nine weeks of school, the district provided personal hotspots, Chromebooks, and school meals to students in need. According to the research by Ladson-Billings (2006), equity and excellence in education can only exist when all students possess the resources needed to be successful in school. In addition to the technology needs, social-emotional learning emerged as a necessity during this time.

Social risks including family income and structure are key indicators to student success and access to a quality education (McKee & Caldarella, 2018). Students with multiple social risk factors are more susceptible to academic risks and as risk factors accumulate, students experience greater difficulties in academic performance (Flenbaugh, 2017; McKee & Caldarella, 2018). COVID-19 uncovered economic disparities in poverty-stricken schools leading to concerns about equity and access and it further exacerbated students' social and emotional well-being.

Selection

This study requested participation from teachers at Brandon Morris High School in Area School District. The staff were invited to participate via email in August 2020. Ten subjects

voluntarily agreed to participate in the research from the initial email invitation. All teachers had at least 3 years of teaching experience and held a professional licensure in the state where the study took place. One participant worked as a College Advisor and held a bachelor's degree but did not hold a professional license. The participants were asked to sign an electronic consent form due to the pandemic and teleworking. The ten individuals who agreed to participate were given an opportunity to ask questions prior to the start of the study. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of all participants.

Data Collection Methods

Each research question utilized multiple data collection methods. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected using interviews, focus groups, surveys, and twelfth-grade academic data. Members of the action research team met every other week from August to December 2020. One meeting was held in January 2021. There were two distinct meetings throughout the study. One meeting was held with the design team and a separate meeting was held with the implementation team. The design team met to plan and reflect upon the data collected during the study. Mertler (2012) emphasizes the importance of the planning stage and data collection from multiple sources in action research to improve practices. The researcher recorded notes and transcribed the data collected to ensure proper data collection and analysis.

The study was conducted during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The physical school building was closed for the duration of the study. The researcher used Microsoft Teams for video-calling to conduct individual and focus group interviews. Teacher reflections and survey data were collected online using Google forms. Access to technology or having limited WIFI connections presented a challenge for some research participants. The absence of face-to-face

interactions between the researcher and the action research team and online data collection tools were limitations to the study.

Surveys

The researcher surveyed seven teachers using the Brackett et al., Social Emotional Beliefs survey. The survey was completed online using Google forms due to remote learning and used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strong Agree. Four questions obtained demographic information and the remaining 12 questions measured the teachers' attitudes about the importance of social-emotional learning in classroom practices. Nine of the questions measured teacher beliefs and comfortability with SEL instruction. An additional three questions focused on administrative support for SEL practices. The use of surveys is an objective form of data collection in that it allows the participants to provide individual responses at their own time and pace. Surveys also assist with gathering data used in qualitative research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Interviews

Three members of the implementation team and one member of the design team participated in interviews to capture descriptive responses based on staff perspective and experiences. The interviews allowed research participants to engage in conversations about the research experiences. Because the purpose of the study was to analyze teacher perceptions of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors, it was important for the participants to share individual experiences after implementing SEL strategies in the classroom. Individual interviews were essential to the process and ensured equity of voice which allowed the researcher to engage with the interviewer about personal, concrete experiences. All

research participants were invited to participate in an individual interview to give an account of their experience. Four participants agreed to the interview.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were used to address social-emotional learning from various perspectives in the same setting. Four members of the implementation team participated in a focus groups on Microsoft Teams. During focus groups, it was important to have equity of voice to ensure that all ideas were captured. The goal for focus group discussions was to encourage open, candid, and rich discussions to gain a deeper understanding of the topic while respecting the range of ideas, understanding differences, uncovering influences, and seeking emergence of new ideas (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Document Review

The design team reviewed school achievement data from 2017 to 2020 and interpreted trends at the beginning of the study. The data provided a way to gauge progress for the research study and gave insight about the school in relation to other schools in the district and state. Bloomberg & Volpe (2019) support the analysis of neutral data in qualitative research studies but encourages researchers to pay attention to the collection and analysis of documentary realities.

The design team also analyzed teacher grade distributions for all teachers in the study on a bi-weekly basis. Corresponding student grades were also analyzed from August 2020 to January 2021 to measure improvement and to compare the data to previous years.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was an ongoing, fluid, and cyclical process that happened throughout the data collection stage. The data were coded by hand, and a descriptive coding approach was

used to analyze the data. The data collected in each cycle were coded to create fourteen. From the categories, seven themes emerged. Table 5 is an example of the coding process performed.

Table 5

Example of Thematic Development from Interviews for Research Question One

Key Phrases from Interview Extract	Codes	Possible Themes	Naming of Themes
I like to do a reflection before jumping in the work. How are you doing? Where are you?	Connecting	Teacher-student relationships Supportive environment	Relationships Promote a Supportive Classroom Climate
I do SEL to get students to engage	Connecting Engagement	Teacher-student relationships	Relationships Promote a Supportive Classroom Climate
If students are not participating, use strategies to address needs. Find out where they are [mentally].	Student Support Strategies	Supportive environment	Relationships Promote a Supportive Classroom Climate
You have to give kids time to adjust even before doing any academic activity. You get more work out of them that way.	Time for SEL Connecting Increased student response	Teacher-student relationships	Explicit SEL Strategies Enhance Instruction
I use the lessons as a warmup class to get started sometimes or just to do a pulse check during class. Students respond more when I do that.	Time for SEL Resources Connecting Increased student response	Improve instruction	Explicit SEL Strategies Enhance Instruction
I used to lead the discussion, but then began using Round Robin when teaching the skills	Strategies Engagement	Direct SEL Skills	Explicit SEL Strategies Enhance Instruction

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to conduct the study in order to provide a more profound understanding of the research problem and to “capitalize on the relative strengths of both quantitative and qualitative data” (Creswell, 2014, p. 4; Mertler, 2012,

p. 26). A triangulation of the data converged both methods to ensure validity and trustworthiness (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Triangulation in case study research is important because it provides different viewpoints leading to a set of findings to contribute to new knowledge acquisition. It acts as a checks and balance of various data sources leading to a more accurate assessment of results. The analysis of the data was ongoing and fluid which occurred throughout the data collection stage. All data were coded by hand and a descriptive coding approach was used to analyze the data. There were 14 categories that emerged from the coding which led to the development of seven themes aligned to the research questions.

Reliability and Validity

The use of multiple data sources in this study increased the validity and reliability of the results. Validity in qualitative research refers to the integrity of the methods and the results generated and it is used to evaluate the quality of the research techniques (Creswell, 2014). If it is valid, it “clearly reflects the world being described” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019, p. 27).

The researcher used investigator triangulation by gathering information from surveys, interviews, focus groups, and document reviews to ensure reliability and validity. Triangulation of the data minimized biases and helped to ensure that the findings were a result of the research approach and not from the researcher. Multiple data sources were collected and analyzed allowing the emergence of themes to be formed. Survey and interview data gave participants an opportunity to provide in-depth feedback about the interventions. Furthermore, the researcher recorded notes throughout the study and used member checking to determine the accuracy of the findings.

Subjectivity Statement

Tight (2017) defines subjectivity as the way biases directly shape research. The researcher's subjectivity in this study stems from her childhood experiences. The researcher grew up in an impoverished area and graduated from high school with top honors. As the first in her family to attend college, the researcher received support from a team of teachers who provided the encouragement and motivation needed to push above current circumstances.

After earning a bachelor's degree, the researcher served one year in Teach for America then returned to teach at her alma mater. The researcher had a strong desire to serve students from the neighborhood where she grew up. As a teacher, the researcher used her story to teach both academic and nonacademic skills to get students to persevere through challenging situations. The researcher attributes her academic success to the social-emotional learning competencies obtained while in high school and these biases may influence the approach used to conduct to the research study.

CHAPTER 4

THE CASE

Story and Outcomes

The purpose of this study was to analyze and describe teacher perceptions of the impact of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors in an inner-city high school. The study focused on teaching strategies that support a culture of learning by explicitly teaching social-emotional learning competencies. There were three focused research questions that guided this study:

1. How are teachers' attitudes about the academic success of 12th-grade students affected by the implementation of social-emotional learning strategies?
2. What are the outcomes of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors?
3. What does an action research team learn from implementing social-emotional learning strategies?

Before beginning the research study near the end of the 2019 school year, the researcher met with the principal to discuss the research study. It was the principal's first year at Morris High School, and she was appointed principal during the second year of the researcher's doctoral program. It was important to discuss the research and its impact on the school given that the principal was hired as a turnaround principal to improve instruction, the graduation rate, and the academic performance of all students. Morris was a considered a failing school based on the three-year College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) average which fell below

60 points. Academically, the school held rank in the bottom 10% of Title I schools in the state which classified it as Promise School by the Office of School Improvement. Furthermore, the graduation rate was on a downward trend even though the school had the largest number and highest percentage of students at Point South, the nontraditional performance learning program, of all the schools in the district. Eleventh and 12th-grade students are recommended to attend Point South when they are severely off track for graduation.

By definition, severely off track is when the number of credits needed for graduation exceeds the total possible credits that a student can earn during the school year. The students attend the program to recoup credits needed to graduate high school in four years. Once students complete the required credits, they return to their home school to graduate with their class. It is important to note that Point South is a program, not a school. It does not earn money based on Full Time Equivalency (FTE). Instead, FTE funds are generated by the home school. Nonetheless, the program boasts a success rate of helping more than 50% of students to graduate on time. The gradual decline in the graduation rate correlated to the culture of a school with limited social-emotional support for students struggling to succeed and graduate on time.

At the start of the year, the researcher was one of only two administrators who remained at the school after the appointment of the new principal. As such, the researcher knew the history of the school and witnessed the decline from high performing to academically struggling within a six-year period.

My Role

The researcher served in a dual capacity as the Curriculum Assistant Principal and the 12th Grade Assistant Principal. The researcher was also the administrator for World Languages and the Career Technology and Agricultural Education departments. In the role of Curriculum

Assistant Principal, the researcher was directly responsible for the schoolwide master schedule, curriculum offerings, and state reporting for Full Time Equivalent (FTE) and Student Data Records. As the 12th Grade Assistant Principal, the researcher provided leadership to more than 200 students and 20 teachers and closely monitored curriculum and instruction ensuring that students were exposed to a rigorous education needed for college or career immediately upon graduation. The researcher also provided continuous support to teachers and staff through coaching, professional development, and classroom observations.

The principal approved the study and given the decline in the graduation rate and academic achievement, the researcher focused the study on 12th grade teachers and social-emotional support for high school seniors. After meeting with the principal, the researcher scheduled a meeting with senior teachers to discuss the research study.

Action Research Team Members

Shortly after meeting with the principal, the researcher began recruitment for the action research team. The process of forming the action research team was completely virtual as it occurred in the middle of a global pandemic. It was important to select teachers and support staff who would be fully vested in the process and willing to participate through completion. At the start of the 2020-21 school year, there was mix of new and returning teachers on staff. Many of the returning teachers were members of the 12th-grade team, which the researcher was asked to lead. It was important to recruit a blend of new and returning teachers on the action research team to have a representative sample of the staff at the school. Table 6 displays the content area and teaching experience for each member of the Action Research Team (ART). After discussing the research with several staff members, an email was sent to formally ask teachers to participate

in the study. Of the nineteen people asked to participate, ten people agreed to join in the research study.

The Action Research Design Team (DT) consisted of Baxter, the Behavior specialist, Shavon, the International Baccalaureate (IB) specialist, Lashaun, the College and Career Advisor, Oglethorpe, the Social-Emotional Learning Facilitator and teacher, and me, the Twelfth-Grade Assistant Principal. Each member of the DT was directly responsible for supporting seniors in the school in some capacity. The Action Research Implementation Team (IT) initially consisted of seven teachers and each teacher was a part of the Senior Academy. The Senior Academy consisted of teachers who primarily taught 12th-grade students. One teacher left the school in the middle of the year and another teacher was unable to complete the study due to illness, leaving five teachers on the action research implementation team. Each member of the implementation team taught 12th-grade students.

The action research design team membership was diverse. The social-emotional learning facilitator, who was also a teacher, participated on both the implementation and the design teams. She was the newest to teaching, with seven years of experience, and she was in her second year at the school. The IB specialist was an alumnus of the school and worked as a language arts teacher prior to his appointment as the IB specialist. The experience from Shavon provided guidance on the needs of the students from a personal perspective. Baxter was new to the school, but previously worked with elementary and high school students. His diverse background provided insight on meeting the needs of students and coaching them into leadership and accountability. His experiences helped the team to explore interventions through a student's lens. Finally, the Lashon's previous work with seniors from varied backgrounds gave a unique perspective on the needs of students in a struggling school. A summary of the action research

implementation team is provided in Table 6. A description of each member of the action research implementation is provided below to give background about their role in the school.

Brook Davis

Brook was a first-year teacher at Morris High School with 29 years of experience. Prior to the pandemic, she had experience teaching in the United States, Puerto Rico, and abroad both in person and online. She held a bachelor's degree in Spanish. She also served as a reader for the Advanced Placement Spanish exam and had strong command of the Spanish language and teaching strategies. As a veteran teacher who had taught in multiple school districts, Brook welcomed collaboration among the diverse group of teachers and the opportunity to integrate social-emotional learning practices into her classroom practices. Her initial interest in the school stemmed from the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. Brandon A. Morris High School was in the process of applying to become an IB school and Brook had experience teaching in this type of setting while teaching abroad.

Amid participating in the research study, Brook also pursued an online certification in social-emotional learning. She was always eager to share her experiences and practices with the team. The team welcomed the excitement from a new teacher at the school and they accepted the experiences that she brought from the online school.

Gordon Jones

Gordon was a 20-year teacher but was only in her third year at Morris. She held a bachelor's of arts degree in History and a master's and specialist degree in Social Studies. Gordon transferred to Brandon Morris High School from Lamont High School, a neighboring school in another district. The population of Lamont was similar to Morris, but the socioeconomic status was much higher. Lamont High had approximately 2000 students of which

96% were black and 44% were economically disadvantaged. The graduation rate of Lamont High School had exceeded 90% over the three years prior to the study, so Gordon was used to working in a high-performing school. Gordon had a personal connection to Brandon Morris High in that her family resided in the neighborhood and her children graduated from the school.

Irvin McIntyre

From the onset, Irvin was a very vocal member of the team. Having spent her entire career at Brandon Morris, she taught high school seniors for the majority of her twenty-three-year tenure. Her experience at Brandon Morris and her expertise with seniors proved to be beneficial to the PLC. Teaching was her second career choice whereas she worked for about 10 years in radio and spent time in marketing, advertising, and small business development. Her expertise in the industry led her to serve as the yearbook sponsor where she worked with students to learn and apply planning, creating, designing, and marketing strategies to produce a memorable yearbook for the student body. Irvin was very open and honest during the PLC and she expressed her discontent about the gradual decline of the graduation rate and student achievement. Having worked approach to the PLC was open and honest.

Oglethorpe Newman

Oglethorpe was a young educator and eager to learn. She had the least amount of teaching experience in the group and was serving in her second year at Morris. She also served as the social-emotional learning facilitator, FBLA sponsor, and the 12th-grade sponsor. In her short time at Morris, she demonstrated strong leadership qualities and she was favored by the students. She taught two college readiness classes and one career technology course. Her strong relationship with the seniors allowed her to be a voice for the senior class. Oglethorpe was, by far, one of the most flexible members of the research team and her passion for teaching students

exuded throughout the PLC. The team valued the connection that she had with the students and her willingness to try to new teaching strategies. Oglethorpe had plans to become a department chair for the Career Technical Education department in the future.

Venus Akens

Venus experienced complications due to the COVID-19 which impacted his ability to complete the study. He participated in cycles 1 and 2, but dropped out later in the study.

Knox Minter

Knox was a World Language teacher with 12 years of teaching experience working with various grade levels. He was in his second year at Morris from an affluent district in the north part of the metro area where the study site was located. Knox bonded with students through his love of music and coaching soccer.

Table 6

Profile of Action Research Implementation Team

Name*	Position	Additional certification	Years of experience
Brook	Teacher and Course Lead	Advanced Placement	29
Oglethorpe	Teacher and Senior Sponsor	Google Level 1	7
Knox	Teacher	Higher Education	12
Irvin	Teacher and Courses Lead	Gifted	23
Gordon	Teacher	None	21

Note. * = pseudonyms.

Action Research Cycles

Each iteration of the research cycle included data collection as part of the research strategy. The action research team participated in three complete research cycles from August 2020 until January 2021 using the four stages of research: constructing, planning action, taking

action, and evaluating action as defined by Coghlan and Brannick (2014). The cycles included Foundations and Implementation (August), Promoting Continuous Improvement (October 2020), and Strengthening Instructional Capacity (November 2020) led by members of the design team.

The initial meeting with the implementation team offered an opportunity to explain the definition of action research and to review graduation, retention, and attendance data for the past three years. Prior to the initial meeting with the implementation team, the design team met to analyze this same data to gain a better understanding of the research and their role in designing the interventions for the study. Morris High had the largest number of students at Point South and this trend occurred for at least two years. The teachers realized a problem existed, but they did not associate the problem with schoolwide instructional practices. There was a strong disconnect between adult beliefs about teaching practices that impact student success which led to this focused research topic.

The constructing stage of the research encompassed data collection from different sources. Data collection began after written consent was signed and collected by the research team. Each participant completed a beliefs survey to determine their viewpoints about social-emotional learning in the classroom. The results of the survey provided the opportunity to apply the theory of action framework to set the expectations, provide a solid foundation, and establish the vision for social-emotional learning practices at the onset of the study.

Action Research Cycle 1: Establishing the Foundation and SEL Implementation

Cycle 1 of the research study occurred from August 24 – September 30, 2020. The first meeting with the action research team was held on September 8, 2020. Prior to the meeting, the participants completed the pre-SEL Beliefs The researcher met with the team to explain the definition of action research, introduced the purpose of the study, and provided academic and

graduation trend data. This led to a discussion about the theoretical lens to guide the study. Although the school was part of an SEL district, we discussed the responsibility of school leadership to provide the structure and training necessary for successful implementation. The Theory of Action framework provided the structure for this study with a concentration on how leader actions impact teacher practices and student outcomes.

In the session, the participants were asked to identify one skill that they possessed as an adult that pioneered their success or led them to overcome any obstacle. After providing answers, they were asked for one skill that they wished that their students possessed. Together, the research team aligned each answer to an SEL competency. The dialogue sparked a discussion about innate skills versus learned skills. One teacher indicated that while she wanted the students to exhibit healthy problem-solving skills, she felt that students should enter the senior year possessing those skills and that they should not be taught during the last year of high school. Most of the team challenged her statement which provided the facilitator a segue to the next step in the research cycle, planning the action. The team discussed ways to explicitly teach social-emotional learning competencies to students, namely social awareness, self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, and relationship skills. The implementation team decided that relationship skills would serve as the social-emotional competency for this research cycle. Team members inquired about grading as many were accustomed to use grades as motivation and to elicit buy-in. Many activities are absent of formal grading which was perceived to be a barrier when implementing SEL in class. There was a healthy debate about how students would be encouraged to participate and whether they would engage in the activities at all. The design team leader shared strategies to promote engagement by suggesting use of the connecting activity as a lesson opener. The research team concluded that the lessons would not

be graded, but students would be given credit for participation, and refusal to participate in the activities would not adversely affect a student's grade. The teachers were asked to explicitly teach SEL the competency at least one day per week for at least twenty minutes using district-created resources. Each competency was divided into a unit and the lessons followed a sequential process. The sequence to teach the unit was modified to meet the needs of the implementation team. However, the lessons for each standard were taught sequentially. The SEL period was built into the master schedule allowing teachers the time needed to implement the curriculum.

The initial meeting also revealed that the teachers had varied definitions of SEL. It was important to define what we wanted SEL to look like in the classroom, but ways to measure success were not discussed during this meeting. The team adopted the formal definition of SEL from CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

Social and emotional learning is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2017, p.1).

The third step was taking action. The teachers used the district resources to teach relationship and communication skills during class. A social-emotional facilitator who served on the design team and the implementation team emailed the lessons to the teachers which included reminders about the time and frequency to implement the lessons. All teachers were encouraged to infuse SEL throughout the day, even when formal SEL instruction was not being provided. Each lesson began with a check-in or greeting as a way to connect with the students. During this cycle, each teacher taught at least three lessons on relationship skills.

The college advisor also partnered with the teachers during this cycle to provide students with SEL skills using post-secondary readiness. The sessions with the college advisor were not related to a specific SEL competency, rather, the advisor used one-on-one meetings to “provide students with individual tasks to accomplish goals that involve communicating their college needs with a professional.”

At the end of the cycle, each teacher wrote a reflection and provided feedback about the lesson and the instructional strategies needed to provide students with attaining SEL core competencies. They reported that the lessons “assisted students in attaining these skills by allowing students to reflect and embrace their emotions, connect with peers, and yielded better communication and positive self-talk needed for better relationship building.” At the same time, the team asked for more strategies and resources, but also felt that more buy-in was needed at the school level. Teachers reported that students were experiencing a greater level of stress because of virtual learning. One teacher conveyed concerns about the diminished value of schoolwide SEL implementation and feared negative repercussions on the State’s evaluation instrument if observed teaching the SEL lessons instead of the academic content.

Action Research Cycle 2: Promoting Continuous Improvement

The second action research cycle lasted five weeks from October 2 – November 6, 2020. The design team met every other week to review student attendance, academic progress, and college access goals and to collaborate about student responses to the intervention strategies. Each meeting began with an agenda and a review of teacher reflection statements. Ongoing data discussions occurred throughout the study. There were two formal data discussions during the research cycle, one at the beginning of the cycle and the other one at the end of the cycle. Each discussion included an iteration of reflections, instructional adjustments, and action plans

tailored to help students experience success in class. Among the topics for the data discussions were student attendance, teacher grading practices, individual student and subgroup academic progress, post-secondary readiness plans, and the action steps taken to improve performance in each area.

The design team also conducted paired observations to observe instructional practices. Teachers received informal feedback in two areas, instructional strategies and classroom environment, to assist with explicit teaching practices and social-emotional learning.

The entire research team met twice a month during the week after the meeting with the design team. The research team operated as a professional learning community and the meetings involved two components: instruction and data. The data gathered by the design team were used to create the agenda topics for the meetings. This cycle focused on ways to continuously improve instructional practices while using data to guide the conversations.

In the first PLC meeting of this cycle, the design team leader opened by asking for feedback on the lessons. Teachers openly discussed triumphs and challenges encountered when implementing the lessons. Feedback and progress from the first stage were used to refine the interventions carried out in Cycle 2. Data collection were similar to the data collected in Cycle 1, but it is also included the wraparound supports needed to implement the interventions.

The implementation team continued to use lessons from the district-created curriculum to implement social-emotional learning strategies in the classroom. The lessons were sequenced, active, focused, and explicit (SAFE) to foster and promote the active engagement needed to acquire new social and emotional skills. The curriculum focused on community building, reflections, emotions, affirmations, choice, mindfulness, and empowerment which aligned with the skills deemed important by the team. The lessons were based on an explicit SEL competency

and included a description and accompanying resources. Using the vision established in the initial phase, the team used the resources and gave feedback on the implementation strategies after each lesson. One teacher wrote:

On the first lesson, most of them [students] were engaged and we were able to have a healthy discussion on the key components of healthy relationships. We focused on empathy and honest communication. I believe they have a pretty clear picture of how to demonstrate empathy. Based on the experiences they shared, I think conflict resolution through communication is one area they need more help with.

The feedback about conflict resolution elicited a discussion among the team about how seniors express themselves when conflicts arise. The team desired lessons with more hands-on, scenario-type activities where students could see and reflect on different areas of conflict resolution from identifying conflict styles to active analysis and active lessons. A member of the design team modeled teaching practices to increase comfortability with teaching SEL skills in the classroom. Based on the feedback, the new SEL focus shifted to Responsible Decision Making. The implementation team agreed to continue implementation using district-created lessons at least once per week and the college advisor continued working with students to promote post-secondary readiness.

During the next phase of the meeting, the design team leader discussed attendance and academic data to offer recommendations on ways the team could tailor SEL instruction to help assist students during regular class time as six out of seven teachers taught a course required for graduation. They were encouraged to use daily check-ins during the non-SEL block to connect with students and increase student engagement. The team leader also discussed enrichment and remediation strategies based on classroom gradebook data and student performance. The team

discussed which proficiency levels would signal an opportunity for reteaching concepts to address misconceptions and which levels would provide opportunities to spiral questions back into the lessons as bell ringers or exit tickets.

Action Research Cycle 3: Strengthening Instructional Capacity

The third and final cycle occurred from November 9, 2020 – January 5, 2021, which equaled six instructional weeks of school. The focal points for this cycle were student responses to lesson implementation and enhancing instructional capacity. During this cycle, the researcher conducted virtual classroom observations to examine instructional practices to support students' social-emotional learning needs. Three teachers agreed to participate in the observations and they each chose the time and date for the observation to occur. The 15-minute informal classroom observations provided direct insight into SEL lesson implementation, student-teacher relationships, and strategies to enhance engagement and motivation. On average, the class rosters contained 30 students, but about 20 students were in attendance in each class. The classroom observation tool assessed evidence of SEL classroom climate and practices. It was not used to evaluate the teachers but instead, it was intended to assess the implementation of SEL practices. The observations were performed across multiple days during different times of the day and the data allowed the team to reflect on SEL practices, reflect on progress, and create strategies for improvement. After the observation, the researcher journaled reflections and gathered individual feedback about the lesson from the teacher's perspective.

During the observation, students participated in the class using the chat feature and verbal responses to interact with the teacher. Overall, the level of student engagement during virtual learning presented a challenge for teachers as some students were reluctant to verbally respond to questions and others opted to keep the cameras off during class instruction. The student-teacher

relationship proved to be more critical as teachers were compelled to form a stronger bond with the students to increase the level of engagement. The teachers used daily check-ins and community gatherings to strengthen the screen-to-screen relationships. For students who were reluctant to speak in class, one teacher wrote “discussing healthy/unhealthy relationships caused them [students] to speak more than they did before.” The research participants recorded their feedback on methods used to implement social-emotional learning strategies into the classroom to build a supportive classroom environment. Providing the team with more interactive activities and ways to align SEL with academic content objectives surfaced as a gap when implementing the lessons.

Teachers continued to reinforce responsible decision-making by teaching students how to practice deliberate listening skills then finding words to express their feelings. The use of open-ended questions to probe student thinking resonated as a high-leverage instructional practice to help students learn the SEL competency. The teachers determined that it was equally important to teach culturally relevant academic content during this time which aligned to social awareness, another SEL competency. The design team provided teachers with an additional lesson from the *Teens Can Lead* curriculum. The second curriculum used situational context to help students identify and solve problems given a real-life dilemma. The team decided to implement this curriculum given the stressors caused by the political climate of the 2020 presidential election and the heightened awareness around race and social injustice sparked by the Black Lives Matter movement. The social-emotional competencies in the curriculum were covert but centered around positive decision-making, self-awareness, and self-management. Teachers were provided an option to incorporate an additional lesson into the classroom practices as needed.

Additionally, the researcher held four individual interviews to engage with team members on a personal level and to gain individual perceptions on social-emotional learning strategies and student success. A focus group interview led by the researcher also provided an opportunity to hear teacher perspectives on teaching SEL strategies to students. The group shared their ideas very openly and offered recommendations for enhanced SEL implementation. The research team also completed a post survey on social-emotional learning beliefs which analyzed changes in overall thinking and knowledge about SEL strategies in the classroom at the end of the cycle.

Support staff, who were also members of the design team, worked with seniors to increase achievement by helping them recover deficient credits and prepare for post-secondary readiness. Post-secondary readiness sessions were held by the college advisor. He held individual student meetings to discuss plans after graduation. The goal was to ensure that every student had a concrete plan after graduating from high school whether college, career, or the military. First and second quarter senior grades provided quantitative data about the academic progress of students while college readiness data gave indications about the student's potential persistence beyond high school.

Researcher Notes of Participant Observations

The professional learning sessions provided time for the research team to form a connection. Irvin rose as the unspoken leader in the group and was usually the first person to respond to questions. She was very open and honest about the challenges she faced with implementing SEL. In her opinion, teaching SEL came naturally to her however the virtual space made it more challenging, yet more important. In the same manner, Brook, who was new to the school, was always willing to share her ideas with the group. She sought out ways to infuse SEL throughout the day and always asked questions during the PLC. Knox was a willing participant

and very amenable to implementing SEL in the classroom. He wanted to be successful but struggled to find his space in the PLC. He was usually the last one to respond to questions and sometimes remained quiet. He struggled making connections with students and used the lessons and music to form a relationship. Nonetheless, he never gave up and persevered throughout the research study. Gordon also experienced challenges connecting with students at the onset of the study. Part of the challenges was due to remote learning as with all the teachers, but it took Gordon a little longer to find her rhythm with the students.

Gordon insisted on building a community of learners who were open and free to share ideas. She tore down the barriers by, as she stated, “sometimes sharing too much information with students.” Her goal was to provide a safe space, free of judgment where all ideas were welcomed. She admitted to spending too much time on SEL but also indicated that it was during these times that students turned in the most work in class. Oglethorpe expressed similar sentiments as the youngest member of the PLC. Her rapport and quick connection with the students, along with her eagerness to learn, provided a level of excitement around implementing the new strategies and learning from the veteran teachers. Oglethorpe wanted the best for the students and wanted to see them excel. She noted that there were obstacles with building student relationships but her role as the senior sponsor enabled the students to connect with her outside of the classroom. One priority and strategy she applied was learning all the names of her students during the first month of school, which occurred during cycle 1 of the research study.

Chapter Summary

The action research cycles occurred from August 2020 to January 2021. The responses from team members indicated the need for all teachers to receive training on how to teach social-emotional skills to students. The team also recognized a gap in school-based trainings provided

to teachers to address student's social and emotional needs. The team identified the core skills that they wanted students to acquire then aligned the skills with SEL competencies and training needed to enhance their ability to teach the skills to students.

Teacher perception data using short response surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews were also collected during the research cycles. Throughout the process, the research team continued to be supportive and engaged in the afterschool professional learning. The remote learning environment was mentally exhausting and challenging for teachers hence, having teachers to attend professional development sessions after school was regarded as a success. Teacher feedback collected along the way guided the study and promoted collaboration by planning, acting, and evaluating throughout the research process.

The next chapter details the findings of the case study and reveals the thematic analysis related to the research questions and literature reviewed.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to analyze and describe teacher perceptions of the impact of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors in an inner-city high school. The study focused on teaching strategies that support a culture of learning by explicitly teaching social-emotional learning competencies. There were three focused research questions used to guide this study:

1. How are teachers' attitudes about the academic success of 12th-grade students affected by the implementation of social-emotional learning strategies?
2. What are the outcomes of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors?
3. What does an action research team learn from implementing social-emotional learning strategies?

Findings from the case study research were gathered using quantitative and qualitative data obtained throughout the study. Data were collected from pre- and post-survey questions, teacher reflections, classroom observations, individual interviews, a focus group interview and document review. Coding and categorization were developed and refined consistently throughout the process based on the conceptual framework. The action research team addressed a gap in the literature on SEL implementation at the high school level. A summary of the findings is shown in Table 7.

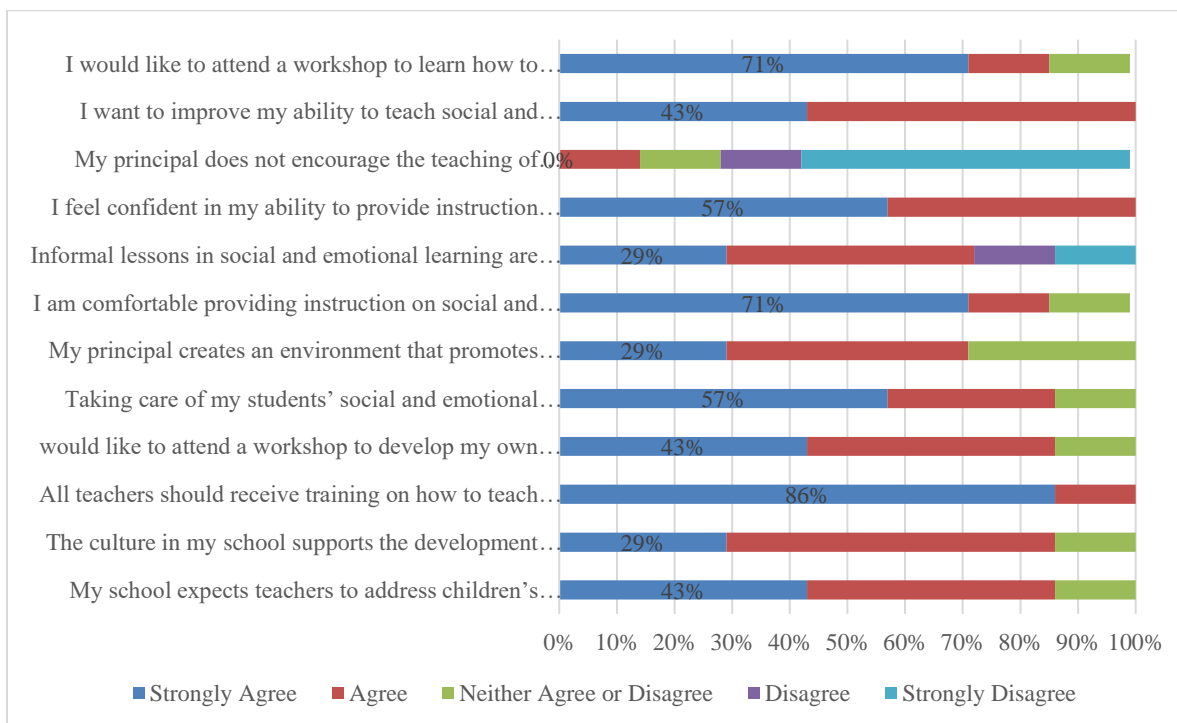
Table 7*Summary of Findings Through Themes Connected to Research Questions*

Research questions	Findings
Q1. How are teachers' attitudes about the academic success of 12th-grade students affected by the implementation of social-emotional learning strategies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1: Explicit SEL Strategies Enhance Instruction • Theme 2: Relationships Promote a Supportive Classroom Climate
Q2. What are the outcomes of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1: Developing an Academic Mindset Emphasizes Learning • Theme 2: Data Discussions Impact Teacher and Leader Practices
Q3. What does an action research team learn from implementing social-emotional learning strategies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1: Resources Needed for Effective Implementation • Theme 2: Integrated Supports Promote Classroom Practices • Theme 3: SEL and Academic Integration Yield Active Engagement

Research Question 1: Mindsets Aligned with SEL Implementation

To determine the mindsets of teachers about the implementation of social-emotional learning, the researcher used the Teacher Beliefs survey developed by Brackett, Reyes, and Rivers (2012) to gain quantitative feedback at the onset of the study. The same survey was administered at the end of the research cycle to compare and contrast changes in beliefs over the length of the research. Qualitative data was obtained using individual interviews, focus groups, and teacher reflections. All seven research participants took part in the pre-interview in August 2020 (Figure 8). An analysis of the interview data revealed two emerging themes.

1. Explicit SEL Strategies Enhance Instruction
2. Relationships Promote a Supportive Classroom Climate

Figure 8*Pre-SEL Survey Results*

As outlined in the purpose, this study focused on teaching strategies that support a culture of learning by explicitly teaching social-emotional learning competencies. The analysis of the data collected revealed two central themes related to the research question one. The first theme was Explicit SEL Strategies Enhance Instruction.

Theme 1 – Explicit SEL Strategies Enhance Instruction

Each of the seven participants agreed that they were confident in their ability to provide instruction on social-emotional learning in August 2020. At the same time, only three out of seven participants stated that they taught SEL lessons in their regular teaching practices. The design team developed social-emotional learning strategies for implementation in the classroom to promote student SEL competencies.

The research participants received structured SEL lessons as part of the research intervention. The lessons focused on a specific SEL competency using the SAFE model (sequenced, active, focused, and explicit). The first lesson, which was implemented during the week of September 21–25, 2020, focused on relationship skills. Relationship skills, as defined by this study, are the ability to work with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The lesson explicitly outlined strategies to teach students how to build relationships with one another and the learning target was aligned with the lesson activities. When asked if students were able to gain the intended skills, one teacher stated:

On the first lesson, most of them were engaged and we were able to have a healthy discussion on the key components of healthy relationships. We focused on empathy and honest communication. I believe they have a pretty clear picture of how to demonstrate empathy.

Another teacher also agreed. The teacher wrote:

Lesson 1 assisted my students in attaining relationship skills by allowing students to reflect and embrace their emotions as we discussed the topic of diversity and acceptance. Additionally, students were able to learn more things about their peers' backgrounds and experiences.

Explicit SEL instruction provided the teachers with opportunities to practice SEL competencies with students on a consistent basis.

For explicit instruction to occur, teachers were encouraged to emphasize the skills using strategies that develop the students' overall SEL competencies and then implement the lessons with fidelity during the SEL-block. During the study, the teachers implemented structured SEL lessons during the first period at least once per week. They also had the option to implement the

lessons in additional periods throughout the day. The SEL block was embedded in the master schedule during the first period to support implementation. The allotted time proved to be beneficial to teachers to gauge how students' readiness for learning each day.

Well, I typically do it for the SEL block. I use a lot of the information and resources that were provided. You know, at the beginning, that we received from the district and you know, from the program. I use it as like a warm up in class to get us started sometimes just to do a pulse check during class periods. Or if I, you know, see that somebody is not participating or not on their usual performance, then you use those strategies for that – just to address and check the needs of the students and find out where they are mentally.

Overall, the majority of the teachers stated that they used the resources provided to teach the SEL-lessons to students to give them an opportunity to develop their SEL competencies. The skills that were taught allowed them to put the skills to use during the period and the skills were also transferable in other settings.

Analyzing teacher perceptions of the impact of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors was also outlined in the purpose of the study. The second central theme aligned to research question one recognized how relationships promote a supportive classroom climate.

Theme 2– Relationships Promote a Supportive Classroom Climate

Six out of seven participants agreed that the culture of the school supports the development of students' social-emotional skills. This belief permeated to the classroom level whereby teachers found the time and space to connect with the students on a personal level. Based on one teacher's response, more time and intentionality were focused to provide the students what they needed to process different emotions. The teacher said:

It's been an interesting year. What I mean is that social-emotional learning has been more important, in my view, than ever before. Relating to the students and just taking those couple of minutes to talk to them and getting to know how they're doing has made a great impact in my teaching. I've used the lessons to kind of connect to them. You will have people talking, thinking, and speaking in ways you would not expect. So, I would say that has grown my teaching methods and my human connections with the students. I think it's a great idea to incorporate it in our teaching altogether.

The majority of the participants shared the same sentiments. Building the relationship with students and sharing the air space to hear their perspectives and needs resonated throughout the study. Making the connections did not come easy. Three out of five participants stated that it was a challenge at the beginning of the study. The responses indicate that building the relationships were difficult, but necessary. As noted by one participant:

No, I wouldn't say that building the relationships with students is easy. I would say that it is a challenge, but once you kind of break it, it definitely become easier. So, at the beginning it is a challenge because the students don't know you and you don't know the students. But somehow you have to break down their wall in order for students to be able to open up. Again, at the beginning it is a challenge, but once school progresses, it becomes easier.

A second teacher added:

You get more work out of them if you know them. If they know that you know them and that you care about them, you get more work out of them. I'll get up in the computer screen or camera just to engage with them because they need that. They just need to know that you are there and you care for them.

Results from Action Research Cycle 1

The results of action research cycle 1 yielded improved instructional strategies on SEL competencies. During this cycle, teachers were intentional in teaching relationships skills which expanded students' relationship competency. Students were able to engage in discourse around differences while avoiding conflict. As teachers developed the students' SEL competency, one of them noted, "for some students who never speak in class, discussing healthy/unhealthy relationships caused them to speak more than they had." Another teacher planned to implement the lessons more frequently outside of the SEL block. Relationship skills and explicit SEL instruction are the foundations needed for teachers to engage with students on a personal level. The use of strategies that promote the class as a community of learners helped to promote student development in the SEL competencies.

Research Question 2: Outcomes of SEL Implementation

To determine how social-emotional learning strategies influenced the outcomes of the success of high school seniors, the researcher conducted individual interviews, teacher reflections, and data talks with members of the design team and grade level team. The researcher also reviewed documents to determine past academic performance and readiness beyond high school. Qualitative results from interviews and reflections were triangulated with the results from the college readiness and academic data. From this analysis, two themes emerged:

1. Developing an Academic Mindset Emphasizes Learning
2. Data Discussions Impact Teacher and Leader Practices

Teacher perspectives about social emotional learning informed the themes aligned to the second research question. Mindsets influence student and teacher behaviors and create the conditions for learning to occur.

Theme 1: Developing an Academic Mindset Emphasizes Learning

When asked about the instructional adjustments needed to promote academic achievement, three out of five teachers discussed reviewing the curriculum and grading practices. All teachers were accustomed to teaching core academic standards and while 86% understood that SEL was important and an expectation from leadership, only 58% admitted to teaching SEL lessons on a consistent basis. As mindsets shifted and teachers began to infuse SEL into their classroom instruction, there was also a shift in instructional practices.

Teachers began to focus on the key standards and ways to grade students for mastering the standards instead of grading them out of compliance. Three teachers recounted a shifted in their own mindsets to promote student learning. One teacher articulated “We've had to shorten items and figure out what's really important to know. It's a challenge and it's a good thing. Now we've realized that some of the things [content] we have been teaching was not really relevant or needed. We really had to reconsider what we were doing.” Another teacher stated, “ironically on the days when we do SEL, students turn in the most work.” A third teacher expressed similar sentiments. The teacher indicated:

I was looking at an assignment and I was impressed with the majority of the kids out of those classes, turned in assignment in. That was actually a day we spent quite a bit of time just talking. It was almost like we were together the full time and on the same page. Most kids turned in their assignments and were responsive.

Part of developing a growth mindset included high expectations for all students. The results showed that four out of five teachers refrained from overt criticism or praise. Instead, they acknowledged praising the student's individual efforts and the process of learning in order to promote a growth mindset. In addition, all of the teachers implemented an amnesty day into the

grading practices as a way for students to demonstrate proficiency on previously failed assignments. Eighty percent of the participants frequently allowed students to conduct self-assessments and they also gave multiple opportunities for success. Students could improve their grade by retaking assessments, the highest weighted category in the gradebook. This method of grading allowed students to demonstrate what they were capable of doing while emphasizing learning at the same time. Teachers gained the understanding that the amount of time needed to process learning and acquire new content varied among each student. The approach was differentiated and addressed the unique learning differences of each student while holding the student accountable for their learning and behavior. Behavior in this sense was defined as lack of attendance, lack of completing assignments or turning in assignments late. Addressing the behavior shifted the process of grading from compliance to student learning. One teacher shared:

I'm used to giving a lot of work, but I had to cut back on the amount of work that I was assigning. When I looked at the assignments in Google Classroom, I noticed my kids turning work in at three or four o'clock in the morning. Some would not turn it in at all. So, I had to just scale back and only put up a certain number of assignments. Then when I do SEL on Wednesdays, we talk, and we go through our SEL activities. I give them time to get caught up on all the assignments that they're behind on. It becomes a good working day, or amnesty, for them. So, when they complained about too much work, I had to realize I was actually giving too much work and they couldn't get it done.

Another participant expressed beliefs about attendance and behavior.

There are some students with attendance issues. But for me, I'm never going to write them [students] off. There are reasons why students tend to be absent often. My process begins with talking to my students and allowing them the chance to make up missing

work. For someone who hasn't done the assignments, I use it as an opportunity for a teachable moment. Those teachable moments are when you need to infuse SEL.

Similarly, another participant gave input about the infusion of SEL to maximize learning for all students. This participant shared:

Focusing on the competencies would help to build a more well-rounded learner. Building teacher capacity to allow students to take ownership of what they are learning creates purposeful learning as opposed to task completion. Instead of looking at coursework as a chore, learners see tasks as opportunities to become wiser and more worldly.

Two teachers noted a shift in student responses and a decreased level of anxiety when using the breakout room to maximize learning experiences. The breakout rooms became synonymous with private office time and allowed students to share their concerns openly. One teacher indicated:

The breakout room is phenomenal because it's almost like pulling a kid in a private office. I learned that kids will talk to you there. Right before the break, one girl said, "I've been lost for two weeks" and I said, "Why didn't you say anything?" She said "I was waiting for you to do a breakout room."

Another teacher referenced the use of breakout rooms to support student learning. The teacher reported using 12-15 breakout rooms during one class period. The teacher said:

The students usually tell me when they're struggling or if they need help with something because we've developed a rapport. One of the strategies that I do is to go into a breakout room with them or plan a one-on-one. They can also do tutorial if they'd like. Typically, they like to get help in class and the private breakout room helps you find out what they need help with. They tend to open up more and ask questions if it's one-on-one.

To help promote the academic mindsets of students, one teacher on the research team taught a college readiness course to 50 seniors. The college advisor also partnered with teachers on the action research team to engage all seniors in activities aligned with college and career readiness. The advisor implemented college sessions which focused on the college application process, financial aid, and post-secondary plans during classroom visits at least twice per week. At the end of October, more than 50% of seniors met individually with the college advisor. The data from the college advisor indicated 44% of the students expressed interest in attending a four-year college while another 10% did not have plans after graduation. About 15% of the seniors reported that they would be the first in their family to become high school graduates. Another 10% stated that they would be a first-generation college student.

One teacher reported interacting with a student about post-secondary plans, sharing:

I had a student who didn't want to make an irrational decision when picking her college choice. She was able to open up to me and let me know that she had other issues going on in her household. Her parent needed her presence at home to provide financial assistance. She decided to delay her college decision and go directly to work after high school.

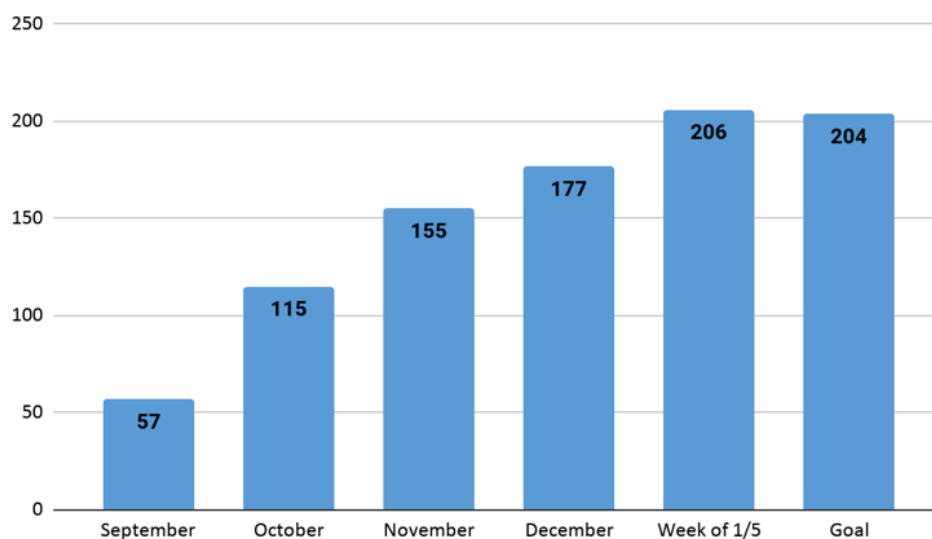
A reflection from the advisor revealed ideas about supporting student's post-secondary plans. X, elaborated:

In one-on-one spaces with students, I can provide students with individual tasks to accomplish tasks that involve communicating their college needs with a professional. The expectation is that they will either be able to accomplish their task and tell me what they want as well. Students self-advocate and work to solve problems with getting ready for life after high school.

Student participation in post-secondary readiness session is depicted in Figure 9. The one-on-one sessions provided students an opportunity to discuss plans after graduation. More than half of the seniors participated in the sessions. Fifty of the students were enrolled in a college readiness course during the day. The remaining students met with the advisor during classes led by teachers on the research team.

Figure 9

One-on-one Post-Graduation Sessions



A shift in mindsets and beliefs encouraged learning by focusing student outcomes. The use of data discussions influenced adult behaviors and instructional decisions. Both teacher and leader practices were refined during this process.

Theme 2: Data Discussions Impact Teacher and Leader Practices

The second theme involved the use of data to impact teacher and leader practices. For each of the research questions in this study, the AR team sought multiple measures of data for

analysis in an effort to create a thorough picture of how teachers' use of social-emotional learning strategies impacted, if at all, the efficacy and resilience of seniors.

At the onset of the study, 73% of participants believed that the principal created an environment to support the social and emotional well-being of students. The use of data driven conversations supported their beliefs and guided leadership conversations. Each month, members of the design team participated in a data talk to analyze student attendance, academic progress, and post-secondary readiness to impact and improve student learning. When asked about the process one member stated, "As we evaluate the efficacy of the SEL lessons, we can judge whether the competencies are evident in the students' behavior, academics, and vernacular."

Grade level PLCs also assisted the research team with the use of data-driven interventions. The team engaged in conversations about how and what to teach to impact student outcomes. For four teachers, there was a shift in the mindsets about instructional practices, student failures, and relevancy of standards as indicated in the reflections. One teacher shared:

We had to kind of reconsider what we were doing. Students were failing. We decided that the last two units should be more project based and we felt that we would be able to reach more kids that way, including the social, emotional learning. I can say the days that I included social, emotional learning are the days that students turned in more of their work, if that makes sense.

The research team reviewed the academic data for the senior class from 9th – 12th grade. Over a four-year span, the data revealed that on average, 20% of students in the senior class were off track each year in ninth, tenth, eleventh, and 12th-grades, respectively. The largest number of retained students occurred between 9th and 10th grade where the number increased to 86 students or 25% of the class.

Leading into the senior year and prior to the study, 20% of all students in the cohort lacked sufficient credits needed for promotion to the 12th-grade and as a result, they were not classified as a senior. This trend in data held true for previous cohorts for the last three years. With an average 20% of students being retained year, the percent of students graduating on time averaged about 70%. The data showed that about 10% of students who entered the senior class on track, failed to graduate in four years.

At the start of the study in August, the design team found that the trend continued with 20% of seniors failing at least class. The number of students failing at least one class increased to 24% in September. In addition, there were 52 students who were severely off track and enrolled in the district's nontraditional high school. At the end of October, the overall number of seniors failing one of more classes decreased by half (see Figure 10). The lowest number of failures occurred in social studies and other classes. Other classes are defined as CTAE, World Languages, PE, and Fine Arts. Participants in the study were a part of the ELA, Social Studies, CTAE, and World Languages departments.

In January, the number of students classified as on track for graduation increased from 71% to 82%. A graph of this data is depicted in Figure 11. The class performance and graduation data did not include students at the non-traditional high school. Data usage fostered learning and created conditions for students to succeed.

Figure 10

Percent of Student Failures by Subject

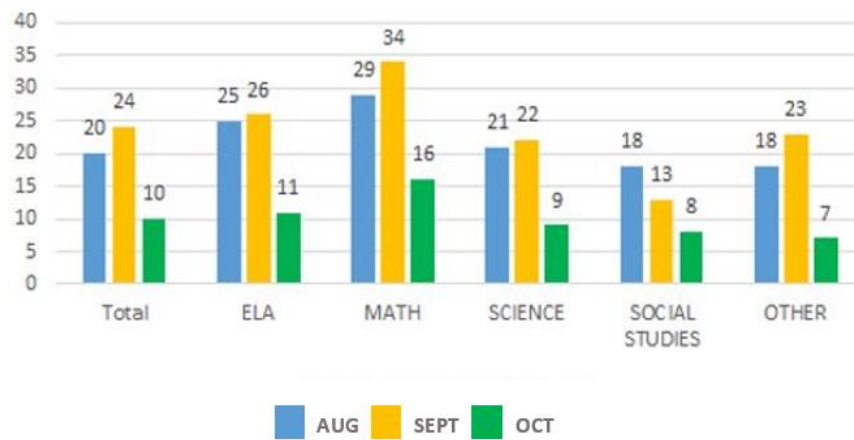
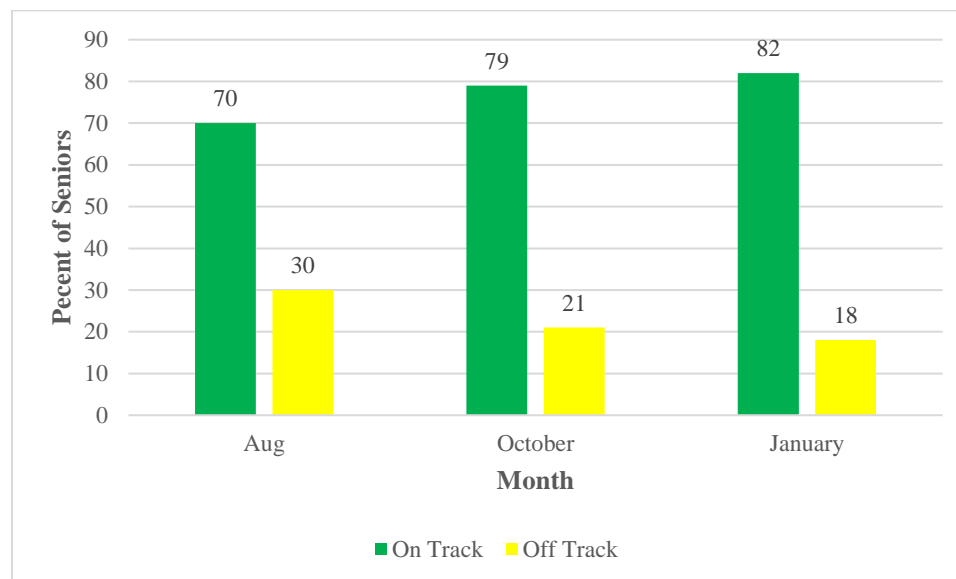


Figure 11

Percent of Seniors on Track for Graduation



Results from Action Research Cycle 2

The action research team used data from post-secondary readiness sessions and data talks, and teacher reflections as well as data from surveys to determine what teachers might perceive as important components when implementing social-emotional learning and the best way to enhance student achievement. The action research team collaborated about the use of social-emotional learning strategies, post-secondary readiness and shared success stories using best practices and student responses to the intervention strategies. The use of data talks provoked discussions around student learning and strategies to increase success. The reflective responses from teachers and student data showed a positive correlation between implementing SEL strategies and student outcomes as it relates to academics, attendance, and readiness beyond graduation.

Research Question 3: Knowledge Obtained by the Research Team

To determine what the Action Research team learned through the process of promoting social-emotional learning strategies, data were analyzed from interviews and reflections provided by the action research team. These data were compared with quantitative data obtained from the Pre- and Post-Teacher Beliefs Survey, Integration Survey, and student data. The transcripts from the interviews were compared to the teacher reflections and survey data to triangulate data. From this analysis, three themes emerged:

1. Structure and Resources Needed for Effective Implementation
2. Integrated Supports Promote Classroom Practices
3. Social-Emotional and Academic Integration Yield Active Engagement

Themes 1 and 2: Structure, Resources, and Integrated Supports are Needed for Effective Implementation and to Promote Classroom Practices

The action research process provided a structure for teachers to implement social-emotional learning strategies within the school day. An examination of qualitative and quantitative data sources, classroom observations, and feedback from research team members along with the researcher's reflective notes, allowed the action research team to gain insight on ways to maximize SEL implementation to enhance student outcomes. It also allowed the action research team to develop a plan of action moving forward.

When implementing social-emotional learning, the action research team learned the importance of personal contact with students and given the remote learning space, implementation was more challenging. One teacher's feedback revealed:

Considering our current circumstances, SEL implementation was challenging since we were lacking that personal contact with the students. However, I believe the initiative

worked and many students were reached through some of the activities. Based on my experience with my students in the classroom, they were able to freely share their feelings and acknowledge there are some areas where they need additional support. I think in the future it would be good to ask for the students' input in terms of their needs and develop an SEL program based on it.

In addition, the school atmosphere for SEL must promote student success and support for students and teachers as indicated by 86% of teachers in the survey. While teachers can promote SEL inside the classroom, two participants agreed that the schoolwide implementation is essential for the overall school community. Thoughts captured from one participated revealed:

SEL must be an integral part of the school curriculum, providing ongoing training for teachers and parents. It should be developed based on realistic goals targeting specific areas. It should provide ample opportunities for the students to practice SEL skills in real life environments and situations.

Another teacher shared his belief of a system of supports for students and teachers. The teacher expressed the need for "continuous opportunities for students to openly and confidently express their feelings and concerns via focus groups and student organizations that promote such opportunities." Five out six participants felt that resources for SEL were essential to implement social-emotional learning strategies with fidelity. One teacher's feedback suggested the need for more resources. The teacher explained:

I would like more resources and strategies like the ones we received. For example, when the team introduced the meditation pieces, I found it to be successful. I knew about yoga and meditation, but I never thought about introducing it to my students in the class until you all presented those resources. So, I think more of those resources would help a lot.

Another teacher indicated the need for additional SEL strategies. The teacher echoed the sentiments of all teachers about the need to improve their ability to teach social-emotional learning to students. This teacher held firm on the need for “more strategies in my toolbox.” There was a need to have a mental break to connect with the students. In this teacher’s words, it’s like we need connecting activities to get to know them. I need those strategies to add to my toolbox and a designated time to do it where I won’t get penalized.”

The Action Research team acquired knowledge about the process implementation of social-emotional learning strategies and its alignment to curriculum integration and student engagement. Integration and engagement are driven by several factors described in Theme 3 – SEL and Academic Integration Yield Active Engagement.

Theme 3: SEL and Academic Integration Yield Active Engagement

Four out of five research participants indicated the use of academic and SEL integration on a consistent basis in the classroom. Based on their responses, they frequently identified the learning objectives for each academic and social-emotional learning lesson. All participants frequently used open ended questions to probe student thinking and provided wait time for students to think and process their answer before responding. Two participants shared strategies for integrating SEL and academics to promote active engagement. One teacher reflected:

On Mondays, I try to do some type of motivational video, just a small little, three-minute clip on YouTube just to get them started for the week. From there, I have the kids do an open reflection in the chat box. I found that I get more answers when I ask them to respond to me privately instead of the whole group. They tell what resonated out of the video and what key words stood out.

Another teacher indicated that her strategy involved a continuous check-in while refusing to allow the students to give up. The participant said, “I call on them constantly until they engage with us. That is kind of hard because some kids check out. But you keep pulling them in by keep calling on them and refusing to let them give up.” This same participant further expounded on her belief in SEL and the connection to engagement. The participant explained:

I have one thing to say about what I've learned about SEL. I would say that I always felt like I did SEL in class when I was face-to-face with the kids, just talking to them, and leveraging any interactions we had. I found that I do it more now that we're distanced. I try to do it more just to get them to engage, engage, engage, so we don't feel so distant.

There was one teacher who indicated the disconnect between SEL and academic standards.

Reflections, that's my go-to. I try to close out the lesson with the reflection each day, but I'd also like to do more check ins. We [Grade Level Teachers] talked about that for next semester. Now that we don't have an EOC, we need to start the unit differently with something related to social-emotional learning and mythology* (pseudonym). How can we build those personal check-ins into the content [mythology]? This way, it's related to me and it teaches SEL.

Less than half of the participants reported the use of engagement techniques that help students to respond directly to one another during class. This engagement strategy was identified as an area for further training. After the training was provided, one participant reflected:

From the PDs that we had, I implemented some of those strategies, especially the sentence starters. Often times, I found myself leading the discussion, but then once I began to play Round Robin with the other students and have them call on their peers, I was able to get more responses and engagement. Instead of me calling on them, they

called on each other. So, their interpersonal relationships make it easier for them to engage with one another in class.

To determine the mindsets of teachers about the implementation of social-emotional learning, the researcher used the Teacher Beliefs survey developed by Brackett, Reyes, and Rivers (2012) to gain quantitative feedback at the onset of the study. The same survey was administered at the end of the research cycle to compare and contrast changes in beliefs over the length of the research study.

Qualitative data was obtained using individual interviews, focus groups, reflections, and the researcher's notes. Quantitative data collection included current and trend school data including student grades, teacher grade distribution, graduation rate, and grade-level retention. An analysis of the data revealed seven emerging themes. Each theme aligned to the research questions that guided the study.

Results from Action Research Cycle 3

The results of the post-Teacher Beliefs survey revealed a shift in teacher beliefs about social-emotional learning. During the Action Research Cycle three, 100% of the research teachers believed that addressing student's social-emotional needs were an expectation from the school. They also believed the school culture shifted to support the development of students' SEL skills. At the same time, the team wanted more resources.

The results from the post-survey revealed a in shift in teacher beliefs. While 85% of the research participants stated that taking care of students' SEL came naturally, the percentage declined to 80% on the post-SEL survey. During this cycle, the action research team gained a better understanding of how to implement social-emotional learning strategies into the classroom

as well as ways to integrate SEL with academic instruction to improve student engagement (Table 8). Teachers modeled and shared instructional practices to increase comfortability with teaching SEL skills in the classroom.

Table 8

Teacher Self-Assessment: Integration SEL into Regular Classroom Instruction

Strategy	Question	Often use (%)	Sometimes use (%)	Infrequently use (%)
Academic + SEL	Identify academic and social-emotional learning objectives for each lesson.	80	20	0
	Structure lessons so students are working with others as well as alone	60	40	0
Active learning and engagement	Ask open-ended questions that surface and probe student thinking.	100	0	0
	Use cooperative learning activities, along with the structures and guidance to provide support.	60	40	0
	Intersperse periods of teacher-led instruction with opportunities for talk.	80	20	0
	Provide opportunities for student choice.	60	40	0
	Teach culturally relevant academic content	100	0	0
	Provide opportunities for student self-assessment.	80	20	0
Reflection	Provide opportunities for students to discuss how they will work together before engaging in cooperative learning and to reflect afterward.	40	60	0

Strategy	Question	Often use (%)	Sometimes use (%)	Infrequently use (%)
	Provide opportunities for students to discuss how they questions; give reflective writing prompts about process, emotions involved, social interactions, or activity results) on both their academic and social-emotional learning.	40	60	0
	Provide opportunities for students to discuss how they will work together before engaging in cooperative learning and to reflect afterward.	40	40	20
Discussion facilitation techniques	Use wait time (provides thinking time for students) after asking a question before calling on anyone to respond.	100	0	0
	Have students use “tag” to call on one another to speak.	40	20	40
	Ask facilitative questions in discussions to help students respond directly to one another.	0	100	0
	Refrain from repeating or paraphrasing students’ words.	20	40	40
	Refrain from overt criticism or praise; instead, respond with interest.	80	20	0

Note. $N = 5$

Data obtained and analyzed in Research Cycle 3 revealed a shift in teacher beliefs and practices. All participants agreed that addressing students’ SEL needs was an expectation from the school and they believed that the school culture shifted to support the development of students’ SEL skills and competencies. A summary of the chapter details the occurrences for this section

Chapter Summary

This action research study was conducted utilizing a combination of qualitative and quantitative data to investigate teacher perceptions of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors. Members of the action research design team served on the schoolwide and grade level leadership teams and the action research implementation were members of the grade level senior academy. Each member participated in the three distinct research cycles that guided this study.

For the first research question, qualitative data revealed teachers' beliefs and attitudes about the academic success of twelfth-grade students after implementing social-emotional learning strategies in the classroom. Qualitative data from surveys, interviews, reflections, and the researcher's notes revealed two themes. The conditions to promote social-emotional strategies in the classroom included the use of explicit SEL instruction and strong relationships among teachers and students. Relationship skills built on trust promoted open dialogue, a sense of community, and culture of safety. Engaging in explicit SEL instruction enhanced classroom practices needed for students to acquire SEL competencies.

The second research question focused on how social-emotional learning strategies influenced student outcomes. The development of an academic mindset to promote learning and the use of data to drive conversations impacted both teacher and leader practices emerged as the thematic principles for this question. A comparative analysis of student grades, teacher grading practices, schoolwide trend data, and teacher reflection data helped shaped the themes for this research question. The reflective responses from teachers and student data revealed a correlation between teacher perceptions of implementing SEL strategies and student outcomes. Teachers

who spent time teaching social-emotional skills to students reported that students participated more in class and turned in more assignments yielding a reduction in course failure.

The learning acquired by the action research team when implementing social-emotional learning strategies was the aim of the final research question. Research question three revealed three themes. Leaders must provide the resources needed as well as integrated supports for teachers to implement SEL with fidelity. Additionally, integrating SEL with academic instruction resulted in active engagement among students. At the conclusion of the study, a comparative analysis of SEL pre- and post- survey results revealed that all participants supported schoolwide training for social-emotional learning and all participants had a desire to improve their own SEL skills. Moreover, all participants affirmed the expectation from school leadership to address students social-emotional learning needs but doubted their ability to implement SEL naturally. The use of resources and strategies remained a high priority among research participants.

A discussion of the findings related to the research questions is discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 6 also provides implications for future research. Need a segue to lead the reader to the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to analyze and describe teacher perceptions of the impact of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors in an inner-city high school. The study focused on teaching strategies that support a culture of learning by explicitly teaching social-emotional learning competencies.

Research Questions

There were three focused research questions that guided this study:

1. How are teachers' attitudes about the academic success of 12th-grade students affected by the implementation of social-emotional learning strategies?
2. What are the outcomes of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors?
3. What does an action research team learn from implementing social-emotional learning strategies?

The action research team consisted of school leaders and teachers who were members of the school's Senior Academy. An action research approach was used to determine how, if at all, emotional learning strategies impacted the academic success of high school seniors. Studies reveal that social-emotional learning has a great influence on academic outcomes, especially in high-poverty schools (Parrett & Budge, 2020). Schools where students feel safe, encouraged, and championed are found to have students with higher academic performance in class and on standardized tests. This study used action research by utilizing focus groups, Likert-Scale

surveys, interviews, and an analysis of academic and graduation trends. An analysis of school-wide interpersonal relationships, learning environments, and decision-making processes helped frame the literature and served as the themes in this study.

The purpose of this action research was to analyze and describe teacher perceptions of the impact of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors in an inner-city high school. The study focused on teaching strategies that support a culture of learning by explicitly teaching social-emotional learning competencies. There were three focused research questions that guided this research study:

1. How are teachers' attitudes about the academic success of 12th-grade students affected by the implementation of social-emotional learning strategies?
2. What are the outcomes of social-emotional learning strategies on the success of high school seniors?
3. What does an action research team learn from implementing social-emotional learning strategies?

Summary of the Findings

This action research study began in August 2020 at Morris High School, a neighborhood school located in the inner-city of a large metropolitan area. An action research case study guided the design of the study. Action research is the process of evaluating, investigating, and analyzing areas of improvement within an organization to develop practical solutions to address them (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

The study involved a combination of novice and veteran teachers who implemented strategies to improve social-emotional learning practices in classroom instruction to influence the academic outcomes of high school seniors. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected

and analyzed which included semi-structured individual interviews, a focus group interview, pre- and post-survey data, informal classroom observations, document analysis, and researcher notes. Triangulation of the data revealed multiple themes connected to the research questions.

The researcher led the team in a series of cyclical research cycles at the beginning of the school year. Each member of the design team held a leadership position in the school or grade level team. The teachers on the implementation team served as members in the 12th-grade, or senior, academy. The design team members met weekly to create processes for providing integrated supports to teachers and engage in conversations to guide continuous improvements in academic, attendance, and college readiness outcomes. Based on the findings, there were three conclusions:

Conclusion 1: Teacher beliefs about the importance of SEL practices and their own instructional capacity influence implementation.

The action research team used pre- and post-survey data to analyze beliefs about SEL practices. The survey data demonstrated how the use of a job-embedded professional learning community affected teacher beliefs and SEL instructional practices. Teacher attitudes about social-emotional learning play a significant role in their commitment to implement SEL practices in the classroom. Beliefs guide teacher-actions and influence their views about what to teach and how to teach it. While teachers valued the importance of teaching social-emotional learning in the classroom, researchers agreed that many teachers felt that there was an inadequate amount of time or they lacked the skills to teach the SEL competencies to students (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; McCallops et al, 2019; Oberle et al., 2016). Teacher beliefs and instructional capacities align with the findings in this study.

Brandon Morris High School was located in an SEL-district with an emphasis on social-emotional learning. Supports for implementation and curriculum resources were provided to the school-based social-emotional learning facilitator who was also a teacher and a part of the action research team. In past years, SEL implementation at the school level was fragmented and inconsistent. The study sought to improve implementation at the beginning of the school year. At the onset of the study, teachers affirmed their beliefs about social-emotional learning and were confident with providing SEL instruction to students. At the same time, only 71% of the participants shared that school leaders at Morris High encouraged the teaching of SEL to students as indicated on the pre-SEL Beliefs survey. The results of the post-SEL Beliefs survey indicated a shift in the data. School leaders expected teachers to consistently implement SEL during class. As the expectations increased, the percentage of teachers who expressed being comfortable with teaching social-emotional learning skills to students decreased. The participants' feedback about their instructional capacity and innate ability to provide SEL instruction also declined which changed their views about SEL implementation. Implementing social-emotional learning strategies using interactive and collaborative pedagogies can strengthen teacher capacity and intensify outcomes for students. Relationships are at the core of student outcomes.

Conclusion 2: Student outcomes are determined by the presence of student-teacher relationships and leadership expectations.

Student-teacher relationships are at the core of successful SEL implementation. To strengthen student-teacher relationships and SEL competencies, students participated in an SEL-focused lesson at least once per week. During virtual learning instruction, the first period teacher served as the classroom advisor and teachers used the first 20 minutes of the school day to

provide targeted SEL instruction to students. Advisory efforts for the 12th-grade academy focused on three core areas: social-emotional learning, post-secondary readiness, and academics. The advisory teachers helped cultivate a caring community of trust and collaboration and they partnered with the college advisor to assist the students with post-secondary readiness.

The literature substantiated a direct correlation between student-teacher relationships and academic outcomes. Relationships, where students felt safe and connected to school, increased the probability of student success (Paolini, 2019; Yang et al., 2018). This encouragement formed the basis of trust and a supportive school climate built up the knowledge of individual students' strengths and weaknesses and the strategies needed to maximize student success as also evidenced in individual interview transcriptions. Strategies used by teachers allowed students to revise their work and have multiple opportunities for students to be successful in class. The focus was on learning regardless of the pace and the amount of time students needed to acquire new information. Researchers agreed that when students in high-poverty schools felt encouraged to learn and cared for, their academic achievement increased (Davis & Warner, 2018; Hopson & Lee, 2011).

The presence of strong teacher-student relationships in schools and the integration of social-emotional learning into the classroom helped students build nurturing and supportive relationships with teachers which are necessary for positive student outcomes. Student trend data and academic data for the first quarter of the school year supported the findings in this study and aligned with the literature reviewed. These data showed that students in the school benefited from positive relationships with teachers where the environment was focused on learning. There was an increase in the academic progress of seniors which classified them as on track for graduation in the spring.

School leaders are responsible for setting the tone of the school and the expectations for teaching and learning using multiple data points (MacNeil et al., 2009). Leadership in this area is critical as it affects student achievement, and it determines the fidelity of SEL implementation. SEL must be supported by school leaders to be effective and the structure must allow time for collaboration, professional development, resources, and lesson internalization (Kennedy et al., 2019).

In schools where student-teacher relationships are strained, student achievement suffers. Likewise, students in poverty-stricken schools are more susceptible to academic risk factors that lead to failure. To prevent pervasive failure, schools need a structure that offers teachers opportunities to reflect, refine skills, and rehearse ways of integrating explicit social-emotional learning into daily classroom practices (Hoffman et al., 2020). Collaboration with other teachers is an essential component of the learning process. The PLC model supports teacher collaboration with an intense focus on teaching and student learning. When teachers provide students with multiple opportunities to experience success, it reinforces the idea that mistakes are used as a tool for learning and failure is an opportunity to develop capacity through success and effort (Cassidy 2015). A schoolwide focus on SEL promotes an understanding of how to implement the strategies to support all students.

Conclusion 3: A schoolwide vision and an explicit, engaging curriculum are essential components of effective SEL implementation.

SEL must be an integral part of the school curriculum and it should be implemented based on realistic goals and expectations for the school. The definition and execution of SEL may vary based on individual beliefs so school leaders need to communicate the expectations for SEL and define what implementation should look like in the building. Leaders must also provide

teachers with the time and resources necessary to implement the strategies into their teaching practices. It begins with a vision. School leaders must establish the vision for SEL and include the plans for implementation and the measures for success. At the same time, leaders must provide teachers with the resources needed to implement SEL with fidelity. At the end of the study, all research participants agreed that school leadership created an environment that promoted social-emotional learning for students, but they expressed the need for hands-on curriculum resources that allow students ample opportunities to practice SEL skills in real-life contexts. The need for curriculum resources to support teaching practices for SEL was also indicated at the beginning of the study. The findings align with the research on sustaining support for SEL through ongoing professional development and access to an explicit and engaging curriculum (Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Osher, 2012). The findings are also associated with the theory of action framework which prioritizes student outcomes based on leader actions that help teachers improve their instructional practices.

The teachers used two curriculum resources to explicitly teach the SEL strategies. The first resource was provided by the school district. The second resource was provided by the design team and it used situational contexts to get students to solve problems and work through real-life conflicts. The feedback supported ease of use with the resources provided by the district however, the teachers also expressed the need for a more engaging curriculum.

The next section discusses the limitations of the study and implications for future research.

Limitations of the Current Study

To ensure a thorough review of the interventions being implemented, this study collected and analyzed multiple data points. Members of the 12th-grade academy joined the research team

after receiving an open invitation to participate in the study. Approximately 25% of all teachers in the 12th-grade academy participated in the study. The sample population may not be a true representation of all teachers. Extending the study to teachers outside of the 12th-grade academy may provide more information about teachers in the school.

The study was limited between August 2020 and January 2021. Additional research is needed to determine the impact of the study on the on-time graduation rate for seniors in the cohort. The study ended prior to determining which students met full requirements for graduation in the spring. Additional research cycles through the end of the year would provide beneficial information to examine the graduation candidates and the implications for the graduation rate.

The study was conducted during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The physical school building was closed for the duration of the study. The researcher used Microsoft Teams for video-calling to conduct individual and focus group interviews. Teacher reflections and survey data were collected online using Google forms. Access to technology or having limited WIFI connections presented a challenge for some research participants. The absence of face-to-face interactions between the researcher and the action research team and online data collection tools were limitations to the study. The limitations of this study along with implications and recommendations can strengthen future research in social-emotional learning at the high school level.

Implications and Recommendations

The researcher offers recommendations based on the findings, analysis, and conclusions of this research study. The recommendations that follow are for school practitioners, district, and government leaders. Most importantly, the findings suggest that social-emotional learning must be a priority for the school, and school leaders must communicate expectations for

implementation. Consistent communication about the shared responsibilities for student success promotes an environment of continuous improvement and creates an atmosphere of accountability and collaboration.

Social-emotional learning has positive effects on academic outcomes. The development of national, state, or local standards at the secondary level can impact teacher instructional practices while ensuring that all students have access to the appropriate supports needed to be successful. It would also require teacher certification programs to provide training to better prepare educators to meet the social-emotional needs of students. Currently, each state is responsible for determining the framework for SEL and roughly ten percent of the states have enacted legislation to address social-emotional in some manner, but primarily at the preschool level. The development of state or national standards at the secondary level would prove to be a beneficial component for ensuring readiness in high school and beyond. This study should be replicated with similar demographics to determine if the results would be aligned with the findings of this study.

Chapter Summary and Final Thoughts

Social-emotional learning strategies have been found to support student outcomes when implemented with fidelity. This study addressed teacher perceptions of social-emotional learning strategies on the outcomes of high school seniors and responded to the gap in the literature about the implementation of SEL at the high school level. School leaders must communicate the importance of social-emotional learning and continually provide engaging resources and ongoing professional development to support implementation. It is equally important for teachers to provide and model explicit SEL strategies and to create a learning environment where students feel safe to take academic risks.

The strength of student-teacher relationships is at the heart of SEL. Teachers with sound, positive relationships expressed having students who felt safe and free to show vulnerability and deficiencies. The students of these teachers knew and understood how they would be supported during class. Teachers used explicit and engaging strategies to fill academic gaps and not to evoke ridicule or shame. The teachers' actions were shaped by their beliefs in a social-emotional learning environment that provided students with a safe space to learn. Essentially, SEL must be embedded into the culture and climate of the school and teachers must be equipped with strategies and resources to implement it with fidelity.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH RELATED TO SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Empirical Findings

APA— by Author(s) and Year	Title of Study	Purpose	Methods/ Framework	Sample	Result(s)	Conclusion(s)
Dougherty, D, & Sharkey, J (2017)	Reconnecting youth: Promoting emotional competence and social support to improve academic achievement	The study analyzed the relationship between social-emotional support and academic success	Student surveys and student achievement data/ Social network theory	110 middle and high school students	The results did not increase emotional competence or academic achievement for participating students	The use of targeted interventions to meet the needs of students may be beneficial
Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger (2011)	The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions	This study analyzed the effects of school-based SEL programming on children's behaviors and academic performance	Meta-Analysis - Used four recommended practices for developing social-emotional learning skills and implementation/ Competence Promotion and Youth Development Framework	213 school-based, universal social and emotional learning (SEL) programs involving 270,034 kindergarten through high school students	SEL programs enhance SEL skills, attitudes, and positive social behaviors following intervention	SEL programs showed positive results on social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school and can be integrated throughout the school setting

APA— by Author(s) and Year	Title of Study	Purpose	Methods/ Framework	Sample	Result(s)	Conclusion(s)
Early, D M, Rogge, R D, & Deci, E L (2014)	Engagement, Alignment, and Rigor as Vital Signs of High-Quality Instruction: A Classroom Visit Protocol for Instructional Improvement and Research	The purpose of the study was to predict student test scores on standardized assessments in math and language arts using a quality instructional protocol	Classroom observations/Frame work for Teaching	1000 students, 33 math teachers, and 25 language arts teachers, four schools	The study found a correlation between quality math and language arts instruction, and achievement on the math and language arts standardized test	The study concluded that high-quality instruction could improve student achievement in math and language arts
Sinclair, M, & Christenson, S (1998)	Dropout prevention for youth with disabilities: Efficacy of a sustained school engagement procedure	The study was designed to re-engage at-risk students in the school setting	Check and Connect Intervention	90 ninth grade students with learning and emotional disabilities	There were no effects for students to complete school, but there were positive effects for students progressing and staying in school	The intervention supported students staying in school, but it did not impact school completion
Tan, K., Sinha, G., Shin, O. J., & Wang, Y. (2018a)	Patterns of social-emotional learning needs among high school freshmen students	To identify patterns of SEL needs among ninth grade students in relation to academic and behavioral performance	Latent class analysis/Social Skills Improvement Framework	323 ninth grade students	Students with more SEL needs experienced greater academic and behavioral challenges	Results further indicate the importance of examining self-reports of students with ratings of their perceived SEL needs
Taylor, R D, Oberle, E, Durlak, J A, & Weissberg, R P (2017)	Promoting Positive Youth Development Through School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Interventions: A Meta-Analysis of Follow-Up Effects	The purpose of this study was to follow-up on the effects of school-based universal SEL interventions	Structured tasks, questionnaires, self-reports, school records (discipline and academic)/ Positive Youth Development Framework	82 school-based, (SEL) interventions involving 97,406 kindergarten to high school students in the US and abroad	There were positive impacts of the intervention, with participants having stronger SEL skills and improved attitudes	There are long-term positive benefits of social-emotional learning on students regardless of students' race, socioeconomic background, or school location

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

**UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM**

Teacher Perceptions of Social-Emotional Learning Strategies on the Efficacy and Resilience of
Twelfth-Grade Students in an Inner-City High School

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Principal Investigator:

Dr. Jami Berry

*Department of Lifelong Education,
Administration, and Policy*

JamiBerry@uga.edu

(Cell) 404-668-5106

This action research seeks to address the influence of social emotional learning strategies on classroom practices in 12th-grade classrooms. The focus will be on developing a vision for social-emotional learning, assessing the beliefs and needs, and providing professional development to teachers to influence classroom practices, strategies for implementation, and ongoing collaborative professional learning communities that incorporate specific learning opportunities that addresses the needs of each teacher.

You are being invited to be in this research study because you currently work with 12th-grade students as a teacher.

Participation in this study will require approximately 10 hours of your time over a five-month period outside of your scheduled work hours. You will first be asked to complete a pre social-emotional learning survey and interview. In addition, based on the needs identified, you may also be asked to participate in professional development workshops and collaborative planning meetings. At the end of the study, you will be asked to complete a social-emotional learning survey.

This study involves the audio taping of your interview with the researcher. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audiotape or the transcript. The tapes will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy.

If you agree to participate in this study:

- We will collect information about beliefs, knowledge, and perceived impact of social-emotional learning strategies in 12th grade classes.
- We will ask you to participate in a professional development workshops. It will take about 60 minutes.
- We will follow up in each month by conducting classroom observations to assess implementation.

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate will have no impact in your participation in programs.

Your decision to take part or not take part in the research will not affect your employment with the school district in any way.

If there are questions that make you uncomfortable, you can skip these questions if you do not wish to answer them. There are no known risks associated with this study.

People who participate in this study may have a better understanding of social-emotional learning strategies and how to implement them with 12th-grade students in a classroom setting.

We will take steps to protect your privacy. The participants will not be asked to provide their name or any identifying information as part of this study. Data will be gathered in an anonymous manner, and therefore, no one could link the responses back to a certain participant. There are no known risks involved with participation in this study. A potential discomfort for participants may involve drawing attention to the social-emotional needs of

students you teach. To reduce this risk we will use pseudonyms in place of names and any audio recordings will be destroyed.

The information will not be used or distributed for future research.

Please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Jami Berry at 404-668-5106, JamiBerry@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

Angela Moore
Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

APPENDIX C: STAFF SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

	SEL Integration Strategy	Frequency of Use			Check to increase
		Often	Sometimes	Infrequently	
Academic + SEL	Identify academic and social-emotional learning objectives for each lesson.				
	Structure lessons so youth are working with others as well as alone.				
Active Learning Structures	Ask open-ended questions that surface and probe youth thinking.				
	Use cooperative structures like “Turn to Your Partner,” “Think, Pair, Share”.				
	Implement cooperative learning activities, along with the structures and guidance to provide support.				
	Intersperse periods of staff-led instruction with opportunities for talk.				
	Provide opportunities for youth choice.				
	Teach culturally relevant academic content.				
	Provide opportunities for youth self-assessment.				
Reflection	Provide opportunities for youth to discuss how they will work together before engaging in				
	Provide opportunities for youth to reflect (ask reflective questions; give reflective writing prompts about process, emotions involved, social interactions, or activity results) on both their academic and social-emotional learning.				

Discussion Facilitation Techniques	Have youth use discussion prompts when they contribute to a discussion. (“I [agree/disagree] with _____ because...,” and “In addition to what _____ said, I think...”)				
	Use wait time (provides thinking time for youth) after asking a question before calling on anyone to respond.				
	Have youth use “tag” to call on one another to speak.				
	Ask facilitative questions in discussions to help youth respond directly to one another.				
	Refrain from repeating or paraphrasing youths’ words.				
	Refrain from overt criticism or praise; instead, respond with interest.				

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following open-ended questions guided the interviews with the action-research team and the at Brandon A. Morris High School.

1. How do you help students develop strategies to make sure that they meet their learning goals?
2. How have you been given the opportunity to implement SEL in the classroom?
3. Please describe a time when you successfully supported a student struggling to understand the content. What was the outcome?
4. In what ways have you engaged students who are not typically motivated?
5. How can you improve your ability to teach social and emotional skills to students?
6. Do you find it easy to implement social emotional learning in high school classes?