SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND SCHOOL CLIMATE: MUTUALLY

REINFORCING CONSTRUCTS

by

JEROME GARAHAM

(Under the Direction of Sheneka Williams)

ABSTRACT

I use a manuscript style dissertation to examine the intersection of school climate and

SEL. These studies offer a critical perspective in discussions about school climate and SEL to

better center these constructs within the broader goals of the promotion of equity. In

documenting how educational stakeholders leverage the flexibility ESSA provides to center non-

cognitive indicators of success in their school improvement plans, my studies accentuate why

these reforms must not take on a color blinded nature.

To understand the racial school climate gap, study 1 of this dissertation uses descriptive

and exploratory research designs. I situate this study within the PVEST framework, by

positioning schools as either cultivating environments that exacerbate or mitigate threats to

students' schooling experiences. This study documents widespread disparities in students'

climate experiences and positions Black teachers as important protective factors against the

racial school climate gap.

In study 2, I document disparities in access to teachers who engage in SEL informed

classroom practices and argue further why inequities in SEL are likely to mirror those in other

prominent school improvement reforms. This study uses a social-ecological framework to

understand the myriad of factors that influence teachers' fidelity to SEL. It shows how a myriad of school and contextual factors implicate teachers' fidelity to SEL classroom practices, and positions mobility, trauma, poverty, and school climate as significant factors driving access to SEL.

Finally, study 3 examines school leaders to understand how they 'makesense' of threats to SEL implementation as well as how they are navigating the new terrain granted by ESSA. Guided by the organizational social capital framework, study 3 extends theory and practice regarding internal and external challenges faced by school leaders implementing SEL reforms. It suggests a lack of preparedness and mindsets unconducive to SEL among teachers as primary barriers to successful implementation. School leaders also conceptualized teacher turnover and instability as substantial barriers to SEL.

Cumulatively, the three studies explicate the intersection of school climate and SEL and center the people involved in building success reforms that improve these constructs, rather than programs that are central in other studies.

INDEX WORDS: Socioemotional Learning, School Climate, Policy Implementation, ESSA,
                Educational Inequities, Education Policy

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REINFORCING CONSTRUCTS

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER 1

PRELUDE TO DISSERTATION

Introduction and Literature Review

Many factors come together to determine what it means for one to be considered

educated. Having a strong command of curriculum, theoretical knowledge, and understanding

facts from multiple disciplines are all associated with being educated. However, these aspects are

incomplete because the phrase "educated person" suggests a more comprehensive concept of

skill development than is captured in measures of cognitive development. As such, an educated

person needs to be knowledgeable across many domains, but must also have pronounced critical

thinking and problem-solving skills, persistence or grit, high academic self-efficacy, and the

ability to establish relationships and work collaboratively with others (Durlak et al., 2011;

Garcia, 2014). Scholars refer to these skills as non-cognitive skills, and the process by which

students learn, develop, and enhance them is referred to as social and emotional learning (SEL)

(Goodspeed, 2016; Garcia & Weiss, 2016).

Despite non-cognitive skill's central role in educating children and developing

responsible, civically engaged, competent students, educational policy has historically

overlooked their importance (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit & Pittenger, 2014). Therefore, schools

have generally facilitated few policies and practices to nurture such skills in students, as the

development of cognitive skills has dominated the education policy agenda (Garcia, 2014). This

lack of attention to students' acquisition of SEL skills is particularly problematic because

scholarship consistently affirms the positive impacts of SEL on students' academic and non-

academic outcomes (Valerio et al., 2014; World Bank, 2014; Miyamoto et al., 2015). As such, policymakers and practitioners must set specific goals to nurture such skills within schools to ensure that comprehensive measures are taken to educate students wholly.

In recent years, educational stakeholders have expressed greater interest in the promotion of non-cognitive skills and many districts and schools are relying on SEL policies, programs, and initiatives to equip students with the range of skills needed to be successful in school and life (Valerio et al., 2014; World Bank, 2014; Miyamoto et al., 2015). Therefore, SEL programs are increasingly employed as school-based interventions to build such skills in students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014; Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Garcia, 2014). SEL is the process by which students acquire core competencies to recognize and regulate emotions, set and achieve goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain relationships, make responsible decisions, and navigate interpersonal situations constructively (Elias et al., 1997; Komarraju & Nadler, 2013). The ability to regulate emotions, display self-efficacy, and to show grit are non-cognitive skills associated with positive outcomes for students (Horowitz & Garber, 2006; Horowitz, Garber, Ciesla, Young, & Mufson, 2007) and SEL programs are helping students realize the benefits of participation (Garcia, 2014).

Importantly, non-cognitive skill development does not occur in a vacuum, and a range of school and societal factors, which are adeptly captured by the "social" aspect of SEL, influenced students' socioemotional development. One way scholars capture this facet of students' acquisition of non-cognitive skills is through the examination of school climate, which serves as a way to underscore their schooling experiences. School climate is increasingly recognized as an essential component of the school improvement process (Kim et al., 2014; US Department of Education, 2014; Voight et al., 2013) and a well-established body of literature continues to

explicate its positive associations with a range of student and school outcomes (Hanson & Voight, 2014; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). The National School Climate Center operationalizes school climate as "the quality and character of school life," which is determined by the "patterns of students', parents', and school personnel's experiences of school life" (2007). Thus, school climate is a multidimensional construct, influenced at individual, classroom, school/organizational, and community levels.

A sustained, positive school climate facilitates the process through which students develop the social, academic, and emotional competencies necessary for becoming productive citizens, who contribute to and lead satisfying lives in a democratic society (Thapa et al., 2013). Research continues to explicate the promising effects of exposure to positive school climates for students and staff members, particularly concerning students' academic and non-academic (McCoy et al., 2013; Owens, 2018; Thapa et al., 2013) and teachers' outcomes (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2011, 2012). Further, evidence also positions a positive school climate as a necessary condition for effective schooling reforms (Bulach & Malone, 1994; Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005 McMurrer, 2012), as schools with poor working conditions struggle to build the capacity and buy-in needed for the effective implementation of policies and initiatives (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Ladd, 2011).

The body of work explicating why positive changes to school climate precipitate effective reform accentuate why the interconnectedness of school climate and SEL must inform policy, research, theory, and practice. To date, very few scholars have conceptualized school climate as a necessary precursor to the effective enactment and implementation of policies intended to facilitate students' socioemotional skill development (Collie et al., 2011, 2012; Osher & Kendziora, 2010; Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jacobson, 2009). The gap in

the literature surrounding the interconnectedness of these two constructs is mostly attributable to the fact that researchers most often treat them as separate, rather than as two sides of the same coin. The theory of action for why improvements in schools' climates must precede efforts to promote SEL is as follows: school leaders and teacher facilitate positive schooling environments wherein students feel safe, valued, validated, and are treated fairly and in turn, are more likely to espouse receptivity to efforts that build their socioemotional development. Furthermore, this theory of action operates on the student level such that a schooling environment that is inclusive and culturally responsive (indications of a school climate) must have socially aware students, who value diversity and the perspectives of others (indicators of positive SEL) (Osher & Kendziora, 2010).

Constructing a conceptual model that empirically highlights the intersections between school climate and SEL sheds light on the mechanisms through which these school improvement straitiges can better school quality. To the extent that climate perceptions predict student outcomes and successful reform, policy efforts seeking to augment schooling outcomes via SEL policies and practices are unlikely to yield optimal returns without first—or at the very least simultaneously—addressing schooling environments. Further, situating SEL reforms within broader efforts to promote positive school climates underscores the roles all educational stakeholders (e.g., students, teachers, and school leaders) play in the successful adoption and implementation of SEL policies and initiatives. Finally, so doing accentuates how all members of a school are influenced by the policies targeting students' and staff members' socioemotional wellness and overall schooling conditions.

Persistent educational inequalities must remain the target of education and social policies, and efforts to promote positive school climate and to build students' SEL skills must too operate

to alleviate disparities in educational inputs and outputs (Jones, Farrington, Jagers, Brackett, & Kahn, 2019). Essential questions exist regarding the extent to which the current SEL policies, frameworks, programs and practices, and associated assessments are congruent with the equity focus necessary to ameliorate disparities in education (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Williams, 2019). As research continues to highlight the wide-spread disparities within education and society, it is increasingly necessary to examine the extent to which reforms touted as beneficial reflect, cultivate, and leverage cultural assets and growing diversity to promote the optimal well-being of students, particularly those from minoritized backgrounds (Ginwright, 2018; Jagers, 2016; Kirshner, 2015; Rivas-Drake, Jagers, & Martinez, 2019). So doing situates policies within an equity framework and ensure that all students have what they need when they need it, independent of their race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, family background, or family income (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017; Jagers et al., 2019).

Nonetheless, persistent challenges exist both in the enactment of race and class conscious policies and the implementation of even those policies that do intend to redress educational inequalities (Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron, & Osher, 2019; Hammond & Jackson, 2015; Osta & Vasquez, n.d.). In the section that follows, I document the myriad of problems associated with efforts to address the factors that constrain schools' abilities to educate students, particularly those from underserved communities, adequately. I also underscore obstacles SEL and school climate initiatives must clear in order to avoid exacerbating the inequities that have plagued students of color and students from low-resource background since the founding of this country (Ginwright, 2018; Jagers, 2016; Kirshner, 2015; Rivas-Drake, Jagers, & Martinez, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

Dominant cultural themes of individualism and materialism are ubiquitous in the U.S. and are frequently foundational to societal functioning and American policy and serve as the bedrock for much of the stigmatization and racism to which students of color are subjected (Jagers et al., 2019). Such dominant ideals position constructs like "maturity, success, and happiness" as best conceptualized by a prism showing how self-sufficient, autonomous, and financially well off an induvial is (Way & Rogers, 2017). Individualism and materialism have undoubtedly led to important advancements in society, but are also values that are often inconsistent with the world view of Black and Brown Students and families. Further, this cultural orientation has helped to create, sustain, and worsen long-standing racial, class, and gender stereotypes that define prevailing notions of what is normal or deviant, right or wrong, and good or bad (Jagers et al., 2019). These themes permeate through all U.S institutions and undoubtedly shape policies and reforms.

Such stereotypes also manifest inequity through operating on both individual and on systemic levels, where their detrimental effects are more pronounced. On an individual level, these stereotypes allow dominant groups, especially upper-income White people, that hold self-determined notions or "normal," to affix blame on disadvantaged students for their life circumstances; to justify and feel entitled to their unearned privilege; and to invalidate the experiences of the populations of people they are marginalizing (Goff et al., 2014; Salter & Adams, 2013). On a systemic level, these same dominant groups hold power and resources to shape national discourse, politics, and social norms (Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010; Piff, Dietze, Feinberg, Stancato, & Keltner, 2015; Watson, 2016). Thus, these groups' evaluations of success and failure and broader evaluations of school conditions and reforms,

which stereotypes influence, may predispose minoritized groups to adverse schooling conditions. This problematic conundrum where dominant groups ascribe notions of normality, while simultaneously leveraging their social and political capital to systematize stereotypes, motivates the need for critical scholarship that challenges and deconstructs the underlying values that shape reforms in society and education (Ginwright, 2018; Jagers, 2016; Kirshner, 2015; Rivas-Drake et al.,).

Schools, like other mainstream U.S. cultural institutions, are not immune to a reliance on these detrimental notions, and more often than not operate as microcosms of society that reproduce these social arrangements and cultural orientations. Scholars critique schools' reproduction of stereotypes by characterizing them as institutions that "prioritize prevailing middle-class American culture and can be thought of as offering a culturally relevant education (CRE) for White middle-income children and youth" (Jagers et al., 2019, p. 164). Thus, how schools characterize schooling, socioemotional wellness, and student success may also be influenced by narrowly defined, normative orientations that predispose culturally diverse students to implicit and explicit forms of bias and racism (A. Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013). When these types of cultural orientations guide the policies that govern education and the reforms that become popularized, they can lead school leaders and teachers to meet students with unwarranted low expectations, discriminatory practices, and microaggressions that undermine their socioemotional adjustment and cognitive learning (A. Allen et al., 2013; Jagers et al., 2019; Darling-Hammond, Cook-Harvey, Flook, Gardner, & Melnick, 2018).

Thus, the primary aim of the studies represented in this dissertation is to add to the dearth of literature offering a critical lens in the SEL and school climate literature by situating these constructs in an equity framework. These studies also position recent SEL and school climate

policies within the broader literature surrounding school improvement efforts in the past to underscore the pitfalls these constructs must avoid to yield optimal results for students. Educational disparities—and the myriad of factors that influence them—have been at the epicenter of education policy for the past half-century (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2001; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999) and SEL and school climate reforms must be advanced in such a way that redresses them.

The body of literature surrounding these constructs positions schools as uniquely situated to leverage their access to at-risk students to weaken the influences of the experiences they face on their academic achievement (Rouse & Fantuzzo, 2009; Rumberger, 1995). Thus, schools have the potential to cultivate protective factors—like positive school climates, and SEL informed policies and practices—to ensure that students reach their full potential. To do so, however, does not come without costs and tradeoffs, as the kinds of reforms advocated for by SEL and school climate scholars call for a reject to the hyper test-focused and zero tolerance for discipline environment that have dominated the educational policy landscape for the past few decades, in favor of a more comprehensive schooling experience that educates the 'whole child' (Garcia, 2014; Garcia & Weiss, 2016).

Thus, the current policy landscape provides both new and uncertain terrains that states, districts, and schools must navigate strategically to leverage the flexibility provided by changes in federal policy. Many states are advancing targeted policies and practices that focus on improvements to school climate (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013) and the inclusion of social and emotional learning (SEL) in schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; Garcia, 2014; García & Weiss, 2016; Graziano, Reavis, Keane, & Calkins, 2007). As such, they provide incredible opportunities for researchers to document and evaluate how schools are

grappling with barriers and challenges related to improving SEL and school climate, the extent to which reforms are advanced to redress inequities, and how schools build capacity for reform. In the following section, situate SEL and school climate reforms within the broader educational policy landscape to underscore how educational actors can charter the terrain of the new policy landscape effectively.

<div style="text-align:center">Social and Emotional Learning and School Climate: The Policy Context</div>

Recent shifts in federal education policy have created fertile ground that is ripe with opportunities to more comprehensively center SEL and school climate in the school improvement process (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; Garcia, 2014; Garcia & Wiess, 2016; Grant et al., 2017; Jones, Farrington, Jagers, Brackett, & Kahn, 2019). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 is the most recent federal push to augment persistent achievement gaps. ESSA mandates that in addition to testing, states must use at least "one additional measure of school quality or student success that is valid, reliable, and comparable across the state and allows for meaningful differentiation in school performance" to measure school effectiveness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016, p. 5). Thus, it has the potential to usher in new educational reforms by giving states, schools, and districts more latitude in determining school effectiveness strategies that buffer students' academic success from the negative influences of risk factors (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016).

As such, ESSA has opened a policy window that many states, districts, and schools are leveraging to orient school reforms around SEL (Kennedy, 2019). This Act grants educators greater flexibility to transition away from the punitive accountability policies that have dominated the federal education policy landscape since the No Child Left Behind era toward ones that position SEL as central for school effectiveness (Grant et al., 2017). To optimize the

opening of this window, however, educational stakeholders pursuing policies and initiatives aimed at educating the 'whole child' must center the school personnel tasked with implementing them and must be informed by the capacity of school leaders and teachers to do so effectively. Further, critical, equity informed scholarship is needed in this new era to ensure that policies and practice adopted under ESSA hold provisions that safeguard equity, access, and inclusion and provide meaningful opportunities for minoritized students to yield tangible benefits from ESSA.

Students, teachers, and school leaders each play significant roles in the facilitation of SEL and school climate, and understanding how they all operate within the movement to promote student and adult socioemotional wellness is necessary. Therefore, I use a three-in-one dissertation style to examine how disparities in school climate perceptions and the factors by which they are influenced (study 1), the factors that predict teachers' commitment to SEL (study 2) and the threats to effective SEL implementation as perceived by school leaders (study 3). The overarching research questions that guide these studies seek to understand better the mechanism through which school climate and SEL intersect to influence students, teachers, and school leaders, respectively.

Furthermore, these studies offer a critical perspective in discussions about school climate and SEL to better center these constructs within the broader goals of the promotion of equity. In documenting how policy actors and educational stakeholders leverage the flexibility ESSA provides to center non-cognitive indicators of success in their school improvement plans, my studies accentuate why these reforms must not take on a color blinded nature. The ESSA era can be marked by incredible progress as the federal government offers some relief from the prescriptive, harsh test-based accountability policies advanced via prior federal policies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; Manna, 2015), and while cognitive development dominated that area, my

works adds to the paucity of working advocating for transformative SEL to be central to the current one (A. Allen et al., 2013; Jagers et al., 2019; Darling-Hammond, Cook-Harvey, Flook, Gardner, & Melnick, 2018)

Finally, these studies seek to underscore the importance of highlighting the 'people' experiencing reforms wrought by SEL and school climate policies and not merely the 'programs' used to improve schooling. A shift in the focus of SEL from an exclusive emphasis on the impacts of programs to one that centers students and school personnel reflects the reality that the implementation, efficacy, and sustainability of SEL reforms (e.g., policies, programs, and practices) are mostly dependent on school personnel such as school leaders (principals and assistant principals) and teachers. Therefore, my studies aim to add to the dearth of scholarship that understands the importance of SEL and school climate studies that demonstrate positive effects on student outcomes but also documents the contextual conditions under which such positive results manifest (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl, Kitil, & Hanson-Peterson, 2017).

Research Questions

Cumulatively, the three studies represented in this study explicate the intersection of school climate and SEL and center the people involved in building success reforms that improve these constructs, rather than programs that are central in other studies. Thus, in study 1, the research questions that guide the study are: 1) To what extent do differences exist in how students perceive the climate of their schools?; 2) Which school contextual factors influence the magnitude of the racial school climate gap?; and 3) To what extent do Black teachers mitigate the magnitude of the racial school climate gap between Black and White and Black and Hispanic students?

Study two focuses on the intersection of SEL and school climate most directly by assessing the relationship between teachers' perceptions of school climate and their fidelity to SEL. In study 2, the research questions are: 1) To what extent do the contexts in which teachers work influence their use of SEL practices in the classroom?; 2) How do teachers' perceptions about school climate influence their fidelity to SEL implementation?; 3) In what ways do individual, schooling, and larger societal factors preclude the effective implementation of SEL practices and policies as perceived by teachers?

Finally, the third study examines school leaders and seeks to underscore the barriers they navigate when implementing SEL policies and initiatives in their schools. In study 3, the research questions are: 1) What primary internal and external threats do principals perceive affect the organizational social capital of schools implementing SEL?; and 2) How do threats to SEL implementation affect the different elements of organizational social capital as perceived by school leaders?

Conceptual Framework: Linking SEL and School Climate

My studies advocate for more research that operationalizes school climate and SEL as being two sides of the same coin. Thus, while separate theoretical frameworks guide each study, a sole conceptual framework guides the overall focus and purpose this dissertation. Osher and Kendziora (2010) Conditions for Learning serve as the conceptual lens through which I link SEL and school climate. These researchers postulate that in order for a school to educate students effectively, they must meet four conditions. First, students must be consistently exposed to a positive school climate, where they feel physically and emotionally safe. Students' perceptions of safety are captured by schools' rules and norms and whether or not schools foster environments that are socioemotionally safe for students (Thapa et al., 2013). A focus on safety stems from

well-established psychological literature that accentuates that feeling socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically safe, in any context, is a fundamental human need (Maslow, 1943). As students feel safe in their schools, they can experience academic and social development conducive to academic success, the promotion of prosocial behaviors, and overall healthy development (Devine & Cohen, 2007; Goldstein, Young, & Boyd, 2008; Gregory et al., 2010).

The second condition that Osher and Kendziora (2010) postulate is that students must be in academically challenging environments, where school leaders and teachers build supportive and engaging school communities and press for high academic expectations. Teachers and school leaders model norms, goals, values, and expectations to their students, and while doing so, lay the foundation for an academically enriching learning environment (Finnan, Schnepel, & Anderson, 2003; Kerr, Ireland, Lopes, Craig, & Cleaver, 2004). Next, and relatedly, Osher and Kendziora (2010) propose that students must feel supported. Schools must establish effective student supports that provide basic needs to them and seek out the significant adults in their lives to work collaboratively with students to encourage, support, and nurture them. Through this process of collaboration, school leaders and teachers establish meaningful relationships with students, which is an essential factor related to achievement (Gregory & Cornell, 2009; Wang, Selman, Dishion, & Stormshak, 2010).

Lastly, schools must prioritize students' SEL. As schools promote social and emotional skills through explicit instruction and as adults model these skills in their interactions with other adults and students, proper socioemotional development in students ensues (Durlack et al., 2011; Jones, 2015; Lee et al., 2012; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). Socioemotional skills such as conflict resolution, communication, kindness, appreciation and respect for diversity, problem-solving, and collaboration are especially necessary skills to foster, as evidence suggests

that, when students learn them, they also experience important academic and life gains (Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004; Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009; Elias & Haynes, 2008).

This conceptual model offers a lens through which researchers and educators can link school climate and SEL and accentuates how reforms that seek to effectively serve students by improving their outcomes must feature attention to them both. As schools seek to satisfy these conditions, students reap the social, emotional, and economic benefits of exposure to positive school climates and SEL (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014; Garcia, 2014; Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). This conceptual lens is useful for my studies because it features a focus on skills building and acquisition as well as pays close attention to the types of schooling environments that nurture SEL through positive school climates.

Further, this conceptual lens also sheds light on actions schools must take in order to ensure that the four proposed conditions are consistently met. As such, as schools consider how best to meet Osher and Kendziora's (2010) conditions, several current school practices must be revisited. For instance, how school discipline students must be change, as mounting evidence suggest that current practices are not consistent with supporting SEL skill development (Brown, 2007; Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010) and are not indicative of a positive school climate (Goldstein, Young, & Boyd, 2008; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Exclusionary discipline practices, especially, are problematic because they are more prevalent in schools with higher achievement gaps and more negative school climates (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2006; Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013; Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005) and harm the academic achievement of suspended and expelled students (Gregory et al., 2010). At the same

time, evidence suggests they offer no benefit to non-disciplined peers (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018; Steinberg & Lacoe, 2018).

While revisiting discipline is necessary, Osher and Kendziora's (2010) conditions for learning also highlight additional elements of schools that preclude learning that must be addressed to systematically to improve schooling. These include ensuring that students are exposed to diverse and rich curriculums that go beyond the tested grades that many schools focus exclusively on (Berliner, 2011; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Desimone, 2013). Further, schools must that active steps to build students SEL skills through explicit instruction (Durlak et al., 2011; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), and by leaders and teachers facilitating positive interactions among and with their students, which go a long way in preparing students to be college and career ready.

Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation is written in manuscript style. Chapters 2-4 are stand-alone articles that will be submitted for publication to scholarly journals. In chapter 2, I examine the intersection of race and school climate and show how schools' contextual factors can either mitigate or exacerbate racial school climate gaps. To understand the scope of students' perceptions of their school climate, the variations between them, and the factors that associate with the magnitude of those differences, this study uses descriptive and exploratory research designs. I situate this study within the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) (Spencer, 1999, 2005, 2006), by positioning schools as either cultivating environments that exacerbate or mitigate threats to students' schooling experiences. This framework elucidates how students face several risks to flourishing in school and that while students' perceptions of stressors most

significantly predict their outcomes, schools can buffer the effects of students' risk factors by providing them with comprehensive services and supports.

In chapter three, I employ an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to underscore the factors that predict teachers' fidelity to SEL practices. In particular, I underscore the relationship between teachers' perceptions of school climate and their fidelity to SEL as well as the mechanisms driving this relationship. This study uses a social-ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to understand better the myriad of factors that influence teachers' fidelity to SEL policies and initiatives. In so doing, this work underscores how teachers' commitment is a latent concept that fluctuates in response to the culmination of individual, schooling, and external effects that shape their working conditions, and, by extension, their classroom practices. The understanding of both the critical roles teachers play in driving SEL and how buy-in from them is essential for successful reform informs the present study, and its contributions add to the small, but essential, body of literature accentuating the key supports and barriers that influence teachers' fidelity to SEL (Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013; Collie et al., 2011, 2012).

In chapter four, I use interview data of school leaders in four districts implementing SEL to understand better their perceptions about the greatest threats they face when implementing systemwide SEL platforms. Guided by the organizational social capital (OSC) framework, this study extends theory and practice regarding internal and external challenges faced by school leaders implementing SEL reforms, particularly those serving in disadvantaged contexts. In illustrating how schools' institutional capacities shape and are shaped by the sociopolitical and geographic contexts in which schools are embedded, this analysis elucidates barriers to the effective SEL implementation and how they affect different elements of schools' social capital.

Specifically, these questions are focused around identifying how principals navigate threats to effective implementation of SEL, underscore how turnover and institutional instability can undermine equity dimensions of SEL initiatives, and positions school leaders as critical agents of change for SEL.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I look across the three chapters to identify recurring themes and to discuss implications for both policy, research, and practice. I conclude with a discussion of ways that future research might continue to explicate about both the intersectional nature of SEL and school climate and the importance of centering people and not programs in research, policy, and practice aimed at augmenting students' and adults' socioemotional wellness.

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CHAPTER 2

EXPLAINING THE RACIAL SCHOOL CLIMATE GAP. EVIDENCE FROM GEORGIA

Introduction

School climate is increasingly recognized as an essential component of the school improvement process (Kim et al., 2014; US Department of Education, 2014; Voight et al., 2013), as a well-established body of literature continues to explicate its positive associations with a range of student and school outcomes (Hanson & Voight, 2014; Thapa et al., 2013). Policymakers and practitioners at federal and state levels of government have expressed increased interest in understanding how students and staff are experiencing schooling, and school climate is a useful, valid, and reliable construct to underscore these experiences. In particular, the Every Student Succeeds Act's (ESSA) mandate that states must have, in addition to testing, at least "one measure of school quality or student success that is valid, reliable, and comparable across the state" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016, p. 5) has provided a pathway for schools to meaningfully explore avenues to improve their climate (Thapa et al., 2013).

As states undertake greater interest in identifying and promoting avenues to improve school climate, research must keep pace and accentuate the landscape of students' schooling experiences, differences within them, and the factors that associate most profoundly with those disparities. While much of the school climate research has focused on elucidating the additive benefits of positive school climates on students' academic outcomes, a paucity of current scholarship contends with the extent to which disparities exist in students' perceptions of school climate and the factors by which they are influenced (Bottiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2016;

Voight, Hanson, O'Malley, & Adekanye, 2015). Such work is especially critical considering the current political climate, which increasingly fosters racial-ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic intolerance, an appetite for white supremacist ideologies, and increasing incidences of hate crimes, which are on the rise under the current administration (Müller & Schwarz, 2018; Rushin & Edwards, 2018; Williams & Graham, 2020). To the extent that such intolerance exists within schools, a necessary step in understanding school climate must involve a rigorous exploration of the myriad of factors that influence how and why students' schooling experiences vary across and within contexts.

Moreover, students disproportionately subjected to ubiquitously unfair discipline practices and policies (Welsh & Little, 2018) and those educated by teachers who lack the culturally responsive pedagogies necessary to teach them (Garmon, 2004; Plata, Williams, & Henley, 2017) likely face distinctive threats to their climate perceptions relative to their more advantaged counterparts. Furthermore, individual differences between students that accompany them as they matriculate through schools, such as racial-ethnic background, SES, and supports and stressors, might also explain substantial variations in students' climate perceptions (Spencer, 1999; Spencer, 2006). Therefore, exploratory research that descriptively documents how, when, and under which contexts such differences in climate perceptions emerge informs policymakers and practitioners of the schooling processes they must target to ensure inputs to improve school climate are optimized.

Some scholars have investigated differences or disparities in how students perceive and experience their schooling environments and have coined the phrase "the racial school climate gap" (Voight et al., 2015). Consistent with the academic achievement disparities literature, racial school gap scholars theorize that it is essential to conceptualize differences in school climate

perceptions as disparities because of the unjust policies and practices that inform students' perceptions of their schools (Hill, 1993; Noguera, 2003). These disparities, frequently between Black and White and Hispanic and White students (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Shirley & Cornell, 2012), while explained in part by subjective differences in how students' climate perceptions, are also explained by objective variation in how school administrators treat students. In particular, the overrepresentation of students of color in school discipline pools (Losen, 2015; Skiba et al., 2011; Welsh & Little, 2018) and underrepresentation in advanced and gifted placements (Domina et al., 2019; Giersch, 2018; Grissom & Rodriguiz, 2017; Grissom & Redding, 2015), due in large part to academic tracking and ability stereotypes (Hill, 1993; Noguera, 2003), are tangible schooling practices that shape students schooling experiences (Hargrove & Seay, 2011).

The connection of inequities to the school climate literature has significant theoretical advances in the field of education, but the racial school climate gap has mostly been underexplored, and the extant literature examining it is limited on several fronts. First, existing studies overwhelmingly rely on relatively small survey samples (Bachman et al., 2011; Booren, Handy, & Power, 2011; Swartz, Reyns, Henson, & Wilcox, 2011). Additionally, while national surveys have the advantage of large sample sizes, they frequently lack a sufficient number of observations in individual schools to draw inferences about the within-school differences in school climate (Hong & Eamon, 2011; Sacco & Nakhaie, 2007). Furthermore, studies that sample on a statewide basis are most often cross-sectional and do not allow for longitudinal analyses that assess how changes in contexts associate with climate gaps overtime (Akiba, 2008; Astor, Benbenishty, Zeira, & Vinokur, 2002; May & Dunaway, 2000; Welsh, 2001).

Nonetheless, the theoretical and empirical arguments gleaned from scholars conceptualizing the racial school climate gap are consistent with prevailing theories that

explicate how multiple contexts, including family, peers, schools, neighborhoods, social structures, and culture shape students' outcomes and perceptions (Bronfenbrenner, 2004; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Gibson & Krohn, 2011; Goldsmith, 2009; Kirk, 2009; Sullivan, 2013). As such, the empirical work in studies testing for mean differences in school climate perceptions across racial-ethnic groups, coupled with guiding theories explaining the factors that affect students' views of their experiences, accentuate why schools' contextual factors might alter the extent to which school climate perceptions vary between students. Inasmuch as school leaders' and teachers' policies and practices reflect a commitment to equity, fairness, and overall concern for the wellbeing of students, schools, are positioned to exacerbate or mitigate threats to the positive schooling experiences of the children they serve, especially students of color.

Students of color are subjugated to external threats to positive schooling experiences that schools can buffer them against by operating as protective factors or exacerbate them by functioning as microcosms of the broader society that espouses unjust pedagogies and practices (Hope & Spencer, 2017; Spencer, 2006). For instance, the rhetoric and subsequent presidential election of Donald Trump may detrimentally affect how students of color perceive their environments and are objectively treated within them. To this end, some recent research has suggested that the election of Donald Trump is associated with increased media reports of school-based harassment and hate crimes (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Other researchers have shown increases in teasing and bullying, primarily as related to race, in counties favoring Donald Trump in the election (Huang & Cornell, 2019). These types of harassment can have lasting effects on how students experience schooling and may result in a range of adverse outcomes for students of color. Thus, to the extent that school leaders and teachers facilitate positive school climates that protect students from the racism that has accompanied Trump's rise,

students of color can experience schooling in a manner that repairs the traumas of racism and does not intensify them.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explicate and quantify the magnitude of the racial school climate gap in Georgia and to accentuate how schools can act as protective factors for Black students, in particular, to ensure all students experience the optimal benefits of positive school climates. To the extent that positive school climates provide additive benefits to student outcomes, the realities students of color face in school may undercut their access to constructive educational outcomes (Berkowitz et al., 2015; Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004; Hopson et al., 2014; Johnson & Stevens, 2006; O'Malley et al., 2015). Consequently, understanding the myriad of factors that influence racial gaps in school climate holds important implications for equity, school improvement, and the emerging policy initiatives to augment students' schooling experiences. Concerning equity, policymakers and advocates should have vested interests in ensuring schools employ fair and equitable practices that position students for academic and socioemotional success. Without this commitment from policy actors, schools may fail to respond to racism, intolerance, harassment, and the other threats to positive perceptions of school climate and objective, detrimental schooling experiences with sufficient and prompt actions.

Furthermore, examining school climate has essential practical implications, as it is a malleable construct, over which school leaders, teachers, and students have considerable influence. Therefore, school climate is a useful construct for school officials to seek to improve with targeted school improvement processes and policies. Likewise, policies seeking to reduce and close academic achievement gaps should be informed by the body of literature highlighting the positive effects of school climate on students' academic and non-academic outcomes (Burdick-Will, 2018; McCoy et al., 2012; Ruiz, McMahon, & Jason, 2018). As such, policies

intended to redress educational disparities must feature safeguards that ensure schools' processes and practices facilitate fairness and equity, and school climate surveys provide one avenue to amplify students' voices related to their experiences in school.

Thus, to understand the scope of students' perceptions of their school climate, the variations between them, and the factors that associate with the magnitude of those differences, this study uses descriptive and exploratory research designs. I situate this study within the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) (Spencer, 1997, 1999, 2006), by positioning schools as either cultivating environments that exacerbate or mitigate threats to students' schooling experiences. This framework elucidates how students face several risks to flourishing in school and that while students' perceptions of stressors most significantly predict their outcomes, schools can buffer the effects of students' risk factors by providing them with comprehensive services and supports. With this framework in mind, the present study explores three separate but related research questions:

1) To what extent do difference exist in students' school climate experiences?

2) To what extent are racial school climate gaps associated with differences within versus between schools?

3) Which school contextual factors influence the magnitude of the racial school climate gap?

This study attempts to underscore the complex set of factors that influence school climates and disparities in perceptions about using survey data from middle and high schools in Georgia from 2014-15 to 2017-18. Using a multiple OLS regression framework, this study examines the between school, shared variance in students' self-reported perceptions of school climate, as well as the school characteristics by which it is influenced. In essence, this manuscript explores whether gaps in school climate perceptions are apparent across student

racial-ethnic subgroups, and if so, the school contextual factors that influence the magnitude of such gaps.

Using the PVEST framework, this study seeks to uncover contextual factors that widen such gaps, as well as potential school characteristics that serve as protective factors that attenuate them. This article advances the existing school climate literature by providing estimates of gaps in perceived schooling experiences between racial-ethnic minority and White students based on all middle and high schools in Georgia who complete annually administered surveys that span four successive school years. To my knowledge, no study to date has focused on rigorously identifying racial and ethnic differences in school climate perceptions using data from a large, statewide sample of students over multiple years. Finally, this study adds to a smaller and mostly dated body of literature seeking to underscore the schooling conditions that associate most closely with the size of racial school climate gaps (Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Goldsmith, 2004; Mattison & Aber, 2007; Voight et al., 2015).

In what follows, this manuscript synthesizes the literature about school climate disparities across student subgroups. Next, a review of the school climate literature accentuating the school contextual factors that influence follows this preceding section. Next, I unpack that PVEST framework, its implications for and application to the present study, which is followed by a detailed methods section. After the presentation of findings, I conclude with a discussion section comprised of a summary of findings, implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

Disparities in Perceptions of School Climate Across Elements

Evidence about whether and to what extent disparities in school climate exist across student subgroups is mixed, with some studies suggesting widespread disparities across student

subgroups (Battistich et al., 1995; Bottiani et al., 2016; McNeely et al., 2002) and other suggesting weak correlation or non-significant differences (Fan, Williams, Corkin, 2011; Koth et al., 2008; Vieno et al., 2005). On the one hand, some scholars assert that race and perceptions of school climate are only weakly correlated (Kuperminc et al., 1997; Way et al., 2007) or non-significant (Bradshaw et al., 2009), suggesting that other factors drive disparities in school climate over and above race, but these scholars tend to examine fewer elements of school climate. For instance, Fan et al. (2011) used data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 to determine whether school or individual-level characteristics account for more of the variance in students' perceptions of school climate using hierarchal linear modeling (HLM). These researchers assessed school climate based on students' perceptions of: 1) order, safety, and discipline; 2) fairness and clarity of rules; and 3) teacher-student relationships. They concluded that students' individual-level characteristics (i.e., such mobility, low-income status, and problem behaviors) were more predictive of how students perceive climate compared to school-level characteristics (i.e., school size, number of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, and school type). Despite the importance of these individual-level factors, Fan et al. (2011) did not find a significant effect of race on school climate perceptions.

On the other hand, Bottiani et al. (2016) assessed school climate by students' perceptions of support from teachers and found that, even after controlling for SES, Black students reported significantly lower levels of perceived support from teachers. These results, however, were moderated by school type, such that in more diverse, lower SES schools, the gap between Black and White students' perception of support was the most significant relative to other school types. Further, Voight et al. (2015) operationalized school climate by focusing on safety and school connectedness, opportunities for meaningful participation, and by perceptions of adult-student

relationships. They found that Black and Hispanic students reported lower perceptions of safety and school connectedness than White students and that the magnitude of these differences varied significantly by school characteristics, suggesting the between school variations in school-level factors account for a significant amount of the variance in these disparities.

Reconciling these differences about the significance of race is both important and challenging. One clear explanation about the differences in results surrounding the association of race and students' perception of climate may be that divergence between scholars' conclusions on race are mostly driven by which elements of school climate they assess in any given study. The multidimensional nature of school climate as a construct lends itself to different results in how students assess any given element. Sense studies tend to only focus on one or a few elements of school climate, rather than on each dimension of the construct at once (Fan et al., 2010; Voight et al., 2014), there is some reason to believe differences about the association of race across studies can emerge. Another explanation may lie in the varied contexts in which researchers assess students' climate perceptions. It may be the case that in certain parts of the country, given specific histories and sociopolitical contexts, the influence of race in students' climate perceptions varies. Both of these realities necessitate the use of large scale, statewide or national datasets that can capture variations in contexts across space and time.

School Level Factors that Drive Climate Disparities

Racial Composition. In addition to examining the influences of individual-level predictors of climate such as race, important school-level characteristics might also help to explain whether or not disparities in perceptions of climate manifest between students. For instance, evidence suggests that Black students, who attend predominately White, higher SES schools, have demonstrably lower perceptions of school climate, relative to Black students in

schools with different racial and socioeconomic compositions (Bottiani et al., 2016). Research also demonstrates that supportive student-teacher relationships are particularly salient for Black students (Decker et al., 2007; Meehan et al., 2003), yet also accentuates that the extent to which Black students experience them is mostly a function of school-level characteristics (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hughes & Kwok, 2007). The line of scholarship provides suggestive evidence that students of color face more discrimination in mostly White and upper-class schools, via relatively worse student-teacher relationships (Benner & Graham, 2013; Seaton & Yip, 2009), but fare far better in schools with a "critical mass" of same-race peers (Benner & Graham, 2009, 2013).

Additionally, Voight et al. (2015) found that White, urban middle school students were less likely to engage in prosocial behaviors in school contexts with higher compositions of Black students, but Black students' proclivity to engage in such behaviors was not a function of the racial composition of their school. Voight et al.'s work suggests that White students in urban schools may have worse perceptions of school climate, which reduces the likelihood that they will pursue interactions with students from other racial backgrounds. Other studies have shown that, across a myriad of contexts, students' perceptions of school safety, an essential element of school climate, is significantly lower in high poverty schools, as they are more likely to experience violence and peer- victimization (Bevans et al. 2007; Bradshaw et al. 2009; Khoury-Kassabri et al. 2004; Koth et al. 2008).

Norms that Reflect Cultural Appreciation. The extent to which schools have strong and consistent norms that reflect and respect for diversity is another school level variable that shares an inverse relationship with racial gaps in perceptions of school climate. When schools foster an appreciation and respect for student diversity and culture, Black and Hispanic students

report feeling safer and more supported, on average (Mattison & Aber, 2007). Chang and Le (2010) found that Hispanic students showed higher levels of empathy towards their peers when they felt that their schools facilitated respect for cultural diversity. Perhaps respect for diversity is less prioritized in more upper-class, White schools, which may have detrimental ramifications for minority students who attend these schools and explain their lower school climate scores in them. Considering evidence of academic tracking (Mickelson, 2001; Oakes, 1995) and disproportionately in school discipline rates (Welsh & Little, 2018a, 2018b), it is reasonable to assume that minority students are unlikely to perceive their schools as displaying a respect for diversity and, accordingly, may have lower school climate scores.

Schools that act intentionally to facilitate environments that cultivate an appreciation and respect for the multi-varied racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds that compromise diverse student bodies are more likely to have students who report feeling supported, safe, and a stronger sense of belonging to their school (Voight et al., 2015). School leaders, teachers, and other administrators may foster cultural appreciation by encouraging students of all racial and cultural backgrounds to enroll in rigorous courses and by ensuring their practices and policies reflect the broad culture of the school. Researchers have studied the intersection of school discipline, and students' perceptions of fairness within schools and have found the Black-White discipline gap to be smaller in schools with higher levels of fairness as reported by students (Mattison & Aber, 2007). Schools also foster cultural appreciation by ensuring students have access to opportunities that prompt engagement with students from similar racial-ethnic backgrounds. For instance, Datnow and Cooper (1997) used qualitative approaches to assess the schooling experiences of Black students attending affluent, predominantly White high schools. They found that the

presence of and subsequent involvement of Black students in cultural groups improved their sense of connectedness to school.

Teachers. Teachers play a central role in—and may serve as primary protective factors for—establishing school and classroom climates that cultivate respect and norms for diversity. Tan (1999) found that teachers who engaged in practices and actions that reflected cultural respect significantly improved the level of school engagement among a sample of middle and high school-aged Hispanic students. Tan also found that Hispanic middle and high school students who felt that other students and teachers respected their culture reported more interest in school. Furthermore, Bellmore et al. (2012) provide suggestive evidence that teachers who promote collaborations between students across racial groups influence students' perceptions of school norms and respect for diversity. Schools with such teachers, on average, have fewer students who self-report experiences of racial discrimination.

In addition to being central figures in the cultivation of positive school climates, teachers' individual characteristics can also serve as important protective factors. While a paucity of extant literature examines the relationship between teacher race and school climate (Voight et al., 2015), some scholars have concluded significant associations. Goldsmith (2004) used a nationally representative sample of eighth-grade students to assess the relationship between the proportion of teachers of color in a school and the climate perceptions of Black and Hispanic students. Goldsmith (2004) worked showed that, on average, increases in the percentage of teachers of color significantly associated with more positive attitudes toward school for Black and Hispanic students.

The impact of teachers of color on students' of color academic and non-academic outcomes has garnered increasing attention, particularly in the last few years (Fairlie et al., 2014;

Gershenson et al., 2016; Redding, 2019). Descriptive evidence suggests that districts that employ more Black and Hispanic teachers have, on average, higher levels of achievement for all students, regardless of race, holding constant poverty rate and expenditures (Meier, Wrinkle, & Polinard, 1999). Causal research suggests Black teachers impact students' test score outcomes and overall schooling outcomes (Gershenson, Hart, Hyman, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2018; Hart, 2020; Joshi, Doan, & Springer, 2018 Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Together, these lines of the literature suggest that improved school climate perceptions might serve as one mechanism by which teachers of color improve the academic outcomes of Black and Hispanic students.

Theoretical Framework

In seeking to understand disparities in perceptions of school climate better, this study guided by the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) and seeks to show the intersections between risks to and protective factors for students' climate perceptions. Using this framework, I position schools as operating as actors that exacerbate or mitigate threats to students' perceptions of their school climate (Cunningham, Corprew, & Becker, 2009; Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2003). The PVEST framework focuses primarily on individuals' perceptions of their experiences and environments and posits that they are frequently more predictive of students' outcomes than are the objective experiences they face (O'Connor Lewis, & Mueller, 2007). According to PVEST, the treatment that one receives does not directly cause an outcome, but his or her perception of the experience itself influences what leads to a desired or undesired outcome (Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, Griffin, Cogburn, 2008; Cunningham et al., 2009).

PVEST is a comprehensive theory outlining several interdependent components: net vulnerability level, net stress engagement, reactive coping mechanisms, emergent identities, and

life stage outcomes (Spencer, 1999; Spencer, 2006). Each of these elements is shaped by an individual's perception of their own experience, which has utility when researchers are interested in understanding how individuals perceive their school's climate. All students, regardless of background, are situated within contexts that feature both risks and protective factors. However, students in some settings invariably face more risks or benefit from more protective factors than others, and the characteristics of each individual's context are specified in the first component of PVEST--net vulnerability engagement (Spencer et al., 1997). Examples of risks might include race, SES, household makeup, or race/ethnicity, and these risks may predispose students to adverse, systematically unjust conditions and outcomes. Importantly, PVEST does not position individuals' racial-ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds as inherent risks but acknowledges that historically disadvantaged students' wellbeing is affected by inequitable and disproportionate threats. These threats, and not a racial or class background alone, are what PVEST scholars contend are risks to positive school experiences for marginalized students.

Protective factors (e.g., exposure to high-quality teaching and/or a diverse school staff), on the other hand, may buffer the influences of these risks and promote resilience, wellbeing, and positive psychosocial outcomes. For marginalized individuals (e.g., youth of color and low SES students), the noted risk factors may be compounded by imposed expectations from teachers that demean their aptitude and by the race and/or class-based stereotypes of peers and school leaders that undermine their effort (Hope, Hoggard, & Thomas, 2016; Hope, Keels, & Durkee, 2016). Alternatively, these students can attend schools with positive climates that intentionally function to dispel the effects of the deep-seated racism that plagues schools. In the case of the former, schools exacerbate, rather than mitigate--as is done in the latter-- students' risk factors and can lead to poor academic and socioemotional outcomes for students of color.

Conceptually, the first stage of PVEST sums students' risk and protective factors, respectively, and the difference between the two, which can be positive or negative, yields their net vulnerability level (McGee & Stovall, 2015). As such, PVEST would consider a student with an imbalance of levels of evident risks (i.e., excessively high) versus the accessibility of protective factors (i.e., uncommonly low) as having a high net vulnerability (Hope & Spencer, 2017). The is considerable variation, however, in how students across subgroups navigate such vulnerability and other stages in the PVEST model underscores potentials sources of the diversification in responses.

The second component, the student's net stress engagement, includes the ways risks and protective factors occur in everyday experiences (Cunningham et al., 2009; McGee & Stovall, 2015). Accordingly, the balance of students' level of challenges compared to their supports influences their wellbeing, decision-making processes, and schooling experiences. The supports made available to students (i.e., personal, social, or structural) can help them navigate the stress of their risk factors by diminishing their influence on students' wellbeing and functioning (Hope & Spencer, 2017), which may assist students in developing socially, emotionally, and academically. For instance, schools can serve as supportive, protective factors that help students manage and overcome the influences of their risks, or students themselves can mobilize and seek to improve their outcomes independent from their schools (Hope, Velez, Offidani-Bertrand, Keels, & Durkee, 2018).

The combination of stressors and supports leads to reactive coping methods, which form the third component of PVEST (Spencer et al., 1997). These responses involve the development of coping strategies that can be either adaptive or maladaptive (Ballard, Hoyt, & Pachucki, 2018; Hope et al., 2018; Hope & Spencer, 2017). These coping strategies then form the basis for the

development of emergent identities, which is the fourth component. This stage of PVEST highlights how individuals perceive themselves because of their experiences and contexts. Emergent identities are constructed through self-appraisal of individuals' lived experiences and shape how they view themselves within and between their various contexts of development (e.g., family, school, neighborhood, and peer group) (Hope & Spencer, 2017). The signals students receive from their environments as well as how they view themselves as a result of their experiences, particularly ones related to their cultural/ethnic background and gender roles, culminate to define their identity (Hope & Spencer, 2017).

Finally, the culmination of these stages leads to the final component: life stage outcomes (Spencer 1999). As identities settle in and stabilize, the foundation for the behaviors students will employ to navigate future experiences also takes shape, as unresolved issues within one life stage affect later coping and identity development processes. As such, this stage refers to the outcomes or results of one's perception of his or her experiences.

Relevant PVEST Literature

Hope and Spencer (2017) used PVEST as a framework to better understand how youth use civic engagement and reactive coping mechanisms to combat racial marginalization. They posit civic engagement as a positive, proactive, and strategic response to unjust sociopolitical conditions that seek to increase minoritized youths' net level of vulnerability over time. They find evidence that marginalized youth tend to be skeptical of and hesitant to engage in traditional political participation because of the history of politicized and racialized suppression in America, a lack of government trust, and perception that politicians are not, have not, and may very well never be responsive to their needs (Diemer & Li,2011; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Therefore, while some youth may internalize this reality and become apathetic in politics, others may

coalesce their political and social capital to make societal change (Hope & Spencer, 2017). While Hope and Spencer's study does not directly address education, it identifies an effective coping mechanism that highlights how students can respond to adverse conditions to yield favorable outcomes.

Few studies have used PVEST to examine school climate (Benner & Graham, 2009; Mikulsky, 2006; Spencer, 2005). Mikulsky (2006) used PVEST to understand better how same-sex attracted youth perceived school climate, paying particular interest to their perceptions related to supports, and how these experiences influenced their academic outcomes. The researcher highlighted just how problematic school climates are for these students, suggesting that about 96% of LGBT youth were exposed to climates where students talked despairingly about and or physically harassed them, and sometimes, even in the presence of staff members. Benner & Graham (2009) used PVEST to underscore the significant challenges Black and Latinx students face when transitioning to high school. Their analyses reveal that while all students face transitional challenges adjusting to schools, these are substantively compounded for minority students when the numerical representation of their racial group is lower in the school they to which they transition.

Despite its rare applications to education, PVEST is a suitable framework to guide this work because it adeptly lays out the intersection of students' experiences and environments and how they influence their outcomes. In the context of the current study, risks are theorized to be best captured by students' racial-ethnic backgrounds. Again, this study positions race as a risk to the extent that students' racial backgrounds disproportionately predispose them to adverse, systematically unjust treatment at school. Protective factors are conceptualized as school-level variables that might mitigate the effects of student race on their climate perceptions, such as the

proportion of minority teachers in a school (Goldsmith, 2004) and student to teacher ratios (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Khoury-Kassabri et al., 2004).

Students who do not perceive their schools' climates as fair and equitable may respond in different ways, and consistent with PVEST, such responses can be adaptive or maladaptive. As such, to gauge students' reactive coping strategies, this study relies on survey items that assess the extent to which students engage in practices that reflect poor mental health. Maladaptive responses to disparities in school climate may lead students to engage in risky behaviors or unhealthy practices, and as such, I attempt to capture students' coping strategies using these data points. Lastly, the present manuscript captures students' life stage outcomes using students' overall school climate scores. Therefore, in this study, I investigated the role of race (risk factor), teachers' race and student to teacher ratios (protective factors), students' self-reported mental health behaviors (reactive coping strategies) as predictors of the racial school climate gap (outcomes).

Methods

PVEST informs the methods employed in this study. Clear evidence highlights the myriad of risk factors that influence students' school climate experiences (Bevans et al., 2007; Bradshaw et al., 2009; Khoury-Kassabri et al., 2004; Koth et al., 2008) and this study uses PVEST to position schools as critical protective factors that can mitigate the effects of those risks on students' perceptions of school climate. Therefore, I investigate the extent to which disparities exist in perceptions of school climate and by which school characteristics such disparities are influenced.

Sample

To better understand disparities in school climate, I use a four-year panel of student-level data for students who took the Georgia School Health Survey (GSHS) from 2014-15 through to 2017-18. This study relied on student survey and state administrative data from 1,131 middle and high schools in Georgia that administered GSHS to at least 75% of their students in each of the four academic years sampled. During this time frame, a total of 2,640,106 student surveys were completed in 1,131 middle and high schools. The Georgia Department of Education requires an annual administration of these surveys, and as such, the sample of surveyed middle and high schools comprised approximately 100% of all middle and high schools in the state. From the sample of schools, three separate analytic samples were employed to examine the 1) Black–White, 2) Black-Hispanic, and 3) Hispanic–White school climate gaps, respectively. The inclusion criteria for each of these samples required that a school (a) have at least 75% of their student offer survey responses from each of the three relevant racial subgroup categories and (b) have a significant number of students of each of the two relevant racial subgroup categories based on federal reporting regulations for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. A total of 920 schools were retained in the Black-White school climate gap analytic sample, 591 in the Black-Hispanic sample, and 576 schools in the Hispanic–White school climate gap analytic sample.

Measures

This study relied on two sources of data: (a) GSHS, administered annually to all middle and high schools in the state, and (b) publicly available school administrative data from the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). Survey data were identified by school identification number but not at the student level; thus, individual-level student survey data were linked with school-level administrative data.

School Climate. The primary dependent variable in this study is students' perceptions of school climate. Annually, the GaDOE administers the GSHS to each school in the state, and students in grades six and above can opt to respond to the survey. Each students' survey score is then aggregated to the school level, such that each year, every school, finishes with a school climate score that is made publicly available. The school climate surveys can be separated into eight different domains, each representing an element of school climate. These subscales are as followed: school connectedness, peer social support, adult social support, cultural acceptance, social and civic learning, physical environment, school safety, and peer victimization. Students respond to items using Likert scales that measure their agreeableness with the questions that are posed to them. An example of an item from this scale is, "I get along with other students at school." For the present study, individual overall climate scores were standardized (i.e., $M = 0$, $SD = 1$) relative to all of the middle and high school students in each analytic sample.

Student Race. Race was operationalized via a series of binary variables for Black, Hispanic, and White, scored based on students' self-reported race and ethnicity on the GSHS. Students' race is self-reported, as students report whether they identify their race or ethnicity as either Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, White or Caucasian, Asian or Pacific Islander, or as Other. For the Black-White and Black-Hispanic analytic samples, the variable "black" is used as a dichotomous indicator and is coded as 1 if a student identifies as Black or African American and as 0 if the student self-identifies as White or Hispanic. Hispanic is the reference category in the White-Hispanic analytic sample.

Student Mental Health. This study uses a secondary part of the GSHS to assess students' mental health to gauge reactive coping mechanisms. Eight items on the survey ask students to respond to a series of questions related to how often in the past 30 days they have:

felt sad or down, anxious, had difficulty concentrating, or had experienced other behavior challenges. Items contain seven responses, ranging from "none" to "all 30 days." Sample items from this subscale are: "In the past 30 days, on how many days have you experienced severe mood swings that have caused problems in relationships?" and "In the past 30 days, on how many days have you experienced severely out-of-control behavior that could hurt yourself or others?" For the present study, individual students' scores were standardized (i.e., M = 0, SD = 1) relative to all of the middle and high school students in each analytic sample.

School Contextual Characteristics. School demographic information was extracted from the CDE's GaDOE, including the percentage of students in a school who were Black, Hispanic, and eligible for direct certification (a proxy for poverty), the student-teacher ratio, the percentage of teachers who were Black and Hispanic, the average experience level of teachers, and the total enrollment level of each school.

<center>**Empirical Strategy for Research Question 1 & 2**</center>

To test for disparities in perceptions of school climate, a series of increasingly controlled regression models were estimated in Stata 15. The present study examined both disparities in reports of school climate experiences between students across racial-ethnic backgrounds and the various school contextual factors that influence the magnitude of differences in school climate perceptions. Separate models were estimated for the Black-White, Black-Hispanic, and the Hispanic-White analytic samples. Students' school climate experiences were modeled as dependent variables. To test the existence and extent of racial school climate gaps within schools, I first estimated a one-level, OLS regression to determine the overall statewide school climate gap, irrespective of school covariates using the equation:

$$Y_i = b0 + b1Race_i + r_i$$

where y is the overall school climate score of student i. The coefficient b1 is the model-implied overall statewide gap in the outcome between White students and either Black or Hispanic students (or Black and Hispanic students). This relationship is modeled by year to allow for an investigation of how the relationship between race and school climate perceptions has changed (or not) over time. For research question 2, a district and school fixed effect specification is added to the regression model above to shed light on the extent to which variation within schools versus between schools associate most substantively with the magnitude of the racial school climate gaps.

Empirical Strategy Research Questions 3

Next, I seek to understand how school contextual factors influence the size of the differences in school climate perceptions across racial-ethnic backgrounds by including increasingly controlled contextual factors into the model. Model one reflects the naïve model and shows the 4-year average difference in school climate perceptions across racial-ethnic categories. Following this, model two includes variables that examine how disparities in school climate change as a function of school structural characteristics. In model three, I include teacher characteristics, and model four adds the percentage of Black or Hispanic Teachers. The full regression specification is modeled by the following equation:

$$\text{SchoolClimate}_i = \beta 0 + \beta 1 \text{Race}_{id} \text{ (Black, Hispanic, Asian, or Other)} + \beta 2 \text{Directcert}_d +$$

$$\beta 3 \text{Disibilities}_d + \beta 4 \text{SchDiscipline}_d + \beta 5 \text{Part-time}_d + \beta 6 \text{Coping} + \beta 7 \text{TchExp}_d + \beta 8 \text{SELQuality}_d +$$

$$\beta 9 \text{TeacherQuality}_d + \beta 10 \text{Stud.Tch}_d + e_{id}$$

where the outcome variable represents a students' overall school climate perceptions score. This score is then regressed on the primary predictor $\beta 1$Race (with White as the reference group), which is a series of dichotomous variables and represents the model implied difference in

school climate perceptions between racial-ethnic minority and White students. Other predictors are added in models 2-5 and serve as school contextual factors that influence the size of the difference represented by $\beta 1$Black (or White). These other coefficients in the model represent how a one-unit change in an independent variable relates to changes in the racial school climate gap, holding constant other variables in the model. However, this study is primarily interested in underscoring how disparities in school climate perceptions are mitigated or exacerbated by the inclusion of other school contextual variables.

The coefficients from the equation represent the relationship between an aspect of schools' contextual factors and the overall school climate. The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch ($\beta 2$), classified as having a disability status ($\beta 3$), the number of student disciplinary infractions divided by 1,000 ($\beta 4$), and the share of teachers that are part-time ($\beta 5$) are included in model 2. Students' average self-reported mental health assessments ($\beta 6$) and are added to the model 2 variables to form model 3. In model four, regression models are fitted that account for teacher characteristics, such as the average teacher experience ($\beta 7$), SEL competence ($\beta 8$) and overall ($\beta 9$) teaching quality, as well as the student-teacher ratio ($\beta 10$).

Importantly, this model building strategy is consistent with prior school climate literature and the PVEST framework guides where and when variables are included in the model. Risk factors are conceptualized by $\beta 1$- $\beta 5$ and protective factors by $\beta 7$- $\beta 10$. Further, $\beta 6$ is a proxy measure for students' reactive coping strategies. Moreover, life stage outcomes in the present study correspond to the overall school climate score, which is a proxy measure for how a student is experiencing their school. Finally, all models include controls from the number of surveys taken in each school, as well as robust standard errors clustered at the school level.

Findings: Unpacking Disparities in School Climate

The results of the study analyses are reported below, organized according to the three research questions. Standardized regression coefficients and p values are reported in parentheses, and the present study uses a .05 alpha level for interpreting significant results.

Research Question 1: To what extent do differences exist in how students perceive the climate of their schools?

Examining all participating middle and high schools in Georgia, A visual representation of these data shows, relative to starting point, all students appear to be developing more positive schooling experiences overtime with regard to the full school climate scale (figure 1). A more granular view of this data, however, reveals substantial differences in school climate experiences across racial lines and among various dimensions of school climate. For instance, figure 1 shows fairly stable increase in White students' overall climate experiences and appears to suggest that White, Asian, and Hispanic students rate their climate experiences comparably, especially in earlier years. This figure also displays consistently lower scores for Black students and students who self-identified as "other," but apparent, slight increases overtime.

Figure 1. Student School Climate Experiences Overtime
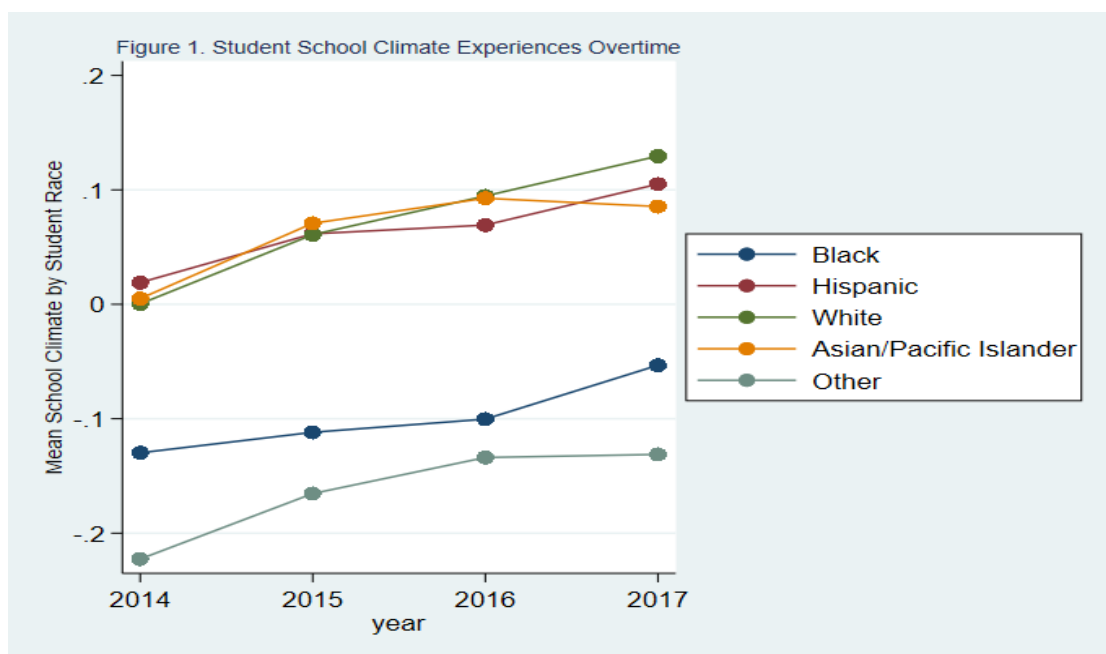
In examining the magnitude of these differences, I find substantial disparities in school climate experiences overtime. In particular, the magnitude of the average difference between Black and White students' perception of school climate has consistently grown over time. In the 2014-15 academic year, the average Black student's overall school climate score was .13 (β = -0.130 p< .01) standard deviations less than that of the average White student (row 2, column 2). During the 2017-18 school year, however, the size of this difference was .18 standard deviations (β= -.18 p<.01), such that Black students, on average, reported far worse perceptions of school climate, than White students (row 2, column 4). The sizes of these differences are comparable in magnitude to prior studies. For instance, Voight et al. (2015) report standard deviations differences of comparable magnitudes for Black-White school climate gaps for perceptions of safety and connectedness (sd=.12)

Additionally, table 2 also examines differences in school climate experiences of other racial-ethnic minorities relative to White students. Results suggest that students who selected "other" as their racial category consistently reported the least favorable schooling experiences relative to other groups, which magnitudes growing overtime relative to White students. Furthermore, table two examines differences in climate perceptions between White and Hispanic students. The results show no significant differences in years one (β= .019 p= .291) and two (β= .001 p= .964), and marginally significant difference in years three (β= -.025 p<.10) and four (β= -.024 p<.10). Though relatively small, the sizes of differences in perceptions of school climate experiences approach marginal significances during a particularly divisive time in the U.S politically. This might be partly explained by the Trump election and his assaults on minority students, but especially could have been detrimental to the schooling experiences of students with migrant families. This survey was administered some time after Trump's election, but

before his inauguration. The year that he was elected came the emergence of the Hispanic-White

school climate gap (2016 column). His first year in office, the gap became largest and

significant.

Table 1. Statewide Racial School Climate Gap

Race/Ethnicity	2014	2015	2016	2017
Black	-0.130**	-0.173**	-0.195**	-0.183**
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Hispanic	0.019	0.001	-0.025+	-0.024+
	(0.018)	(0.016)	(0.014)	(0.013)
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.005	0.010	-0.002	-0.044*
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.019)
Other	-0.223**	-0.226**	-0.229**	-0.261**
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Constant	0.000	0.061**	0.095**	0.130**
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.010)
R^2	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
N	629,522	663,781	672,294	674,354

This table represents mean differences in students' schooling experiences for middle and high schools in Georgia with students who self-identify as White as the reference group.

The coefficient for 'Other' represents students who self-identified as either 'Multi-Racial,' 'Native-American,' or endorse 'Other' as their racial-ethnic background

$+ p<0.1$; $* p<0.05$; $** p<0.01$

These results point to clear disparities in school climate perceptions and suggest Black

students, in particular, are being subjected to adverse schooling experiences. While this study

cannot tease apart students' perceptions of their experiences from their objective experiences,

well-established bodies of literature provide plausible explanations that Black students are

mistreated in their schools (Domina et al., 2019; Giersch, 2018; Grissom & Redding, 2015;

Grissom & Rodriguiz, 2017; Hargrove & Seay, 2011; Hill, 1993; Noguera, 2003). This study

attempts to capture where forms of this mistreatment might be largest--or, are at the very least,

perceived that way by students--by deconstructing the overall climate score and examining the

different subscales of the GSHS. Given the fact that school climate is a multi-dimensional

construct, focusing on where gaps are more pronounced between students sheds light on the specific elements of school climate that need to be improved to ensure all students experience the benefits of exposure to positive school climates.

Figure 2. Students' Schooling Experiences Trends By Climate Dimension
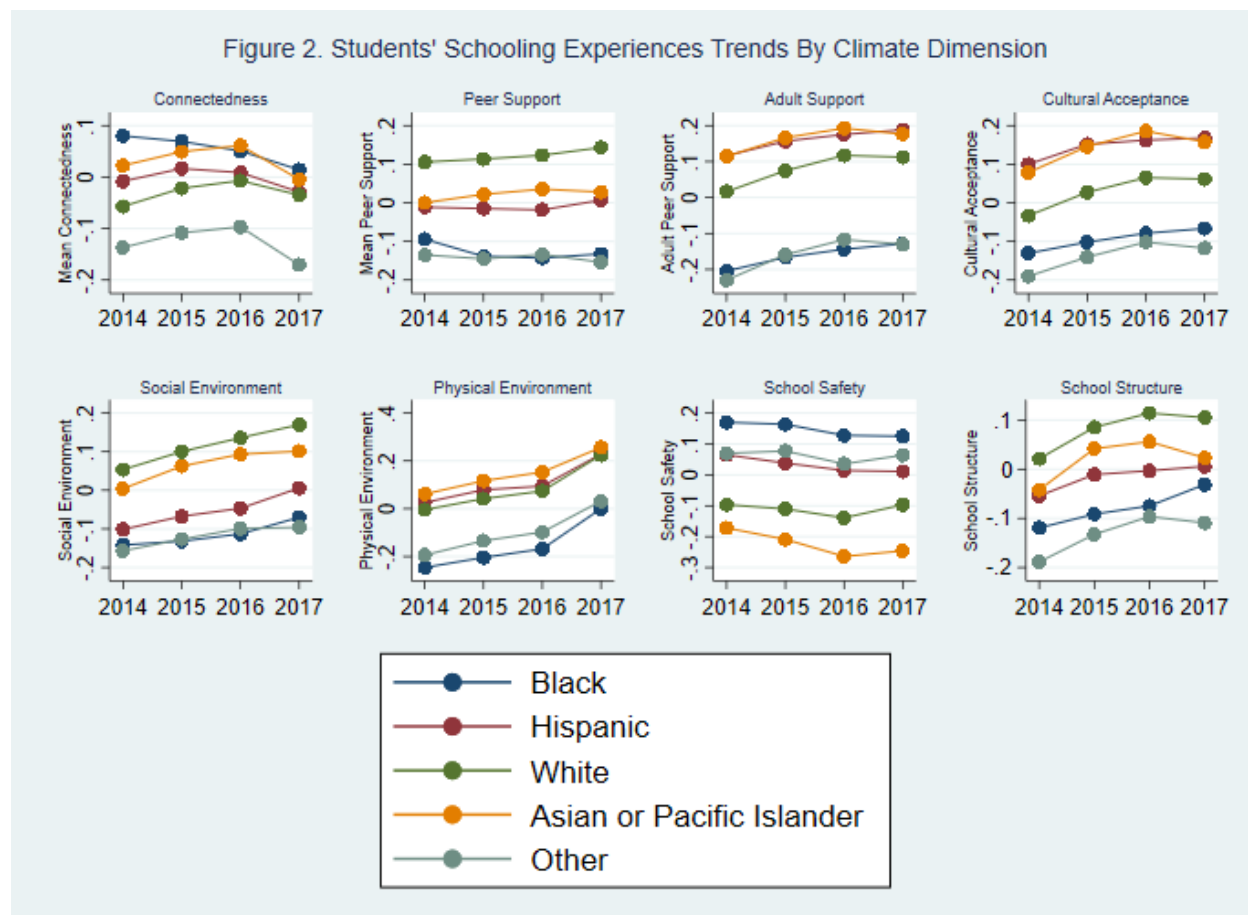
The results of the between-school mean differences across student subgroups on various elements of school climate are shown in table 3. In analyzing the Black-White racial school climate gap, results suggested that the largest gaps in perceptions of school climate were for peer support (β= -.25 p<.001), adult support (β= -.24 p<.001) and the physical environment of schools, which corresponds to how students rate the look of their schools (β= -.24 p<.001). The racial school climate gap between Black and White students, however, was reversed when considering aspects of school climate related to connectedness (β= .09 p<.001) and safety (β= .14 p<.001), such that Black students, on average, tended to regard their schools as more

connected and safer relative to White students. While not explored in the study, PVEST scholars would contend that results suggesting higher levels of school connectedness among Black students might be related to adaptive coping strategies Black students use to navigate the disparities in other elements of school climate.

Generally, these trends hole when examining the Black-Hispanic analytic sample. Across the 4-year dataset, Black students scored the school climate survey .15 standard deviations lower than Hispanic students, on average (β= -.15 p<.001). As shown in Table 3, the results gaps were largest when assessing perceptions of adult support (β= -.32 p<.001) and the physical environment of schools (β= -.26 p<.001), suggesting that Hispanic students reported feeling more supported by adults in their buildings and rated the appearance of their buildings far more favorably relative to Black students, on average. Hispanic students were also far more likely to report higher perceptions about the extent to which their schools modeled respect for cultural diversity when compared to Black students (β= -.24 p<.001). Similar to the Black-White racial school climate gap, Black students tended to regard their schools as more connected (β= .06 p<.001) and safer (β= .04 p<.001) relative to Hispanic students.

Across the middle and high schools examined in the White-Hispanic analytic sample, White students report marginally statistically significantly higher school climate perceptions relative to Hispanic students (β= .026 p<.10). The most pronounced gaps observed were for the social and civic learning aspects of school climate (β= .17 p<.001) and for perceptions related to support from peers (β= .13 p<.001). However, White students reported less favorable views of cultural acceptance (β= -.12 p<.001), safety (β= -.11 p<.001), and adult support (β= -.08 p<.001). On average, these results suggest that White and Hispanic students had relatively similar school climate perceptions across time and elements of school climate.

Table 2. Statewide Racial School Climate Gap by Subscales

Race	School Connections	Peer Support	Adult Support	Cultural Acceptance	Social Learning	Physical Environment	Safety
Black	0.08**	-0.25**	-0.24**	-0.12**	-0.23**	-0.24**	0.26**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Hispanic	0.03**	-0.13**	0.08**	0.12**	-0.17**	0.02	0.14**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.06**	-0.10**	0.08**	0.11**	-0.05**	0.06**	-0.12**
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Other	-0.10**	-0.26**	-0.24**	-0.17**	-0.24**	-0.18**	0.17**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
2015	0.02**	-0.01**	0.05**	0.05**	0.03**	0.05**	-0.01*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
2016	0.02**	-0.01+	0.08**	0.08**	0.06**	0.08**	-0.05**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
2017	-0.02**	0.01	0.08**	0.08**	0.10**	0.22**	-0.02**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	-0.03**	0.13**	0.03*	-0.02*	0.07**	-0.01	-0.09**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
R^2	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02
N	2,616,128	2,616,120	2,616,133	2,616,119	2,616,119	2,616,118	2,616,108

This table represents mean differences in students' schooling experiences for middle and high schools in Georgia with students who self-identify as White as the reference group.
The coefficient for 'Other' represents students who self-identified as either 'Multi-Racial,' 'Native-American,' or endorse 'Other' as their racial-ethnic background

$+ p<0.1$; $* p<0.05$; $** p<0.01$

Research Question 2: To what extent are racial school climate gaps associated with differences within versus between schools?

Table 3 examines the extent to which racial school climate gaps are mostly explained by differences within schools versus between schools. Substantively, this question seeks to underscore whether students within the same schools describe their schooling experiences in disparate ways or if disparities operate at the school level. Column one shows average school climate disparities with students of color subgroups. Across the state, Black and students who self-identify as other report significantly and substantively worse school climate experiences relative to White students, with students self-identifying as other reporting the worse across

student subgroups. When looking between schools, the magnitudes of the gaps reduces for both

Black students and students in the other group, though they remain significant. Looking within

schools, gap between Black and Other students and White students decrease further, but the

magnitudes are smaller.

Table 3. Racial School Climate Gap by Level

Race/Ethnicity	Statewide Gaps	Between Schools Gaps	Within Schools Gaps
Black	-0.171**	-0.102**	-0.035**
	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.004)
Hispanic	-0.008	0.022*	0.049**
	(0.014)	(0.010)	(0.005)
Asian/Pacific Islander	-0.008	0.044**	0.014+
	(0.016)	(0.011)	(0.008)
Other	-0.234**	-0.194**	-0.171**
	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.005)
2015	0.043**	0.051**	0.047**
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)
2016	0.066**	0.080**	0.068**
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.005)
2017	0.099**	0.122**	0.103**
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Constant	0.018+	0.215**	-0.051**
	(0.011)	(0.017)	(0.011)
R^2	0.01	0.03	0.07
N	2,615,995	2,613,960	2,613,960

+ $p<0.1$; * $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$

Together, these results suggest that school climate experiences appear to associate more

strongly with differences between schools, rather than within school. This implies that school

climate disparities are not primarily a function of individual differences in schooling experiences

between students within the same school, though there is some evidence this is the case, but that

school climate disparities operate at the school level. Thus, schools' contextual factors (funding

levels, segregation levels, etc.) might associate most profoundly with students' schooling

experiences.

Research Question 3: Which school contextual factors influence the magnitude of difference in students' perceptions of school climate across racial-ethnic backgrounds?

To underscore the extent to which the racial school climate gap between Black and White students changes in response to the inclusion of school contextual variables, a series of increasingly controlled regression models are fitted. Model one begins with a simple OLS regression with no controls, school contextual variables (risk factors) are included in model two, the mental health scale is added in model 3, while variables for the characteristics of teachers are added in model three (protective factors). These models include district fixed effects to underscore the operation of school climate at the school rather than individual level.

Across the 4 years of the sample, the average difference between Black and White students' perceptions of school climate is -.11 standard deviations (β= -.11 p<.001). When adding school contextual variables, as shown in table 4, reduces marginally (β= -.007 p<.001). This reduction suggests that school structural variables play an essential role in explaining variations in students' perceptions of school climate and that redressing the fact that Black students are disproportionately sorted into schools with more risk factors could improve Black students' schooling experiences. Model four included these variables because school climate literature has shown that they each share a significant relationship with students' perceptions of school climate (Voight et al., 2014), which is consistent with the present study. As hypothesized by PVEST scholars, the statistically significant relationship between the mental health scale and students' perceptions of school climate indicates that students may be employing maladaptive coping strategies in response to weaker school climates (Hope et al., 2018; Hope & Spencer, 2017).

In model three, table 4 also shows how the magnitude of the Black-White racial school climate gap varies after accounting for teachers' characteristics. In particular, I focus on average teaching experience, average SEL teacher quality and overall quality as assessed by Georgia's teacher evaluation system, and the student-teacher ratio in schools. These variables also reduce the magnitude of the racial school climate gap between Black and White students, though the coefficient remains negative and significant (β= -.109 p<.001).

Consistent with my hypothesis about the operation of the PVEST framework in the present study (Hope et al., 2018; Hope & Spencer, 2017; Spencer, 1994), variables in model three position teachers as protective factors who can mitigate the relationship between students racial-ethnic backgrounds and climate perceptions. Table four also shows how the magnitude of the racial school climate gaps changes for other racial ethnic minorities relative to White students.

Table 4. School Contextual Factors and Racial School Climate Gaps

Variables	Racial Climate Gaps	Risk Factors	Reactive Coping Strategies	Protective Factors
Black	-0.109**	-0.074**	-0.114**	-0.109**
	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Hispanic	-0.007	0.040**	0.015*	0.015*
	(0.014)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.021	0.029*	0.011	0.007
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.011)
Other	-0.199**	-0.183**	-0.161**	-0.160**
	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
% Poverty		-0.001*	-0.001*	-0.001*
		(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
% SWD		0.004	0.002	-0.001
		(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
# Student Infractions		-0.135**	-0.127**	-0.102**
		(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.017)
% Part Time		-0.002*	-0.002*	-0.003**
		(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Mental Health Scale			-0.252**	-0.251**
			(0.002)	(0.002)

Teachers SEL Quality				0.097**
				(0.035)
Teacher Quality				0.165*
				(0.068)
Std.Tch Ratio				-0.015**
				(0.003)
R^2	0.02	0.03	0.10	0.10
N	2,615,995	2,584,081	2,584,080	2,584,080

$+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01$

Following the PVEST framework, such disparities in school climate suggest that Black students and Hispanic students may face similar but also distinctive threats to their schooling outcomes. While both groups are subjected to unfair schooling practice, Black students may bear the brunt of long-standing inequities in schools, which might explain such differences. The geographic context of the present study, a conservative state in the deep south, might also explain such stark differences in the Black-Hispanic school climate gap. Furthermore, Hispanic students may be less likely to report, notice, or feel the full weight of discriminatory schooling practices due to the many programs intended to support them in school, such as English as a Second Language (ESOL) supports. To be clear, this study does not intend to minimize the very real and painful experiences Hispanic students face, particularly in the current political climate, but argues that the historical and present contexts of schooling in Georgia might explain why Black students report far worse climate perceptions than Hispanic and White students.

Discussion

The present study examined the myriad of school-level factors that influence the racial school climate gap between students from different racial-ethnic backgrounds. In particular, this study was primarily interested in explicating protective factors that weakened the association between students' race and their school climate perceptions. Using the PVEST framework (Spencer, 1994, 1997), this study conceptualizes school climate as an essential assessment of students' perceptions of different elements of their schooling experiences. PVEST

theorists often position students' racial-ethnic backgrounds as threats to schooling outcomes because of the systematic injustices and racism that society subjects minoritized students to in education and other fields (Diemer & Li 2011; Hope & Spencer, 2017; Watts & Flanagan 2007). As such, the present study uses the PVEST framework to position schools as important protective factors that can buffer the damaging effects of the multifaceted inequities that often detrimentally affect minoritized students' schooling experiences.

To understand the function of race in school climate perceptions, as well as the school-level factors associated with changes in the magnitude of the relationship between students' racial-ethnic background and school climate scores, I merged a 4-year panel of administrative data for all middle and high school in Georgia with a subsection of the Georgia School Health Survey (GSHS) from academic school year 2014-15 to 2017-18. The present study quantifies the racial school climate gap between Black and White, Black and Hispanic, and Hispanic and White middle and high school students. To do so, I fitted a series of increasingly controlled OLS regressions. Regression models were fitted as guided by the PVEST theory as well as prior literature related to the mechanisms by which school climate disparities function.

Summary of Findings

In this study, I find that, on average, Black students consistently report far less favorable perceptions of school climate relative to Black and Hispanic students across almost all elements of school climate. This finding is consistent with other research showing significant disparities in school climate experiences between Black and White students (Battistich et al., 1995; 2008; Bottiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2016; McNeely et al., 2002) and expands this literature by also showing gaps between Black and Hispanic students that researchers should further explore in other settings. I find inconsistent and comparatively small school climate gaps between

Hispanic and White students and the magnitude of the difference has varied marginally across the 4-year sample

Importantly, this study also finds that the magnitudes of racial school climate gaps are associated with several school contextual factors. For instance, after accounting for variables such as the school enrollment, poverty, students' self-reported mental health behaviors, and the number of disciplinary infractions, the Black-White and Black-Hispanic racial school climate gaps lower, although they remain statistically significant. Further, these gaps persist after accounting for characteristics of teachers, and higher shares of Black teachers are associated with more pronounced reductions in the Black-White and Black-Hispanic racial school climate gaps. While causality cannot be inferred from such cross-sectional analyses, the results, coupled with the PVEST framework and prior literature (Goldsmith, 2004; Voight et al., 2015), position teachers as vital protective factors for Black students.

The multi-dimensional nature of school climate as a construct informs the present manuscript. As such, I also consider how the magnitude of the racial school climate gaps changes as different elements of school climate is assessed. Results suggests that across the eight elements of school climate measured in this study—school connectedness, peer support, adult support, cultural acceptance, social/civic learning, physical environment, school safety, and school structure—students who self-identify as Black report far less favorably school climate perceptions relative to White and Hispanic students on roughly all dimensions. Black students report more positive perceptions of school connectedness and safety than their White and Latinx peers. PVEST theorists would argue that Black students might be employing positive reactive coping mechanisms to manage the poor school climates to which they are exposed. Surprisingly, Black students tend to regard their environments as more connected than their other race peers,

despite also endorsing significantly lower peer and adult support. This finding might suggest that overall, Black students do not feel supported by their schools, but may have a small group of peers and teachers, perhaps Black teachers, to whom they feel especially connected, which explain their higher rating for connectedness. As such, Black students may not experience support from high numbers of people but may receive quality support from individuals who matter significantly to them.

Differences between White and Hispanic students across elements of school climate are less noticeable and tend to be statistically insignificant. This result is somewhat hard to reconcile with prior literature that shows apparent gaps in school climate perceptions between Hispanic and White students (Fan et al., 2011; Thapa et al., 2013; Voight et al., 2015). Further, considering widespread media reports about racist incantations spewed in schools--such as, "build that wall,"--that target Latinx students, one would assume they face similar threats to positive schooling experiences as Black students.

Implications for Policy and Practice

These results have significant implications for policy and practice. Policymakers at local, state, and federal levels have positioned school climate as a critical target area in schools' improvement strategies (Bottiani et al., 2014; Thapa et al., 2013; Voight et al., 2015). In particular, some states are seeking to fulfill the ESSA mandate that requires additional assessments of school effectiveness beyond test scores by focusing on interventions to promote positive school climates (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). However, the law requires that measures of school effectiveness must be valid, reliable, and comparable across the state, which, perhaps even inadvertently, advocate for school-level, aggregated climate scores, which may obscure the racial disparities in students' schooling experiences uncovered in this study and

others (Battistich et al., 1995; Bottiani et al., 2016; McNeely et al., 2002; Voight et al., 2015). Therefore, policy efforts seeking to augment students' climate perceptions should feature subgroup indicators of school climate to elucidate disparities. Further, these results should also draw the attention of school and district level policymakers and encourage them to consider how their actions and inactions may be contributing to the racial school climate gap. Recent evidence suggests that all students tend to have more positive perceptions of school climate when their schools exude respect for cultural diversity in their policies and practices (Voight et al., 2015).

In addition to policy, these results hold implications for practice as well. Given longstanding racial and ethnic differences between a majority White teaching workforce (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005) and a majority Black and Latinx student population in urban settings (Sable et al., 2010), professional development may be needed to support school officials. For instance, teachers and school leaders serving students of color may benefit from professional development and job training that teach them practical ways to recognize and bridge gaps in how their students experience schooling. In particular, as teachers and school leaders become aware of the cultural and ecological gaps in their relationships with students from racial-ethnic backgrounds different from their own, they are better able to engage in practices that ensure all students reap the benefits of positive school climates (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Limitations

This study is limited on several fronts. First, it is descriptive and exploratory, and the cross-sectional design used in the present study provides policymakers and researchers insufficient evidence to draw casual inferences regarding the variables observed. The study results would not allow one to assert that increasing the share of Black teachers in a school

causes decreases in the racial climate gap, for instance. Additionally, participating schools in this study were chosen entirely from Georgia, which has a unique racial history that differs starkly from other studies that have concluded different findings regarding the racial school climate gap. As such, my findings suggesting significant gaps in school climate perceptions between Black and Hispanic students may not be easily replicable in places without the racial history of a state in the deep south.

Moreover, the present study could not link individual surveys overtime to fit student fixed-effects specifications that would underscore within unit variations in school contextual variables affect students' individual perceptions of school climate. Such an analytic strategy would shed additional light on the mechanisms that drive variation in the racial school climate gaps across student subgroups. Finally, the data in the present study are nested by nature, and the present study does not use an HLM design. While I use robust standard errors clustered to the school by year level in an attempt to account for correlated residuals between students nested within schools and districts, some scholars contend that this adjustment does not solve the violations in the independence assumptions for OLS models (Cheah, 2009).

Relevant Future Work

There remains much to be gleaned from studies assessing factors that explain the racial school climate gap. To close this divide, school climate research can benefit from the use of experimental and quasi-experimental designs to understand how targeted programs and policy changes impact racial school climate gaps. One approach that researchers have identified as successful is the Double Check model (Bottiani et al., 2012; Bradshaw & Rosenberg, 2017; Hershfeldt et al., 2009), which uses a CARES framework to ensure teachers are equipped with skills that enhance cultural Connections to curricula, Authentic relationships, Reflective

thinking, Effective communication, and Sensitivity to student culture (Bottiani et al., 2015). Importantly, such programs must target changes in teachers' and school leaders' policies, practices, and dispositions, rather than assume that students' climate perceptions need correction.

Moreover, future research can also examine how variations in racial school climate gaps are associated with the magnitude and direction of student test-score achievement differences. Scholars have theorized many compelling reasons for why students score differently on standardized tests, but further research is needed to underscore whether and the extent to which school climate serves as an important mechanism in such disparities. Similar research can also examine the relationship between disproportionality in school discipline and the racial school climate gap. Important schooling areas such as test score achievement and discipline practices might serve as significant explanatory variables for the racial school climate gap. Finally, future work must explicate the moderating effects of exposure to positive school climates. Perhaps positive school climates moderate the relationship between risk factors, such as exposure to crime, and students' academic outcomes (i.e., test scores and graduations rates), which, if proven right, would further lend credence to school climate as a critical policy lever to improve educational outcomes and further realize equity in schools and society.

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CHAPTER 3

AN EXAMINATION OF FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHERS' FIDELITY TO SEL

Introduction: Teachers and Educational Reforms

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is increasingly recognized as an important aspect of the school improvement process as more states, districts, and schools seek to improve the socioemotional and academic outcomes of their students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; Komarraju & Nadler, 2013). Scholars commonly conceptualize SEL as the process through which students and adults acquire and learn to effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, show self and social awareness, make responsible decisions, and develop meaningful relationships with others (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Jones & Kahn, 2017; NCSEAD, 2019; Osher, Cantor, Berg, Steyer, & Rose, 2018; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). Beginning in 2004, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has triennially conducted a state scan of competency standards to assess the extent to which SEL is included in states' competencies, standards, and guidelines for school improvement. As of 2018, 18 states had been identified by CASEL as having developed state-wide SEL standards, which represents an increase from one and four in 2011 and 2014, respectively (Dusenbury, Dermody, & Weissberg, 2018). This suggests a strong appetite among educational stakeholders for focus on SEL.

Research consistently documents the positive effects of SEL programs on students' outcomes, and practitioners, policymakers, and scholars have advocated for a greater focus on SEL in K-12 settings (Jones, Farrington, Jagers, Brackett, & Kahn, 2019). Over the past 25

years, the knowledge base around the importance of SEL has continued to grow (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Williams, 2019), and local, state, and federal policies appear to be responding to the evidence by increasingly incorporating SEL in school improvement strategies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; Eklund, Kilpatrick, Kilgus, & Haider, 2018). Most notably, education stakeholders are using new provisions under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, which mandated, in addition to standardized testing, that states must develop additional measures of school effectiveness which allow for reliable and valid comparisons across schools and increase academic achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; Garcia, 2014; García & Weiss, 2016; Graziano, Reavis, Keane, & Calkins, 2007).

To the extent that the national attention centering SEL in federal and state education policy and schooling practice continues to grow, more research is needed to accentuate the ecological (e.g., the multidimensional and interactive personal and environmental factors that shape behavior) aspects of schooling that promote or halt fidelity to SEL. As Dusenbury's et al., (2018) state scan of standards elucidates, teachers are increasingly tasked with ensuring students develop SEL competencies and, as such, are central to the process of SEL delivery (Izard, 2002; Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Further, teachers impact students' non-cognitive skills (Blazar & Kraft, 2015; Gershenson, 2016; Jackson 2018; Kraft, 2019), which further underscores the important role they play in driving SEL reforms.

Despite the centrality of teachers in SEL initiatives, only a paucity of current scholarship empirically and/or theoretically contends with their roles in promoting social and emotional wellness in students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). In particular, researchers have underexamined how teachers' commitment to SEL operates within and functions by way of complex systems—ranging from micro levels to broader, external ones. For

instance, teachers often educate students in settings affected by punitive accountability systems that disincentivize deviation from content on tested grades and narrow curriculums (Loveless & Griffith, 2014; Welsh, Graham, Williams, 2019). Such schooling environments may provide little space to focus on SEL and likely have teachers who are unwilling or lack the capacity to implement SEL with fidelity.

While well supported by research, theory, and practice, SEL reforms may add additional job demands on the teachers tasked with implementing policies and practices that build students non-cognitive skills. With regard to SEL, teachers must offer students explicit instructions in (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010; Sauve & Schonert-Reichl, 2019), which takes time and requires professional development. Oftentimes, educators are expected to implement new reforms absent ancillary efforts among policymakers to commensurately increase their voice (Gallup: State of America's Schools 2014; Sparks & Malkus, 2015), the quality of their pre-service teaching training (Schonert-Reichl, Kitil, & Hanson-Peterson, 2017) and their resources (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson & Salovey, 2012) to adequately support their SEL efforts. Consequently, students are unlikely to receive the optimal benefits of SEL as teachers are underprepared to curate pedagogical strategies and effective practices to support the socioemotional development of students.

Therefore, using a social-ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the present study seeks to better understand the myriad of factors that influence teachers' fidelity to SEL policies and initiatives. In so doing, this work underscores how teachers' commitment is a latent concept that fluctuates in response to the culmination of individual, schooling, and external effects that shape their working conditions, and, by extension, their classroom practices. The understanding of both the important roles teachers play in driving SEL

and how buy-in from them is essential for successful reform inform the present study, and its

contributions add to the small, but important, body of literature accentuating the key supports

and barriers that influence teachers' fidelity to SEL (Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland, Bruce, &

Hariharan, 2013; Collie, Shapka, Perry, 2011, 2012). The three following research questions

guide this investigation:

> 1) To what extent do the contexts in which teachers work influence their use of SEL
> practices in the classroom?
> 2) How do teachers' perceptions about school climate influence their fidelity to SEL
> implementation?,
> 3) In what ways do individual, schooling, and larger societal factors preclude the
> effective implementation of SEL practices and policies as perceived by teachers?

In exploring these questions, the present manuscripts sheds light on the importance of ensuring

teachers benefit from teaching in positive working conditions and feel well supported to

effectively lead SEL delivery. Further, the study also explores the interconnectedness of school

climate and SEL, and argues for why policymakers and practitioners must focus on both

constructs to provide optimal benefits to students.

To explicate factors that halt or promote the progression of teachers' use of SEL

classroom practices, this study employs an explanatory sequential, mixed-methods design.

Specifically, I use quantitative data from the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and the

Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) to highlight the relationship between

schools' contextual factors and their SEL quality. Using annually administered surveys assessing

teachers' perceptions of school climate from the Georgia School Personnel Survey (GSPS) and

statewide observation data on teachers' classroom SEL practices from the Georgia Teacher Keys

to Effectives System (TKES), this manuscript examines how variations in teacher SEL practices

are associated with school-level contextual factors.

I then use qualitative, semi structured interviews with teachers from four school districts, that have implemented district-wide SEL policies and/or initiatives to contextualize and triangulate data yielded from the quantitative analyses. From this data, I document emergent themes related to teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards SEL, perceived supports and barriers, use and fidelity, and thoughts on how SEL initiatives can be improved. As teachers face constant accountability pressures and sanctions, better understanding how they navigate within structures that create and amplify such pressures underscores how schooling can be improved to ensure teachers are well prepared and supported to optimally produce desired SEL outcomes for students.

Results from the manuscript suggest a positive relationship between school level aggregates of teachers' perceptions of school climate and SEL teacher quality. Specifically, quantitative data suggests that, after controlling for a number of schools' contextual variables, schools staffed with teachers with more favorable perceptions of the school climate also are composed of teachers with higher SEL effectiveness scores. Poverty, discipline, and heavy focus on testing serve as the greatest barriers to teachers SEL fidelity, as reviewed through both quantitative and qualitative data. In support of these findings, results from interviews suggests that teacher and student mobility patterns trauma appear to be primary mechanisms driving lower SEL quality in schools with high proportions of poor students, while staff connectedness and perceptions of the school leader explain the positive relationship between school climate and SEL.

Together, these strands of data highlight factors that must be addressed in order to ensure that SEL is implemented with fidelity and is effective and sustainable. To the extent that policies seeking to advance SEL use targeted strategies to improve teachers' working conditions, there is

more reason to believe that such initiatives will be well received by teachers and implemented effectively. Importantly, this study underscores how, in addition to understanding how teachers' personal attributes shape their commitment and pedagogies toward SEL, research must capture the ecological structures by which their thinking and practices are influenced. Scholarships consistently accentuates how teachers are more likely to embrace and implement reforms when they are involved in decisions about it and participate in the design and development of such change (Campbell, Lieberman, & Yashkina, 2015). Therefore, in order to ensure effective SEL policy implementation, teachers and their voices must be amplified in the SEL movement and the present investigation accentuates why this is the case.

The rest of the article proceeds as followed: Subsequently, I synthesize recent scholarship assessing teachers' roles in promoting SEL. This literature section also synthesizes current research related to common barriers to teachers' fidelity to SEL reforms, specifically the prominent role of school climate, to shed light on why teachers may not espouse loyalty to SEL. Afterwards, I situate teachers' classroom practices and pedagogies within the social ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which guides the methods and findings sections that come next. Lastly, policy and practice implications and conclusions are discussed.

Social and Emotional Learning and Teachers

While some schools rely on SEL programs to influence students' academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2012), many others seek to change their policies and practice to facilitate positive school climates that feature SEL (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Approaches that seek to center school personnel in SEL reforms are largely informed by research that consistently highlights teachers' and schools'

effects on students SEL skills (Deming, 2017; Fricke, Loeb, & Hough, 2019; Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Jackson, 2018). Personnel centric SEL strategies position school leaders as responsible for cultivating climates where teachers feel supported enough to espouse fidelity to SEL (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Patti & Tobin, 2006), and teachers as responsible for responding to such supports by using SEL practices in their classrooms.

Considering the reality that teachers are primary deliverers of SEL, their perceptions about the SEL supports made available to them can affect the sustainability and effectiveness of SEL reforms (Brackett et al., 2012; Ee & Cheng, 2013; Pajares, 1992; Zinsser, Shewark, Denham, & Curby, 2014). One element that may drive teachers' perceptions of support is their competence related to SEL, which is influenced by the training and resources offered to them by their schools and districts (Elliott, 1988; Ringwalt et al., 2003; Sobol, Rohrbach, Dent, & Gleason, 1989). The extent to which schools afford teachers time and space to learn SEL practices and pedagogy and provide them the professional development such learning necessitates are also important for effective SEL (Brackett et al., 2012). Schools seeking to implement SEL must ensure that requisite teacher supports are in place, such as well-trained coaches who affect SEL fidelity (Brackett et al., 2009; Devaney, O'Brien, Resnik, Keister, & Weissberg, 2006; Ransford et al., 2009).

Another factor that influences teachers' fidelity to SEL is their beliefs about its salience for student success (Buchanan, Gueldner, Tran, & Merrell, 2009). Teachers understand that their performance evaluations will be mostly determined by their students' performance on state tests, and teachers, particularly those serving lower achieving students, must feel that a focus on SEL will lead to academic gains in order for successful implementation and sustainability to ensue (Pajares, 1992). The culture around testing and how it shapes teachers' behavior and pedagogies

is important to keep in mind because schools and broader education policy often disincentivize focus on subject matters not directly related to tested grades (Center on Education Policy, 2006; Hargrove et al., 2000; King & Zucker, 2005; Loveless & Griffith, 2014).

Barriers to Teachers' Fidelity to SEL

Among teachers, some empirical analyses provide suggestive evidence that commitment to SEL is a function of teachers' perceptions related to school climate, namely support from administrators. For instance, Ransford et al. (2009) found that school climates that lead teachers to experience higher levels of burnout significantly reduces teacher reported fidelity to SEL in their classroom, relative to more positive climates that feature teachers who experience fewer incidences of burnout, have higher self-efficacy, and support from their peers. They also found that teachers' perceptions of the quality of curriculum training in SEL significantly predicted how many SEL lessons they implemented in their classrooms, which is consistent with other research (Brackett et al., 2012). Collie et al. (2012) extend this literature by concluding that teachers' fidelity to SEL is indirectly related to work-related stress and low self-efficacy, and is positive predicted by teachers' perceptions of support.

Another school level barrier to SEL fidelity includes limited access to training sessions for teachers (Brackett et al., 2012; James, Reddy, Ruiter, McCauley, & van den Borne, 2006; Story et al., 2000). Research suggests that when teachers attend more sessions that teach them how to effectively use practices related to SEL, their students experience more positive SEL and academic gains (Reyes et al., 2012). Further, when teachers display little motivation to implement SEL, likely the result of poor school climates that do not cultivate receptivity to reforms, students' academic outcomes do not improve when schools adopt SEL initiatives (Zinsser et al., 2014).

Studies on coaching highlight how administrative support is important for teachers. Teacher coaching is commonly used to improve instructional quality and is gaining attention as an effective way to bolster the quality of implementation for SEL programs. Older studies of SEL interventions find that teachers who receive in-service training implement programmatic SEL changes more effectively than those who receive no such training (Reinke, Stormont, Herman, & Newcomer, 2014; Perry, Murray, & Griffin, 1990; Ross, Leupker, Nelson, Saavedra, & Hubbard, 1991). Joyce and Showers (2002) found that giving teachers active demonstrations, feedback, and space to practice new skills during coaching sessions substantially increased the likelihood that teachers employed those skills in their classrooms. More recent evidence goes in the same direction; Brackett et al. (2012) find that implementation quality is largely a function of the available trainings and supports made available to them. This body of literature accentuate why training, support, and coaching much accompany the adoption of SEL reforms and how schooling environments that cannot or do not invest in such resources are unlikely to reap the optimal benefits of SEL initiatives.

Teachers' Perception about Climate and SEL Implementation

Very few studies examine how teachers' perceptions of school climate influence their fidelity to SEL in their classrooms, though the ones that do suggest a positive relationship. Teachers' perceptions of school climate influence their ability to and likelihood of implementing SEL programs (Beets et al., 2008; Guo, 2012), particularly when they experience psychological stressors like burnout and low self-efficacy (Collie et al., 2011, 2012). Teachers frequently lament the frequency and short-lived duration of many school reforms (Dahill-Brown & Lavery, 2012), which makes the sustainability of those reforms challenging to implement and often ineffective. Research suggests that the most effectively implemented policies are ones that are

holistically incorporated into the school culture, particularly in terms of being included in school curriculum (Kerr et al., 2004; Rohrbach et al., 1993, 2006). Efforts to improve school climate, then, will need to feature and receive buy-in from teachers, to ensure that those initiatives fully realize the benefits of positive school climates.

Among the different elements of school climate that predict teachers' commitment to SEL, their perceptions about the support they receive from their administrators (Beets et al., 2008; Elliott & Mihalic, 2004; Gittelsohn et al., 2003; Payne, Gottfredson, & Gottfredson, 2006; Ransford et al., 2009) and peers (McCormick et al., 1995; Sheldon, 2005) appear to have the most pronounced effects on their fidelity to SEL. For instance, studies find that making principals aware of their roles in building receptivity to reforms increased the quality of implementation (Rohrbach et al., 1993). Another study highlights potential interactional effects of administrative support, because teachers' perceptions of it relate significantly to the quality of SEL implementation (Kusche´ & Greenberg, 1994; Kam, Greenberg, & Walls, 2003).

While important, these studies likely undervalue the relationship between teachers' perceptions of school climate and their fidelity to SEL, because this area of research is most often explored using teacher-reported measures of their own SEL fidelity (Ransford et al., 2009; Reyes et al., 2012; Zhai et al., 2015). The possibility exists that teacher over or under inflate their use of SEL practices, which may be a function of school, district, or state level factors. For instance, the Zhai et al. (2015) study was conducted in Chicago, which has a state level policy that mandates weekly instructional activities to SEL. Thus, teachers in this context might inflate their commitment to SEL out of fear of lower evaluations, while other teachers may not be subjected to these same pressures. To overcome this limitation, multiple methods of SEL

evaluations are preferred, but having school leaders observe teachers' SEL competence might better highlight the mechanisms that influence it.

Situating Teaching in a Social Ecological Framework: Assessing Contextual Factors

A useful framework for better understanding how teachers' fidelity to SEL in their classroom functions as a result of their perceptions of school climate and other systemic barriers, this study relies on a social-ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Consistently and increasingly, educational research suggests that teachers' effectiveness in and commitment to reforms are shaped by the social and intellectual organization of their schools and local communities, and by broader societal and policy structures (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Day & Gu, 2010; Tschannen-Morgan & Barr, 2004). Despite this understanding, few scholars use social and ecological lenses to investigate how the multiple environments in which teachers work and live interact and influence, and are influenced by, their capacity to commit to reforms (Howard et al., 1999; Johnson et al., 2016).

Within Bronfenbrenner's social ecological framework, four environment levels explicate how behavior and commitment are facilitated: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994; Sincero, 2012; Welsh & Little, 2018). A microsystem is conceptualized as the complex relationships between individuals and their environments that interact within particular contexts (e.g., homes, schools, workplaces, etc.) (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Ecological theorists define contexts as places with particular physical features wherein people participate in particular activities in specific roles (e.g., daughter, parent, teacher, employee, etc.) (Gu, 2018). Furthermore, the microsystem is the most influential predictor of individual development and behavior and includes the most meaningful relationships

(Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Sincero, 2012). In the context of teachers, then, this level reflects the individual and complex roles educators bring with them into schools and classrooms.

The next level of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) framework is the mesosystem and it reflects the interactions, degree of alignment, and conflicts between varying aspects of an individual's microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Sincero, 2012). In considering the home and the school, for instance, the mesosystem accentuates how the home and family interact with the school and classroom and individually and cumulatively impact individuals (Cross et al., 2015). The next level layers larger, social contexts in which an individual does not have direct contact, but by which he or she is influenced. Referred to as the exosystem, this level highlights how school administrators, institutional infrastructures, and culture can serve to foster teacher commitment or cause it to falter. Finally, the macrosystem considers the cultural contexts of each individual (e.g., socioeconomic status, ethnicity or race, location) and how the broader societal, cultural, political, and economic realities of individuals shape institutions' social trends and ultimately affect their environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Sincero, 2012).

Using a social ecological approach to understand the myriad of factors influencing teachers' commitment to SEL is justified for three key reasons. First, theories using environment-centered approaches to explain individual behaviors reinforce the importance of centering the influence of multilevel contexts on the growth and development of individuals. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) focuses on the interconnectedness and interactions between multilevel systems and elucidate the ways they facilitate individuals' choices and behaviors. Conversely, theories that decontextualize how individuals' behaviors are shaped overstate the influence of individual character traits, while ignoring the effects of other important ecologies (Ungar, Russell, & Connelly, 2014).

Secondly, this social-ecological model elucidating how contexts influence individuals reflects an understanding that teachers are positioned in complex worlds of work and enables researchers to investigate how their capacity to teach effectively and to commit to reforms influences and is influenced by their professional worlds (Ungar et al. 2013). This framework highlights the relational nature of teaching and underscores how their actions and inactions are influenced by micro, macro, and social-cultural structures (Day & Gu, 2010; Jordan, 2012). Inasmuch, then, as schools function to nurture constructive relationships, support, and individual agency, teachers' propensity to support and buy-in to such reforms increases (Gu, 2014).

Finally, this theory is suitable because it reflects the fluidity of teachers' commitment and how it fluctuates as contexts change. Studies using social ecological theory examine how changes and exchanges within and between systems influence individuals (Eriksson, Ghazinour, & Hammarström, 2018). Social ecological theorists posit that development and behavior are a byproduct of many interconnected and interacting social systems (Ayers, 2010; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Changes or disruptions to family (microsystem), school leaders, composition, and culture (microsystem), as well as larger sociocultural, political movements (macrosystem) and historical systems (exosystem) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Haight et al., 2014) may shape whether or how teachers commit to or prioritize SEL initiatives among competing alternatives.

In the present study, the social ecological theory is employed to explicate the ways in which factors at multiple levels influence whether and how teachers prioritize and commit to SEL reforms. In this study, I consider how individual characteristics, such as race, upbringing, experience, and ideology (microsystems) operate within diverse and complex schooling environments (mesosystems) that are nested within communities (exosystems) and are

influenced by social, cultural, and political structures (macrosystems) that shape teachers' practices and priorities.

Data and Methods

This study uses a social-ecological framework to examine the myriad of factors that influence teachers' use of SEL practices in their classrooms. This inquiry is motivated by research that highlights that teachers' perceptions of school climate and broader organizational, social, and political factors hold important ramifications for their commitment to SEL (Brackett et al., 2012). Therefore, this study used an explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Park, 2003) in which a social ecological framework informed quantitative analyses that investigated school-wide trends related to teachers' fidelity to SEL and school climate. These analyses then guided the selection of interview questions to probe teachers' perceptions about such trends for greater contextualization and triangulation.

This study relies on Tashakkori & Creswell's (2007) conceptualization of mixed-methods research as the process by which an investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates findings, and draw inferences about a specific phenomenon using both quantitative and qualitative data. An explanatory sequential, mixed methods design is useful for highlighting the varying ecologies that interact to shape whether and how teachers espouse fidelity to SEL. This method is a two-phase research design, where quantitative data take priority over qualitative data. In phase one, quantitative data are collected and analyzed, and the researcher uses this data to determine the qualitative data that will be collected and analyzed. These data are then integrated when the analyses of both the quantitative and qualitative aspects are complete, so that the latter is used to more comprehensively explain the findings from the former (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2016).

Rationale for Mixed-Methods Design

The purpose for using a mixed-methods design in the context of this study is threefold: triangulation (DeCuir-Gundy & Schutz, 2016), complementarity (Greene, 2007), and weakness minimization. Regarding the former, I use qualitative interviews to examine the extent to which there is congruence between trends identified through quantitative analyses, specifically how school climate and SEL intersect to influence how and whether teachers prioritize SEL in their classrooms. This strategy is useful because it aids researchers in better understanding complex phenomenon from multiple angles (Maxwell, 2016). Further, my rationale for triangulation reduces the likelihood that the findings are more a function of biases in the methods that are chosen than indicative of specific underpinnings that lead to results (Maxwell, 2016). In addition to triangulation, complementarity is also an important justification for this study because I am elaborating and enhancing understanding about the how school climate and SEL intersect between school contexts and teachers (Bryman, 2006; Greene, 2007)). In this way, qualitative findings are used to both provide context for quantitative findings as well as to shed lights on the mechanism driving them.

Finally, the third rationale for mixed methods is weakness minimization; the strengths associated with one approach can mitigate the weaknesses of another one (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). A limitation with the quantitative data used in this study, particularly considering that it is largely correlational, is that few insights can be gleaned about the mechanism driving the patterns identified with numbers alone. Often, quantitative approaches fail to capture the myriad of contextual factors, which leaves valuable information un/under-explored (Cooper & Hall, 2016; Gratton & Jones, 2010; Greene, 2007; Patton, 2002). Such overemphasis on patterns and trends, without an in-depth exploration into factors driving them,

can limit the knowledge based around SEL and the factors that influence teachers'

implementation of it in their classrooms that this study seeks to build.

To offset these weaknesses, qualitative approaches were incorporated in this study. The

individual interviews enabled me to engage in deeper investigation into the factors driving

patterns observed from the quantitative data. In addition, the semi-structured format of the

interviews provided flexibility to explore new trends that were initially unforeseen or untested in

phase I of this study. Such qualitative approaches, however, are not without weakness. The

interview data alone has a limited ability to quantify the magnitude of a particular phenomenon

and how well emergent themes exist among a larger sample of participants (Gratton & Jones,

2010; Greene, 2007; Patton, 2002). Overall, the mixed portion of this study lends credibility to

the findings, and multiple validities are increasingly necessary in research (Cooper & Hall,

2016). Multiple validities legitimation operates on the premise that research with mixed validity

types (e.g., quantitative, qualitative, and mixed) enhances the quality of inferences drawn from

and about phenomena of interest (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). The current study achieves

multiple validities by using a number of methodological techniques (e.g., descriptive analyses,

regression analyses, and qualitative interviewing) to answer and probe questions about factors

influencing teachers' SEL fidelity.

Quantitatively, this legitimization was achieved through careful model building, approach

research designs, and by repeated efforts made to ensure that assumptions that accompany the

method chosen were not violated. Qualitatively, data trustworthiness and credibility were

enhanced through the following techniques: (1) a transparent subjectivity statement, (2) the use

of theory and research to guide the questions asked, (3) the use of clear, open, and non-leading

interview questions, and (4) detailed transcriptions (Roulston, 2010). Taken together, the

integrated findings yielded from both sources of data offer a granular view of micro, meso, exo, and macro factors that influence whether and how teachers implement SEL practices in their classrooms (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994; Sincero, 2012; Welsh & Little, 2018). Without both data sources, the phenomena of interests would have been largely understudied, and the rich findings gleaned from the study would not have been feasible using each method independently (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006).

Data Sources

Data for this study come from multiple sources. Phase one of the research design used school-level teacher observation data from the Georgia Department of Education's (GaDOE) Teachers Keys to Effective System (TKES) for the academic years 2013-14 to 2017-18. This data is combined with school-level climate surveys, administered annually to all personnel in the state. Next, this merged data set is linked to total enrollment and student demographics (e.g., race/ethnicity, percent FRL, and achievement), data that also come from the GaDOE. Finally, these data are merged with information on the characteristics of teachers in a school (e.g., level of degree attainment, experience, and credentialing), which comes from the Georgia Personnel Inventory (GPI).

Phase I: Quantitative Data. The primary dependent variable is this study is a proxy measure for teachers' fidelity to SEL practices in the classroom. Each year, Georgia conducts observations on all teachers in the state based on Teachers Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS), which accounts for 50% of teachers' evaluations of effectiveness (GaDOE, 2018). While each of these standards relate to different elements of SEL, the one that most closely aligns with CASEL's conceptualization of SEL assesses teachers' practices related to constructing positive learning environments. This standard is evaluated on 1 of 4 levels, ranging

from ineffective on the low end and exemplary on the highest end of the spectrum. A teacher is deemed ineffective if their overall score is below 1.5 (out of 4); is deemed as "needs improvement" if the score is greater than 1.5, but less than 2.5; is considered proficient if the score is between 2.5 and 3.5; and is exemplary if the score is above 3.5 (GaDOE, 2018).

Creating a positive learning environment is assessed by the extent to which teachers use teaching practices that "provides a well-managed, safe, and orderly environment that is conducive to learning and encourages respect for all" (GaDOE, 2018, pg. 32). Within these observations, one element on which teachers are observed assesses how well they attend to the socio-emotional development of the students in their classrooms. Evaluators pay attention to the extent to which teachers show concern for students' socio-emotional well-being. The observations are also focused on how teachers interact with students, encourage cohesiveness and collaboration between and among students, and facilitate an emotionally safe environment for all students.

The primary predictor variable in this study is teachers' perceptions of school climate. To assess how variations in teachers' fidelity to SEL are explained by school climate, I used a version of the GSPS that is restricted to teachers. Each year, the GaDOE administers the GSPS, which collects data on school level personnel in the state of Georgia assessing their perceptions related to school climate. Each school has received a perception of school climate score from teachers starting in year 2012-13 through 2017-18. Responses to the GSPS are recorded on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. An example of an item from this scale is, "I get along well with other staff members at my school." These responses are aggregated to the school level.

Phase II: Qualitative Data. As described above, trends and patterns from descriptive and regression analyses on quantitative data then informed my qualitative inquiry that more directly probed teachers on factors that influence their commitment to SEL. I purposefully sampled teachers (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2016) from districts which have adopted and implemented district-wide SEL initiatives because fidelity from teachers is especially important to the success of such reforms. Importantly, I wanted to capture teachers that held different positions in the SEL implementation hierarchy because their unique ecological contexts likely shape the extent to which there are willing to engage in SEL. The categories included: 1) "early implementers" (e.g., teachers in districts in Year 5 of implementation); mid-implementers (e.g., teachers in districts in year 3 of implementation); and late implementers (e.g., teachers in schools in years 1 or 2 of implementation).

Furthermore, I used a criterion-based section approach, which involves predetermines a specific set of characteristics a participant must have to be considered suitable for the study (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). A suitable subject, as defined by my study, is a teacher who was at least moderately knowledgeable about the process of implementing SEL reforms in their schools. The participant also had to be in a district or school that had or is currently implementing SEL reforms, broadly defined, and the participant also had to be willing to participate in an interview.

From the sampled districts, I conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers that lasted between 45 minutes and an hour. My interview protocol focused on: (1) teachers' background and experience, (2) knowledge and attitudes about SEL, (3) self-reported fidelity to SEL, (4) barriers and supports surrounding SEL, and (5) recommendations for improving SEL. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Although teacher experience varied greatly, all

the interviewees had to have served at their present school for at least 2 years which included the period of policy implementation.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1. The first research questions in this study uses descriptive analyses to assess how the conditions in which teachers work shape whether and how much they engage in practices that build their students' social and emotional wellness. Using terciles, which evenly spilt a continuous variable into three groups, I constructed different thresholds for SEL effectiveness (e.g., low, medium, and high) and looked at how means and standard deviations varied between them for a number of schooling. In particular, I paid close attention to the sociodemographic characteristics of the students in the schools, to discipline, to teachers' overall perception of school climate and their perceptions of different elements of it, to the education and experience of the teaching composition, and finally to the overall quality of the school. These descriptive statistics show the landscape of the types of schooling conditions in which teachers are actively engaging in observed practices that build their students' SEL skills. The granular view of such descriptive statistics helped me to identify variables to control for in specifying regression models and laid the foundations for areas to be probed during interviews.

Research Question 2: The second research question investigates how teachers' perceptions of school climate influences their fidelity to observed SEL behaviors in the classroom. To address this question, I fit a series of multivariate ordered logistic regression analyses to better understand the log odds of a school being rated in the upper third of the SEL effectiveness distribution (e.g., the high group create by terciles), relative to the bottom two thirds (e.g., the medium and low group). The predictive model of this study is expressed in the following equation:

$$\text{logit } [(P(Y \leq j)] = a_j - \beta 1 \text{TeacherClimate} + \beta 2 \text{ PerBlack}_{st} + \beta 3 \text{ PerHis}_{st} + \beta 4 \text{ Directcert}_{st} +$$

$$\beta 5 \text{ SchDiscipline}_{st} + \beta 6 \text{TchExp} + \beta 7 \text{PerBlackTch} + \beta 8 \text{PerHispTch} + \beta 9 \text{CCRPI} + \beta 10 \text{TotalTch}$$

$$+ \beta 11 \text{SchoolSize} + eit$$

where the outcome variable represents teachers' SEL effectiveness as a categorical variable, with j=1 corresponding to teachers rated as ineffective, =2 referring to those rated as average, and =3 representing teachers rated as exemplary. I then regressed this outcome on the primary predictor, which is a measure of teachers' perceptions of school climate ($\beta 1$) aggregated to the school level. Coefficients in the model represent how a one-unit change in independent variables relate to the log odds of falling into the upper category of SEL quality relative to the lower ones. Sociodemographic controls were included in models to account for potentially unobservable, confounding factors: Black ($\beta 2$), Hispanic ($\beta 3$), and percent free or reduced priced lunch ($\beta 4$). Within school variation in the number of student infractions ($\beta 5$) is also include as a student level control. The average teacher experience in a school ($\beta 6$), and proportion of Black ($\beta 7$) and Hispanic ($\beta 8$) teachers are included as controls because evidence suggests these variables are related to observed teacher effectiveness. School Quality ($\beta 9$) is measured by Georgia's CCRPI ratings, determined by the number of students scoring at or above proficiently on state exams, and is also included. Controls for the number of teachers ($\beta 10$) and school enrollment ($\beta 11$) are included as controls as well. Finally, these models include clustered standards errors at the school by year level.

To account for within school variation in the predictor variables, this model is refitted using a school by year fixed effects ordinal logistic regression analysis. The school fixed-effect specifications account for time invariant differences in schools over time. These analyses include robust standard errors at the school by year level.

Research Question 3. As discussed above, I draw on insights from patterns revealed in the quantitative data to inform the qualitative aspects of this study. The third research question in this study seeks to better understand what teachers perceive as barriers to their use of SEL practices in their classrooms. Literature consistently suggests that poor school climates, emotional burnout, and other psychological barriers reduce the likelihood that teachers will display a commitment to SEL (Collie et al., 2011, 2012). I seek to extend this literature by focusing on a broader set of challenges and organizing them into the four ecological levels explained in the social ecological framework. Qualitative interviews were used to further contextualize and triangulate patterns that emerged from the quantitative data.

After interviews were conducted and transcribed; deductive coding was used to triangulate and contextualize findings yielded from descriptive and regression analyses. Codes and themes were updated iteratively to ensure that findings held across interview types and contexts. For instance, teachers interviewed frequently mentioned a lack of support from parents in recent SEL initiatives, which was not identified initially examined in quantitative data, and this emergent theme was later examine descriptively. In this way, then, both inductive and deductive coding was used, which is suitable because both quantitative and qualitative methods informed each other throughout the study. Finally, great attention was also paid to the specific elements of school climate that predicted teachers use of SEL, as these variables are modifiable and can be changed with relative ease.

Description of Participants

In total, 35 semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers from one of the four districts. The overwhelming majority of teachers interview were women (86%) and there was wide variation in both years of experience across the sample taught as well as the subject areas

taught. Further, 45% of the sample self-identified as Black/African American, 52% as White/Caucasian American, and the remaining 3% as either Latnix or Bi-Racial. Per the inclusion criteria, all teachers in the sample were members of their school for at least 2 years and were at least moderately knowledgeable about SEL. To screen for whether or not teachers were aware of SEL, the first question asked to every interviewee asked them to describe the best understanding of SEL and all teachers interviewed and included in the analyses were able to offer clear definitions

Policy Contexts: The Confluence of SEL and District-wide Education Policy

District-wide SEL policies and initiatives varied widely across all four districts sampled in the present study, though there were a number of unique facets that make meaningful comparisons. For instance, all four districts used weekly advisements periods as the primary vehicles for delivery SEL lessons to students. During these periods, teachers across all districts taught SEL lessons that would focus on different non-cognitive skills each week, month, or quarter. Furthermore, all of the districts used either restorative practices, positive behavior interventions and supports, or similar culturally responsive SEL practices to promote pro-social behavior, track discipline, and weaken schools' proclivity to use punitive discipline practices. Lastly, all district set system-wide goals for SEL, though only three of the four—districts 1, 2, and 4—used formal methods to track the effectiveness of the initiatives. More information about the districts can be found in Appendix 1.

Each district from which participants were chosen were at different stages of implementation for their SEL platforms. District 1 was in the 5th year of implementation and has the most comprehensive policies and systems in place to promote SEL. For instance, every school in the district spends at least 45 minutes each day to teach SEL lessons and there are

comprehensive monitoring systems in place to ensure this is done with fidelity. District 3 is in the third year of implementation and has include SEL, along with literacy and numeracy, as its system-wide schooling improvement strategies. Students get weekly advisement lessons in SEL and teachers are expected to implement SEL into instructional time. District 3 is in the second year of implementation and use PBIS initiatives to drive the SEL vision. The district is especially well known for the high academic accomplishments of its students and appears to be minimally implementing SEL relative to the others. Lastly, district 4 is in the first full year of implementation and has strongly modeled its SEL plans after district 1.

Phases of Mixing Quantitative and Qualitative Data

According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2006), there are three stages or phases to a research study: (1) conceptualization stage, (2) experiential stage, and (3) inferential stage, and it is important for research to clearly lay out how data were integrated. In the current study, the mixing of methods occurred at every stage. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2006) describe the conceptualization phase as involving the development of research purposes and questions. The purpose of this study was to identify key influences associated with teachers' fidelity to the use of SEL practices in their classrooms, with particular emphasis paid to the myriad of teacher identities, contexts, and experiences that shape their teaching pedagogy. The construction of this purpose statement intuitively incorporates a mixed methods approach, as terms like ''identify'' and ''associate'' generally indicate the use of quantitative methodologies, while the term ''experiences'' is often examined using qualitative approaches, such as interviews. The intentional inclusion of these terms in the purpose statement signifies the mixing of methods at the conceptualization stage.

The next stage is the experiential stage, which involves methodological operations including data collection and analysis (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). During the data collection stage, mixing occurred sequentially; quantitative methodologies identified patterns and relationships, which, in turn, informed the interview protocol and the framing of the questions posed to interviewees. The final stage of a research study is the inferential stage (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). The inferential stage involves the explanation of the study's findings. In this stage, data from both methods were mixed and integrated to triangulate findings resulting from quantitative analyses, probe divergence, and gain a granular understanding of potential mechanisms that drive results. The quantitative data were used primarily to provide descriptive information and were corroborated with the emergent qualitative themes from teachers. Figure 1 shows the explanatory sequential mixed methods design.

INSERT FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE

Findings

Descriptive analyses

Georgia is a large state with 181 school districts and more than 2,200 schools. On average, a school in the state has roughly 52 teachers, with 71% self-identifying as white, 26% as Black, 2% as Hispanic, and the remaining as either Asian, Pacific Islander, or other. With regard to education credentials, 35% of teachers hold a bachelor's degrees, 43% master's, 19% specialist, and 2% doctoral. The overwhelming majority of teachers hold professional licensure status [M=98%] and are employed on a full-time basis [M=94%]. With regard to experience, roughly 6% of Georgia's teachers are classified as new (i.e., having fewer than one year of experience), 36% as having 1-10 years of experience, 35% with between 11-20, 19% with 21-30

years, and roughly 4% with greater than 30 years of experience. For greater details on the composition of Georgia's teaching force, see table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 AROUND HERE

Research Question 1: To what extent do the contexts in which teachers work influence their use of SEL practices in the classroom?

Table 2 displays means and standard deviations of schooling characteristics across different levels of SEL classification (e.g., below average SEL schools [low], average SEL schools [middle], and exemplary SEL schools [high]). Descriptive analysis in this table reflects several notable differences between varying levels of SEL quality. For instance, schools in the upper third of the distribution of SEL effectiveness tend to have significantly fewer proportions of Black [M=26% sd=23%] and poor [M=53% sd=28%] students compared to schools in the bottom third, which have higher shares of Black [M=51% sd=32%] and poor [M=79% sd=22%] students. Table 2 also displays important differences in the number of disciplinary infractions across the different classifications of SEL effectiveness. For instance, schools in the top threshold of SEL effectiveness have more than 150 fewer reported student infractions [M=250 sd=385] relative to schools in the bottom threshold [M=349% sd=414]. These differences are likely largely explained by well-established disparities in schools' discipline practices (Pearman, Curran, Fisher, & Gardella, 2019; Welsh & Little, 2018), but may also point to differences in approaches to perceived student misbehavior. Current discipline and behavior reporting practices, over which school leaders likely have some discretion and are malleable (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010), are often targets of SEL reforms.

With regard to perceptions of school climate, notable differences also exist across SEL quality classifications. For instance, teachers tend to assess the overall climates of schools

substantially more favorably in the highest threshold for SEL effectiveness [M=78, out of 100 sd=6) compared to teachers in schools with the lowest SEL effectiveness [M=73 sd=7]. With regard to varying levels of school climate perceptions, teachers in schools at the bottom of the distribution for SEL quality view parents as significantly less involved in their students' education [M=60 sd=29] relative to those in the top of the distribution [M=70 sd=27]. Teachers' perceptions of the learning structure of lower quality SEL schools [M=85 sd=18] also tends to be lower than those in schools with the largest share of highly effective SEL teachers [M=89 sd=16]. Across all levels of SEL quality, schools are largely staffed with teachers who tend to report low feelings of safety (M=59 sd=11). These differences in school climate perceptions overall, as well as the subscales of these climate perceptions, suggest that a positive relationship might exist between them and commitment to SEL practice. This relationship is examined more directly using both qualitative and quantitative approaches below.

<div align="center">**INSERT TABLE 2 AROUND HERE**</div>

In further descriptively analyzing the data, Table 3 stratifies the sample by the proportion of students eligible for free or reduced priced lunch, Black, White, and Hispanic students. These data reveal similar discrepancies in who has access to teachers who engage in practices that build SEL skills, as well as how teachers' perceptions of school climate vary across terciles of the above characteristics. For instance, schools with the largest proportion of Black and Poor students are consistently taught by teachers who perceive the climate of the schools less favorably and who are significantly less likely to be rated as highly effective SEL teachers. These schools also have a significantly higher percentage of their teachers rated as ineffective relative to schools with lower proportions of Black and poor students. In accessing thresholds for the percentage of students enrolled in the school who self-identify as Hispanic, these

discrepancies are not found and are often reversed, suggesting a more even distribution of teacher climate perceptions and SEL practices across the low, middle, and high groups of Hispanic student enrollment. A more detailed description of these differences can be found in table 3.

INSERT TABLE 3 AROUND HERE

Research Question 2: How do teachers' perceptions about school climate influence their fidelity to SEL implementation?

To better understand the extent to which changes in SEL effectiveness associate with variance in teachers' perceptions of school climates, I fit a series of multivariate ordered logistical regression for each of the years in the data (2014-15—2017-18). As shown in table 4, across all years, teachers' perceptions of school climate remain significant predictors of SEL quality status. For instance, a one-unit increases in teachers' school climate perceptions in the 2014-15 school year improves the likelihood of being in the highest group of SEL effectiveness by 1.056%. This coefficient is stable over time as shown in the first row of table 4.

INSERT TABLE 4 AROUND HERE

Tables 4 also shows how the proportion of students eligible for FRPL is a consistently significant predictor of the SEL effectiveness. For instance, across all years, a one percentage point increase in the share of poor students decreases the likelihood of a school being in the highest group of SEL effectiveness by roughly .99 percent. This coefficient is also relatively stable over time and is further probed later in qualitative analyses. When taken with the descriptive results, these results suggest a negative bivariate relationship between the share of poor students in schools and teachers' fidelity to the use of SEL practices in a school, net the other variables included in the model. In figure 2, this bivariate relationship is shown across

different schooling characteristics and appears to be the weakest in schools with the higher share of Black students.

<div align="center">**INSERT FIGURE 2 AROUND HERE**</div>

When accounting for school by year fixed effects, and thereby assessing the extent to which within school variation in predictor variable associate with changes in schools' SEL effectiveness status, several notable findings emerge as shown in table 5. For instance, while higher school climate perceptions continue to associate with higher levels of SEL effectives, and poverty still shares an inverse relationship, the fixed-effects model reveals the number of disciplinary infractions as another significant factor of schools' SEL placement. For instance, for every additional student infraction, the log odds of a school being in the upper part of the SEL effectiveness distribution decreases by .00025 (β<.05). This might suggest that teachers in these schools are, on average, responding to higher accounts of student misbehavior and may have less capacity to engage in SEL practices.

Additionally, as the proportion of Black teachers within a school increases by one percentage point, the log odds of being in the highest threshold for SEL quality decreases by .0047 percent and this coefficient approaches statistical significance (β< .10). Several prior studies shed light on what factors may be explaining this negative relationship. First, research has found that teachers in classrooms with higher concentrations of Black, Hispanic, male, and low-performing students tend to receive significantly worse observation ratings than do teachers serving more advantaged students (Campbell & Ronfeldt, 2016). As such, to the extent that Black teachers are more likely to teacher in such schooling context, this negative coefficient may reflect biases in how evaluators assess teaching effectiveness overall. Further, Jacob and Walsh

(2011) found that White teachers are rated more favorably by principals than non-White teachers, which might also explain the negative relationship.

On the other hand, however, other research might point to why such a relationship exists. First, if Black teachers are more likely to be assigned to schools and classrooms with higher shares of minority and lower achieving students, as is suggested by prior research (Kalogrides, Loeb, & Beteille, 2013), while simultaneously facing constant pressures to improve test scores (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010; Mulvenson, Stegman, & Ritter 2005), there is reason to believe that they may less likely to deviate from instruction to focus on SEL. Furthermore, these teachers may also be more likely to be placed in schooling contexts with fewer resources, and by extension, have limited or non-existent training with implementing SEL, which is important for fidelity to SEL (Brackett, et al., 2012). While these mechanisms cannot be tested quantitatively, they are probed later using richer qualitative interviewing.

Finally, within school variation in CCRPI scores associate with decreased in the log odds of being placed in the highest group for SEL quality (ln= -.0079 p<.10). This result appears a bit counter intuitive at first glance, but qualitative analyses discussed below shed some light on the negative coefficient. For instance, schools that really prioritize test scores, which accounts for the largest share of the overall CCRPI score, may be less willing to focus on SEL for fear that it detracts from their academic focus. Further, higher performing schools may be more likely to assume that their students do no need SEL training, and as such, do not prioritize it among their schools' goals.

INSERT TABLE 5 AROUND HERE.

Taken together, these results of the quantitative analyses consistently suggest that teachers' perceptions of school climate are important for explaining variation in their SEL

effectiveness. Considering the fact the school climate is both malleable (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005; Voight, Austin, & Hanson, 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016) and shaped in large part by the practices and values exuded by the school leader (Allen et al., 2015; Goff, Goldring, & Bickman, 2014; Moolenaar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2010), a positive school culture can serve as an important support to teachers trying to promote social and emotional wellness. Common barriers from these analyses are student poverty, discipline, and school quality. In what follows, these barriers and supports are situated within the social ecological framework and probed further through qualitative interviewing to offer a granular view of how they influence teaching practices related to SEL.

Research Question 3: In what ways do individual, schooling, and larger societal factors preclude the effective implementation of SEL practices and policies as perceived by teachers?

The social ecological framework explicates how microsystems, mesosystms, exosystems, and macrosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994; Sincero, 2012; Welsh & Little, 2018) work together to influence teacher**s'** behaviors and practices. In triangulating the findings from the quantitative data, the qualitative portion of this study seeks to further contextualize such findings as well as shed light on possible mechanisms driving them. In interviews with teachers, qualitative results suggest: a) school climate plays a leading role in whether and the extent to which SEL is implemented with fidelity; b) teachers' individual experiences shape their SEL use; c) teachers' ideologies about their responsibilities as a teacher influence their fidelity to SEL; and d) student and school level poverty, time, and pressures to meet academic thresholds are pressing barriers to SEL use. In what follows, these themes are fleshed out in detail and build support for the case that effective implementation of SEL relies on the extent to which

educational stakeholders address the multilayered systems that influence teachers' perceptions of and fidelity to SEL in the classroom.

"School Principals Make or Break the SEL Vision."

Teachers consistently responded that principals were indispensable in the process of SEL and expressed that the actions or inactions school leaders took around its implementation held important ramifications for how teachers responded to it. For instance, financing and building time in the school schedule for SEL initiatives were important signals to teachers about how seriously school leadership took SEL. In response to the question, "how does your school leadership cultivate school climates that are receptive to SEL reforms?" one special education teachers from district 1 commented, "the money and financial resources provided to support such initiatives… because these programs are not free." Later, she also suggested that her school leadership team blocked off the first 45 minutes of the day for the implementation of the SEL program and that, "the vice principal builds time into our schedule for SEL. When things happen at school, she says, 'oh no, that can't happen at this time because this is the time for SEL.'

As principals build time in to the schedules for and financed reforms related to SEL, teachers appeared more likely to implement them with fidelity. Teachers, across all districts, recognized that school leaders who acknowledge the time constraints that made implementing SEL challenging tended to be supported and patient in the SEL process, while those who did not discouraged SEL. For instance, one Spanish teacher from district 3 suggested, "in the schools I have been in, it's [principals' responses to teachers taking time away from instruction to focus on SEL] always, 'tell the counselor, send them [students] to the counselor, don't stop instruction' if they are having an issue you see as a teachable moment for SEL." Similarly, a high school

math teacher from district 1—the district with one of the most systematic SEL policies in the state—pointed out:

> Ultimately my job is to educate, you know, I teacher and my evaluation is based on how much growth we show or students. So if you spend all your time on the social and emotional piece and I'm not teaching… you know, because you have to get the curriculum across… that's what they are being graded on. SEL might get a student to calm down, but if they cant add, subtract, multiply, or divide, then that will reflect poorly on me.

Among teachers with the least favorable views towards a focus on SEL, what is identified above was the most common type of answer. A science teacher responded from the same district, "if my AP walks in while I am teaching some lesson on SEL, she gonna wanna know why I am not teaching standards if my kids aren't on grade level." Teachers who held these types of views were more likely to teach students in tested grades and were in districts who tended to have more pronounced challenges with the academic achievement of their students. Nonetheless, it appears especially problematic that even in districts that have established districtwide goals for SEL, teachers can be reprimanded for using instructional time to focus on it.

On the other hand, teachers with more favorable view towards SEL, tended to be less concerned that using instructional time to promote SEL in their classroom would reflect poorly on them in their evaluations by school leaders. A high school algebra teacher remarked: "My AP was awesome, and she understood why I moved the way I did. She still gave constructive feedback when I focused on SEL and that was helpful." Another ELA teacher from district 4 expressed a similar sentiment, pointing out: "I feel like I wouldn't get a talk to or be told that I'm wasting academic minutes [when I would use SEL lesson during class]. They [school leaders] wouldn't be like, 'what are we doing with these academic minutes?' and that was important." Across districts, teachers' perceptions about the culture around their schools' evaluations

remained a consistent theme and positive and negative perceptions yielded polar opposite reactions to SEL us in the classroom.

Another way school culture influenced teachers' fidelity to SEL was related to staff connectedness. One prevailing theme about connectedness is summed nicely below by a high school English from district 4, who said: she [her principal] created a climate in cultural of 'Ohana'. That was our theme for the school—family—and she always promoted family. She was very big about relationships and would model this to teachers, so they built them with students." Furthermore, teachers talked a great deal about how the extent to which their principals modeled SEL to other adults in the room was a factor shaping teachers' responses to the implementation of SEL. Across districts, teachers recognized that their school leaders could not simultaneously be serious about SEL and talk rudely and/or dismissively to students and staff.

"SEL is modeled by caregivers"

Consistent with the microsystems level of social ecological theory, I find that teachers' closest relationships and personal experiences influence their perception and use of SEL in the classroom. In responding to where she felt her deep commitment to SEL came from, a high school English teacher from district 4 remarked:

> My mother was very influential in teaching me the importance of SEL. She will always let us communicate and would communicate with us. She always gave us life lessons that focused on more than just academics. She always asked us how we were doing and encouraged us to be social and to join clubs.

Teachers also references how having mothers who were life-long educators was also very important in shaping their passions to build social and emotional wellness with their students. Furthermore, a social studies teacher from district 2 recalled how witnessing her mother serve as a pre-K teaching fundamentally shapes the way she frames her class to build SEL skills, stating:

> Watching my mom teach early grades showed me how important SEL is for young children. I think it was a lot in the way I was raised and the way I watched her be a teacher because we were raised to be aware of how other people were feeling and how to be aware of our emotions but also ensure we are checking how we react to them before you do something that you might regret.

In addition to mothers who modeled SEL to teachers in the study, teachers often reflected on what they felt they were missing from their teachers as children and sought to fill those gaps for their students. For instance, a math teacher in district one pointed out, "I remembered how much I hated history because I never, and I look back, I like never saw myself in a positive light in history and this affected my own identity and socioemotional wellness." This teacher went on to talk at length about how her experience as a biracial student, who struggled with self-identify in both "predominately White and Black spaces" shapes her use of classroom practices that ensure students learn SEL skills such as self and social awareness.

Far more accounts were shared that exemplify the ways by which SEL is modeled by personal experiences. For instance, a middle school Latino, ESL teacher marked how his early encounters with immigration and law enforcement influences how he views the importance of social and emotional wellness. He pointed out, "In my own background, there was constant instability and I lived in a context in which my social and emotional health was never really attended to because of fear" [of separation from family members]. After recounting stories about his past and some of the challenges he faced in his environment, he went on to talk at length about how it "inspired him to work in a school that is predominately Black and Hispanic and to change narratives that tell them that they aren't suited for 'this' job or cant do 'this' thing."

In additional to explicating the microsystems—such as early relationships and personal experiences—that shape teachers SEL use, these findings shed light on how mesosytems and identities also shape behavior. Black, bi-racial, and Latinx teachers interviewed in the sample

talked a great day about navigating what it meant to be a teacher of color within education and how they own, oftentimes inadequate, experiences matriculating through school and life shapes how they engage their own students. As Bronfenbrenner's (1977) framework points out, the mesosystem reflects the interactions, degree of alignment, and conflicts between varying aspects of an individual's microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Sincero, 2012) and how individual navigate their varied identities (i.e., as a teacher and person of color) can oftentimes greatly influence the types of practice they engage, or fail to, in order to adequately support their students.

"What's My Responsibility as a Teacher?"

Across all districts, teachers endorsed favorable views of SEL and regarded the skills as important for students to learn in order to be successful in school and beyond. However, within and between districts, and especially across subject areas taught, there were clear differences in perceptions about teachers' role in promoting SEL. On the one hand, teachers who held more negative views about the notion that teachers should be evaluated based on how well they attend to the social and emotional wellness of students, viewed their responsibility as teachers more narrowly than did teachers who supported SEL observations and evaluations. An elementary school math teacher from district 1 suggested,

> My background is not in the social part of training these kids, you know, dealing with their emotions and you know, some of the stuff that they're dealing with at home and all of that. I was not trained to be a therapist and all my degrees are in education and leadership… not the social and emotional stuff. That stuff is not… you know… what I am supposed to do.

This sentiment was very common among participants who felt that SEL was simply "another one, of too many hats, that teachers are wearing that they should not be." Relatedly, a math teacher from district four expressed, "You're not a psychologist or counselor or anything like

that. Ultimately we are there to teach and we have to focus on academics." Further, others strongly alluded to the notion that parents, and not teachers should be teaching kids SEL. An algebra teacher from district 3 suggested, "teachers feel like they can't undo what parents have done to students from a SEL standpoint. Parents have to teach kids to communicate and stuff. That's not really for the classroom."

On the other hand, teachers who supported evaluations based on SEL were far more likely to describe the role of teaching as going far beyond just teaching content knowledge. When asked to respond to whether or not teachers should be evaluated based on their SEL competence, a middle school ELA teacher from district 3 remarked, "100%... 100%... Sometimes the only gains I make with kids is SEL stuff. There is so much more to the job [than just testing], there's so much more I do every day, and it'd be nice to be appreciated for that." A common sentiment expressed by many teachers was summed well by a middle school teacher from district 2:

> I am a firm believer that you cannot even touch the curriculum in your class if you do not have a strong bond with your student. They need to know that they can trust you, that they can respect you, that you can respect them. You have to have a positive culture in your classroom in order for your students to really get down to the nitty gritty and dig deep into content."

Teachers who supported having their teaching effectiveness be determine in part by their SEL competence continued to express the fact that teaching was about so much more than content and that imparting SEL skills was central to their jobs.

In further explaining the roles of teaching, another science teacher from district 3 pointed out:

> you're not just teaching a part of their brain, you're teaching the whole brain, you're teaching the whole kid, you're teaching the emotions, you're teaching everything that makes up that person, you're teaching it. If you try to narrow to one side of it, you're not going to be successful.

Ideologies about the roles of teaching consistently yielded stark contrasts between those in favor

of SEL observations and those who opposed them. While the vast majority of teachers were

either on side of this coin (yes) or the other (no), a few gave more balanced approaches that

suggested that, "if there are trainings in place to teach SEL and a clear vision of what is expected

from teachers and how it will be implemented in the school, then yes, I would support the

standards," as expressed by a teacher from district 2. Another more balance approach was

expressed by other teachers who pointed out,

> I don't think so [teachers should not be evaluated on SEL]. I say no because there are
> other ways you can check whether or not teachers are attending to the SEL development
> of students. Teachers will buy in to SEL when they know the benefits of SEL. Formal
> evaluations just make people defensive and resistant at times. I don't think this should be
> done with something as delicate as SEL.

Teachers ideologies about teaching are most proximally informed by relationships that exist in

the mirco and exo systems, and appear to play a leading role in where teachers land on their roles

in the SEL process.

"High Poverty, No Time, and Standardized Testing"

Across all districts, the most frequently mentioned barriers to the effective

implementation of SEL were poverty, time constraints, and the hyper focus on testing. While

these are distinct themes alone, together, they point to a common problem—that teachers face

too many pressures to get students, especially poor, minority, and lower achieving students, to

give instructional time to SEL. This was especially true for teachers in tested grades, who felt

that every minute spent away from teaching student content would potentially reflect poorly on

them as educators and would not support student testing achievement. The social ecological

framework posits these pressures as existing mostly in the exosystem, which reflects schools'

cultures and institutional practices and politics, and the macrosystem, what accentuates how cultural and political factors can detrimentally shape behavior.

For instance, a math teacher from district 3, which is especially known for its strong academics pointed out, "There is a lot of testing and that creates a lot of anxiety for teachers and it makes it harder [for them to focus on SEL]. Right now that is the mode [hyper testing] that everyone is in and this adds a lot to teachers' plates. Testing blocks all of the SEL stuff." Time constraints and testing pressures also make it difficult to invest fully into securing the kinds of student relationships that allow for meaningful SEL. In describing the barriers she faces when attempting to build the SEL skills of her mostly marginalized and at risk students, a 9th grade ELA teacher from district 2 remarked:

> With my students, most of the have PTSD I think. They hear gun shots all the time, they have classmates or family members who are on the street, in prison, or dealing with addiction, and this causes them to build up walls as defense mechanism and SEL is purposed to tear those walls down. But that takes a lot of instructional time."

Despite talking at length about how much time it takes to build those relationships, and what spending it might do for her evaluation, this same teacher endorsed a strong commitment to SEL and suggested that she was willing to, "be marked down if it meant establishing real relationships with my students."

> Teachers suggested that school level poverty was such a prevailing challenge because, I have kids that live in hotel. I have kids who have a large family and there may not be enough food. I would say the poverty is the biggest thing or low social economic status because they're not having the proper resources, meaning money. So how can we address the whole child, when there is such a lack of resources?—social studies teachers from district 1.

Another frequently cited mechanism teachers cited regarding poverty and SEL had to do with the mobility of students. In talking about the challenges in building meaningful social and emotional connections with her classroom with mostly poor students, a high school math teacher from

district 2 suggested, **"**Transient students make it hard to build relationships. Student mobility is such a challenge in schools and so teachers might keep a little distance between them and their students because they don't know who they will have in their classroom." Sense many SEL practices rely on making and maintaining deep relationships, teacher suggested that frequent mobility might limit teachers' willingness to engage in SEL practices in schools with higher shares of poor students.

Discussion: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Data: The Role of Social Ecologies

As the SEL literature continues to expand knowledge related to the effects of SEL programs (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Durlak et al., 2011; Garcia, 2014; Graziano, Reavis, Keane, & Calkins, 2007; Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, & Perry, 2002), there is increasing needs for studies that examine mechanism that explains whether or not SEL reforms centered on teachers will be successful. As such, this study uses an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to underscore patterns the describe and predict teachers' SEL use, as well as the mechanism that drive such trends. Using a social ecological framework, this study situates teachers' SEL fidelity as operating within a number of complex systems that must be addressed in order for SEL to be implemented effectively and sustainably.

Figure 3 presents a conceptual model that accentuates the social ecological factors influencing teachers' fidelity to SEL in the classroom. Microsystem factors, such as teachers own characteristics, personal experiences, and ideologies shape both how teachers view the role of teaching and the extent to which they feel instructional time should be devoted to SEL. Furthermore, school climate and leadership are additional factors that influence teachers' use of practices that build SEL skills. On the other hand, student body characteristics, such as the proportion of poor and Black students present several challenges to SEL, making teachers less

likely to engage SEL practices and build relationships for fear that students' defense mechanism and mobility patterns may derails efforts. The final exosystem variables that influence teachers' SEL practices are student achievement and discipline. While teachers appear less willing to prioritize SEL in schools with more disciplinary infractions, teachers in both high achieving and lower achieving schools face similar pressures to prioritize testing gains and not SEL skills.

A number of factors operating at macrosystems also shape teachers' fidelity to SEL. For instance, testing pressures from high-stakes test-based accountability leaves teachers far less willing to deviate from instructional time to support SEL delivery in their classrooms. Teachers are fearful that taking instructional time to build students SEL skills may reflect poorly on them and as a result, elect to spend the entirety of class time focused on teaching content. Further, a lack of training in SEL in teacher preparation programs also can leave teachers feeling as though they are not equipped with the skills and knowledge to adequately support students' socioemotional wellness.

<div align="center">**INSERT FIGURE THREE AROUND HERE**</div>

<div align="center">**Policy Implications**</div>

This study demonstrates how policymakers can leverage teachers' favorable views towards comprehensive SEL approaches to reform student learning (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Lasky, 2005) and effectively fulfil the Every Student Succeeds Act's (ESSA) mandates. However, failing to attend to the ecological realties (e.g., working conditions, stressors, and burnout) that shape teachers' fidelity weakens the SEL movement, because teachers are more likely to minimally implement or even ignore SEL standards when they experience unsupportive administration or burnout (Kam et al., 2003; Ransford et al., 2009). Teachers may also be less willing to commit to SEL reforms because of the continued pressure to do more work, often with

fewer resources, and, accordingly, with less efficacy (Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999). In the Schools and Staffing Survey (2003–2004), public teachers reported being contracted to work far fewer hours than they actually do (Ransford et al., 2009; Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2006), which may leave teachers less willing to espouse fidelity to SEL because it adds to their extensive workloads.

Additionally, these results provide insights into how challenges related to increasing job demands and potential experiences of burnout can be mitigated so as to allow teachers space to effectively drive SEL implementation (Strein, Hoagwood, & Cohn, 2003; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). As such challenges are rectified, research accentuating the positive aspects of universal, classroom-based SEL on academic and non-academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001; Payton et al., 2008) can serve as greater motivation to propel SEL literature and practice forward. Additionally, this study demonstrates how policymakers can leverage teachers' favorable views towards comprehensive SEL approaches to reform student learning (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Lasky, 2005) and effectively fulfil ESSA mandates. Lastly, this study adds to the growing body of scholarship positioning school leaders are central drivers of school culture (Allen et al., 2015; Goff et al., 2014; Moolenaar et al., 2010), and highlights the important role they play in systematically advancing SEL in schools' policies and practices.

Scholarly Implications

The majority of studies assessing the teachers and SEL are focused on the induvial unit of analyses (e.g., Birkett et al., 2009; Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008; Kosciw, et al., 2012). While teacher-level analyses are important to identify associations between SEL use and personal factors, recent initiatives in ESSA related to the use of additional measures of school effectiveness, such as those related to SEL use, evaluate the functioning of schools as a whole. In

particular, under ESSA, over 50% of a school's accountability is comprised of school-level outcomes (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Further, while variations in SEL use exist within schools, the primary theory of action of much of the climate research, and particularly as informed by social-ecological frameworks, indicated how collective perceptions of climate shape behavior over and above individual ones.

Previous research indicates that school demographic variables influence academic teachers' perception of climate, and by extent, then, their willingness to espouse fidelity to reforms (Bierman et al. 2010; Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005). For example, Bierman et al. (2010) examined school poverty as a moderator in the evaluation of the Fast Track version of PATHS, which is an SEL program for low-income children in first through third grade. This suggests that school SES is an important control variable in model specifications. Further, Tseng and Seidman (2007) argue that, over and above school level resources, social processes that take place in school settings (e.g., social norms, relationships, and interactions) also shape teachers' behaviors, which further accentuates the importance of school level analyses.

Directions for Future Research

This research has laid the foundation for several areas of future inquiry. For instance, while this study focused on teachers only, future researchers should access how other school personnel face similar and different pressures when trying to implement SEL. School principals and counselors are also central to many SEL reforms and should be centered in research to ensure that policymakers are informed by the varying realities faced by different educational stakeholders tasked with implementing SEL reforms. Additionally, rom a quantitative perspective, future research must examine how individual teachers' perceptions of school climate associate with their own commitment to SEL. One challenge with school level aggregates is that

they ignore the variations within schools, which is problematic because the present study is unable to probe whether or not the relationship between school climate perceptions and SEL differ by important demographic characteristics such as race, gender, experience, among others.

Conclusion

In order to identify the myriad of factors influencing the extent to which SEL centralizes in teachers' practices, there is greater need for informed thought on how teachers develop and change their pedagogical thinking (Pérez Gómez, 2007). Inasmuch as researchers and policymakers understand how teachers' complex systems of personal constructs are situated in, influence, and are influenced by ecological structures, recommendations can be made to identify effective ways to reformulate and developed their pedagogies (Martinez, 2016). Pérez Gómez (2007) posits (de)construction as a necessary element of changing teachers' practices, as they undergo the process of altering their mental constructs and the actions they accumulate overtime.

With this in mind, and the understanding that teachers are too often tasked with teaching in highly pressurized, accountability driven cultures, schools must create spaces for teachers to engage in critical reflection practices (Schön, 1983) and offer them support and training (Durlak, 2015; Jones & Bouffard, 2012) to develop teachers' pedagogical thinking about SEL (Ebadi & Gheisari, 2016). With regard to self-reflective practices, attending to what teachers model through their action and inactions is also important, because they send important signals to students and other adults that can advance or halt SEL reforms (Jennings & Frank, 2015). Therefore, supporting teachers with professional development and training that facilitate iterative cycles of reflection can foster the process by which teachers deconstruct their pedagogical thinking to better reflect the importance of SEL.

Importantly, in addition to understanding how teachers' personal attributes shape their commitment and pedagogies toward SEL, research must capture the ecological structures by which their thinking and practices are influenced. Scholarships consistently accentuates how teachers are more likely to embrace and implement reforms when they are involved in decisions about it and participate in the design and development of such change (Campbell et al., 2015). Therefore, research on the factors that influence teachers practices and pedagogies must contend with the reality that they operate within complex systems and are influenced by individual, school, community, and sociocultural factors when delivery education to students.

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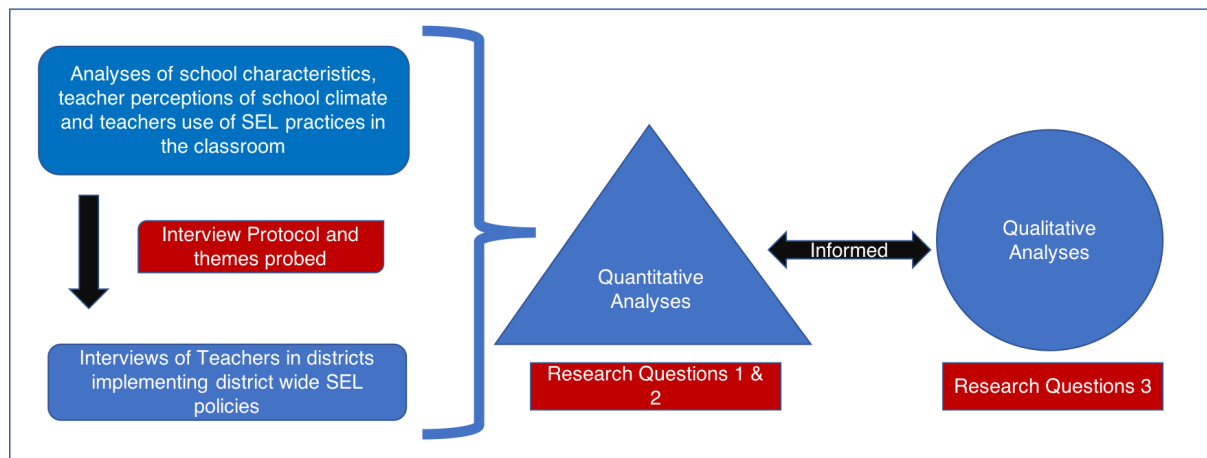
Figure 1.

Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods Design

Table 1. Composition of Georgia's Teachers

Variables	All Schools		Teachers 2015-16		Teachers 2017-18	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
% Bachelor's	35.35	10.58	34.57	10.55	36.48	10.49
% Master's	42.96	9.45	43.19	9.54	42.64	9.33
% Specialists	19.45	9.83	20.06	9.98	18.58	9.43
% Doctoral	2.25	2.74	2.17	2.68	2.31	2.79
% Professional License	97.47	41.53	97.81	3.63	96.73	4.69
% Provisional License	2.26	3.88	2.48	3.85	3.62	4.90
% Full Time	93.90	8.21	93.93	8.37	94.06	7.89
% Part Time	6.50	8.39	6.36	8.45	6.29	8.00
% Black Teachers	25.68	28.69	25.02	28.32	26.42	29.19
% Hispanic Teachers	1.91	3.15	1.84	3.03	2.05	3.26
% White Teachers	70.55	29.55	71.63	28.93	68.94	30.49
% <1 Yr Exp	6.05	5.83	6.08	5.84	5.88	5.73
% 1_10 Yrs Exp	36.44	11.89	36.18	11.86	36.74	11.95
% 11_20 Yrs Exp	35.25	10.09	35.55	10.11	34.86	9.94
% 21_30 Yrs Exp	18.88	8.73	18.74	8.65	19.18	8.68
% >30 Yrs Exp	3.68	3.55	3.73	3.54	3.68	3.67
# Teachers Observed	49.44	24.46	48.07	22.94	50.62	25.38
# Total Teachers	52.23	25.73	51.83	24.72	52.83	25.98
N =	8,605		2,118		2,163	

Note. All descriptive statistics represent means and standard deviations for all merged schools in Georgia for school year 2015-16 and 2017-18.

Table 2. School Summary Statistics By SEL Quality

Variables	All Schools Mean	All Schools SD	Low School SEL Quality Mean	Low School SEL Quality SD	Medium School SEL Quality Mean	Medium School SEL Quality SD	High School SEL Quality Mean	High School SEL Quality SD
% Black	38.43	30.29	50.65	31.89	38.58	29.87	26.03	23.25
% Hispanic	13.69	15.33	11.11	13.61	15.00	17.16	14.97	14.69
% White	41.05	29.03	33.26	29.48	39.99	29.13	49.91	25.91
% Poverty	66.51	27.86	78.68	22.41	67.46	26.46	53.37	28.36
% SWD	11.70	5.02	11.70	4.15	11.68	5.49	11.71	5.31
% ELLs	5.69	9.99	4.60	8.79	6.12	10.92	6.36	10.05
% Gifted	10.43	8.51	7.81	6.24	10.28	7.89	13.12	10.06
# Student Infractions	298.68	406.58	349.42	414.28	322.25	429.66	250.03	384.80
Teachers Climate Perceptions	75.46	7.11	72.54	7.19	75.22	6.50	78.86	5.94
Staff Connectedness	84.77	18.88	82.92	19.22	84.36	19.50	87.04	17.77
Learning Structure	86.83	17.44	84.56	18.10	86.57	17.58	89.38	16.25
School Safety	59.18	10.92	58.51	11.57	59.41	10.95	59.60	10.12
Physical Environment	79.94	18.34	77.29	19.17	79.73	18.04	82.75	17.44
Relational Climate	73.58	20.54	68.47	21.66	73.23	20.06	79.47	18.00
Parental Involvement	60.82	29.21	52.50	29.33	60.98	28.41	70.34	26.59
% Exemplary SEL	0.28	0.24	0.04	0.05	0.22	0.08	0.57	0.16
% Effective SEL	0.69	0.24	0.91	0.09	0.76	0.10	0.42	0.16
% Ineffective SEL	0.03	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.03	0.03	0.01	0.02
Teaching Experience	13.32	2.62	12.92	2.70	13.13	2.67	13.90	2.39
% Advanced Degrees	64.68	10.53	63.54	10.91	64.32	10.65	66.18	9.82
School Enrollment	779.40	532.74	696.92	329.00	831.02	610.62	876.89	533.14
School Performance	72.88	12.63	67.97	11.60	73.20	11.59	78.72	11.40
School Climate	3.56	0.97	3.26	1.01	3.59	0.92	3.90	0.82
N =	8,866		2,852		2,841		2,841	

Note. All descriptive statistics represent means and standard deviations for all merged schools in Georgia from school year 2015-16 through 2017-18. Thresholds for SEL Quality are determined by terciles, which evenly split the sample into three group (e.g., Low, Medium, and High), and represent teachers' observed use of classroom practices that build students' socioemotional development.

Table 3. Teachers' Climate Perceptions & SEL Quality by Quintiles

| Variables	Low	Middle	High
Panel A: Quintiles of % FRPL Students Served			
School Climate Perceptions	79.49 (5.46)	74.84 (6.18)	72.15 (7.34)
% Exemplary SEL Teachers	0.39 (0.26)	0.25 (0.22)	0.18 (0.20)
% Effective SEL Teachers	0.60 (0.26)	0.72 (0.22)	0.77 (0.20)
% Ineffective SEL Teachers	0.01 (.02)	0.03 (.04)	0.05 (.06)
Average SEL Quality	2.37 (0.27)	2.22 (0.23)	2.13 (0.22)
% FRPL	33.82 (15.40)	70.87 (9.26)	96.26 (3.93)
Panel B: Quintiles of % Black Students Served			
School Climate Perceptions	79.67 (5.28)	76.34 (5.80)	70.55 (6.72)
% Exemplary SEL Teachers	0.36 (0.26)	0.29 (0.24)	0.18 (0.19)
% Effective SEL Teachers	0.63 (0.26)	0.69 (0.24)	0.76 (0.19)
% Ineffective SEL Teachers	0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (.03)	0.05 (.06)
Average SEL Quality	2.34 (0.27)	2.26 (0.25)	2.13 (0.21)
% FRPL	47.83 (26.79)	65.09 (23.51)	86.89 (16.89)
Panel C: Quintiles of % Hispanic Students Served			
School Climate Perceptions	74.65 (7.72)	76.50 (6.77)	75.77 (6.27)
% Exemplary SEL Teachers	0.23 (0.23)	0.30 (0.25)	0.31 (0.24)
% Effective SEL Teachers	0.73 (0.23)	0.68 (0.25)	0.66 (0.23)
% Ineffective SEL Teachers	0.036 (0.05)	0.03 (0.04)	(0.04)
Average SEL Quality	2.20 (0.25)	2.27 (0.27)	2.28 (0.25)
% FRPL	70.13 (29.13)	57.40 (28.99)	70.51 (22.72)
Panel D: Quintiles of % White Students Served			
School Climate Perceptions	71.03 (6.76)	76.56 (6.20)	79.20 (5.47)
% Exemplary SEL Teachers	0.21 (0.20)	0.29 (0.25)	0.33 (0.27)
% Effective SEL Teachers	0.74 (0.19)	0.68 (0.24)	0.65 (0.26)
% Ineffective SEL Teachers	0.052 (0.06)	0.02 (0.03)	(0.02)
Average SEL Quality	2.15 (0.22)	2.27 (0.26)	2.32 (0.27)
% FRPL	86.52 (16.63)	64.32 (26.76)	47.86 (24.27)
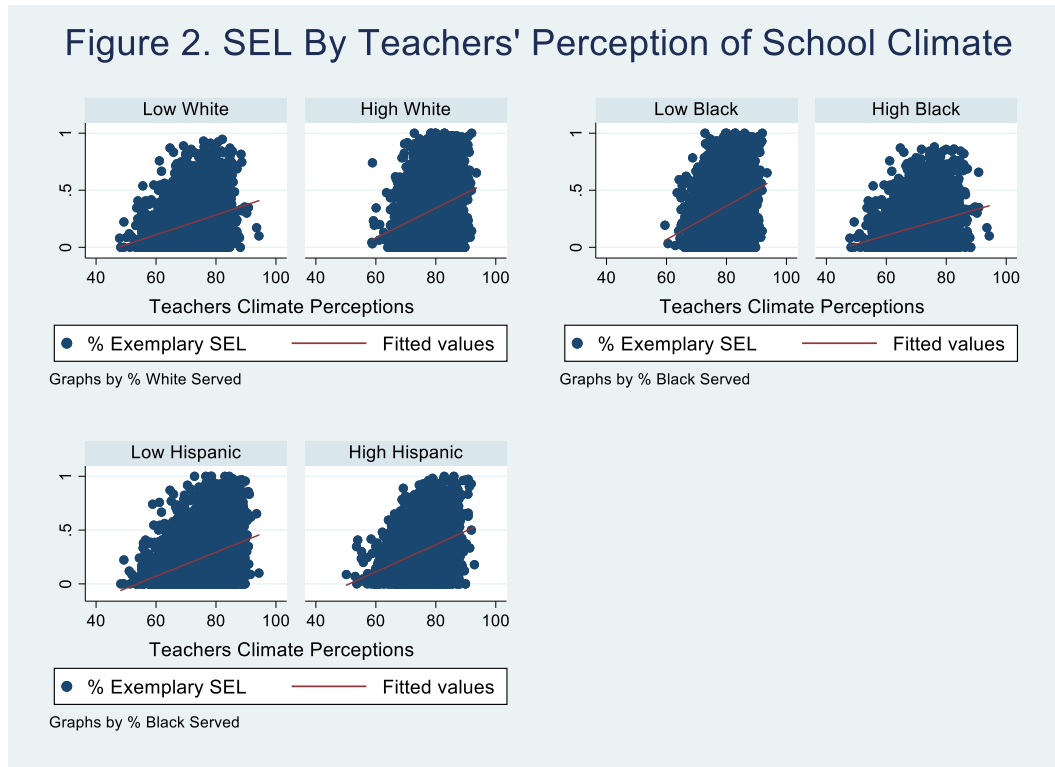
Figure 2.

SEL By Teachers' Perceptions of School Climate

Table 4. Factors Predicting Levels of SEL Quality

	2014	2015	2016	2017
SEL Quality Status				
Tch. Climate Perceptions	1.056***	1.055***	1.053***	1.059***
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
% Poverty	0.990**	0.991**	0.992*	0.990***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
% Black	0.998	1.005	1.008*	1.004
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
% Hispanic	1.009	1.009	1.013*	1.012
	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.007)
# Student Infractions	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Teaching Experience	1.029	1.000	1.011	1.025
	(0.029)	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.029)
% Gifted	1.008	1.018*	1.003	1.007
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.008)
# Total Teachers	1.001	0.999	1.010	1.024**
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.008)
% Advanced Degrees	1.001	1.020***	1.008	1.005
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
% Black Teachers	1.008	0.994	0.988**	0.997
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
% Hispanic Teachers	1.000	0.981	0.981	1.007
	(0.016)	(0.021)	(0.014)	(0.016)
% Professional License	1.060	1.003	0.986	0.915
	(0.069)	(0.058)	(0.015)	(0.050)
% Provisional License	1.025	0.984	0.951	0.915
	(0.064)	(0.054)	(0.044)	(0.047)
School Enrollment	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.999*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
% ELLs	1.006	1.008	0.995	0.996
	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.009)
% SWD	1.017	1.009	1.010	1.011
	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.016)
School Performance	0.993	0.986	1.003	1.008
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.007)
Observations	1936	1966	1999	1956

Table 5. Factors Predicting SEL Quality Status

VARIABLES	SEL Quality Status
Teachers Climate Perceptions	0.045**
	(0.0066)
% Poverty	-0.0084**
	(0.0021)
% Black	0.0017
	(0.0027)
% Hispanic	0.0085+
	(0.0047)
# Student Infractions	-0.00025*
	(0.00011)
Teaching Experience	0.012
	(0.017)
% Gifted	0.0065
	(0.0050)
# Total Teachers	0.0058
	(0.0051)
% Advanced Degrees	0.0093*
	(0.0039)
% Black Teachers	-0.0047+
	(0.0025)
% Hispanic Teachers	-0.016
	(0.012)
TAPS_Rating_7.17.27	3.99**
	(0.16)
School Enrollment	0.00018
	(0.00028)
% ELLs	0.0017
	(0.0070)
% SWD	0.0094
	(0.010)
School Performance	-0.0079+
	(0.0041)
Number of Schools	2,061
School FE	YES
Year FE	YES

Table 6. Participants and Summary Statistics for Sample Districts

Variables	District 1	District 2	District 3	District 4
Number of Participants Interviews				
School Climate Perceptions	71.48 (7.96)	73.18 (6.34)	78.23 (5.91)	73.22 (5.39)
Staff Connectedness	82.06 (17.12)	87.43 (17.99)	86.02 (17.99)	84.53 (17.35)
Learning Structure	83.13 (19.07)	85.32 (20.00)	88.83 (15.24)	84.11 (18.12)
School Safety	55.892 (13.77)	60.476 (8.71)	60.405 (11.25)	60.00 (11.08)
Physical Environment	76.66 (20.00)	82.24 (19.09)	87.00 (15.58)	76.33 (15.30)
Relational Climate	62.73 (27.33)	65.59 (21.78)	76.94 (19.43)	70.14 (16.86)
Parental Involvement	53.56 (34.69)	57.80 (26.71)	67.64 (27.45)	57.44 (25.57)
% Exemplary SEL Teachers	0.21 (0.20)	0.21 (0.18)	0.48 (0.23)	0.27 (0.22)
% Effective SEL Teachers	0.73 (0.19)	0.73 (0.18)	0.50 (0.22)	0.71 (0.21)
% Ineffective SEL Teachers	0.060 (0.07)	0.056 (0.06)	0.015 (0.02)	0.020 (0.03)
Average SEL Quality	2.15 (0.22)	2.15 (0.20)	2.47 (0.24)	2.25 (0.22)
% FRPL Students	83.19 (30.45)	88.86 (9.54)	54.99 (25.16)	54.53 (17.07)
% Black Students	80.06 (28.31)	49.88 (13.52)	32.46 (17.01)	51.91 (20.17)
% Hispanic Students	6.34 (9.22)	23.71 (14.96)	28.33 (19.08)	9.75 (4.04)
% White Students	10.98 (21.53)	20.31 (14.28)	25.05 (18.57)	30.87 (23.03)

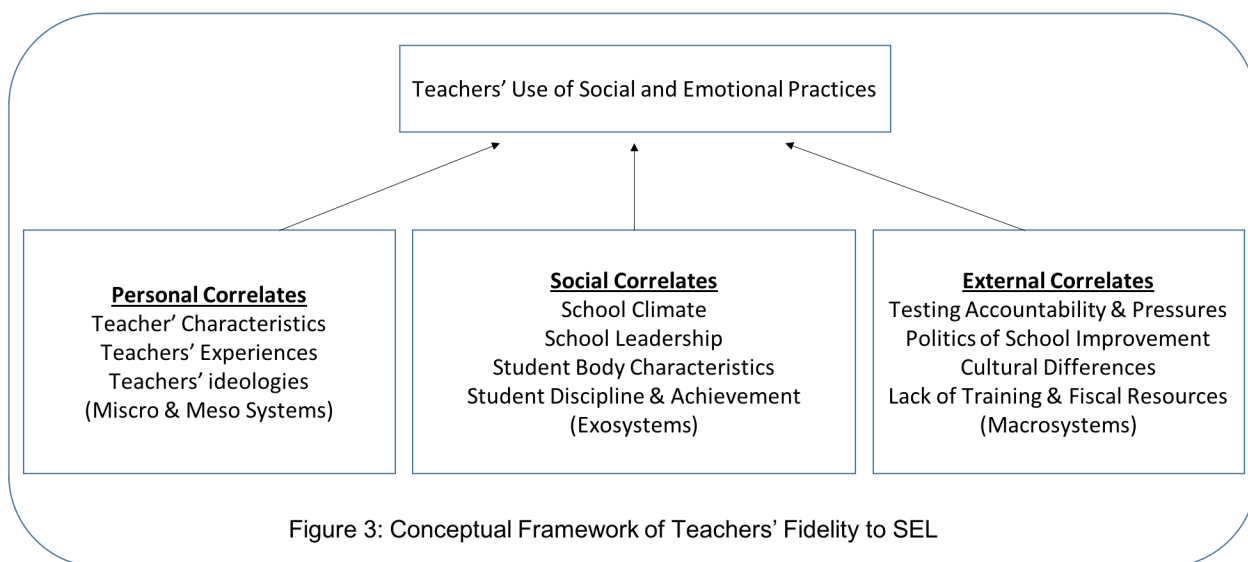Figure 3: Conceptual Framework of Teachers' Fidelity to SEL

Figure 3:

Conceptual Framework of Teachers' Fidelity to SEL

CHAPTER 4

BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL

LEARNING

Introduction: Principals and Educational Reform

Recent shifts in federal education policy have created fertile ground that is ripe with

opportunities to more comprehensively center social and emotional learning (SEL) in the school

improvement process (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; Garcia, 2016; Garcia & Wiess, 2016;

Grant et al., 2017; Jones, Farrington, Jagers, Brackett, & Kahn, 2019; Walls, Ryu, Fairchild, &

Johnson, 2018). The passage of the Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 has opened a

policy window many states, districts, and schools are leveraging to orient school reforms around

SEL (Kennedy, 2019). This Act grants educators greater flexibility to transition away from the

punitive accountability policies that have dominated the federal education policy landscape since

the No Child Left Behind era toward ones that position SEL as central for school effectiveness

(Grant et al., 2017). To optimize the opening of this window, however, educational stakeholders

pursuing policies and initiatives aimed at educating the 'whole child' must center the school

personnel tasked with implementing them and must be informed by the capacity of school

leaders and teachers to do so effectively.

The growing prominence of SEL on states' policy agendas nationwide is supported by a

well-established and growing body of literature accentuating the positive impacts of programs on

students' short and long-term outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Hart, DiPerna, Lei, & Cheng, 2020;

McCormick, Capella, O'Connor, McCLowry, 2013). However, as with other prominent school

reform strategies that show promise, scholarship demonstrating positive effects on student outcomes must be coupled with more research that documents the contextual conditions under which such positive results manifest. Therefore, although lines of inquiry emphasizing the positive effects of SEL programs are essential, and justify their utility in school improvement plans, research underscoring fundamental mechanisms necessary for successful implementation fills essential gaps in the literature about critical processes for SEL reforms (Doss, Johnston, & Akinniraniye, 2019).

A shift in the focus of SEL from an exclusive emphasis on the impacts of programs to one that centers school personnel reflects the reality that the implementation, efficacy, and sustainability of SEL reforms (e.g., policies, programs, and practices) are mostly dependent on school personnel such as school leaders (principals and assistant principals) and teachers. In particular, principals play indispensable roles in establishing the schooling cultures that effective implementation of and adjustment to school reforms necessitate (Allen et al., 2015; Goff, Goldring, & Bickman, 2014; Moolenaar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2010). However, social, geographic, and other contextual factors individually and cumulatively shape schools' capacity to implement SEL effectively (Walls et al., 2018). Schools facing constant turnover, that have hiring challenges, and that serve more difficult to teach students may face unique threats to building the institutional capacity necessary to implement SEL reforms optimally. Thus, highlighting how principals build the organizational social capital (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2009; Coburn & Russell, 2008; Leana & Van Buren, 1999; Smylie & Evans, 2006) for SEL in their schools elucidates both critical implementation barriers to effective SEL as well as the how school leaders respond to them.

A small but emerging body of scholarship serves as the foundation for the recent shift in the SEL literature from program evaluations to systemwide supports for the personnel implementing the reforms aimed at promoting students' socioemotional skills (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl, Kitil, & Hanson-Peterson, 2017). This shift in focus, although mostly focused on the importance of teachers' in the SEL process, is primarily informed by research increasingly highlighting their effects on students' non-cognitive outcomes in the short (Blazar & Kraft, 2017; Gershenson, 2016; Jackson, 2012, 2018; Kraft, 2019; Ladd & Sorensen, 2017) and long-term (Deming, 2017; Heckman & Kautz, 2012). The personnel-oriented approach to SEL has also been marked by other research explicating the intersection between teachers' perceptions of school climate and their fidelity to SEL (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2011, 2012; Ransford et al., 2009; Reyes et al., 2012; Zhai et al., 2015). The orientation of teachers in the SEL process is supported by existing research that positions them as essential agents of change in the delivery of reforms (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bowden, Lanning, Pippin, & Tanner, 2003; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). Thus, SEL approaches that ignore how teachers' perceptions of school climate shape SEL are unlikely to yield optimal benefits (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012; Collie et al., 2011, 2012).

While research increasingly explicates how teachers play vital roles in the facilitation of students' SEL skills, far less scholarship underscores principals' roles in the delivery of SEL and how they leverage their positions in schools to promote effective implementation (Kennedy, 2019). A recent, nationwide review of leadership preparation programs shows that educators have very limited, and frequently no, exposure to coursework that prepares them for their roles in facilitating SEL (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). A gap in understanding about the role's school principals play in the facilitation of school-based SEL initiatives (in)advertently divorces them

from the process of optimizing the policy window created by ESSA to promote students'

socioemotional wellness. Given principals' roles in shaping positive school climates (Allen et al.,

2015; Goff, Goldring, & Bickman, 2014; Moolenaar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2010), in building buy-in

from stakeholders to realize school vision (Brown, Anfara, & Roney, 2004; Caprara,

Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Collie, Shapka, Perry, 2012), and in driving effective

reform, there exist great urgency to fill gaps about how they build and sustain capacity for the

effective implementation of SEL. As such, better understanding which skills, strategies, and

experiences principals are leveraging to overcome barriers to SEL implementation in their

schools, in lieu of formal academic training, sheds light on how districts and schools can

optimize the policy window created by ESSA for SEL in such a way that drives students

socioemotional and cognitive development.

Therefore, this study qualitative study relies on interview data from principals from four

districts in Georgia that are implementing systemwide SEL programs. Guided by the

organizational social capital (OSC) framework, this study extends theory and practice regarding

internal and external challenges faced by school leaders implementing SEL reforms, particularly

those serving in disadvantaged contexts. In illustrating how schools' institutional capacities shape

and are shaped by the sociopolitical and geographic contexts in which schools are embedded,

this analysis elucidates barriers to the effective SEL implementation and how they affect

different elements of schools' social capital. Two research questions guide the present study:

1. What primary internal and external threats do principals perceive affect the
   organizational social capital of schools implementing SEL?
2. How do threats to SEL implementation affect the different elements of organizational
   social capital as perceived by school leaders?

Specifically, these questions are focused around identifying how principals navigate threats to

effective implementation of SEL, underscore how turnover and institutional instability can

undermine equity dimensions of SEL initiatives, and positions school leaders as critical agents of change for SEL.

In the sections that follow, this study begins with a brief literature review that accentuates how evolving federal policies have created a policy window for the centering of SEL on the national policy agenda. This portion of the lit review is followed by a synthesis of scholarship on the centrality of school leaders in shaping positive school climates. Next, I describe the OSC framework and its application to my methods and findings sections, which follow the theoretical framework section. After the presentation of findings, I conclude with implications for SEL, policy implementation, and school reform. Finally, this study ends with a discussion and implications section.

How Policy Shifts Facilitate the Evolution of Principals' Roles

Historically, principals had in many ways escaped the pressures teachers face in terms of augmenting students' test scores, as educational stakeholders tended to regard principals' impact on student outcomes as more distal, such that they cultivate an environment in which learning takes place and facilitate positive school cultures, which lead to improved outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2008). Teachers, on the other hand, are typically regarded as more proximal influencers of student test scores in that the role of the teacher is more directly tied to student learning (Fuller & Hollingworth, 2014; Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Pashiardis & Brauckmann, 2009; Williams & Welsh, 2018).

However, as educational stakeholders increasingly advocate for higher quality in education, policy actors have relied on the use of punitive test-based accountability to boost school effectiveness (Allen, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015; Welsh, Graham, & Williams, 2019). Starting with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, expansions to the role the

federal government plays in the provision of public education, policy actors' rallying cries for increases in the quality and production of public-school education have only amplified, as evidenced by recent federal policies. For instance, the mandates of NCLB (2001) were accompanied by more considerable financial investments in K-12 education by the federal government and held that school districts were responsible for the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of their students. The law mandated that school effectiveness was to be measured mostly by student performance on standardized tests and required 'failing' school districts to offer supplemental schooling services to their students (Heinrich & Nisar, 2013). President Obama's Race to the Top initiative added additional pressures to school and districts by holding teachers, and to a lesser degree, principals, accountable for the academic achievement of students (Bird, Wang, Watson, & Murray, 2009).

These accountability pressure persisted, and in some ways, are too amplified, with the enactment of ESSA, as the legislation pushes states to devote increased attention to the roles of principals in the process of improving education (Manna, 2015; Williams & Welsh, 2018). While the law does provide greater flexibility for districts and schools to leverage Title I funds to improve the quality of principals, it also acknowledges them as contributors to students' academic success and holds them accountable for it (Corcoran, 2017; Haller; Haller, Hunt, Pacha, & Fazekas, 2016, & Manna, 2015; Williams & Welsh, 2018). In centering principals in the school improvement process, ESSA appears to be responding to research framing principals as accounting for up to 25% of the variance in students' academic performance on tests (Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010; Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2012; Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012).

With these additional pressures on school leaders, however, has come increased flexibility that can and must leverage to support students (Manna, 2015). The devolution of power ESSA grants to states (Fairman, Johnson & Eberle, 2017), uniquely positions schools and districts to seek creative ways to improve the schooling process that go beyond traditional efforts to improve test score. While the NCLB era was marked by problematic schooling practices that narrowed curriculums and relied heavily on teaching to the test in response to test-based accountability pressures (Ehren & Hatch, 2013; Jennings & Bearak, 2014), ESSA has expanded the notion of schooling effectiveness (Allbright & Marsh, 2020. The flexibility and funding the law provides to support principals have created the necessary conditions for schools to prioritize SEL, while also enhancing the academic outcomes of their students (Corcoran, 2017; Haller et al., 2016).

Two policy levers many states are pulling in response to the passage of ESSA place more targeted focus on improvements to school climate (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013) and the inclusion of SEL in schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; Garcia, 2014; García & Weiss, 2016; Graziano, Reavis, Keane, & Calkins, 2007). These approaches are supported by a growing body of scholarship, although it has not fully explicated the roles of school leaders in facilitating the schooling cultures necessary for foster teachers' SEL competencies and students' socioemotional development. Therefore, in the section that follows, this manuscript motivates the importance of centering school leaders in the SEL process by synthesizing extant literature accentuating their roles in shaping positive school climates, which are necessary for reform.

School Leaders' Influence on School Climate

There is a substantial body of evidence in the literature that suggests that school principals must be knowledgeable of their school's cultures before the effective implementation of schooling reforms can ensue (Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005; Nichols, 2014; Rowland, 2008). For instance, Taylor and Williams (2001) argued that as test-based accountability continues to remain a threat in many school settings, effective leaders can cultivate schooling environments that buffer teacher morale and school climates from the adverse effects of high-pressure testing environments. Further, Hess and Kelly (2005) posit educational leadership as possibly the most crucial determinant of the facilitation of a positive school climate. Relatedly, Fullan (2002) postulates, "Only principals equipped to handle a complex, rapidly changing environment can implement the reforms that lead to sustained improvement in student achievement" (p. 16). As such, school leaders serve as critical change agents in the effective implementation of reforms, and their actions and/or inactions, as well as the culture they set, influence the likelihood of effective implementation (Fullan, 2001).

Therefore, research is needed to understand how leaders cultivate receptivity to the reforms they are often tasked with implementing. Research suggests that school leaders able to construct a positive school climate, which facilitates improvements in students' academic outcomes and improves teachers' and students' perceptions of school climate are best situated to implement reforms effectively (Reavis, Vinson, & Fox, 1999). Thus, as principals are increasingly held responsible for students' academic performance (Williams & Welsh, 2018) and are provided more latitude to support students' socioemotional wellness, they need to realize that they influence culture in complex and meaningful ways.

Much of the prior work explicating principals' effects on school climate was highly theoretical and struggled to assess this relationship empirically. More recent literature (Allen et al., 2015; Goff, Goldring, & Bickman, 2014; Moolenaar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2010), however, has become increasingly robust, and as such, is better positioned to explicate school leaders' influence on climate. Much of this work is situated in Burn's (1978) conceptualization of the transformational leader, which is characterized by a person's ability to motivate, engage, and encourage others to achieve a shared set of goals. Research has shown that principals viewed as transformational leaders tend to use practices that lead to positive school climates that feature staff members who commit to the leaders' vision for the school and who tend to espouse higher degrees of job satisfaction (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This type of leadership influences academic achievement via increased job satisfaction among teachers and through improved school climate, each of which influences students' outcomes (Brown, Anfara, & Roney, 2004; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Collie, Shapka, Perry, 2012).

School Leaders' Influence on Teachers' Perceptions of School Climate

To build receptivity to reforms, school leaders need to build buy-in among teachers, who most often are the primary influencers of successful reform. Further, long-standing research highlights that teachers' interpretation or sensemaking of policies hold critical ramifications for whether and how they implement them (Coburn, 2001; Evans, 2007; Honig & Coburn, 2008; Jensen, Kjærgaard, & Svejvig, 2009; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). Therefore, SEL approaches must also be informed by research displaying how school leaders shape the perceptions of their teachers and staff. School leaders exuding characteristics of transformational leadership, for instance, have been found to positively influence teachers' perceptions of school climate (Allen et al., 2015). These researchers focused on 5 elements of transformational

leadership—idealized attributes, idealized behaviors, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration—concluding that each element of leadership was significantly predictive of how teachers perceived their school's climate.

Notably, their findings surrounding how principals behave is consistent with other work, suggesting that teachers' perceptions of school climates are primarily a function of their interactions and engagement with their leaders (Owens, 2004; Vos et al., 2012). Further, the individual consideration element, which reflects the extent to which leaders exude care, respect, and support for the essential roles teacher play in the school improvement process, elucidates how variations in teachers' perceptions of climate are, in large part, influenced by whether and to what extent leaders offer administrative support to them.

Hauserman et al. (2013) and Leithwood and Jantzi's (2005) work also highlight the relationship between leadership and school climate. They both find that highly rated transformation leaders most commonly serve in schools that perform well on tests and that teachers in these schools often report being recognized by their leaders as among the most significant components in student success. Such recognition helps teachers feel more positive about the environments they teach in and accentuate the lengths leaders must go to in order to ensure that their teachers feel valued, lest their reform efforts will be futile.

The body of research by which the present manuscript is informed and the audience it seeks to inform is situated within extant research explicating the centrality of principals in school-level reform efforts. This research provides suggestive evidence that characteristics of school leaders likely influence the effective implementation of SEL in school, as the implementation of reform relies on buy-in from teachers (Brackett et al., 2012; Devaney, O'Brien, Resnik, Keister, & Weissberg, 2006; Ransford et al., 2009). This buy-in, however, is

likely unattainable if principals do not cultivate positive school climates in which teachers feel valued and supported. Further, the capacity of school leaders to build such buy-in is different across school contexts, and many leaders face more pronounced barriers to successful implementation, at least in part, because of their contextual factors.

While significant, a dearth of the extant literature on SEL and school climate has focused exclusively on how principals build capacity for the successful implementation of SEL in light of the many barriers faced by school leaders, particularly those serving in disadvantaged contexts, who implement SEL reforms. As such, little is known about the organizational changes schools need to make, the characteristics leaders must have, and actions they must take to construct positive school climates that facilitate SEL. Therefore, the next section of this manuscript situates SEL in the prior literature on school leaders and reform and in the OSC framework to underscore how organizational barriers can undermined school leaders' capacities to leverage the policy window opened by ESSA to more comprehensively feature SEL in their school improvement plans.

School Reform, Social Context, and Organizational Social Capital

Much of the extant literature on reform suggests that each school's responses to policy changes are predominately affected by the contextual features of schools that prior research illustrates as relevant for organizational change: capacity (skills and capabilities of individuals in the organization) (Holme & Rangel, 2012), trust between members (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Elmore, 2003), strong networks (Achinstein, Ogawa, & Speiglman, 2004; Coburn & Russell, 2008; Smylie & Evans, 2006), and teachers' sensemaking about the policy change (Coburn, 2001). With this body of scholarship in mind, the present study sought to understand better how school leaders foster schooling environments that featured characteristics such as capacity, trust,

and positive perceptions. While these themes were noticeable during the data analysis stage, a more in-depth investigation of the interview data revealed that teacher turnover, resource constraints, and a lack of buy-in from and preparedness of teachers were the primary challenges school leaders in my sampled faced when attempting to implement SEL in their schools.

With these challenges in mind, I began to search for studies that would shed light on why the primary challenges principals in the sample endorsed so detrimentally affected the organizational functioning of schools implementing SEL. The literature on school reform served as the foundation for this search, as this body of work consistently asserts a negative association between leadership and teacher turnover and organizational functioning (see e.g., Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2000). In reviewing the literature examining school conditions that most significantly predict turnover, several themes emerged. First, low morale and poor working conditions were regarded as the primary drivers of turnover (Allensworth et al., 2009; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Ingersoll, 2001; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005; Loeb, Kalogrides, & Horng, 2010).

Additionally, an inability of school leaders to promote positive school climates, especially as perceived by teachers, also emerged as a critical reason why school leaders may struggle to implement SEL in my literature search (Collie et al., 2011, 2012). Finally, scholars studying turnover also posited the school compositional factors, such as the proportion of low-income and low-achieving students, and students of color only affect turnover through working conditions, suggesting that teachers in schools serving these students are unlikely to leave provided they feel supported (Carter-Andrews, 2009; Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Eckert, 2013; Sleeter, 2001; Vagi, Pivovarova, & Miedel Barnard, 2019). Despite these searches,

however, I found no studies investigating why or how turnover and other threats to effective reform might hinder principals' efforts to promote SEL in their schools.

Following an expansion of my search, I stumble upon the OSC framework, which is common in the field of organizational behavior and management. This framework provides a useful lens through which to view how internal and external factors can detrimentally harm the efficacy of SEL reforms, as well as how principals might seek to mitigate them. I discuss that framework in detail below.

Organizational Social Capital, Instability, and Organizational Learning

According to Leana and Van Buren (1999), OSC is a function of organizations that elucidate the "character of social relations" within an organization (p. 538). OSC accentuates how knowledge is transferred among individuals, which facilitates productivity. Scholars conceptualize the OSC framework as an organizational resource that fosters and facilitates cooperation, efficiency, knowledge transfer between individuals within an organization (Holme & Rangel, 2012). With such conditions, organizations are far more likely to learn and perform adequately, mutually set and reach goals, and function as a cohesive unit (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Rather than positioning individuals within a network as functioning within a loosely coupled system, the OSC framework postulate that an institution is an "attribute of the collective, rather than the sum of individuals' social connections" (Leana & Van Buren, 1999, p. 539).

OSC consists of four core dimensions: structural, relational, cognitive, and intellectual (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). The structural dimension shows how network ties are fostered between members (Nahapiet & Goshal, 1998). The dimension of structural capital in an organization captures both individual networks as well as the overall level of cohesion, which cumulatively affects the transfer of information within an institution (Bolino, Turnley, &

Bloodgood, 2002). Institutional instability is particularly detrimental to the structural dimension because constant turnover breaks social networks and make it difficult for reforms to gain and keep momentum (Dess & Shaw, 2001). The detrimental effects of institutional instability on the structural dimension are especially pronounced when key actors who are influential to the success of reforms (i.e., teachers and school leaders) leave the organization because they often hold the knowledge, experience, and contextual familiarity necessary for successful reform (Dess & Shaw, 2001).

The relational dimension of OSC highlights how relationships are formed within an institution and sheds light on organizational culture (Holme & Rangel, 2012). These relationships are formed via a series of interactions between members and can also be very sensitive to change (Nahapiet & Goshal, 1998). Thus, fostering relational skills is important for organization stability and success. Importantly, this component of OSC accentuates why it is necessary for members of an organization to like and work well and identify with other individuals to build trust, mutual vision, and cooperation (Bolino et al., 2002). Given the high-pressure environments many school leaders and teachers perform their jobs in, it is especially crucial for schools implementing reforms to have stable relational climates, and constant instability can erode this climate (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; Leana & Barry, 2000).

Changes in the structural and relational elements of OSC adversely influences the cognitive dimension. The cognitive dimension refers to the creation and sustaining of shared values, interpretations, and institutional practices (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Cognitive capital is created "in network structures where linkages are strong, multidimensional, and reciprocal" (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 258). When organizations are stable, frequent and close interactions between members ensue, in which members get to know one another, share relevant

information, and establish common vision, norms, and values (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). Lastly, the intellectual dimension highlights the collective knowledge of the organization and how it is used to enhance institutional stability (Holme & Rangel, 2012). Unstable organizations lose significant intellectual capital when members leave because the individuals replacing them likely lack the contextual knowledge to be effective educational reformers (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005).

Together, these dimensions form to foster organizational climates conducive to effective policy implementation. School leaders play vital roles in building, sustaining, and maximizing the social capital of their schools, and theory suggests that some may be more efficient in doing so than others (Holme & Rangel, 2012; Leana & Van Buren, 1999). Importantly, in pursuit of the effective implementation of SEL reforms, principals face both internal and external challenges that are frequently unevenly distributed across schooling contexts. For instance, principals serving lower-achieving students and students of color disproportionately face instability (Allensworth et al., 2009; Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2006; Fuller & Young, 2009; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001; Jackson, 2009; Kelly, 2004; Loeb et al., 2005; Loeb et al., 2010; Scafidi, Sjoquist, & Stinebrickner, 2007), which may affect their capacity to implement SEL reforms successfully.

The OSC framework highlights how internal and external barriers detrimentally affect the structural, relational, cognitive, and intellectual capital of schools. Considering the fact that school leaders are tasked with navigating such barriers skillfully as they implement reforms, underscoring how such challenges constrain their capacity for SEL fills glaring gaps in the literature on the central role of school leaders in the delivery of SEL. Therefore, the following methods section details the process this study used to uncover emergent themes that highlight barriers to SEL reforms and how they constrain schools' social capital.

Methods and Data Sources

As stated previously, the analyses for the present study draws on data culled from interviews of school principals who serve in districts that have adopted systemwide SEL policies in four districts in Georgia. This study drew on a collective sensemaking framework, which position responses to reforms as contingent on both individual interpretation of changes and the collective negotiation of meaning between actors within an organization (Coburn, 2001). Guided by the OSC framework, the present study seeks to accentuate: 1) the primary threats principals perceive affect the implementation of SEL and 2) how such threats erode the OSC of schools implementing SEL initiatives. These questions are primarily motivated by policy implementation literature that shows how and why many policies fail to deliver their desired results (Dahill-Brown & Lavery, 2012).

I used a criterion-based section approach, which involves predetermines a specific set of characteristics a participant must have to be considered suitable for the study. A suitable subject, as defined by my study, is a school leader (principal or AP) who was at least moderately knowledgeable about the process of implementing SEL reforms in their schools. A suitable participant also had to be in a district that had enacted or was currently implementing systemwide SEL reforms.

From the sampled districts, I conducted semi-structured interviews with principals that lasted between 45 minutes and an hour. My interview protocol focused on: (1) principals' background and experience, (2) knowledge and attitudes about SEL, (3) self-reported fidelity to SEL, (4) barriers and supports surrounding SEL, and (5) recommendations for improving SEL. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Interviews also focused on understanding how

principals' perceptions of the external, geographic conditions in which their schools are embedded influenced their capacity to implement SEL.

After interviews were conducted and transcribed, a hybrid coding approach was used to uncover emergent themes. The OSC framework served as the foundation for the development of codes. Codes and themes were updated iteratively to ensure that findings held across interview types and contexts. Themes were clustered by topic area (i.e., instability, internal/external barriers to implementation, and primary strategies). In cases where apparent discrepancies arose within analyses, transcripts were re-read and checked against the coded data to ensure that interpretation was consistent with the preponderance of data and that conclusions were not overreaching (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Description of Participants and Policy Contexts: The Confluence of SEL and District-wide Education Policy

In total, 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted with school leaders from four districts implementing systemwide SEL policies. The overwhelming majority of leaders interview self-identified as female (86%), and there was wide variations in both years of experience across the sample. Further, 45% of the sample self-identified as Black/African American, 52% as White/Caucasian American, and the remaining 3% as either Latnix or Bi-Racial. Per the inclusion criteria, all school leaders in the sample were members of their school for at least two years and were at least moderately knowledgeable about SEL.

District-wide SEL policies and initiatives varied widely across all four districts sampled in the present study, though there were a number of common facets that make for meaningful comparisons. For instance, all four districts used weekly advisements periods as the primary vehicles for the delivery of SEL lessons to students. During these periods, teachers across all

districts taught SEL lessons that focused on different non-cognitive skills each week, month, or quarter. Furthermore, all of the districts used either restorative practices, positive behavior interventions and supports, or similar culturally responsive SEL practices to promote pro-social behavior, track discipline, and weaken schools' proclivity to use punitive discipline practices. Lastly, all districts set systemwide goals for SEL, though only three of the four—districts 1, 2, and 4—used formal methods (i.e., teacher evaluation and/or observations) to track the effectiveness of the initiatives.

Each district from which participants were chosen were at different stages of implementation for their SEL platforms. District 1 was in the 5th year of implementation and has the most comprehensive policies and systems in place to promote SEL. For instance, every school in the district spends at least 45 minutes each day to teach SEL lessons, and there are comprehensive monitoring systems in place to ensure this is done with fidelity. District 3 is in the third year of implementation and has include SEL, along with literacy and numeracy, as its systemwide schooling improvement strategies. Students get weekly advisement lessons in SEL, and teachers are expected to implement SEL into instructional time. District 3 is in the second year of implementation and use PBIS initiatives to drive the SEL vision. The district is especially well known for the high academic accomplishments of its students and appears to be minimally implementing SEL relative to the others. Lastly, district 4 is in the first full year of implementation and has strongly modeled its SEL plans after district 1.

Research Design

This study used a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive thematic analysis to understand and describe school leaders' perceptions of barriers to SEL implementation and how they affect different elements of schools' social capital. This qualitative analysis allows patterns

in barriers to SEL implementation to emerge as the data is examined. These qualitative methods are well-suited for identifying and analyzing emerging patterns, particularly as it relates to SEL, as there is relatively sparse literature documenting how schooling and societal challenges affect the stability and efficacy of SEL.

Thematic analyses involve a process by which researchers search for and extract patterns found in the data through continuous readings of the data. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) conceptualize thematic analysis as "a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis" (pp. 3-4). The process of analyzing data thematically involves the examination of data sources and the identification of themes that capture a phenomenon of interest (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman, 1997). As consistency ensues in emergent themes, and after repeated readings of data sources, the emergent patterns become the categories for analysis. The themes in the present study incorporated by a deductive, a priori template of codes method, as well as by the data-driven, inductive approach; thus, the present study uses a hybrid approach.

As described by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive analysis involves six steps. The primary objectives of the first two steps are to develop a codebook that will form the basis for analyzing data deductively and to test the applicability and reliability of the codebook. These steps are followed by the next two steps, which involve performing inductive and deductive analyses of the data. Next, the fifth step Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) identified concerns connecting codes and themes that emerge during inductive and deductive analyses. The final step is corroborating and legitimating coded themes, which involves a process of testing the consistency of codes and ensuring that emergent themes are representative of the subjects interviewed. The codes are then connected with each other, while

themes are further grouped, resulting in the identification of the core themes that sheds light on the phenomenon of interest.

Deductive Analyses

Researchers use deductive analysis to develop and test existing theory qualitatively to underscore the extent to which underpinnings of the theory hold across time, space, topic area, and subjects. Thus, the sources of theory vary widely, ranging from previous research and theoretical orientation or frameworks, as well as individuals' professional and personal experiences (Yukhymenko et al., 2014). Sense it relies on existing sources of knowledge, the deductive analysis approach serves as an efficient way to analyze data and ensures that emergent themes developed thematically are situated well within prior research (Hyde, 2000; Thomas, 2006). In order to perform deductive analysis, first the codebook is developed, and then it is applied to the data. Typically, deductive codes in the codebook are developed prior to the initial reading of the data, which scholars consider the template approach (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). However, this process can also be iterative and expounded after the reading of the data (Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

The codes in the codebook are identified by name, definition, and description by the researcher, who is guided by existing theory, and the codes are then organized by broad categories depending on research method and research questions (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Next, the researcher tests the applicability of the codebook to the raw data to determine the extent to which the identified codes capture essential elements of the phenomenon of interests. The reliability of the codes is then tested, which involves the process of analyzing a small portion of the raw data for consistency across subjects. This process is repeated multiple times, and results are compared across interviews. The iterative nature of deductive coding is

important because when noticeable differences exist in the application of the codebook, the researcher must modify it and repeat the process.

Inductive Analysis

Inductively analysis is another commonly used method of examining data thematically in qualitative research (Thomas, 2006). Basic inductive analysis is a technique the involved the process of reading and making sense of raw data by deriving categories, themes, and model that underscore important phenomenon. The primary goal of the inductive analysis is to allow research findings to emerge from the specific subjects interviewed or observed rather than necessarily relying on existing theories, as is done in deductive analyses (Thomas, 2006). Inductive analyses involve the following three purposes: (1) synthesizing diverse, often broad raw text data into brief summary findings; (2) establishing transparent and consistent links between summary findings and research objectives; and (3) developing or informing a theoretical model of the raw data that elucidates new or better-understood principles of the research topic (Thomas, 2006). The job of the research is to allow narratives to emerge from the data that reflect the most relevant themes subjects identified when being interviewed. Inductive analysis is also an iterative process and involves the reading and re-reading of data to form themes and categories, which are continually defined, refined, clarified, and amended.

Combining Inductive and Deductive Analyses

The hybrid approach of inductive and deductive thematic analyses is a form of thematic coding that allows the flexibility of inductive coding affords (derived from the raw data) and the guidance of prior theory and research offered by deductive coding (derived from a theoretical framework). This process empowers researchers to identify how they generate themes from their raw data to uncover meanings central to the phenomenon they are studying. For example,

Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) used the hybrid approach to underscore how performance feedback among nurses can inform their self-perceived competence. After creating a codebook with codes and themes, inductive codes are created based on the raw data, and the template is applied to the inductive codes. Then, codes are connected to discover themes across the data using an iterative process and clustered under headings to reflect research questions.

Analytic Procedures

As mentioned above, the data for the present study include transcripts and field notes of interviews of school leaders in 4 districts implementing systemwide SEL initiatives in their schools. Before data analyses, I created a codebook based on the theoretical concepts of the Organizational Social Capital framework, which included upper-level categories combined into themes. Once the codebook was created, the raw data were prepared for the analyses; particularly interviews were transcribed and structured using a common format. Then, the analysis was carried out, first inductively to answer research question one, and deductively to answer research question two.

The refined codebook of principals' perceptions of barriers to effective SEL implementation in their schools includes the following six themes: (1) Teachers' preparation for, and mindsets and beliefs about SEL, (2) instability and turnover, and (3) time and resources. During this step of data analysis, inductive coding was carried out on the transcripts and field notes to highlight key barriers to effective SEL implementation. In this study, in-vivo codes were used to create inductive codes; therefore, exact words found in the data were used to name the codes. The aim of using in vivo codes was to ensure that concepts stayed as close as possible to participants' own words and used their own terms in order to capture key elements of what was described. While these themes were ascertained inductively, the next step involved situating

them within the OSC framework to underscore how each affected the four levels of social capital necessary for effective reform: structural, relational, cognitive, and intellectual. This hybrid approach was then used to answer research question two.

Findings

In the following section, I illustrate how aspects of both societal and school context worked together to threaten the efficacy of SEL initiatives by precipitating organizational instability, by constraining resources, and by hindering stakeholder buy-in (research question 1). I then examine the ways in which these barriers to SEL implementation influenced or were influenced by the structural, relational, cognitive, and intellectual dimensions of social capital within schools (research question 2). In the following, I present emergent patterns that I believe enhance our understanding about why schools may lack the organizations social capital necessary for the effective implementation of SEL initiatives.

Research Question 1: What primary internal and external threats do principals perceive affect the organizational social capital of schools implementing SEL?

Teachers Underprepared to Deliver SEL with Efficacy. Across all schools, a common theme pertaining to the barriers to effective implementation of SEL was a perception among school leaders that teachers lack the necessary training, skills, and predispositions to implement SEL efficaciously. Principals in the study indicated that the internal threat of a lack of preparedness among their teachers implicated the efficacy of SEL reforms in three primary ways: (1) teachers lacked the SEL competencies they were tasked with implementing, (2) teachers struggled to developed and engage a trauma informed approach to teaching, and (3) teachers held mindsets unconducive to SEL. While relying on commonly used practice to build understanding,

such a professional development and training, principals across schools and districts in the

present study consistently noted these challenges.

   With regard to the first primary manifestation of a lack of preparedness among teachers,
principals highlighted that despite playing a central role in the delivery of SEL, teachers often
struggled to develop competence in SEL. This challenge posed such a barrier to a school in
district 2 that one school leader remarked:

    I honestly wish that our district had not done anything with kids [in crafting out SEL
    plans]. I wish we had left kids out of the SEL equation. If I were to start a new school
    [SEL initiative], I would focus 100% of the energy around SEL on building wellness for
    teachers and staff—their health and mental health. I know that sounds kind of crazy
    because we're here about the kids and we focus a lot of our interventions on them. But
    I've been thinking a lot about that recently and if I had to do it all over again I wouldn't
    focus on the kids.

The general consensus among principals that teachers needed far more preparation to effectively

deliver SEL is consistent with prior literature suggesting teachers receive very limited, and in

many contexts no, coursework that build SEL competence (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017).

Principals overwhelming acknowledged that teachers are tasked with juggling a lot and appeared

most concerned that teacher may struggle in particular with SEL skills related to self-

management, which is a critical component of SEL. For instance, a school leader serving in a

middle school in district 1 exclaimed, "I know my teachers deal with a lot. I put a lot on them

and it is important for me to make sure they are good in other part of their lives [outside of

teaching] for anything to be effective."

   Principals also lamented the fact that the common approach in education is to simply,

"drop a program on teachers that's kids focused," as highlighted by a high school assistant

principal serving in a high needs school in district 1. She later continued, "I think a bigger

challenge is supporting teachers as they change, especially in this time of high stakes

accountability and teacher burnout. How do we get them to model self-discipline and empathy,

and responsible decision making? That's what we need." The use of scripted programs is

popular, particularly for districts adopting system wide reforms because, "district folks always feel that need to kind of standardize everything. So they basically pick a SEL program and they're going to make sure that it's standardized so that it looks the same across school," as pointed about by a middle school principal in district 4. He later continued by explaining that the scripted programs are ones that put very little onus on teachers to weave them into instruction and to reflect on them, a level of ease he conceptualized as "good, sometimes, considering how much else we ask of our teachers." However, along with others, he also pointed out how one sized fits all approaches that district office folks love and pay large sums of money for, circumscribed flexibility, do not prompt teacher fidelity, and are rarely effective. Several school leaders lamented the fact that so many teachers simply read the curriculum for the day, but spent very little time truly engaging it and doubted students got anything meaningful from the SEL portions of their school days.

Principals' notions related to the lack of preparedness among teachers also coalesced around the notion that teachers failed to engage in trauma informed teaching pedagogies and practices. Principals described their teachers as lacking an understanding of the manifestation of trauma in students' behaviors and dispositions, which presented major obstacle to SEL efficacy in among school leaders in the present study. For instance, a high school principal from district 3 remarked, "We struggled to get our teachers to fully understand the detrimental effects of trauma. [So] we needed them to become more aware and well-versed in identifying students in trauma and the fact that behaviors were reflective of those traumas." In discussing efforts to engage his teachers about how trauma affects students, an elementary school assistant principal noted, "We were really making sure that we taught our teachers what that [trauma] looks like,

how it manifests itself in the classroom, and then, most importantly, what they can do on the flip side to support the kids in trauma."

While principals generally expressed shock at how little exposure teaching had to trauma informed care, indicated by their apparent lack of understanding, they struggled to communicate effective ways to mitigate this problem. Schools leaders consistently pointed out that, "we struggle simply to fill positions half the time, yet alone in being selective about who truly 'gets it' and will really use trauma informed practices they have never learned." Principals consistently noted a reliance on professional development to fill these gaps, as "our teachers and other staff are not coming out with experiences unless they have trauma in their own background. They don't really understand what that looks like," as noted by an assistant principal in district 1.

Finally, a lack of preparedness among teachers also manifested in predisposition and mindsets around discipline and behavior that were not conducive to the use of SEL practices. Principals in the study consistently characterized teachers as holding strong beliefs systems in the notion that "any form of misbehavior must be met with firm punishment," as suggested by a high school principal discussing many of his teachers' negative reactions to the deployment of social circles to resolve conflicts. Principals also noted particularly meaningful progress in the implementation of their SEL plans once teachers shifted their mindsets from one that sought to punish student misbehavior at every turn. For instance, an elementary school principal in district 4 who recounted an especially notable turning point in progress with her teachers remarked:

> And I think one of the main things that happens with SEL… because teachers are starting to shift their perspective of if there's a misbehavior, if it's a behavioral infraction, it automatically has to come with a behavior referral and a consequence. But that's shifted from that philosophy to more of a philosophy of if there's a behavior that I'm seeing, I'm not just taking the behavior at face value anymore. Now I want to get to the root of it. I want to give the kids a chance to restore their practice. So it's much more of a reflective conversation within the classroom because the teachers are creating that a time in their classrooms

While an ongoing challenge, changing teachers' perceptions about the cause of and appropriate consequences for misbehavior was a hurdled many principals struggled to help their teachers clear, and interviewees suggested that professional development, modeling, and evaluations were the most common approaches that appeared to be successful.

Teachers mindsets also emerged as a central theme in principals' perceptions of barriers in conversations about the extent to which teachers felt their classrooms or schools needed SEL. For instance, principals describe the challenge of convincing their teachers that SEL was impactful and necessary even in classrooms and schools where there are not "400 office referrals each year." Principals appeared to struggle conveying the importance of SEL to teachers who felt that their students were very well behaved and thriving academically and often had a hard time responding to questions posed by teachers of higher achieving, more well-behaved students probing the need to do something, "like this [SEL plans] that is so comprehensive." At the other end of the spectrum, however, school leaders also suggested that many teachers believe that it is incumbent upon parents to teach SEL skills and questioned the extent to which school hours should be used to build them. An elementary school principal for district 2 summarized this challenge neatly:

> A lot of, some of our teachers believe that students should already have these skills when they come to school, {they're} thinking that some of the skills should be taught at home. Right? So, they're like placing blame, for lack of a better word on the parent and say, 'well, you know, this the parent's responsibility to do XYZ.' Anything that is not related to the core curriculum, then 'we should put it on the parents' {as argued by these teachers}. However, we see that the parents are not doing it, then we're not necessarily stepping in the gap to, you know, to narrow that gap and actually teach those skills.

Thus, principals unable to shift mindsets about who 'needs' SEL (and who doesn't) and about the extent to which schools can and should use instructional time to teach SEL skills were consistent themes revealed in interviews with teachers about barriers to SEL implementation.

Instability in Personnel and Programs. Another prominent barrier to effective SEL implementation as endorsed by principals across all four districts was instability. Instability manifested via two primary channels in the present study: turnover among staff and educational fads that come and go.

While teachers' mindsets and lack of preparation to deliver SEL with efficacy was the most frequently cited theme across interviews, teacher turnover was characterized as holding the most detrimental ramifications for the SEL initiatives school leaders sought to have materialize in their schools. Schools leaders constantly cited turnover and teacher shortage challenges as being key detriments to SEL because teachers who do not buy-in to the SEL visions know they are unlikely to face severe consequences and are difficult to screen out of the hiring process, due to the fact that schools struggle to fill open vacancy. For instance, one high school assistant principal exclaimed:

> You know, we don't even have enough teachers, we don't have no subs. Teachers are, you know, constantly under a great deal of stress and so we don't want them to leave. How do we then say they must focus on social emotional health and their relationship skills, on being able to model self-discipline, having empathy, and slowing down to talk about things like ethics, reflecting, responsible decision making? How can you even screen for those things when you have so many teachers leaving due to stress and so many openings?

Teacher turnover threatens the stability of principals' SEL efforts so dramatically because school leaders often put a substantial amount of time and resources in training teachers for the SEL reforms, only to have them leave because of stress and the high-pressure environments they serve in as educators. When this happens, schools do not only lose teachers who they must quickly replace, but also lose any accumulated capital they build up in training teachers.

Further, when they face resistance from teachers, principals often times described feelings that there is little they can do to push teachers to fully buy-in to the SEL vision. One

principal suggested frequently hitting brick walls with encouraging teachers to engage the SEL

curriculums more seriously only to later find out they, "don't plan on teaching beyond this

school year anyway and only wants their school loans paid off." The fear of and reality that

teachers will leave if put under too much stress creates a major stability problem for principals

implementing SEL, and while many interviewees discussed wanting to simply screen out

teachers who they felt would not buy-in to the SEL vision, the extreme shortages makes so doing

unlikely.

Instability was also prominent as school leaders discussed educational fads that gain

popularity among district leads, get imposed on them, and were replaced by other ones shortly

thereafter. Such a process was described as confusing, exhausting, as depressing to the morale of

educators, and as a frequent occurrence in their experiences. In recounting his experience with

the Second Steps SEL program adopted by his school district in the first year of its system wide

SEL program, one elementary school assistant principal noted:

> This program has not fit well into our current SEL initiatives as neatly as we would have
> liked. Weaving in a third component with second step has been really challenging
> because it's so scripted and because it's so one thing after the other, this lesson on this
> week and the next lesson on the next week, and it 'kinda' took away a little bit of the
> flexibility that the teachers had to say these are the needs within my classroom
> community and this lets me identify the need of my students better than the district. They
> feel little bit more handcuffed with the second steps program.

School leaders also pointed out that they were often mandated to adopt specific SEL programs,

which frequently disrupted their own initiatives and created clashes between educators and

district personnel. Principals cited these instability challenges as affecting teachers' commitment

to SEL because some educators "have figured out the game—that something new and innovative

that "is going to solve all of our problems and help all children achieve," comes down the pike

every couple of years. The just wait it out because they know it [the new initiative] will fall by

the wayside." This type of instability was cited as a major obstacle to SEL, as it prompted

fatigue, burnout, and hampered teachers' willingness to meaningful buy-in to reforms.

Tradeoffs, and limited time and resources. The final theme related to barriers

frequently cited among educators was a scarcity of time and resources, which made navigating

tradeoffs difficult and burdensome among principals. School leaders pointed out the need for,

"more boots on the ground to comprehensively deliver SEL to students." In addition to

personnel, time was another important challenge. In explaining limitations of time, on school

leader from district 1 highlighted:

> I think the biggest challenge any school always face this time because in order to really
> make the focus on providing kids with these really key needs, which is those social
> emotional needs that they need to have met and those basic needs that need to be met in
> order to prioritize how we meet those needs, something else has to give.

Sense school principals have to account for how each hour of a school day is allotted, the time

issue is especially challenging to overcome. District office personnel were describe as always

questioning why hour were allocated how they were and challenged school leaders to ensure that

the common tested grades were well represented in each day. The allocation of time threatens

SEL implementation because it can strain relationships between school leaders and both

educators and district officials, as indicated in the quote below:

> So where did you take the time from [to focus on SEL]? Do you take it from reading
> instruction? Do you take it from science or social studies? So there's a question of how do
> you meet the need from the standpoint of time and when do you decide that you're going
> to pull minutes away from something else? You're going to face a little bit of pushback,
> both from a district and you're gonna face some pushback from certain teachers that
> believe that other things should be a priority.

Navigating these tradeoffs constructively is an important skill school leaders appear to need in

order to effectively build capacity and the coalition of support for SEL.

Documenting barriers to SEL implementation is particularly useful as the reform gains national prominence on education policy agendas and provides practical utility for the present study. However, a secondary aim of the present study is to expand theory regarding the OSC framework to underscore why innovative reforms might falter. Thus, the next section of the findings situated themes that emanated from this study into the OSC framework by explicating how each theme affects varying dimensions of social capital in schools. Although all of the themes were not present at all of the schools, and affect school differently, I argue that together, the themes elucidate how organizational instability, under-preparedness, and scarcity can erode or prevent the accumulation of the organizational social capital necessary to implement SEL.

Research Question 2: How does instability affect the different elements of organizational social capital in the implementation of SEL?

Dimension 1: Cognitive Capital. One essential aspect of the cognitive dimension of organizational social capital is a shared vision, system of beliefs, and norms, which can ''hold together a loosely coupled organization'' (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 487) and encourage cooperation among its members (Holme & Rangel, 2012). The primary elements themes that principals' revelations about SEL barriers suggest may erode the cognitive capital of schools are teachers' mindsets, lack of preparation, and limited engagement with trauma informed pedagogy. Teachers talked at length about the need to convert "naysayers" and to ensure that everyone within the school building bought into the SEL vision fully. One middle school principal reflected: "I have done [trained in SEL] the lunch room ladies, bus drivers, custodians, police officers, technologists, facility warehouse worker, everyone; no matter what your job is, you have has seen the presentation and heard the vision."

The accumulation and stability of cognitive capital relies heavily on mutual vision and principals sought to build such capital by both findings "cheer leaders for the visions," but by also engaging "naysayers." For instance, when asked about what he did to secure buy-in from teachers, a high school replied:

> We went ahead and sent 18 people to it [a SEL training]. And they [teachers] were strategically chosen based on if we thought they were going to be cheerleaders of it. But then we also specifically sent people that would be the naysayers to it because those are the ones that are going to be the hardest to convert. But if the naysayers are going to the training and are seeing it firsthand from, cause it's not just our school that was there, it was schools from all across the state, at least 10 that are with professional trainers. They can see the results for themselves and now your naysayers are the ones that are also saying, 'wow, this really works.'

Thus, findings creative ways of getting the individuals within the school who might depress morale on board with the vision was a chief way school leaders attempted to build and stabilize the cognitive capital necessary to implement SEL with efficacy.

This process also required an important shift in mindsets regarding who was responsible for teaching SEL skills, how discipline should be meted out, and about the effects of trauma on behavior from maladaptive ones among teachers to ones conducive to SEL. Current discipline practices are frequent targets of SEL reforms, over which school leaders have discretion (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010), and likely may be able to change to build capacity for SEL. As such, school leaders who disclosed working tirelessly to inform teachers of student trauma, the importance of restorative justice, and negative ramifications of exclusionary discipline illustrated key elements of the process of build cognitive capital for SEL.

Dimension 2: Relational Capital. In interviews, school leaders discussed the implications of tradeoffs and scarcity as the key detriments to the efficacy of SEL in schools. For instance, teachers in tested grades frequently felt slighted when time from their classes was reduced to build a master schedule for SEL. In recounting an experience where a

recommendation was made to reduce a reading block by 5 minutes to build time for SEL, a high-school principal noted:

> My only concern that it would go away is due to the fact that you're going to have some folks that say, if you're doing that, what are you taking away from, from a time standpoint, from our core academic instructional piece? So I think you're always 'gonna' have those people that are fighting for time But if you wind up taking just five minutes off that reading block, you're going to have those passionate reading teachers who are like, you're not giving me enough time to meet my kid's needs to read.

He later recalled how teachers can take these suggestions up with the district office by pointing out, "the district office is going to hold us accountable to how we allocate every hour for every day." Therefore, teachers passionate about specific initiatives can coalesce and in/advertently harm the relational capital of schools by breaking network ties and social cohesion among members.

Such differences can also make it difficult to build mutual vision and norms, which are important for building relational capital (Bolino et al., 2002; Inkpen & Tsang, 2005). When teachers trust their school leaders, another essential aspect, they may be less likely to challenge the vision set out for the school by appealing to the district or building coalitions that undermine said vision (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). This challenging was even more pronounced when disconnects ensued between staff members (i.e., assistant principals and principals, for instance), and really strained relationships. One assistant principal in district 2 noted: "I once asked my principal why he felt the need to give out the 10-day [suspension] to the kid. What did you think that was going to do? Why should he miss 10 days of instruction? We just often didn't agree on stuff like that." While these experiences of conflict were common, there were also instances when the relational capital, trust, values, and norms were much stronger, which is encapsulated in the quote below:

> And the reason I even applied for an assistant principal position and came to this school was because when I shadowed this principal and it's his first year, the principal he was just so in line with my values as a person and as a leader; that is when the position came open, I said, you know, the opportunity to work under him and learn from him… I couldn't pass that up. And you know, even today we looked at each other and we had a fight [break out and school] and we were debriefing. Sometimes we just make sure that we're aligned and that your discipline doesn't depend upon who [which one of us two] answered the call because that's not equitable. And so we'll check in with each other sometimes and you know, give each other referrals and say, how would you handle this one.

Such a thorough process reflects strong relationship capital where, as explained by this assistant principal, there is mutual respect and vision among the staff and they manifest in important decisions related to school matters. This process can take time, and requires stability to build such a culture, but appears necessary for the accumulation of the relational capital necessary for SEL implementation.

Dimension 3 & 4: Intellectual/Structed capital: Building instructional capacity through training, professional development, and coaching. I also heard in interview data about the effects of instability on the intellectual capital in schools. The intellectual capital of an organization, according to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), consists of the capabilities of members within an organization in terms of "theoretical knowledge (explicit knowledge) as well as hands-on experience (tacit knowledge) and the collective sum of those skills and capabilities at the organizational level" (Holme & Rangel, 2012, p. 270). On the other hand, the structural dimension consists of the structure of network ties between actors (Nahapiet & Goshal, 1998). It comprises both individual relationships and the cumulative configuration of network ties (Bolino et al., 2002, p. 510).

In the present study, instability was consistently regarded as the most detrimental influence on leaders' SEL plans. Turnover in school personnel and in the vision set by district official—especially in the programs and initiatives used to materialize said vision—hindered

SEL in pronounced ways as perceived by school leaders in this study. The effects of these types of turnover were precipitated by what school leaders characterized as wasted time and resources spent in preparing teachers to lead the SEL reforms, only to have them leave shortly thereafter. When teacher left their school then, school leaders talk about breaks in network ties between teachers and staff, a loss of contextual familiarity that left the build when veteran teachers left, and threats to the overall level of cohesion of the school. Each of these elements are key elements of the structural and intellectual capital of schools.

Each of leaders in the study shared stories about how their schools struggled to build and maintain a cadre of teachers with the high levels of explicit and tacit knowledge necessary to fully realize their visions for SEL. The most commonly cited culprit for this problem was the constant turnover of trained teachers and a hesitancy to put too much on inexperienced teachers with regard to SEL. This turnover required administrators to devote many resources to the preparation and training of new teachers to build the explicit and tacit knowledge required to successfully monitor, nurture, and teach students socioemotional skills. For instance, one principal detailing his school's response to training teachers in response to constant turnover remarked:

> So [as] I mentioned before, the PD [professional development] planning, that is a very extensive to catalog, if you will, of professional development offerings, we spent some big money to bring in some very important pieces… like we spent money to bring in a nationally normed expert on trauma informed practices. She's going to spend two days and everyone that I can get through that thing is gonna go through a half day with the nation's expert on trauma. And we just spent the money and did that and felt really good about it.

Such approaches were common, as school leaders felt the best way to respond to the turnover problem was to train all or the vast majority of their teachers at once and then to use these teachers to train newer ones when there was turnover.

With regard to turnover and constant changes in district mandates, school leaders adopted a "make it our own approach" and did just enough of the directive to avoid consequence, but preferred to continue in their own plans to address students' socioemotional wellness. In discussing how his school responded to his district's SEL mandates, an elementary school principal remarked

> So basically, and the most politically correct way possible [to say this], we 'danced the dance.' So the district is asking us to do second steps, so we do second step. Does it look like maybe as much and as many of the elements of second step as our prescriptive? Do we actually roll through? Probably not. Because in order to do and meet those requirements, once again, there in mind is the issue of time. And so we've gotten very creative in the ways that we've rolled second steps into responsive classroom and still do their lessons, but we just break them up, rather than doing it how they [the district office] say we should.

School leaders felt that the standard, one-size-fits-all approaches were counterproductive and did not provide the kind of flexibility needed to successfully roll out SEL. District mandates often prompted burnout and fatigue among teachers and elected to, "cut certain parts of it [the district mandate because if we do not continue to exercise the same buy-in, the same collaboration we used in our own plans, then teachers and everyone will start to fatigue." Thus, mitigating instability was skills school leaders needed to develop.

Discussion and Implications

The present study uses qualitative interviews with school leaders in Georgia, who serve in districts implementing system-wide SEL policies, to better understand threats to the efficacy of SEL implementation. In particular, this manuscript uses the OSC framework to underscore how schools' capacities to effectively implement SEL policies are detrimentally threatened by internal and external challenges that school leaders often struggle to mitigate. This analysis illustrates how these internal and external barriers constrain the resources that schools rely on to effectively and sustainably implement SEL oriented reforms.

The analyses of the data gleaned from interviews with school leaders suggest 4 primary threats to SEL implementation as perceived by school leaders in the sample. First, school leaders identified a lack of preparedness among their teachers as a common threat to the effectiveness of SEL. This issue of preparedness among teachers was multi-faceted, as teachers were often identified as personally lacking the socioemotional competencies SEL policies tasked them with implementing. Further, teachers also struggle with adopting the trauma informed pedagogies and practices school leaders sought to have include in their SEL plans. The training and resources that school leaders deployed to address these limitations were perceived as scarce but were thought to be much easier to build capacity for, relative to changing the detrimental belief systems teachers' mindsets about students' misbehavior. Detrimental mindsets held be teachers were most often described as ones that assumed punitive, rather than restorative measure should follow student misbehavior and that teachers were not responsible for teaching and nurturing students' socioemotional development. These views are inconsistent with the scope of SEL and served as common challenges faced by school leaders across all 4 districts.

While a lack of preparedness among teachers was the most frequently emergent theme identify via inductive and deductive analyses, the most detrimental barrier to schools' SEL reforms was instability in personnel and vision of district officials. To respond to the lack of preparation of teachers, principals deployed resources aimed at educating them, but so often lost teachers and staff members who transitioned to different schools shortly after receiving trainings and professional development. The issue of teacher turnover manifested in schools SEL implementation challenges such that inexperienced teachers (with regard to SEL) were often trained in SEL competencies only to leave the school in following years. When this happened, they were often replaced by newer, inexperienced teachers and this problem is especially

pronounced in more disadvantaged schools that are both more likely to experience high rates of turnover and have difficulty hiring experienced staff.

Turnover in the mandates handled down by school districts also was revealed as a barrier to SEL. Oftentimes, school leaders discussed how their own SEL visions did not coincide well with those of their school districts, which prompted fatigue, burnout, and frustrations. In such cases, schools often elected to ignore or minimally implement their districts' SEL plans. Finally, school leaders identified limitations in time, and consequently tradeoff, as barriers to effective SEL. School leader often struggled to build time into their schools' schedules for SEL and frequently struggled to build buy-in from teachers who had their own vision for what schools should prioritize. These challenges hampered in organizational social capital of schools in important ways that have negative implications for the sustainability of SEL.

This analysis offers several implications for policy. First, it indicates that educational stakeholders interested in the promotion of SEL reforms and in augmenting the school improvement process should thoughtfully consider the effects of instability on schools' ability to build the organizational social capital necessary to effectively implement SEL reforms. With careful paying careful attention to the harmful effects of personnel turnover, it is unlikely that SEL will deliver on its prominence. Furthermore, the findings of the present study explicate why efforts to promote socioemotional wellness in students must not morph into color-blinded, one size fits all policy prescriptions that make either of the two following assumptions. First, approaches must not assume that only poor, lower-achieving, and mis-behaving students. At the same time, however, policies must also be informed by the reality that schools' social, geographic, and other contextual factors influence their capacity to implement SEL reforms in different ways. Thus, harder to staff schools and schools with higher rates of personnel turnover

will require additional and unique resources to implement SEL successfully relative to more advantaged schools.

The study also offers important implications for practice. Consistent with other research (Brown, 2007; Gregory & Fergus, 2017), the results of the current examination provide further evidence that current approaches to and mindsets surrounding school discipline and student misbehavior are counter-productive to realizing the promise of SEL. Thus, current discipline practices, which are frequent targets of SEL reforms, and over which school leaders likely have discretion (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010), must become better informed by how punitive approaches to student misbehavior hinder students' socioemotional development. SEL advocates frequently paint exclusionary discipline practices as counterproductive to building SEL skills (Brown, 2007; Gregory & Fergus, 2017) and evidence suggests that such policies are more prevalent in schools with higher achievement gaps and more negative school climates (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2006; Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013; Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005). SEL targets school discipline because it is among the most important school-level policies and current practices have been found to harm the academic achievement of suspended and expelled students (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010), while offering no benefit to their peers (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018).

Nonetheless, while revisiting discipline is important, school leaders trying to effectively build receptivity to SEL must also ensure that students are exposed to diverse and rich curriculums that go beyond the tested grades that many schools focus exclusively on (Berliner, 2011; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Desimone, 2013), build students' SEL skills through explicit instruction and modeling (Durlak et al., 2011; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), must establish rapport with and buy-in from teachers, who are primary change agents in educational reforms.

Therefore, how leaders do and have done this effectively has important ramification for the effective implementation and sustainability of SEL.

Conclusion

The policy window for the adoption of schooling approaches and strategies that more comprehensively support students social and emotional development will be optimized only to the extent that educational stakeholders build the organizational social capital necessary for successful reform. Therefore, if students are to realize the promise of SEL, educator preparation programs must provide educators with tangible and actionable resources that build their SEL competencies and preparedness. So doing ensures that all students gain access to high quality teachers and principals, who each play important roles in fostering climates and classrooms where effective SEL skill accumulation ensues. This preparation is especially important for schooling implementing SEL that face staffing challenges and high rates of turnover, as these appear to be prominent challenges faced by school leaders seeking to build capacity for SEL.

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CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSIONS

Discussion and Recurring Themes

This study has examined two indicators of schooling effectiveness that states are increasingly using in response to recent changes in federal policy: SEL and school climate. The introduction to this dissertation, as well as the three studies it describes, position schooling reforms related to these processes within the broader landscape of equity-informed educational policies. The preceding chapters also explicate why reform efforts to promote SEL must be coupled with commensurate efforts to facilitate school climates, which are disparately sorted across and within schools. The recurring themes from these above chapters are as followed: ESSA has opened a policy window for greater focus on non-cognitive indicators of school success; these reforms must be targeted and reject one size fits all approaches that ignore inequities; and school climate and SEL are inextricably linked constructs that must be addressed simultaneously to yield optimal returns to students.

ESSA: The Policy Window for SEL and School Climate

Recent shifts in federal education policy have created fertile ground that is ripe with opportunities to more comprehensively center SEL and school climate in the school improvement process (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; Garcia, 2014; Garcia & Wiess, 2016; Grant et al., 2017; Jones, Farrington, Jagers, Brackett, & Kahn, 2019). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 is the most recent federal push to augment persistent achievement disparities in educations. ESSA mandates that in addition to testing, states must use at least "one additional measure of school quality or student success that is valid, reliable, and comparable across the state and allows for meaningful differentiation in school performance" to measure

school effectiveness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016, p. 5). Thus, it has the potential to usher in new educational reforms by giving states, schools, and districts more latitude in determining school effectiveness strategies that buffer students' academic success from the negative influences of risk factors (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016).

For many years now, in response to concerns about the inequitable distribution of educational goods and services, many other policies and reforms have been adopted and implemented to serve as protective factors against the threats to students' schooling outcomes (Berkowitz, Moore, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2017). In recent years, approaches to bolster school climate and SEL in schools have shown promise as interventions that can mitigate the effects of inequality in student outcomes (Garcia, 2014; Garcia & Weiss, 2016). However, much like other education reforms, efforts to enhance students' non-cognitive skills face many implementation challenges and greater research is needed to understand how educational stakeholders can assuage them to ensure students benefit from this movement to educate the 'whole child.'

As states undertake greater interest in identifying and promoting avenues to improve school climate to promote SEL, research must keep pace and accentuate the landscape of students' schooling experiences, differences within them, and the factors that associate most profoundly with those disparities. While much of the school climate research has focused on elucidating the additive benefits of positive school climates on students' academic outcomes, a paucity of current scholarship contends with the extent to which disparities exist in students' perceptions of school climate and the factors by which they are influenced (Bottiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2016; Voight et al., 2015).

Such work is especially critical considering the current political climate, which increasingly fosters racial-ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic intolerance, and increasing

incidences of hate crimes (Müller & Schwarz, 2018; Rushin & Edwards, 2018; Williams & Graham, 2020). To the extent that such intolerance exists within schools, a necessary step in understanding school climate must involve a rigorous exploration of the myriad of factors that influence how and why students' schooling experiences vary across and within contexts. Without improvements in these areas of school climate, students are unlikely to benefit from widespread efforts to promote socioemotional wellness tangibly.

Additionally, as SEL continues to gain prominence at all levels of government, scholars must raise critical questions about the extent to which students have access to teachers who engage in practices that build their SEL skills. To the extent that disparities in access to SEL competent teachers mirror other teaher sorting patterns (Clotfelter et al., 2005; Goldhaber et al., 2015; Kalogrides & Loeb 2013; Lankford et al., 2002), students of color and poor students may have limited access to schooling enviornments that build their non-cognitive skills and miss out on the promise of SEL.

Variation in teachers' classroom practices may exist for several reasons. For instance, individual differences between teachers may be a primary source of variation such that some teachers are better able to impart SEL skills relative to others. To the extent that teachers' pre-service characteristics serve as a key mechanism associated with their use of SEL practices, educational stakeholders can understandably raise significant education equity concerns about whether and by what magnitude traditionally disadvantaged students receive systematically different access to SEL than their more advantaged peers.

The policy window created by ESSA also holds considerable implications for school leaders, who play indispensable roles in the cultivations of school climates that nurture students' socioemotional wellness (Allen et al., 2015; Goff, Goldring, & Bickman, 2014; Moolenaar,

Daly, & Sleegers, 2010). The legislation pushes states to devote increased attention to the roles of principals in the process of improving education (Manna, 2015; Williams & Welsh, 2017). While the law does provide greater flexibility for districts and schools to leverage Title I funds to improve the quality of principals, it also acknowledges them as contributors to students' academic success and holds them accountable for it (Corcoran, 2017; Haller; Haller, Hunt, Pacha, & Fazekas, 2016, & Manna, 2015; Williams & Welsh, 2017). In devolving some power to decide school improvement strategies back to states (Fairman, Johnson & Eberle, 2017), however, ESSA, uniquely positions schools and districts to seek creative ways to prepare school leaders to lead SEL and school climate initiatives in their schools.

While the NCLB era was marked by problematic schooling practices that narrowed curriculums and relied heavily on teaching to the test in response to test-based accountability pressures (Ehren & Hatch, 2013; Jennings & Bearak, 2014), ESSA has expanded the notion of schooling effectiveness. The flexibility and funding the law provides to support principals have created the necessary conditions for schools to prioritize SEL, while also enhancing the academic outcomes of their students (Corcoran, 2017; Haller et al., 2016). In centering principals in the school improvement process, ESSA appears to be responding to research framing principals as accounting for up to 25% of the variance in students' academic performance on tests (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2012; Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010). The law also may be informed by the well-established body of literature explicating school leaders' roles in effective reform (Kelley et al., 2005; Nichols, 2014; Rowland, 2008).

Disparate Access to SEL and School Climate

To understand the scope of students' perceptions of their school climate, the variations between them, and the factors that associate with the magnitude of those differences, study 1 of this dissertation uses descriptive and exploratory research designs. I situate this study within the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) (Spencer, 1999, 2005, 2006), by positioning schools as either cultivating environments that exacerbate or mitigate threats to students' schooling experiences. This study seeks to underscore the widespread disparities in students' schooling experiences and highlights how such inequities threaten the effectiveness and stability of SEL reforms. In it, I argue that without substantive changes to schools' climates, there exists a high likelihood that disparities in schooling with be mirrored in SEL.

Examining all participating middle and high school students in Georgia who took the Georgia School Health Survey (GSHS) between the 2014-15 and 2017-18 academic school years, I find that, on average, Black students report far less favorable perceptions of school climate relative to Black and Hispanic students across almost all elements of school climate. Additionally, after accounting for variables such as the school enrollment, poverty, students' self-reported mental health behaviors, and the number of disciplinary infractions, the Black-White and Black-Hispanic racial school climate gaps lower, although they remain statistically significant. Further, these gaps persist after accounting for characteristics of teachers, and higher shares of Black teachers are associated with more pronounced reductions in the Black-White and Black-Hispanic racial school climate gaps.

In study two, I document disparities in access to teachers who engage in SEL informed classroom practices and argue further why inequities in SEL are likely to mirror those in other prominent school improvement reforms. This study uses a social-ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to understand better the myriad of factors that

influence teachers' fidelity to SEL policies and initiatives. In so doing, this work underscores how teachers' commitment is a latent concept that fluctuates in response to the culmination of individual, schooling, and external effects that shape their working conditions, and, by extension, their classroom practices. To do so, I couple quantitative data from the Georgia Teachers Keys to Effectiveness System (TKEYS), which is Georgia's statewide teacher evaluation system, the Georgia School Personnel Survey (GSPS), and administrative data on all school in Georgia for the 2014-15-2017-18 academic school years with interview data of teachers from four districts implementing systemwide SEL initiatives.

Results from the manuscript suggest a positive relationship between school-level aggregates of teachers' perceptions of school climate and SEL teacher quality. Specifically, quantitative data suggests that, after controlling for a number of schools' contextual variables, schools staffed with teachers with more favorable perceptions of the school climate also are composed of teachers with higher SEL effectiveness scores. Poverty, discipline, and a heavy focus on testing serve as the greatest barriers to teachers' SEL fidelity, as reviewed through both quantitative and qualitative data. In support of these findings, results from interviews suggest that teacher and student mobility patterns and trauma appear to be primary mechanisms driving lower SEL quality in schools with high proportions of poor students. In contrast, staff connectedness and perceptions of the school leader explain the positive relationship between school climate and SEL.

Finally, in study three, I examine school leaders to understand better how they 'makesense' (Coburn, 2001) of threats to SEL implementation as well as how they are navigating the new terrain granted by ESSA. Guided by the organizational social capital (OSC) framework, study three extends theory and practice regarding internal and external challenges faced by

school leaders implementing SEL reforms, particularly those serving in disadvantaged contexts. In this study, I use interview data of school leaders in four districts implementing SEL to understand better their perceptions about the greatest threats they face when implementing systemwide SEL platforms.

The analyses of the data gleaned from interviews with school leaders suggest four primary threats to SEL implementation as perceived by school leaders. First, school leaders identified a lack of preparedness among their teachers as a common threat to the effectiveness of SEL. Detrimental mindsets held be teachers were most often described as ones that assumed punitive, rather than restorative measures should follow student misbehavior and that teachers were not responsible for teaching and nurturing students' socioemotional development. Instability and teacher turnover were perceived as the most detrimental hindrances to SEL, while a lack of resources and times also served as constraints. Cumulatively, these challenges hampered the organizational social capital of schools in important ways that have negative implications for the sustainability of SEL.

Cumulatively, these studies add to the dearth of literature offering a critical lens in the SEL and school climate literature by situating these constructs in an equity framework. These studies also position recent SEL and school climate policies within the broader research surrounding school improvement efforts in the past to underscore the pitfalls these constructs must avoid to yield optimal results for students. Educational disparities—and the myriad of factors that influence them—have been at the epicenter of education policy for the past half-century (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2001; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999) and SEL and school climate reforms must be advanced in such a way that redresses them.

They also add to the body of literature positioning schools as uniquely situated to leverage their access to students to weaken the detrimental impacts of inequities in students' schooling experiences (Rouse & Fantuzzo, 2009; Rumberger, 1995; Spencer, 1999, 2005, 2006). Thus, schools have the potential to cultivate protective factors—like positive school climates, and SEL informed policies and practices—to ensure that students reach their full potential. To do so, however, does not come without costs and tradeoffs, as the kinds of reforms advocated for by SEL and school climate scholars call for a reject to the hyper test-focused and zero tolerance for discipline environment that have dominated the educational policy landscape for the past few decades, in favor of a more comprehensive schooling experience that educates the 'whole child' (Garcia, 2014; Garcia & Weiss, 2016).

SEL and School Climate: Mutually Reinforcing Constructs

Finally, these studies also underscore why positive changes to school climate precipitate effective reform and accentuate why the interconnectedness of school climate and SEL must inform policy, research, theory, and practice. To date, very few scholars have conceptualized school climate as a necessary precursor to the effective enactment and implementation of policies intended to facilitate students' socioemotional skill development (Collie et al., 2011, 2012; Osher & Kendziora, 2010; Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jacobson, 2009). The gap in the literature surrounding the interconnectedness of these two constructs is mostly attributable to the fact that researchers most often treat SEL and school climate as separate, rather than as two sides of the same coin. The theory of action for why improvements in schools' climates must precede efforts to promote SEL is as follows: school leaders and teacher facilitate positive schooling environments wherein students feel safe, valued, validated, and are treated

fairly. In turn, they are more likely to espouse receptivity to efforts that build their socioemotional development.

Furthermore, this theory of action operates on the student level such that a schooling environment that is inclusive and culturally responsive (indications of a school climate) must have socially aware students, who value diversity and the perspectives of others (indicators of positive SEL) (Osher & Kendziora, 2010). Importantly, however, teachers and school leaders must foster schooling environments that nurture these skills in students. As shown in my studies, the educators doing so are inequitably sorted across and within schools. Thus, my studies argue that without targeted efforts to redress the inequitable schooling conditions in which students are educated, without changes to unjust schooling practices and pedagogies, and without proper preparation of teachers and school leaders, few notable changes to students' socioemotional skills will emerge.

Limitations With SEL and School Climate

Several reasons have come together to explain why students' socioemotional development has historically been excluded in education policy discussions. Firstly, the era of standards and test-based accountability, facilitated by A Nation At Risk and continued under NCLB, ushered in a movement that has regarded only the development of cognitive skills as important. Such intense focus on tests and standards has led schools to concentrate exclusively on cognitive skills to avoid accountability sanctions (Garcia, 2014). This narrowing of the curriculum does not lend itself to the inclusion of SEL in schools' policies and practices, which has led to such skills being historically overlooked (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014; West, 2016).

Furthermore, measuring students' non-cognitive skills relies on student survey/self-report measures, which inherently involve some elements of bias, human error, and social desirability.

As such, an unintended consequence of evaluating schools on SEL may be that students may struggle to give accurate representations of their NCS, which can influence schools' accountability scores. Additionally, school leaders encourage students to inflate their self-ratings to appease accountability sanctions (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015). Lastly, for students to self-report their NCS, they must have some surface-level understanding of the skills being assessed. For instance, sixth graders must be able to conceptualize—to some extent—what their "growth mindset" is, to give an accurate representation of it on a scale.

Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

These limitations, however, should not undermine the importance of SEL, considering how it benefits students. A comprehensive education is one the focuses on the development of the whole child, and for too long, policymakers have only regarded cognitive development as important. Moving forward, however, and through the path that ESSA has created, researchers must advocate for greater focus on SEL and school climate in schools' improvement plans to ensure students are educated in environments that nurture their non-cognitive skills. As the field advances, unique opportunities arise to have teachers' training and professional development sessions also recognize the importance of SEL so that they are equipped to teach and develop them, and foster classroom environment conducive to enhancing non-cognitive skills. We are but in the beginning stages of the comprehensive education SEL necessitates, but as researchers continue to advance the field, it behooves policymakers and educators to follow suit.

Specifically, the changes in discipline and curricular practices and additional resources that SEL informed education might yield are critical next steps for research. SEL researchers have essential questions to answer concerning discipline practices and SEL. Firstly, "how do school leaders discipline students in a way conducive to fostering their non-cognitive skills such

as self-control and emotion regulation?" Secondly, "to what extent do current discipline practices complement SEL?" Answers to such questions might lead to a reduction in zero-tolerance policies, which are counterintuitive to student achievement and lead to the use of behavioral techniques such as mindfulness meditation, which teaches non-cognitive skills.

Furthermore, researchers must shed light on the curricular changes needed to include SEL inside the classroom and what those changes look like in practice. Using more collaboration-oriented assignments at school might go a long way in facilitating SEL in school practices. There is also a glaring need for more research that examines how teachers and school leaders can be better prepared to deliver SEL to their students. Discipline and curricular changes and increased resources bring the field closer to realizing SEL informed education.

The prevailing interests in SEL and school climate have come at a time ripe with opportunities to center students' socioemotional development as ESSA has offered states some freedom from the punitive accountabilities policies that have dominated education policy for the past 30 years. To leverage this moment equitably, effectively and optimally, SEL and school climate advocates must move strategically, and the present dissertation explicates barriers to overcome, pitfalls to avoid, and promising approaches that ensure the best for all students.

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