Social-Emotional Learning: A Comparison Between Subgroups of Eighth-Grade Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare middle school student survey results on social-emotional learning (SEL). Results from subgroups of special education (SPED), English language learners (ELL), and students receiving free and reduced meals were compared with scores from peers. A quantitative research design was used. The dependent variable consisted of the student scores of SEL on the fall 2018 and spring 2019 administration of the Panorama Student Self-Perception of Social Emotional Learning Competencies. The population for the study was a group of eighth-grade students from four middle schools receiving Title I funding in a large, suburban school district. Data analysis revealed that students receiving special education services rated themselves slightly lower than their peers in the areas of grit and emotional regulation, while they rated themselves slightly higher in coping with anxiety. Students receiving English language learning services rated themselves slightly higher than peers in coping with anxiety, while they rated themselves similar to their peers in grit and emotional regulation. Students who received free and reduced meals did not rate their perceptions of social emotional skills differently from peers. Implications for further action include providing information to teachers and service providers regarding student perceived or actual deficits in the identified areas so instruction and reinforcement of those skills could be addressed in instruction or therapies. The study results also indicated that students who receive special education and English language learning services perceive their abilities to cope with anxiety better than their peers. Additional inquiry in this area may provide information

that could be useful in working with students. Teachers and counselors may benefit from professional development and training to understand and identify student SEL needs, as well as to incorporate SEL learning targets through specific lessons and incidental learning opportunities. Based on the findings from the study, additional research is recommended, including replicating the study with different grade levels or in different school districts, examination of different SEL constructs, school climate, or relationships with the school environment, or a longitudinal study examining students' perceptions of their skills over time.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the educators in my family. My grandfather, Marshall Batho, was a teacher, principal, and superintendent in Evergreen Park, Illinois. My grandmother, Althea Batho, first taught in a one-room schoolhouse, and her initial teaching license was written in pencil on a piece of notebook paper.

My mother, Janice Mueller, was a fourth-grade teacher and later, one of the first elementary counselors in her school district. My children, Will, Maddie, and Gwynne, have taught me more than I could have ever taught them. I am looking forward to many happy times with my new granddaughter, Rosie. Finally, I am grateful for my little dog, Clara, who sat at my feet as I worked.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Since 2000, researchers in Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) have demonstrated that specific skill instruction and attention to school climate can positively impact student outcomes in the areas of social and academic success. These successes have been demonstrated in various settings, from preschool to high school and in job and career preparedness (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). SEL is most often used to describe instruction and support for a student's ability to identify and manage emotions in themselves and others, interact positively and productively, and problem solve. Other terms that have been associated with SEL include character education, soft skills, 21st century skills, and noncognitive skills. Additional topics related to SEL include empathy, grit, growth mindset, and self-regulation. The definition of SEL continues to grow and change based on investigation and research from related fields, including education, psychology, and child development. Variance in the definition of SEL is viewed both positively and negatively, as it has allowed the growth and expansion in the field; however, a lack of a singular definition has made comparisons of research and programs difficult (Jones & Doolittle, 2017).

Since the early 2000s, a significant increase in attention to SEL regarding student learning has been attributed to No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015). These Acts, adopted in 2002 and 2015 respectively, represented the United States' commitment to educating the nation's youth from grade school through high school. In 2002, NCLB focused attention on the achievement of all students, with particular attention paid to student progress "regardless of race, income,

zip code, disability, home language, or background" (U.S. Department of Education. (2020, para.3) while the 2015 revision, ESSA sought to create better opportunities for fully preparing all students for success in college and careers. Later, Melnick et al. (2017) noted that accountability for school quality and student success resulted in expanding the definition of student success to include academic success and social-emotional skills. Melnick et al. describe the ability to identify and manage emotions, build successful relationships, and make good decisions as examples of skills closely related to personal success.

As more schools strive to provide instruction and support with social emotional skills, it is important to measure student needs and progress to determine program selection, instruction, and efficacy. Utilizing data from these measures and groups, school teams can consider academic and SEL data, climate, Tier 1 academic and SEL instruction, interventions, student school and after-school supports and programs, and community involvement in a more strategic manner. Additionally, testing can be repeated to measure program efficacy and guide decision-making for building support, student needs, and instruction.

In 2001, Learning First Alliance noted that a key challenge for educators involves serving culturally diverse students demonstrating varied abilities and motivations for learning. Blum and Libbey (2004) indicated that students possessing core social emotional skills are more likely to be connected and engaged while in school. The need for a greater understanding of the importance of equity and social-emotional learning, as it impacts academic achievement and future success of student subgroups, is gathering the attention of educators. Specific to SEL, one area receiving attention is school

discipline policies. Such policies have not changed while educators and institutions have embraced social-emotional learning for students, resulting in inconsistency between SEL concepts taught and the kinds of discipline practices utilized. Noltemeyer and McLoughlin (2015) purported that removing students from classrooms and the use of suspensions negatively impact student progress.

Furthermore, Noltemeyer and McLoughlin (2015) added social-emotional competence of educators influences school climate, student motivation, and response to student behavior in the classroom. While in the early stages of investigation and implementation, some school districts are beginning to address how individual and institutional bias can negatively impact groups of students. Differences in the type, amount, and intensity of school discipline and the need for developmentally appropriate and socially and emotionally sound interventions are fueling the call for reform at state and federal levels (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Gaining a better understanding of the needs of students from subgroup data may help educators and administrators make more informed and equitable decisions for student SEL teaching targets, Tier 1 instruction, behavioral interventions, and discipline policies.

Background

Internationally, SEL is addressed in a wide range of countries through various organizations, initiatives, and research. Committee for Children is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization supporting Second Step, one of the most widely recognized SEL programs for students in preschool through middle school (Second Step, 2018). In 1979, Committee for Children began with a goal to provide equitable access to SEL as a way to help students thrive in school and later in life through culturally adapted programs in

countries such as Brazil, Australia, Japan, Finland, Germany, Norway, Iraq, Sweden, and Turkey. Furthermore, in 1994, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was formed in partnership with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) describes its goal "to establish high-quality, evidence-based SEL as an essential part of preschool through high school education" (CASEL, 2022, para.10) Additionally, CASEL seeks "to make SEL a part of a high-quality and equitable education for all" (CASEL, 2022, para. 10).

In the United States, SEL research and program development grew from several decades of inquiry from researchers in education and psychology beginning in the late 1960s with the Comer School Development Program at the Yale School of Medicine (Weissberg et al., 1977). In 1987, the Social Development Project, a district-level program within the New Haven, Connecticut public school system, was designed "to educate knowledgeable, responsible, and caring students who acquire a set of basic skills, values, and work habits for a lifetime of meaningful work and constructive citizenship" (Weissberg et al., 1997, p. 1). The W.T. Grant Consortium School Based Promotion of Social Competence further advanced SEL inquiry and programming. Later unifying efforts from CASEL in 1994 through the publication of *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators* (Elias et al., 1997) served to establish and describe the field. Implementation of state teaching standards began in 2010, with all 50 states adopting standards for preschool. During this time, 34 states adopted standards for infants and toddler programs. Among them, Illinois was the only state with free-standing standards for kindergarten through high school. Additionally, Pennsylvania, New York,

Washington, and Kansas also considered standards but had yet to adopt them (Dusenbery et al., 2020).

In 2012, Kansas was the first state to adopt SEL standards integrated with character development (Kansas State Department of Education [KSDE], 2018). In 2018, SEL development was selected as one of five Kansas State Board of Education outcomes along with kindergarten readiness, individual plan of study, high school graduation rate, and postsecondary attendance/completion. The Kansas Social, Emotional, and Character Development Model Standards (KSDE, 2018) describe a broad social-emotional goal:

> Each student develops the social, emotional, and character competencies that promote learning and success in life as a way to prepare students academically, cognitively, and through technical and employability skills that will enable students to be successful in the workforce or postsecondary education (p. 3).

An additional impetus for support of SEL in Kansas was reflected in 2016 when the Kansas legislature passed the Jason Flatt Act requiring the Board of Education of each school district to provide youth suicide awareness and prevention programs. Initially passed in Tennessee in 2007, the Act requires yearly, two-hour teacher training in suicide awareness and prevention. According to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (2017), suicide was the second leading cause of death for youth and adolescents aged 10-18. According to data from SEL surveys in District A, 150 of every 1,000 students had considered suicide (A. Salava, personal communication, May 27, 2020).

District A includes 11 elementary and four middle school buildings receiving Title 1 funding from the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE, 2017). The

graduation rate for 2017 was 91.2% and included a population breakdown of 66% White, 17 % Hispanic, 4.7% African American, 4.3% Asian American, .3% Native American, and .2% Pacific Islander students (District A, 2017).

Federally funded Title I programs assist schools with the highest student poverty levels in meeting educational goals. Table 1 includes a description of District A demographics.

Table 1

2018-2019 District A Demographic Information

Subgroup	Percentage
Race/Ethnicity	
Minority	36.2
Non-Minority	63.8
Gender	
Male	51.4
Female	48.6
Socioeconomic status	
Free/Reduced Lunch	47.3
Full Pay Lunch	52.7
ELL status	
ELL	9.54
Non-ELL	90.46
Special Education Status	
Students with Disabilities	15.17
Students without Disabilities	84.83

Note. Adapted from District Overview (director of assessment and research, personal communication, January 13, 2022).

In fall of 2017, District A began surveying student social emotional skills 2-3 times per year. Topics of investigation were selected by the district from a menu of options provided by the testing platform. During the fall of 2018 and spring of 2019, the district assessed social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety as

areas for SEL. Additional data was collected in the areas of school safety, teacher-student relationships, sense of belonging, and cultural awareness. Data was utilized at the individual, classroom, building, and district levels to provide information regarding at-risk students, classroom and building initiatives, and district planning (District A, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

Since 2000, universal SEL instruction has been initiated and expanded in school settings. A key challenge for education is to serve culturally diverse students who may demonstrate differing abilities and motivations for learning (Learning First Alliance, 2001). Previous studies addressing subgroups of students (e.g., English language learners, students receiving free and reduced meals, students receiving special education) revealed that social and emotional skills differed significantly among these students (School Quality Improvement Index & The CORE Data Collective, Riverside County Office of Education, 2015). The call for more studies of student needs within subgroups was evident. Recent researchers sought to better understand the social, emotional, and academic strengths and needs of students who may differ from larger groups of students within their school (Jones & Kahn, 2017). If understanding and teaching SEL have the potential to mitigate issues of equity for student groups, similarities and differences in skills and perceptions among these groups of students need to be identified and examined (Castro-Olivo, 2014). Specifically, in District A, educators sought to identify students at risk for suicide to determine if the needs of groups of students are adequately addressed within the school climate and through teacher and peer relationships (E. Dugan, personal conversation, March 1, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine if differences exist in the self-perception of social emotional skills among different subgroups of eighth-grade students. The specific areas selected (i.e., social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety) were chosen from a group of traits selected by district administrators. Results were made available to teachers, administrators, and district leaders to understand student needs and plan support for students. More specifically, this study examined the differences in selected areas of social emotional skills among students receiving special education services, English language learning services, and those receiving free and reduced meals.

Significance of the Study

The findings of the current study may contribute to the body of knowledge in social emotional learning, specifically, the similarities or differences in self-reported survey data of subgroups of eighth-grade students. The findings may be informative on two levels. First, SEL assessment and education have the potential to address issues of equity and rigor within the educational system for historically under-represented and under-performing student groups (Jagers et al., 2018). Examples of differences in student performance in reading, math, and behavior are well-documented within the identified subgroups (Eisenberg, 2006; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). The possibility that SEL is a mitigating factor in student academic performance has prompted calls for research on the topic (Jagers et al., 2019). While circumstances addressing the nuances behind these disparities remain largely undefined, investigating these topics within a given setting, and student population may provide information.

Second, programs and practices within schools may impact equity-related issues that would benefit smaller, often marginalized groups through examination of instruction and content, teacher training, targeted SEL lessons, programs, and practices (Kreuter et al., 2003). If significant differences in social emotional skills were found in subgroups, District A has recommended resources teachers can use for SEL instruction. Furthermore, teachers are also encouraged to address SEL topics within their curricular content.

The results of this study may carry implications for SEL assessment and instruction at building and district levels for eighth-grade students in the general education population and within subgroups of students. Additionally, districts may use information from subgroups to plan for support beyond instruction for eighth-grade students, such as extracurricular and community programming. The findings of this study may shed light on a direction for further analysis of climate, instructional practices and content, and needs-based SEL instruction within the district.

Delimitations

Defined by Lunenburg and Irby (2008), delimitations are "self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study" (p. 134). The delimitations set for this study included:

1. Participants in the study were students enrolled in the eighth grade in a large, suburban Kansas school district.
2. Data were collected from August 2018 to May 2019.
3. Students attended one of four middle schools receiving Title I funding, selected from 10 middle schools within the district.

4. The study was limited to four aspects of social-emotional skills (social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety) within the Panorama Student Self-Perception of Social Emotional Skills assessment.

Assumptions

Assumptions are "postulates, premises, and propositions that are accepted and operational for the purposes of the research" (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 135). The assumptions that influenced this study include:

1. Students were adequately instructed on how to complete the survey.
2. Identical survey administration was utilized within each school.
3. Measures retrieved from the Panorama Student Self-Perception of Social Emotional Skills competencies (social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety) were complete and accurate.
4. Selected middle school demographic data were complete and accurate.
5. Students responded to the assessment honestly and accurately.
6. The interpretation of survey results represented an accurate reflection of student perceptions.

Research Questions

The following research questions were utilized in this study:

RQ1. To what extent do eighth-grade student Panorama scores of social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety differ between students receiving special education students and students not receiving special education?

RQ2. To what extent do eighth-grade student Panorama scores of social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety differ between English language learners and non-English language learners?

RQ3. To what extent do eighth-grade student Panorama scores of social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety differ between students receiving free and reduced meals and students not receiving free and reduced meals.

Definition of Terms

Key terms are words that can have different meanings and appear throughout the research study. The following terms were used in this study.

Anxiety

The National Association of School Psychologists describes anxiety as a reaction to situations perceived as stressful or dangerous. Anxiety can cause difficulties at school or home and include physical, cognitive, and behavioral aspects. Students experiencing anxiety may avoid situations, have difficulty separating from parents or caregivers, have difficulty concentrating, may be less likely to take developmentally appropriate risks or have poor peer relationships.

Emotional Regulation

Panorama Education (2015) defines emotional regulation as "how well students regulate their emotions" (p. 6).

English Language Learners (ELL)

KSDE (2021) defined students between the ages of 3 and 21 whose home or native language is other than English and whose current limitations in the ability to understand, speak, read, or write English impacts their effective participation in school

education programs. English language learners may be immigrants or refugees born in another country or born in the United States living in homes where another language besides (or in addition to) English is spoken (KSDE 2021).

Free and Reduced Meals

Kansas school sponsors that participate in the meal program receive reimbursement from the USDA for each meal served to eligible students. In return, they must serve meals that meet federal requirements and offer reduced-price and free meals to eligible students. Students from households with incomes at or below 130% of the federal poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those between 130% and 185% of the poverty level are eligible for price reductions, for which students can be charged no more than 40 cents per meal. Students from households with incomes exceeding 185% of the poverty level pay full price, though meals remain subsidized with federal and state funds (KSDE 2021).

Grit

Panorama Education (2015) defines grit as "perceptions of how well students are able to persevere through setbacks to achieve important long-term goals" (p. 25).

Individual Education Plan (IEP)

As defined by the Kansas Special Education Process Handbook, The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is defined as a written statement for each student with an exceptionality, which describes that child's educational program and is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with special education laws and regulations.

Panorama Student Self-Perception of Social Emotional Competencies

Panorama Education began in 2013 as a technology platform for collecting survey data from students to provide data-driven action to support student learning through surveys and analytics. Currently, Panorama has contracts with over 900 school districts and partners with Second Step (SEL curriculum from the Committee for Children), the California Office to Reform Education (CORE) districts, and other large districts on a national level. The platform allows districts to select topics from a group, including math, literacy, behavior, SEL, and attendance, to build a customized system for data collection used for formative and summative assessment for individual students, classrooms, buildings, and school systems. Data may be disaggregated between subgroups, used to identify students at risk, and assist with developing tiered systems of support, student surveys, equity and inclusion surveys, parent and teacher surveys, and professional development (Panorama Education, (2015).

Social Awareness

Panorama Education (2015) defines social awareness as "how well students consider the perspectives of others and empathize with them" (p. 6).

Social Emotional Skills

Durlak et al. (2011) define SEL as "the process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively" (p. 406).

Special Education Services

As defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA-1975), special education services are specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. These include instruction conducted in the classroom, the home, hospitals and institutions, and other settings, as well as instruction in physical education.

Organization of the Study

The first chapter of this study included a description of the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance, delimitations, assumptions, research questions, and definition of terms. In Chapter 2, the literature relevant to the research questions is reviewed. Chapter 3 details the design and methodology of the study utilized to conduct the research, while the results of hypothesis testing are reported in Chapter 4. A summary of the study, the findings related to the literature, as well as the conclusion are provided in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Educational systems have long defined student success as competence in mathematics, science, language arts, and social studies (Krachman et al., 2018). However, in an increasingly complex society and work environment, the ability to self-manage, work in groups, problem solve, and remain socially aware, is now relevant within the context of schools (Durlak et al., 2015; Eisenberg, 2006; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Weissberg et al., 1997). Students also benefit from understanding the needs of others, learning how to be good citizens, and contributing to their communities (Masten & Coatworth, 1998; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998). Since 2000, there has been a steady increase in interest, theory, and research in SEL.

Elias (2004) defined SEL as "a process in which students learn to identify and manage their emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors" (p. 204). Social and emotional learning, often termed soft skills, was initially based on character education and conflict resolution. While many educators recognized connections between social skills and academic success, research supporting the strong connection between social-emotional skills and academics became more evident in the early 2000s (Dweck, 2006; Farrington et al., 2012; Heckman et al., 2006). Findings of these studies revealed that students demonstrating social-emotional competency had better academic results from kindergarten through high school, as well as within higher education settings.

Twenty-first-century educators are challenged to teach students with differing levels of abilities, motivation, and cultural diversity (Learning First Alliance, 2001). A

variety of influences further impact student learning within social contexts, including peers, teachers, and family. Academic engagement is impacted by a student's ability to regulate their emotions and navigate an increasingly complex social landscape. The ability to understand and use social-emotional skills effectively is associated with improved well-being and academic skills (Eisenberg, 2006; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998). However, many students lacking effective social and emotional skills become less connected to school as they progress from elementary to high school (Blum & Libbey, 2004). Educators and researchers have considered that understanding, teaching, and evaluating SEL skills could represent an opportunity to close significant educational gaps for subgroups of students. Social and emotional learning is also described as a public health issue. Greenberg et al. (2017) describe the benefits of SEL as an "ideal foundation for a public health approach to education" (p. 13). The researchers argue in favor of SEL as a public health issue for three reasons. First, they identify schools as an ideal location for children to receive interventions. Second, they support SEL instruction to improve student academic achievement and competence and prevent behavioral and emotional issues. Finally, they argue that applying universal interventions for SEL could lead to positively improved public health. Improved public health as an additional benefit of school-based SEL instruction is also described in Greenberg et al. (2017). Students possessing highly developed SEL skills are more likely to have higher employment rates, wages, less substance abuse, and lower criminal activity (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015a); (Moffit et al., 2011). However, questions remain regarding definitions, working models,

implementation, assessment, and utilization of results to further impact and improve student outcomes, particularly with respect to student subgroups.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was established in 1994 to provide support to schools and districts in the area of SEL development and practice. CASEL also seeks to encourage research and practice and impact policy related to SEL in schools. CASEL defines SEL as a set of five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making, and states that these skills and competencies are the foundations of one's ability to learn. Teaching priorities include identifying and naming feelings, addressing concerns, and providing strategies for responses, including regulating emotions. Collaborating State Initiatives work to encourage states to provide equity-focused and integrated SEL within educational systems at the state level. In addition, CASEL reports that while all 50 states have statewide standards or competencies for preschool, just 18 have developed standards for K-12. Of those 18 states, six are aligned with their preschool standards (Dusenbury et al., 2020).

This review of the literature includes the history of SEL in schools. Efficacy of SEL instruction in schools is reviewed along with criticism of SEL programs in schools and research. Comparative studies of SEL and subgroups of students, and the future of SEL in schools complete this chapter.

History of Social Emotional Learning in Schools

Social and emotional learning was first referenced in ancient Greek literature. Plato wrote of curriculum as holistic in nature, including not only math, science, art, and physical education, but also character and moral judgment to develop the character of

good citizens (George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2011). Similarly, teachers at all levels of education have sought to prepare their students for productive citizenship. The works of Comer at the Yale School of Medicine Child Study Center in 1968 (Panjwani, 2011; Weissberg et al., 1997) at the K-12 New Haven Social Development program, and the W.T. Grant Consortium on School-Based Promotion of Social Competence (1992) formed the basis of modern interest and research in SEL.

One of the earliest modern models of SEL began with Montessori in 1906. By focusing on the development of the whole child, including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills, Montessori created a classroom for disadvantaged preschool children, emphasizing an environment allowing for exploration and self-directed learning. Previously regarded as unteachable, these children were drawn to puzzles, daily living tasks, and hands-on learning as described in The Montessori Method (Montessori, 1909). Montessori believed self-directed learning and interdependence contributed to students learning about the organization of society and the skills needed to meet challenges. Montessori (1964) later utilized similar methods for the learning needs of older students as described in The Advanced Montessori Method. Impacted by world events during this time, Montessori also included peace education and social justice topics within classrooms and writing. Montessori classrooms were popular in the United States until 1920 when criticism from the progressive education movement led to a decline in all but a few independent schools. Kilpatrick disagreed with Montessori's doctrine of development and child liberty, questioning the amount of freedom allowed for children in school settings. He questioned these methods as being based on observations of children in poor Italian neighborhoods, which were not applicable in other settings. Additionally,

children's work in a Montessori setting was student-driven and could last up to two hours, whereas most students' work in a typical Kindergarten classroom would not exceed more than thirty minutes (Thayer-Bacon, 2012). Following their decline, Montessori classrooms experienced a slight resurgence in the 1950s with programs continuing in existence.

Dewey (1916) often referred to education as a social function necessary for life. Along with educational and human development theorists Vygotsky (1962) and Piaget (1952), Dewey (1916) viewed education as both social and communal. These theorists believed education required a social responsibility to develop students who are reflective, informed, and autonomous thinkers so they may be productive citizens in a democratic society. The writings of Dewey, Vygotsky, and Piaget also described teachers and schools as having a responsibility to develop students with moral character who will ultimately contribute to society.

Considered the foundation of research and theory in cognitive development, social cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1962) proposed that the development of social skills preceding cognitive skills with social interaction serves as the basis of the development of cognition. Additionally, children were thought to learn through the behavior of both teachers and peers modeled within their zone of proximal development. Individual development was to be understood in the context of social and cultural experiences.

Later, Piaget (1952) believed constructivism characterized education as both social and communal, supporting the notion that education must connect to the real world while balancing a rigorous curriculum. Further, schools should equip their students to be

life-long learners who contribute to society and are good citizens. Overall, education was described as a moral responsibility.

Steiner (1984), a clinical psychologist, used transactional analysis applied to the study of emotions. Transactional analysis describes human personality as multi-faceted within the individual, with a transaction as the ability to examine a single social interaction as a unit. At the most basic level, transactional analysis allowed the study of interactions between people (Berne, 1961). Steiner (1984) defined the ability to understand and name feelings in oneself and others as the core of emotional literacy theory. Emotional literacy theory also includes the ability to identify feelings, have empathy, manage feelings, mitigate emotional conflict, and understand emotions as a part of daily living. The objective analysis of emotions and the ability to understand, control, and manage feelings are used to facilitate relationships between others. Further, emotional interactivity can be utilized to increase effective interactions between people.

Comer (1988) believed the experiences of children at home and school impacted both social and academic development. The Comer School Development Program focused on minimizing the impact of student behavior by addressing school routines and procedures that triggered conflict. The school also emphasized the management, organization, and integration of educational activities. By the 1980s, the program surpassed the national average for academic achievement. Programming decisions were made by the consensus of the staff with problem-solving and collaboration as guiding principles. The school also focused on providing a positive building and classroom climate aligned with curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Comer, 1988).

In the 1980s, a five-year project brought professionals together to investigate school-based promotion of social competence under the W.T. Grant consortium (Edutopia, 2011). In 1994, Weissberg and Elias chaired this consortium and worked with leading experts to review existing programs and establish core skills to prevent students from the difficulties associated with poor social interaction and decision-making (CASEL, 2022). Skills were divided into three categories: emotional skills, the ability to read and interpret social cues, and a positive attitude and problem-solving abilities. Emotional skills encompassed the identification and labeling of feelings, the ability to express feelings, judgment of the intensity of feelings, management of feelings, and the ability to delay gratification. The consortium considered inner dialogue a skill used to manage challenges and self-reinforce behavior. The ability to read and interpret social cues included recognition of social influences on behavior and perspective related to oneself in the context of the larger community. A positive attitude and problem-solving were described as important cognitive skills for student success.

Moreover, behavioral skills included nonverbal abilities such as eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice, and gestures, in addition to verbal skills characterized by the ability to formulate appropriate requests, respond to criticism, resist negative influences, listen to and help others, and participate in positive peer groups. In 1994, the multidisciplinary group became CASEL (Elias et al., 1997). Today, this early classification of social skills serves as the beginning of many definitions of SEL and remains a varied and undefined area for criticism (Adelman & Taylor, 1997).

The New Haven Social Development Project began in 1987 with the formation of a task force. Previous attempts to develop social skills were based on models such as the

War on Drugs (Nixon, 1969) and character education programs which had limited success. Researchers noted that many problems students encountered shared a common basis in poor problem-solving and communication skills, antisocial attitudes about fighting and education, limited constructive-school programs, and a lack of adult guidance and monitoring. The task force, which included the superintendent, board of education, university psychologists, and parents and community members, developed a comprehensive curriculum for the public school system. The goal of this 10-year program was to provide sustained effort to prevent high-risk behaviors and enhance social emotional skills in students. Curriculum committees established learning objectives for each grade level while monitoring federal standards, state mandates, local educator priorities, and input from stakeholders. Grade level curriculum included 25 to 50 hours of instruction in health, culture, careers, and personal relationships (Weissberg et al., 1997).

In 1989, Covey developed The Leader in Me Program for schools. This school improvement model used practices to develop SEL in teachers and students by developing a collective and collaborative culture within the school. SEL was practiced through a leadership format. The program sought to change mindsets through the belief that all students can lead. Additional components of the program include identifying genius in all students, believing change starts with the individual, understanding that educators may empower students to lead with their own thinking, and developing the whole person. Gage et al. (2019) conducted a study from 2009 to 2015 that included 154 schools in Florida. In grades K-5, the researchers found fewer disciplinary incidents for students participating in The Leader in Me program when compared to a control group for up to six years following the collection of baseline data.

Henderson and Dweck (1990) wrote that people's underlying beliefs about their learning and intelligence inform their motivation and achievement. Growth mindset grew from research in brain plasticity, which showed that connectivity between neurons changes with experience and practice. Dweck (2006) noted that a change in one's beliefs could have a powerful impact on their performance. Individuals with a fixed mindset believe intelligence and performance are based on inherent skills and properties. Those with a growth mindset believe that extra time and effort can lead to higher achievement. Dweck also found that teachers have a profound impact on students' understanding of a fixed versus a growth mindset through the kind of feedback they provide. When teachers praised performance (e.g., "you are so smart"), students were more likely to determine that intelligence is a fixed and unchangeable property and were more likely to believe they were "good at" or "not good at" particular skills. When teachers praised the effort and described performance as believing the student can improve, students were more likely to persist and improve their outcomes (Dweck, 2006).

Weissberg and Resnik (2003) recommended strategies to help teachers and districts create social emotional learning for preschool through Grade 12. A two-year program for collaborating states was established with the aim of preparing students to succeed in school and the future with evidence-based practices for SEL. The CASEL assessment work group collaborated with states on SEL guidelines and policies. In addition, CASEL provided training and information on the selection and use of curriculum, worked to align and describe distinctions between various frameworks of SEL, identifed and shared key principles designed to promote practical and informative measurement of program impact, and collaboration for assessment as a means of

maximizing efforts and avoiding duplication (CASEL, 2019a). Elias et al. (2019) purported that SEL provided the missing piece between academics and student success and advocated for regularly planned, systematic lessons. Additionally, Elias et al. (2019) outlined needed skill priorities for young adults. These priorities indicated it was insufficient for job candidates to be proficient in reading, calculation, and writing. Employers believed social emotional skills were more important than previously thought with respect to school quality, degrees, and test scores. Skills identified as highly sought after in new employees included the ability to listen and learn, oral communication, adaptability, problem-solving, personal management skills, the ability to work in groups, organizational skills, and leadership.

Furthermore, Goleman (1995) advanced the theory of emotional intelligence. Prior to the mid-1990s, intelligence quotients (IQ) were considered the standard for measuring ability and potential. Some viewed IQ as a fixed, inherent measure, while others argued it was impacted and changed by experience. Emotional intelligence describes how emotions are regulated in the brain and represents a more flexible way of thinking about an individual's ability and potential. Five components were identified as aspects of emotional intelligence, including self-awareness, self-regulation, internal motivation, empathy, and social skills. The regulation of emotions represented a way of thinking that considered alternative possibilities for the development of individuals (Goleman, 1995).

Duckworth et al. (2007) researched the importance of effort, practice, and learned behavior and their impact on individual success. Grit was defined as "a combination of passion and perseverance" (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1087). Self-control, "the voluntary

regulation of impulses in the presence of momentarily gratifying temptations" (Duckworth, 2016) also developed scales to measure grit and gathered data from students, teachers, salespeople, and business leaders. Results showed that individuals were more likely to be successful when they demonstrated stamina and a willingness to work to make their future goals a reality. Academic success was not positively correlated with SEL instruction. However, it was shown to be significantly impacted by the ability to persevere and complete tasks even when perceived as difficult (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Duckworth & Steinberg, 2015).

Efficacy of Social Emotional Learning Instruction in Schools

Since 2000, the expansion of the concept of SEL through books, articles, and research has revealed both varied and incompatible results regarding the efficacy and benefit of school-based programming. In 2017, CASEL conducted a meta-analysis of SEL programs in schools, including 213 studies and 270,000 students. The study was one of the first in which the impact of universal interventions, including participation and instruction for all students instead of groups of students with previously identified areas of deficits in social emotional skills, was examined. The study included students who had participated in SEL programming from kindergarten through high school. Results showed a significant increase in the ability to demonstrate positive social emotional skills compared to peers, improved attitudes, behavior, and academic performance resulting in a gain of 11 percentile points on measures of achievement tests and grades. The results also provided evidence that teachers could successfully implement programming resulting in student improvement (Taylor et al., 2017).

In 2001, Learning First Alliance noted that a key challenge for education would be to serve culturally diverse students demonstrating differing abilities and motivations for learning. Researchers indicated students possessing core social emotional skills are more likely to be connected and engaged in school as they progressed through the system (Blum & Libbey, 2004). In a study measuring self-control, 95% of students scoring highly were shown to graduate from high school, compared to 58% of students scoring significantly lower (Moffit et al., 2011). Students achieving higher scores in emotional skills were shown to have greater academic success in kindergarten, high school, and higher education settings (Dweck et al., 2014; Farrington et al., 2012; Gabrieli et al., 2015; Heckman et al., 2006). Studies that controlled for other factors such as socioeconomic status and ability noted that students with higher levels of social skills in kindergarten were more likely to graduate from high school (Jones et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the California Office of Reform in Education (CORE, 2015) looked at combined data to create a school quality improvement index. Their focus was to improve student outcomes, moving from traditional accountability models to more innovative and inclusive models. These models included academic, social emotional, climate, and cultural considerations. This group sought to obtain measurable, actionable, and meaningful information that could be used to guide continuous student progress. In a related area, Mantz (2017) looked at several associations between students and teachers and students and peers regarding their relationship and the quality of their emotional competence. Mantz (2017) found that positive associations between these relationships translated to higher social emotional learning scores. Mantz (2017) also determined that both types of relationships and direct teaching of social emotional learning competencies

should be investigated for program development to advance a students' academic and social skills.

The CORE districts continued to research the development and implementation of student social-emotional surveys as a method of accountability and improvement. In 2018, four social-emotional competencies were selected for assessment. The four areas included growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), self-management, and social awareness (CASEL, 2005). Data from 378,465 students within five districts were analyzed across the areas of grade point average, English language arts and mathematics state test results, attendance, and suspensions. In Grades 5-12, sample groups of students, including English language learners, those receiving free and reduced meals, special education, and Black, Asian, Hispanic, and White students, were compared to the population (CORE, 2015). Data indicated the effects of summary measures of social emotional skills, demonstrating these skills highly impact student performance and achievement. Fifty percent of CORE schools were statistically different from the average of all schools in the collaborative. Further, significant differences were found in scores of student subgroups. Students scoring themselves in the lowest levels of the survey were more likely to be English language learners as well as those receiving special education when compared to White students who consistently rated themselves in the highest categories. All differences in these areas were statistically significant. Students with disabilities fell behind the general sample by 0.41 standard deviations (CORE, 2015).

Gehlbach and Hough (2018) examined survey data obtained from a consortium of school districts in California that sought to determine the validity and reliability of their survey questions and results. Gehlbach and Hough (2018) specifically examined the

quality of survey measures, the fidelity with which the data was obtained, and the appropriateness of the data used in making decisions related to program components. Gehlbach and Hough (2018) found that most decisions made regarding content and assessment were philosophical in nature and related to the characteristics districts deemed most important.

Later, Paul (2018) found that student decision-making and responsibility taught within the context of curriculum content yielded increases in social emotional learning and whole-brain learning. School leaders were encouraged to identify and provide resources to help teachers understand the relationship between learning and social emotional growth. Academic studies focusing on social emotional learning for students in primary and secondary schools proliferated in the 2000s, with a wide range of areas investigated within the topic.

For example, Blum and Libbey (2004) indicated that students possessing core social emotional skills were more likely to be connected and engaged in school as they progress through the system. A 2016 School Quality Improvement Index and the CORE Data Collaborative, Riverside County Office of Education (2016 reported that while 43% of all students met or exceeded standards for academic performance in English language arts, only 33% of students in the lowest-performing racial/ethnic subgroup met or exceeded standards, with only 1% ELL students and 7% of students with disabilities. In mathematics, 12% of students met or exceeded standards, while only 7% of the lowest-performing racial/ethnic subgroup, 1% of ELL students, and 0% of students with disabilities met or exceeded standards. Students who fell in the lowest performing subgroups (19% for students categorized in a racial/ethnic group and 30% for students

with disabilities) occurred at higher rates than all students (15%). With suspension rates, the lowest-performing racial and ethnic subgroup and students with disabilities fell at 12% compared to 5% of all students, demonstrating that students reporting lower SEL skills were more likely to experience social behavior difficulties in school.

Students with disabilities were 34.1% more likely than the national average for middle school students to be the subjects of bullying (Blake et al., 2012). Studies of depression among students with disabilities are limited, but several researchers have reported students with learning disabilities have higher rates of depression than their peers (Maag & Reid, 2006; Mishna, 2003). Students with disabilities were disproportionately represented in a study of bullying, and Rose et al. (2016) recommended that schools include targeted supportive programming for this group of students.

Social emotional learning programs are frequently directed and emphasized toward younger populations; however, adolescents may need increasing levels of SEL as they experience the new demands of social interaction paired with a desire to navigate situations with less adult support and interaction (Yeager, 2017). Adolescents are likely to experience more socio-emotional experiences and social identity development than younger students (Coleman & Hendry, 1999; Lerner & Steinberg, 2009), specifically during a time when academic and behavioral difficulties can emerge or exacerbate. Social emotional learning programs also have been less likely to address the needs of adolescents due to the universal prescriptive format and lack of developmental considerations (Hamedani & Darling-Hammond, 2015; Yeager et al., 2017). Tan et al. (2018) found patterns of social emotional learning needs of high school freshmen

students and sought to identify patterns of needs for adolescent students. Findings demonstrated that the number of absences, disciplinary referrals, and low and failing grades indicated a need for additional SEL intervention. Additionally, adolescent students demonstrating difficulties initiating conversations, asking for information; responding to others appropriately; reporting feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and sadness; and reporting verbal or physical aggression could benefit from work in the areas of self-regulation, engagement, and supports for internalized problems. Tan et al. (2018) concluded with the recommendation to prioritize programs specifically tailored to student needs rather than a universal approach.

Criticism of Social Emotional Learning Programs in Schools and Research

A frequent criticism of SEL focuses on how it is defined. As mentioned, SEL is defined in various ways by researchers and educators. For example, CASEL's definition focuses on five competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Jones and Kahn (2017) describe a model of cognitive regulation, emotional processes, and interpersonal skills. While these models overlap, differences in working definitions may contribute to contradictory findings related to the misalignment of SEL targets and measured outcomes (Greenberg et al., 2017). However, some similarities exist with new and frequently used terms in education. Shriver and Weissberg (2020) note the terms collaborative learning, student engagement, and instructional leadership as examples of terms used in education that may represent more than one definition. Moreover, CASEL provided a uniform definition as early as 1999 and published a revised definition as recently as October 2020.

Overgeneralization of SEL Programming

Overgeneralizing SEL programming for students has been criticized as districts seek to find solutions for the many difficulties students experience in school and their communities. Social emotional learning has been used to address a wide variety of issues, including low student engagement, the academic achievement gap, racism, violence, depression, and anxiety. Shriver and Weissberg (2020) stated, "Historically, only a very small percentage of classroom interventions and school or district initiatives have been shown, over multiple studies and many years, to have significant, positive effects" (p. 53). Others argued traits such as self-efficacy, confidence in task completion, and grit are more highly correlated with academic success. In response, Schriver and Weissberg (2020) cited several studies and program evaluations demonstrating benefits for students of all ages and backgrounds. Additionally, the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development examined the evidence for social emotional competencies and found it "essential to learning, positive development, and success in school, careers, and life" (Jones & Kahn, 2017, p. 5).

Culture and Equity

Advocates of SEL have focused on the benefits of programming and how it can extend to all students. However, there has been a suggestion of importance for students with low achievement and under-represented groups. It must be noted that SEL research has "been dominated by White researchers and reformers, though much of the programming has been directed at Black and Brown students in urban districts" (Starr, 2019, p. 70). Critics have begun to push back on the idea that children of color need White educators to teach them how to persevere and regulate their behavior. Others have

questioned the possibility that a focus on a student's ability to self-regulate may have advanced the belief that students are not trying hard enough instead of having effective instruction and academic support. Further criticism has also noted that students from impoverished backgrounds or those who have experienced high levels of toxic stress as young children may not have the pre-requisite skills to access grit or self-control (Neblett et al., 2012; Umana-Taylor, 2016). Approximately 10-15% of students have experienced a stress-response system that is over-prepared to respond in fight or flight situations of conflict. These stressors make it difficult for children to access their executive function skills and employ or learn a grit and growth mindset (Finn & Hess, 2020). Race, gender disparity, culture, and societal norms related to power and privilege within school disciplines, are all cited as issues impacting the effectiveness and understanding of SEL (Miller-Cotto & Byrnes, 2016).

A lack of teacher training, professional development, and attention toward the teacher's social emotional skills and well-being are other areas for consideration, research, and development (Jagers et al., 2018). Conversely, Schriver and Weissberg (2020) argued that equity issues had been considered from the beginning of SEL research. They stress the understanding that the absence of culturally competent developmental thinking contributes to the failure of many White educators when trying to understand and connect with children from diverse cultural backgrounds. Subsequently, CASEL continues to advocate SEL as a benefit for all children, regardless of background, and in support of equity-related issues.

Research and Programming

Criticism has also focused on the legitimacy of results, impact of programming, instruction, study groups, assessment, measures of improvement, and application of results. A lack of data-driven results and decision-making associated with SEL research and the selection, application, and evaluation of programs utilized in schools are cited as areas of concern. Survey methods and the wording of questions within surveys have been shown to impact how responses are obtained and the subsequent results of these studies (Martens, 1993). For example, psychological testing scores are considered flawed as they contain both a true score and an error score (Ghiselli et al., 1981). A true score is reflective of the aspect being measured, including both systematic variance and typical fluctuations in test scores, while the error score includes variations in the test-taker's performance on a given day (Eignor, 2013). Informant reports are inherently biased due to their reliance on subjective measures and lack of controlled conditions. Social emotional learning programs and curricula are highly marketed and profitable for publishers and vendors, often without accountability or consideration for effectiveness or targeted need. Many research studies related to SEL receive their primary support from private foundations (Walton Foundation, Gates Foundation), which invest in promoting SEL within schools (Zhao, 2020).

Criticism of Measurement and Assessment

The lack of a standardized definition and means of measurement of SEL has also been cited as an area for criticism, including a variety of terminology and definitions for SEL concepts related to a measurement of skills (Wigelsworth et al., 2010). The available measures vary significantly, particularly in their use and purpose. Measures are

developed to assess student acquisition of skills, identify student deficit skills for program development, or assessment to identify research purposes. Some assessments measure typical behavior, while others are developed to identify significantly different behavior from the norm. Finally, very few measures have been subjected to item response theory to address the possibility of bias (Wigelsworth et al., 2010). Different aspects of programming could impact student needs based on ethnicity, level of development, socio-economic status, and gender. The need for theory-driven research and analysis of student subgroups to determine efficacy should occur as districts spend funds and instructional time on assessments and programs (Taylor et al., 2002; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). Furthermore, McKown (2017) acknowledged criticism regarding a lack of research-based assessment of SEL:

> In the push to boost young people's social and emotional learning (SEL), assessment has lagged behind policy and practice. We have few usable, feasible, and scalable tools to assess children's SEL. And without good assessments, teachers, administrators, parents, and policy makers can't get the data they need to make informed decisions about SEL. (p. 157)

CASEL sought to provide information on the improvement and accountability of programs through assessment, recommending two types of measurement considered appropriate for evaluating programs and initiatives, including direct assessments administered directly to children and indirect assessments administered to adults who work with children and know them well. Yopp et al. (2017) noted that the National Research Council recommended that assessment be guided by two principles. First, purposeful assessment demonstrates how results would be used. Second, systematic

assessment would be administered in the classroom setting. Data from assessments should provide feedback to programs to maximize student progress. Standards exist for assessing SEL programs and include teacher rating scales, a description of measurements, validity of assessment construction, and defined measurement scales. Tests must be age-appropriate and be administered in a timeframe of 10-20 minutes. Tests must also provide reliability and validity, standards for data allowing for the interpretation of results. When possible, tests and scoring should be electronic to aid in the speed and accuracy of assessment and analysis of the results. Measures for older students can include student self-reports and third-party observational measures.

The *Handbook of Social Emotional Learning-Research and Practice* addresses research, practice, policy, intervention and prevention programs, conceptual, and scientific issues (Durlak, 2015). The relationship between mental health and academic success, the roles of school and district leadership, teacher training, and school-family relationships were described to guide program development and accountability. Assessment, innovations, and challenges of SEL programs in schools were also described to address both conceptual and scientific aspects while speaking to their relationship to student success in academics, mental health, and well-being.

Criticism of Social Emotional Learning Research Related to Funding Sources

Funding for SEL programs and research is based on local and state initiatives and federal funds, including Title I, Title II, and Title IV (Price, 2015; Second Step, 2017). Historically, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act ESEA (1965) was designed to provide equal opportunity for all students. Later reauthorized in 2015, under ESSA, many efforts related to the development of SEL programs are based on the objectives of federal

laws and the Department of Education. Title I is the largest federally funded educational program, providing supplemental funding to school districts with higher levels of students living in poverty. Title II provides for teacher and administrator preparation, training, and recruiting, while Title IV addresses funding for additional programs, materials, services, and staff that cannot be purchased by local or state funds (Committee for Children, 2020).

However, Price (2015) noted that many factors influence funding for SEL in schools with significant amounts obtained from non-federal sources. Funding may be obtained from multiple sources and may be impacted by the description of the services or program. For example, programs or materials could be characterization as a social-emotional or health related. Additional funding sources include foundations or charitable trusts, which require maintenance of relationships, partnerships, and systems in place for fiscal management, data collection, and program evaluation.

Starr (2019) cautioned districts to investigate programs and materials before applying for or accepting grant money for SEL programming. Starr outlined concerns regarding funding related to product development by both for profit and non-profit sources noting these groups can over promise and over-simplify SEL with rigid, step-by-step programming. Starr advocates for SEL instruction to be integrated into all aspects of school, as opposed to a separate class or curriculum.

Social Emotional Learning and Middle School Students

Middle school marks a time of significant change for young adolescent students. Along with increased independence, students learn to adapt to increasing expectations in their social and school lives. Research specific to adolescent students indicates that SEL

programs may help improve specific skills and mindsets, resulting in improved social and academic outcomes. Further, the importance of school climate, opportunities for students to feel respected, gain status, and admiration from peers and adults are found to be more effective than specific skill instruction and practice and are viewed as effective for younger students (Yeager, 2017).

Coleman and Hendry (1999) found adolescents are likely to experience more socio-emotional experiences and social identity development than younger students. They recommend the following areas of emphasis for successful SEL implementation, including 1) awareness and discussion throughout the curriculum, 2) consistency throughout the school environment, 3) discipline policies that are educational and restorative, 4) a caring, safe, and supportive learning environment characterized by trust and respect, 5) effective instructional strategies including collaborative and inquiry-based learning;), 6) individualized and multitiered tiered supports, and 7) extended learning opportunities.

In a study of middle school students related to bullying, cyberbullying, homophobic comments, and sexual harassment, Espelage et al. (2019) conducted a three-year randomized trial of 36 schools in Kansas and Illinois. Utilizing Second Step, results showed a decrease in self-reported bullying, cyberbullying, and name calling for students receiving SEL instruction. However, no direct intervention effects were reported.

Later, Main (2018) examined teacher capacity to embed SEL content within the general classroom setting. Teachers from a post-graduate training program were asked to plan lessons and embed SEL content from CASEL's five categories into science, math, physical education, English, information and communication technologies, business, the

arts, and geography. Teachers were asked to focus on student mindsets and classroom climate. Prior to the intervention, teachers indicated they lacked confidence in knowing how or what to teach. Results of the study were obtained from student responses. The most common strategies used to embed SEL into classroom content were cooperative learning and relationship building. Following instruction, 39% of teachers indicated a growing awareness of how to provide authentic SEL learning and modeling of strategies for students (Main, 2018).

Social Emotional Learning and English Language Learners

Fisher and Frey (2019) outlined best practices for students who are ELL recommending high expectations, culturally responsive teaching, and recognition of social emotional needs. Fisher and Frey also described teaching students to label feelings within themselves and others, utilizing emotional regulation and self-regulation skills and teaching vocabulary through real and imaginary characters with reading materials. Time spent in reflection and feedback related to materials was also recommended as valuable for developing ELL students' understanding of content and adjustment to the school environment. Dresser (2013) recommended embedding SEL into the curriculum in learner-centered programs and providing a safe and positive environment.

Access to educational equality remains an obstacle for many students, with Latinx and Black students more likely to attend disadvantaged schools (Cauce et al., 2011). National statistics reveal higher rates of attempted suicide, drug use, and early parenthood for all groups of students, with Latinx youth having the highest teen pregnancy rate, high school dropout rate, and an increased likelihood of living in poverty. Students living in high-risk situations are at a disadvantage and also more likely to have poorer academic

outcomes (Umana-Taylor et al., 2009). Social-emotional learning may be a predictor of resilience, and well-designed studies may provide opportunities to assess the acquisition of skills benefitting students personally and academically (Capara et al., 2000; Haynes et al., 2003). Haynes et al. also examined the relationship between social-emotional, academic, and behavioral measures and found strong, statistically significant correlations. For elementary students, self-management and self-efficacy were strongly related, while middle school students were more highly impacted by growth mindset and social awareness. High school students with a strong growth mindset and social awareness skills were more likely to have higher grade point averages. Conversely, increased absenteeism and suspension rates were positively correlated with lower SEL scores.

Social Emotional Learning and Students who Experience Low Social Economic Status (SES)

The relationship between poverty and reduced academic achievement has been well-documented (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Newman, 2008). While those experiencing poverty are as diverse as other groups of people, children living in poverty are more likely to have lower levels of literacy and language development (Allington et al., 2010), fewer material resources, lower levels of physical and mental health, reduced levels of well-being, and cognitive development (Conrath, 1988, 2001; EvansWinters & Cowie, 2009). In 1946, the U.S. Department of Food and Nutrition Service initiated the National School Meal Program. This federally appointed program provides free or reduced meals to students with household incomes below 130% of the poverty level. Students whose families receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits also qualify for reduced-priced meals. Many prerequisite programs related to SEL began

as programs to address poverty-related concerns including student absenteeism, conduct, and substance abuse. As programs developed and measured academic, engagement, and social improvements for students, a shift was implemented from targeted, individualized, or group remediation programs to universal interventions or school-based SEL programs for all students. This public health approach labeled schools as the optimal location to intervene with children and used programming to improve student skills and academic achievement, while reducing the likelihood they would experience future problems with social behavior. Such interventions were valuable, cost-effective, preventive programs positively impacting school culture, family, and community involvement, promoting wellness, school success, and preventing mental health disorders (Greenberg et al., 2017).

Social Emotional Learning and Students Receiving Special Education Services

Special education services in schools were developed to address inequalities for students with disabilities. Issues related to services, transportation, and support are outlined in Individual Education Plans (IEPs) to provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). IEPs provide specially designed instruction and supports to identified students. While improvements have been made in student access to special education services, a disproportionate number of students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds remains. Disproportionality refers to the over-identification of students from these backgrounds for special education services (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Hosp & Reschly, 2004). Students receiving special education are over-identified within eligibility categories, placed in more restrictive settings, and disciplined at a higher rate than their non-disabled peers (Sciuchetti, 2017; Snyder et al., 2016).

Students who fall behind their peers in academic achievement or social behavior skills may be referred for a special education evaluation. Students qualify for special education services under one of 13 categories including autism, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, gifted, intellectual disability, specific learning disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, sensory impairment, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, or other health impaired. Students with CLD backgrounds are identified as having difficulty in academic, social, emotional, and behavioral skills more frequently than their peers. School-based factors contributing to the increased referral rate include referral practices, assessment practices and tools, and expectations (Garcia & Ortez, 2004).

In a study of students with learning disabilities in four different special education settings, results indicated placement slightly impacted measures of social emotional skills, including social acceptance, friends, relationship quality, loneliness, depression, social skills, and problem behaviors (Wiener & Tardif, 2004). Students placed in more restrictive settings, including self-contained and inclusion classes, experienced more difficulties with social and emotional skills. However, students in more inclusive settings were more accepted by peers, had better academic outcomes, and had fewer behavior problems. Wiener and Tardif (2004) also noted some evidence that students placed in general education settings without support may have had the most difficulties with social emotional adjustments. The researchers noted that continued study is needed regarding special education placement, outcomes, and impact of social emotional skills.

Additionally, Hickman (2017) studied emotional intelligence in special education classroom teachers and its impact on student reading achievement. Results demonstrated

that teacher stress management was a significant factor in reading skill development for students. Billingsley (2004) cited research establishing that stress significantly impacts retention and longevity for special education teachers. Billingsley further noted that a teacher's ability to manage stress impacts both teaching performance and student achievement.

Comparative Studies of SEL and Subgroups of Students

Studies of the relationships between specific social emotional skills and subgroups of students first appeared in 2018. Moulton et al. (2018) examined data from a group of 112,670 students in 192 schools and 16 states. They found that students with higher SEL skills had better grades, assessment scores, behavior, and attendance. Yeager et al. (2019) investigated a group of 6,300 ninth-grade students with grade point averages below the school median. Students who received growth mindset intervention were found to have improved grade point averages at levels better than peers that did not receive the intervention.

That same year, Usher et al. (2019) examined the relationship between academic achievement and survey scores on grit, self-efficacy, and relationships. Reading and math achievement scores of 2,430 students in Grades 4-8 were examined. The researchers found positive correlations between higher grit and self-efficacy scores compared with achievement. In addition, they found that older students and those students who were categorized as having a lower socioeconomic status (SES) demonstrated lower grit and self-efficacy scores. Furthermore, Usher et al. (2019) did not find correlations between assessment scores and groups of students categorized by ELL, SES, Special Education (SPED, race, and gender.

Finally, Haun (2020) examined the relationship between SEL and academic growth in students in Grades 3-5. A weak positive relationship between grit, self-efficacy, and math Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) was found. Haun (2020) also examined student subgroups (e.g., ELL, SES status, gender, grade level, and SPED status) and found that all group scores were more closely related to grade level. Specifically, there were stronger relationships between scores in Grade 5 when compared to Grades 3 and 4.

Future of Social Emotional Learning in Schools

While the topic of SEL efficacy and program implementation remains popular, with frequent articles in trade literature and research, very few research studies examine data among student subgroups. The 2002 revision of PL 114-95 focused attention on student progress for all student groups, including race, income, disability, and English language learning status. If the ability to apply SEL skills to daily school and work life is integral to academic and work success, data regarding the strengths and needs of historically under-performing subgroups compared with peers are needed to understand if differences exist.

While universal SEL instruction in schools may result in improved academic and personal achievement for students overall (Jones & Doolittle, 2017), some subgroups are not benefitting at the level of their peers (Jagers et al., 2018; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2015). If data can provide evidence of whether social emotional constructs are beneficial or impactful for elementary, middle, and high school students, it is also likely to reveal characteristics that educators could consider as they evaluate academic content and instruction, school and after school programming, and community supports. This

information could increase the likelihood that SEL interventions would result in improved academic and personal success for students within subgroups.

Social emotional skills can be taught to school children of all ages through either a specific curriculum or embedded in curricular content. Improved SEL skills positively impact school climate, student behavior, self-regulation skills, and academic achievement (McNeeley & Timmerman, 2016). Skills are maintained over time with improved outcomes for students graduating from high school and performance in secondary settings. Social emotional learning programming has also been shown to be cost-effective. McKown (2017) outlined areas for future development and best practice for SEL assessment, performance, and standards related to assessment, performance, and standards. Specifically, McKown (2017) recommended that program success be identified and researched to determine if it aligns with student needs. Additionally, programs should be selected on objective and data-driven measures regardless of reviews or popularity with pilot tests conducted before school-wide adoption. Formative and summative assessments should also be used to measure program effectiveness. McKown (2017) recommended that all stakeholders understand and use data to determine resource and program effectiveness.

Recent articles have referenced the term transformative SEL. This term focuses on educational equity by investigating how SEL might be utilized within the context of CASEL's five competencies to advance equity, student, academic, and personal success. Jagers et al. (2019) described a need for an understanding of the ways SEL can improve academic, social, and emotional skills in all children. The authors outlined questions regarding guiding framework, programming, understanding, and the use of cultural assets

to promote successful outcomes for students – particularly with diverse backgrounds and circumstances. Jagers et al. (2019) described transformative SEL as representing

> …an as-yet underutilized approach that SEL researchers and practitioners can use if they seek to effectively address issues such as power, privilege, prejudice, discrimination, social justice, empowerment, and self-determination….it must cultivate in them the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required for critical examination and collaborative action to address root causes of inequities. (p.163)

Jagers et al. (2019) recommend further discussion of how these concepts could be represented within the framework of the five competencies and as an integrated part of CASEL's strategic focus.

The global COVID-19 pandemic exposed further need for the provision of SEL as the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory regarding a compelling need for mental health services for school-age children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021). The report cited civil unrest and social media as additional factors contributing to the need for supportive school environments. Additionally, identification and service for students with disabilities were difficult during the pandemic. The U.S. Department of Education encouraged the use of federal COVID-19 relief funding to address student groups disproportionally impacted by the pandemic, including students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Recommendations for all students included expanded SEL instruction and support and the need for understanding the impact of trauma on mental and physical health. A continuum of support for student mental health,

school counselors, social workers, and the support of all school personnel was indicated as a shortage of certified and qualified providers was noted.

Summary

Researchers have demonstrated that while universal SEL instruction in schools results in improved academic and personal achievement for students as a whole, some subgroups are not benefitting comparatively. When data can be utilized to evaluate or identify needs related to particular social emotional constructs for elementary, middle, and high school students, it is also likely to reveal characteristics that may be more efficacious for students within subgroups, increasing the likelihood that information obtained from SEL assessment can be used to make decisions about instructional content, practice, climate, relationships, and school and community supports to result in increased academic and personal success.

This review of the literature contained a summary of the history and development of social emotional learning in public schools from the early 1900s to 2022. A description of the research regarding the impact of teaching social emotional skills to students beginning in the preschool years through high school shows a relationship between improved SEL skills and academic achievement with skills sustained over time. Further, it has been shown that classroom teachers can teach SEL either through a separate curriculum or embedded within the academic content, with results positively impacting student data in both measures of social emotional skills, academic engagement, academic skills, and employment skills later in life. Studies have called for further research regarding the strategic selection and application of efforts targeted at students who continue to struggle both academically and socially. Chapter 3 describes this study's

research design, selection of participants, measurement, data collection procedures, data analysis and hypothesis testing, and limitations.

Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this study was to determine the difference between scores of social awareness, coping with anxiety, grit, and emotional regulation among groups and subgroups of 8th-grade students. Chapter three describes the study methodology, including research design, selection of participants, and measurement. The chapter also describes procedures related to data collection, data analysis and hypothesis testing, and the limitations of the study.

Research Design

This study used a quantitative quasi-experimental design to examine if significant differences exist between groups of students in the areas of social awareness, coping with anxiety, grit, and emotional regulation on a standardized measure of social emotional skills. The selection of this quantitative approach reflects a postpositivist philosophical view, characterized by a traditional methodology allowing the researcher to propose a theory, collect data, and analyze data to test that theory. Archival data were used in the study. The data included results from both fall 2018 and spring 2019 testing windows for the Panorama Social Emotional Skills Survey.

Three independent variables (IV) in the study were assigned to students' group status. The special education status IV has two categories: students receiving special education and students not receiving special education. The English language learner status IV has two categories: English language learner and non-English language learner. Finally, the free and reduced meal status IV also has two categories: students receiving free and reduced meals and students not receiving free and reduced meals. The four

dependent variables (DV) in the study included social awareness, coping with anxiety, grit, and emotional regulation scores.

Selection of Participants

The sample for this study was eighty-grade middle school students from District A for which a purposive sampling method was used. Lunenburg and Irby (2008) defined purposive sampling as "selecting a sample based on the researcher's experience or knowledge of the group to be sampled" (p. 175). The sample for this study was eighth-grade middle school students from four middle schools receiving Title I funding in a large, suburban school district in the fall of 2018 and spring of 2019. Scores from all eighth-grade students within the four schools were included in the study.

Measurement

This section describes the survey instrument and the sections within the survey, including social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety. Following each section is a table that summarizes the questions within each section of survey topics. Student subgroups including students receiving special education, English language learners, and students receiving free and reduced meals, are then described.

Panorama Student Surveys

Students' social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety were measured by subscales in Panorama Student Surveys. The Panorama Student Survey was developed by a team of researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (Gehlbach & Brinkworth, 2011). The six-step design process included a literature review, interviews and focus groups, synthesis, item creation, expert review, and cognitive pre-testing/interviewing.

Social Awareness. Students' social awareness was measured by a social awareness subscale, which measures how well students consider others' perspectives and empathize with them. Eight items are included in this subscale (see Table 2). Students ranked themselves using a five-point Likert-type scale appropriate to the question. Students' social awareness level scores are reported on a dashboard customized to the district results and include item averages by grade level for the district, school, and individual student.

Table 2

Social Awareness Survey Items and Scales

Question	Scale
During the past 30 days, how carefully did you listen to other people's point of view?	Not carefully (1), Slightly carefully (2), Somewhat carefully (3), Quite carefully (4), Extremely carefully (5)
During the past 30 days, how much did you care about other people's feelings?	Did not care at all (1), Cared a bit (2), Cared somewhat (3), Cared quite a bit (4), Cared a tremendous amount
During the past 30 days, how well did you get along with students who are different from you?	Did not get along at all (1), Got along a little bit (2), Got along somewhat (3), Got along pretty well (4), Got along extremely well (5)
During the past 30 days, how often did you compliment other's accomplishments?	Almost never (1), Once in a while (2), Sometimes (3), Frequently (4), All the time (5)
During the past 30 days, how clearly were you able to describe your feelings?	Not clearly at all (1), Slightly clearly (2), Somewhat clearly (3), Quite clearly (4), Extremely clearly (5)
During the past 30 days, when others disagreed with you, how respectful were you of their views?	Not at all respectful (1), Slightly respectful (2), Somewhat respectful (3), Quite respectful (4), Extremely respectful (5)
During the past 30 days, to what extent were you able to stand up for yourself?	Not at all (1), A little bit (2), Somewhat (3), Quite a bit (4), Tremendous amount (5)
During the past 30 days, to what extent were you able to disagree with others without starting an argument?	Not at all (1), A little bit (2), Somewhat (3), Quite a bit (4), Tremendous amount (5)

Note. Adapted from Panorama Dashboard: *Social Emotional Learning*, by Panorama Education, 2018. https://secure.panoramed.com/olathe/understand

Grit. Students' grit level was measured by grit subscale. Grit is defined as "how well students are able to persevere through setbacks to achieve important long-term goals" (Panorama Education, 2015, p. 25). There were five items in this subscale (see Table 3). Students ranked themselves using a five-point Likert-type scale appropriate to the question.

Table 3

Grit Survey Items and Scales

Question	Scale
How often do you stay focused on the same goal for several months at a time?	Almost never (1), Once in a while (2), Sometimes (3), Frequently (4), Almost always (5)
If you fail to reach an important goal, how likely are you to try again?	Not at all likely (1), Slightly likely (2), Somewhat likely (3), Quite likely (4), Extremely likely (5)
When you are working on a project that matters a lot to you, how focused can you stay when there are lots of distractions?	Not focused at all (1), Slightly focused (2), Somewhat focused (3), Quite focused (4), Extremely focused (5)
If you have a problem while working towards an important goal, how well can you keep working?	Not well at all (1), Slightly well (2), Somewhat well (3), Quite well (4), Extremely well (5)
Some people pursue some of their goals for a long time, and others change their goals frequently. Over the next several years, how likely are you to continue to pursue one of your goals?	Not at all likely (1), Slightly likely (2), Somewhat likely (3), Quite likely (4), Extremely likely (5)

Note. Adapted from Panorama Dashboard: *Social Emotional Learning*, by Panorama Education, 2018. https://secure.panoramed.com/olathe/understand

Emotional Regulation. Students' emotional regulation was measured by an emotional regulation subscale, measuring how well students regulate their emotions.

There were six questions in this subscale (see Table 4). Students ranked themselves using a five-point Likert-type scale with responses appropriate to the question.

Table 4

Emotional Regulation Survey Items and Scales

Question	Scale
When you are feeling pressured, how easily can you stay in control?	Not easily at all (1), Slightly easily (2), Somewhat easily (3), Quite easily (4), Extremely easily (5)
How often are you able to pull yourself out of a bad mood?	Almost never (1), Once in a while (2), Sometimes (3), Frequently (4), Almost always (5)
When everybody around you gets angry how relaxed can you stay?	Not at all relaxed (1), Slightly relaxed (2), Somewhat relaxed (3), Quite relaxed (4), Extremely relaxed (5)
How often are you able to control your emotions when you need to?	Almost never (1), Once in a while (2), Sometimes (3), Frequently (4), Always (5)
Once you get upset, how often can you get yourself to relax?	Almost never (1), Once in a while (2), Sometimes (3), Frequently (4), Almost always (5)
When things go wrong for you, how calm are you able to remain?	Not calm at all (1), Slightly calm (2), Somewhat calm (3), Quite calm (4), Extremely calm (5)

Note. Adapted from Panorama Dashboard: *Social Emotional Learning*, by Panorama Education, 2018. https://secure.panoramed.com/olathe/understand

Coping with Anxiety. This subscale was requested by the school district as a custom feature of the Panorama survey based on identified need in the district. This

subscale measured a student's self-perceived level of anxiety related to their perceptions of other students' feelings about them, in addition to grades and factors outside of school. There are six items included in this subscale. Students ranked themselves using a five-point Likert scale appropriate to the question. This scale varies from the preceding subscales and was developed specifically for the district (see Table 5). Panorama provided some research guiding them in the development of the subscale. For example, in an article about anxiety in academic achievement situations, the authors described a facilitating anxiety scale with similar questions and responses to those used in the Panorama subscale (Alpert & Haber, 1960). The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (Heimberg et al., 1987). is also similar to the Panorama Coping with Anxiety subscale.

Table 5

Coping with Anxiety Items and Scales

Question	Scale
How stressed do you get about other students at school liking you?	Extremely stressed (1), Quite stressed (2), Somewhat stressed (3), Slightly stressed (4), Not stressed at all (5)
How often do you worry about what other students think of you?	Almost always (1), Frequently (2), Sometimes (3), Once in a while (4), Almost never (5)
How stressed do you get about doing well in your classes?	Extremely stressed (1), Quite stressed (2), Somewhat stressed (3), Slightly stressed (4), Not at all stressed (5)
How often do you worry about grades?	Almost always (1), Frequently (2), Sometimes (3), Once in a while (4), Almost never (5)
How stressed do you get about things outside of school?	Extremely stressed (1), Quite stressed (2), Somewhat stressed (3), Slightly stressed (4), Not at all stressed
How often do you worry about things outside of school?	Almost always (1), Frequently (2), Sometimes (3), Once in a while (4), Almost never (5)

Note. Adapted from *Panorama Dashboard: Social Emotional Learning*, by Panorama Education, 2018. https://secure.panoramed.com/olathe/understand

According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), validity is the degree to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure" (p. 181). Confirmatory factor analysis results were used to indicate the structural validity of each subscale. Results from the comparative fit index (CFI) indicated that emotional regulation, grit, and social awareness subscales met the preferred threshold of .95 or better. However, the CFI result is not available for the Coping with Anxiety subscale. Secondly, a measure of model fit

was assessed via a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) for the subscales at or below the typical threshold of 0.08 (Panorama Education, 2018).

Panorama Education (2018) also investigated convergent and discriminant validity, which assesses the degree the instrument measures what it is designed to measure. For example, on the student survey, questions eliciting answers regarding similar topics were examined to determine if they procured similar responses. If scores were similar, there is evidence of convergent validity. Further, two different question constructs measuring different topics would demonstrate small correlations and indicate discriminant validity. Topic intercorrelations for all assessment areas in Panorama Education were examined with rank-order correlations for both convergent and discriminant validity. Topic intercorrelations were performed using Spearman rank order correlations, with scores ranging from -0.1 to 0.1. Spearman correlations between two variables with a range of +1 to -1 indicate balance between the variables.

Reliability, according to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), "is the degree to which an instrument consistently measures whatever it is measuring" (p.182). Internal consistency was used to examine the reliability of the subscales, and emotional regulation, grit, and social awareness subscales met or exceeded the typical threshold of .70 (*a*-Cronbach's alpha). Again, the reliability information for the Coping with Anxiety subscale was not available. Inter-item reliabilities of the four subscales ranged from $\alpha = .76$ to .86 in the current samples (Panorama Education, 2018). A summary of validity and reliability information is represented in Table 6.

Table 6

Reliability and Structural Validity Results by Subscales

Subscales	α	CFI	RMSEA
Emotional Regulation	0.84	0.99	0.05
Grit	0.74	0.99	0.05
Social Awareness	0.80	0.96	0.06

Note. Adapted from "User Guide: Panorama student survey," by Panorama Education, 2015.

The coping with anxiety subscale was exclusively created for District A. Therefore, reliability and structural validity measures were not available. Results from the current study noted a Cronbach's Alpha of .860 for Emotional Regulation (6 items), .763 for Grit (5 items), .810 for Social Awareness (8 items), and .860 for Emotional Regulation (6 items).

Special Education Status

Special education status was measured by student qualification for individualized and specialized instruction, as identified through their Individual Education Plan (IEP). An evaluation was conducted by teams from early childhood screening, Program for Infant and Toddlers with Disabilities (Part C of IDEA), general education teams or collaborative teams, parents, or self-referral by an adult student. The team reviewed data from all areas related to the suspected exceptionality. Example evaluation areas include health, vision, hearing, social emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, assessments, communicative status, and motor abilities. The evaluation must include strategies to collect both academic and functional levels of the student's

skills. A team of qualified professionals and the parents of the child being evaluated makes the eligibility decision, which indicates whether the child is one with an exceptionality and the need for special education or related services. Students qualify for special education after a process of general education interventions and supports, initial evaluation for special education, and finally, team consensus and agreement that the student is eligible and in need of service. Placement in special education includes the identification of one of the 13 eligibility categories previously mentioned. In Kansas, services for gifted students are included under special education services. Giftedness was not considered part of the special education group in this study. Scores of gifted students were included in the peer group scores.

Identification of an exceptionality category is found in the student information system Synergy Student Information System (SIS). Special education reports are written and managed through Synergy Special Education (SE), which serves as an IEP writer and allows for district-level oversight while providing a centralized database. The process for identifying students who qualify for special education services is outlined in the Kansas Special Education Process Handbook (KSDE, 2021). This handbook thoroughly describes the steps an educational team must take when identifying students for special education services, providing consistency in the eligibility process between districts and schools on a year-to-year basis. The process for qualification for special education in Kansas has remained consistent since 2008, and the method for categorization of students in Synergy SIS and SE has remained unchanged since 2016.

ELL Status

KSDE provides guidance for school teams when identifying students in need of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) (also referred to as Limited English Proficient (LEP) students or English Language Learners (ELL). Several criteria must be met to qualify, including a language other than English indicated on the Home Language Survey, an assessment of the student's English proficiency using an approved assessment, and if the assessment reveals the student is limited in any of four domains (listening, speaking, writing, or a composite of the four domains).

In District A, an initial placement screening test, the Idea Placement Test (IPT), is administered to screen students for identification and placement. This test was designed to evaluate proficiency in English for children between 3 and 8 years of age who are native speakers of other languages and are being considered for placement in programs for English language learners. The test is administered to individual students using an easel-style book containing pictures that correspond to test items. There are three levels of oral tests that require a spoken response across the areas of vocabulary, vocabulary in context, reading, and understanding. Additional sections include Reading for Life Skills, Language Usage, Writing Conventions, Write a Story, and Write Your Own Story. The test consists of a maximum of 91 items depending on the number of items the student answers and can take 5-25 minutes to administer. Raw scores are converted to one of seven proficiency scores and classify students as non-English speakers, limited English speakers, or fluent English speakers.

Each year, following placement, the Kansas English Language Proficiency Assessment-Placement (KELPA-P) is administered to re-qualify students for services.

Tests are administered online or by an in-person test administrator who delivers directions in English. Testing generally occurs over several sessions, 10-20 minutes in length. Directions and test items are read to the student. For Grades 6-8, there are 6 items on the listening subtest, 19 items on the reading subtest, 12 items on the writing subtest, and 6 items on the speaking subtest. On the listening subtest, students listen to a question and are given a multiple-choice answer of 2-4 options. On the reading subtest, students read a short story and select a response from one of four written choices. On the writing subtest, students are asked to write a story based on two topic choices. A second aspect of the writing subtest includes questions and four answer choices regarding word meanings and understanding of written sentences. On the speaking subtest, students are asked direct questions about their interests or preferences (e.g., clothes or travel destination). Results of KELPA-P screening yield three levels of proficiency. A student scoring in the Beginning level displays few grade-level English language skills and will benefit from ELL Program support. Students in the Early Intermediate level demonstrate evidence of developing grade-level English language skills and will benefit from ELL program support. At the Intermediate level, the student applies some grade-level English language skills and will benefit from ELL program support. Students in the Early Advanced level demonstrate English language skills required for engagement with grade-level academic content instruction at a level comparable to non-ELLs. Students at the Proficient level received a score of 4 in all domains.

Students qualifying for English Language Learning services receive a tag in the learning management system. The process for identification of English language learners was updated in 2006 when KSDE selected a cadre of teachers, curriculum directors, and

principals to review the data cut scores and analyze each test item. The alignment was most recently completed and adopted by the Kansas Board of Education in 2018 (C. Clayton, personal communication, September 23, 2021).

Free and Reduced Meal Status

The free and reduced meal status was measured by standards set by the state, conducted yearly, and based on family income levels. Students from households with incomes at or below 130% of the federal poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those between 130% and 185% of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals. A student can be charged not more than 40 cents per meal. All other students are classified as not receiving free or reduced priced meals.

Qualification is determined by the income application submitted by the household. Eligibility determination is based on the household's size and combined gross income (before taxes or deductions). The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) uses the federal income guidelines, which change every school year. Families obtain an application from their school office, complete the form, and return it to the school office. Applications may be submitted at any time of the year. This system of determining eligibility for free and reduced meals has been used since 2004, beginning with the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act, which established certification for families for a calendar year (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2008).

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to data collection, the researcher submitted the Research Application Request-Internal Form for the school district to obtain approval to conduct research. Completed forms were electronically mailed to the director of assessment and research

from the participating school district on December 2, 2021 (see Appendix A). Permission was granted by the director on December 17, 2021. Next, the process to obtain permission from Baker University was obtained by submitting an Institutional Review Board (IRB) request to the University on December 8, 2021.

The Baker University IRB committee approved the study on December 9, 2021 (see Appendix B). The researcher then requested scores from the fall 2018 and spring 2019 administration of the Panorama Student Self-Perception of Social Emotional Competencies. Data was obtained from the director of assessment and research.

Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) described the research questions and hypothesis testing as a guide for the research. Research questions and hypothesis testing outlined below provide information on how the researcher intended to answer the research questions.

RQ1

To what extent do eighth-grade student Panorama scores of social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety differ between special education students and non-special education students?

H1. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of social awareness among students receiving special education and students not receiving special education services.

H2. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of grit among students receiving special education and students not receiving special education.

H3. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of emotional regulation among students receiving special education and students not receiving special education.

H4. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of coping with anxiety among students receiving special education and students not receiving special education.

Four independent-samples t tests were conducted to address the four hypotheses in RQ1. The means of social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety between two groups of students (i.e., students receiving special education and students not receiving special education) were compared. Independent-samples t tests were chosen for hypothesis testing since the method examines the mean difference between two mutually exclusive independent groups. Additionally, both means of two groups are continuous variables. The level of significance was set at .05. When appropriate, Cohen's d effect size is reported.

RQ2

To what extent do eighth-grade student Panorama scores of social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety differ between English language learners and students who are not English language learners?

H5. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of social awareness among English language learners and non-English language learners.

H6. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of grit among English language learners and non-English language learners.

H7. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of emotional regulation among English language learners and non-English language learners.

H8. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of coping with anxiety among English language learners and non-English language learners.

Four independent-samples t tests were conducted to address the four hypotheses in RQ2. The means of social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety between two groups of students (i.e., English language learners and non-English language learners) were compared. Independent-samples t tests were chosen for hypothesis testing since the test examines the mean difference between two mutually exclusive independent groups, and both means of two groups are continuous variables. The level of significance was set at .05. When appropriate, Cohen's d effect size is reported.

RQ3

To what extent do eighth-grade student scores of Panorama scores of social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety differ between students receiving free and reduced meal and students not receiving free or reduced meals.

H9. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of social awareness among students receiving free and reduced meals and students not receiving free or reduced meals.

H10. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of grit among students receiving free and reduced meals and students not receiving free or reduced meals.

H11. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of emotional regulation among students receiving free and reduced meals and students not receiving free or reduced meals.

H12. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of coping with anxiety among students receiving free and reduced meals and students not receiving free or reduced meals.

Four independent-samples t tests were conducted to address the four hypotheses in RQ3. The means of social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety between two groups of students (i.e., students receiving free and reduced meals and students not receiving free or reduced meals) were compared. An independent-samples t test were chosen for the hypothesis testing since it examines the mean difference between two mutually exclusive independent groups, and both means of two groups are continuous variables. The level of significance was set at .05. When appropriate, Cohen's *d* effect size is reported.

Limitations

Limitations that may have an impact on the findings or generalization of this study included:

1. District A provided the same professional training for teachers to administer the Panorama surveys; however, the administration of the surveys may have varied depending on the teacher.

2. Students' scores of self-perception could be affected by many factors, including but not limited to students' comprehension of the question and their emotional state when answering the questionnaire. Survey results of perceptions of feelings and competence are subjective in nature and may change based on individual experiences and outside influences, such as interactions with family, peers, or school staff.
3. Student groups from both fall and spring assessment testing windows were included in the sample impacting groups due to student movement in and out of buildings.
4. Panorama could not provide evidence for reliability or validity of the survey for coping with anxiety, as it was a custom item specifically developed for District A.
5. Building emphasis, teaching, and modeling of social emotional skills, including self-regulation, will differ between schools. For example, a school may have selected one of the four areas surveyed as a building emphasis for the year, which would impact a student's understanding and awareness of the concept, resulting in higher or lower ratings for that item.

Summary

The research methods utilized for this quantitative study were presented in Chapter 3 and included research design, selection of participants, measurement, data collection procedures, data analysis, hypothesis testing, and limitations. Archival data from the spring 2018 and fall 2019 administration of the Panorama Education Social-Emotional Learning Measures, specific to eighth-grade students enrolled in four middle

schools, were used. A review of the validity and reliability of all measurements was also included. The results of the study are presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Results

Specific areas addressed on the Panorama Student Survey were utilized to examine if differences exist in the self perception of social emotional skills among different subgroups of eighth-grade students. The areas included social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety. Results from three subgroups of students were included; specifically, students receiving special education, English language learning services, and free and reduced meals. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample. Archival data from a District A database was used to test the hypotheses.

Descriptive Statistics

According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), descriptive statistics are the "mathematical procedures for organizing and summarizing numerical data" (p. 63). The sample in this study comprised students enrolled in Grade 8 during the 2018-2019 school year within District A. Table 7 displays the results of the descriptive analysis.

Table 7

Descriptive Analysis

Demographic Group	*N*	Percentage
Gender		
Male	848	51.5
Female	799	48.5
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian/Alaskan Native	8	0.5
Asian	51	3.1
Black or African-American	128	7.8
Hispanic	311	18.9
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	5	0.3
Two or more races	77	4.7
White	1,067	64.8
ELL Status		
No ELL	1,287	78.1
ELL	357	21.7
Missing Information	3	0.2
Socioeconomic Status		
No Free/Reduced Meals	1,270	77.1
Free/Reduced Meals	374	21.7
Missing Information	3	0.2
Special Education Status		
No Special Education	1,480	89.9
Special Education	167	10.1

Note. ELL = English language learner. Adapted from *District Overview* (director of assessment and research, personal communication, November 17, 2020.

Student groups for special education categories included autism, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, orthopedic impairment, other

health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, and traumatic brain injury. These categories were coded as "Special Education." Students not receiving Special Education or those receiving Gifted services were recorded in the "No Special Education category."

Hypothesis Testing

Results of hypothesis testing addressing the three research questions examined in the study are discussed in this section. Each of the research questions is followed by four hypotheses. The method for hypothesis testing and results are described below.

RQ1.

To what extent do eighth-grade student Panorama scores of social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety differ between students receiving special education and students not receiving special education.

H1. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of social awareness among students receiving special education and students not receiving special education.

Results of the independent-samples *t* test indicated no statistically significant difference between the two means, $t(1644) = 1.64$, $p = .102$. The mean of social awareness for students not receiving special education ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.60$, $n = 1480$) was not statistically different from the mean of social awareness for students receiving special education ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.69$, $n = 166$). H1 was not supported. The social awareness scores are the same between students receiving special education and students not receiving special education.

H2. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of grit among students receiving special education and students not receiving special education.

Results of the independent-samples *t* test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two means, $t(1643) = 2.32$, $p = .020$, $d = .19$. The mean of the grit scores for students not receiving special education ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.71$, $n = 1478$) was significantly higher than mean of the grit scores for students receiving special education ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.75$, $n = 167$). Thus, the research hypothesis was supported. Students receiving special education services had lower grit scores than those not receiving special education. Cohen's *d* indicated a small effect at .19, indicating the difference in the level of grit scores was slightly lower for special education students.

H3. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of emotional regulation among students receiving special education and students not receiving special education.

Results of the independent-samples *t* test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two means, $t(1644) = 2.15$, $p = .032$, $d = .18$. The mean of emotional regulation scores for students not receiving special education ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.79$, $n = 1480$) was significantly higher than the mean of emotional regulation scores for students receiving special education ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.84$, $n = 166$). Thus, the research hypothesis was supported. Students receiving special education services had lower emotional regulation scores than peers who did not receive special education. Cohen's *d* indicated a small effect at .18, representing the difference in the level of emotional regulation scores was slightly lower for special education students.

H4. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of coping with anxiety among students receiving special education and students not receiving special education.

Results of the independent-samples *t* test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two means, $t(197.11) = -2.27$, $p = .024$, $d = -.20$. The mean of the coping with anxiety scores for students not receiving special education ($M = 2\ .89$, $SD = 0.83$, $n = 1480$) was significantly lower than the mean of the coping with anxiety scores for students receiving special education ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 0.91$, $n = 166$). Thus, the research hypothesis four was supported. Students not receiving special education services had lower coping with anxiety scores than those receiving special education. Cohen's *d* indicated a small effect at -.20, indicating the difference in the level of coping with anxiety scores was slightly lower for students not receiving special education.

RQ2

To what extent do eighth-grade student Panorama scores of social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety differ between English language learners and students who are not English language learners?

H5. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of social awareness among English language learners and non-English language learners.

Results of the independent-samples *t* test indicated no statistically significant difference between the two means, $t(1641) = 0.63$, $p = .526$. The mean of social awareness scores for students not receiving English language learning services ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.62$, $n = 1286$) was not statistically different from the mean of social awareness scores for students receiving English language learning services ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.59$,

n = 357). H5 was not supported. The social awareness scores are the same between students receiving English language larning services and students not receiving English language learning services.

H6. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of grit among English language learners and non-English language learners.

Results of the independent-samples *t* test indicated no statistically significant difference between the two means, $t(1640) = 0.81$, $p = .417$. The mean of grit scores for students not receiving English language learning services ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.71$, $n = 1286$) was not statistically different from the mean of grit scores for students receiving English language learning services ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.73$, $n = 356$). H6 was not supported. The grit scores are the same between students receiving English language learning services and students not receiving English language learning services.

H7. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of emotional regulation among English language learners and non-English language learners.

Results of the independent-samples *t* test indicated no statistically significant difference between the two means, $t(1641) = 0.95$, $p = .342$. The mean of emotional regulation scores for students not receiving English language learning services ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.80$, $n = 1286$) was not statistically different from the mean of emotional regulation scores for students receiving English language learning services ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.82$, $n = 357$). H7 was not supported. The emotional regulation scores are the same between students receiving English language learning services and students not receiving English language learning services.

H8. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of coping with anxiety among English language learners and non-English language learners.

Results of the independent-samples *t* test indicated a statistically significant difference between the two means, $t(613.83) = -2.03$, $p = .043$, $d = -.12$. The mean of coping with anxiety scores for students not receiving English language learning services ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.85$, $n = 1286$) was significantly lower than the mean of coping with anxiety scores for students receiving English language learning services ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.78$, $n = 357$). Thus, the research hypothesis was supported. Students receiving English language learning services had higher coping with anxiety scores than those not receiving English language learning services. Cohen's *d* indicated a small effect at -.12, indicating the difference in the level of coping with anxiety scores were slightly higher for students receiving English language learning services.

RQ3

To what extent do eighth-grade student scores of Panorama scores of social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety differ between students receiving free and reduced meals and students not receiving free or reduced meals.

H9. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of social awareness among students receiving free and reduced meals and students not receiving free or reduced meals.

Results of the independent-samples *t* test indicated no statistically significant difference between the two means, $t(1641) = 1.53$, $p = .125$. The mean of social awareness scores for students not receiving free or reduced meals ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.61$,

n = 1270) was not statistically different from the mean of students receiving free or reduced meals (*M* = 3.64, *SD* = 0.62, *n* = 373). H9 was not supported. The social awareness scores are the same for students receiving free and reduced meals and students not receiving free and reduced meals.

H10. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of grit among students receiving free and reduced meals and students not receiving free or reduced meals.

Results of the independent-samples *t* test indicated no statistically significant difference between the two means, *t*(1640) = 1.57, *p* = .118. The mean of grit scores for students not receiving free and reduced meals (*M* = 3.57, *SD* = 0.71, *n* = 1268) was not statistically different from the mean of grit scores mean for students receiving free and reduced meals (*M* = 3.51, *SD* = 0.73, *n* = 374). H10 was not supported. The grit scores are the same between students receiving free and reduced meals and students not receiving free and reduced meals.

H11. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of emotional regulation among students receiving free and reduced meals and students not receiving free or reduced meals.

Results of the independent-samples *t* test indicated no statistically significant difference between the two means, *t*(1641) = 0.69, *p* = .488. The mean of emotional regulation for students not receiving free and reduced meals (*M* = 3.40, *SD* = 0.80, *n* = 1270) was not statistically different from the mean of emotional regulation scores for students receiving free and reduced meals (*M* = 3.37, *SD* = 0.81, *n* = 373). H11 was not

supported. The emotional regulation scores are the same between students receiving free and reduced meals and students not receiving free and reduced meals.

H12. A significant difference exists between eighth-grade student Panorama scores of coping with anxiety among students receiving free and reduced meals and students not receiving free or reduced meals.

Results of the independent-samples *t* test indicated no statistically significant difference between the two means, $t(1641) = -0.92$, $p = .356$. The mean of coping with anxiety scores for students not receiving free and reduced meals ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.85$, $n = 1270$) was not statistically different from the mean of coping with anxiety scores for students receiving free and reduced meals ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.79$, $n = 373$). H12 was not supported. The coping with anxiety scores are the same between students receiving free and reduced meals and students not receiving free and reduced meals.

Summary

Data analysis results were presented in Chapter 4. A summary of the descriptive statistics for the study sample and an explanation of hypothesis testing was provided for the three research questions. Differences in scores of grit, emotional regulation, and coping with anxiety were found between students receiving special education services and those not receiving special education services. More specifically, students receiving special education have significantly lower grit and emotional regulation scores but significantly higher coping with anxiety scores than students who did not receive special education. The effect size was small for all areas of difference. Scores of social awareness were the same between students receiving special education services and those not receiving special education services. Students who received English language

learning services were found to have significantly higher coping with anxiety scores than students not receiving English language learning services with a small effect size, but scores in self-awareness, grit, and emotional regulation were the same between the two groups of students. Scores of all four measured variables were the same between students who received free and reduced meals and those who did not receive free and reduced meals. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the study, findings related to the literature, and conclusions.

Chapter 5

Interpretation and Recommendations

Students who understand and use social and emotional skills effectively are more likely to demonstrate better academic skills and improved overall well-being than peers who have less SEL understanding and ability (Eisenberg, 2006; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998). Examples of differences in student performance in reading, math, and behavior are well-documented for students in identified subgroups (Eisenberg, 2006; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). SEL assessment and education have been proposed to address issues of equity and rigor within the educational system for historically underrepresented and underperforming student groups (Jagers et al., 2019). In 2001, Learning First Alliance noted that a key challenge for education would be to serve culturally diverse students who may demonstrate differing abilities and motivations for learning. Chapter 5 includes the study summary, findings related to the literature, and the conclusions.

Study Summary

Compared in this study were social emotional survey scores of students from subgroups of students receiving special education, English language learners, and those who received free or reduced meals with the scores of eighth-grade level peers. Student scores from four middle schools in a Midwestern public school system were utilized for the study. This section includes an overview of the problem, the purpose of the study and the research questions, a review of the methodology, and the major findings.

Overview of the Problem

SEL assessment and instruction in school have demonstrated improved academic and social skills for students of all ages (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). If the ability to apply SEL skills to daily school and work life are integral to academic and work success, data regarding the strengths and needs of historically underperforming subgroups compared with peers is needed to understand if differences exist. Students receiving special education services have demonstrated slightly impacted measures of SEL including social acceptance, friends, relationship quality, loneliness, depression, social skills, and problem behaviors when compared with peers (Wiener & Tardif, 2004). Children who live in poverty are more likely to have lower levels of literacy and language development (Allington et al., 2010), fewer material resources, lower levels of physical and mental health, and reduced levels of well-being and cognitive development (Begle, 2006; Ciaccio, 2000a, 2000b; Conrath, 1988, 2001; EvansWinter & Cowie, 2009). Access to educational equality remains an obstacle for many students, with Latinx and Black students being more likely to attend disadvantaged schools (Cauce et al., 2011). District A utilizes SEL survey results for a wide variety of purposes, including as a screener to identify individual students at risk, determine classroom and building targets for SEL instruction, and for District A data regarding SEL skill levels and areas for improvement as a part of their strategic plan.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine if differences exist in the self-perception of social emotional skills among different subgroups of eighth-grade students. The specific areas selected (i.e., social awareness, grit, emotional regulation, and coping

with anxiety) were chosen from a group of traits selected by district administrators. Results are made available to teachers, administrators, and district leaders to understand student needs and plan supports. More specifically, this study examined the differences of selected social emotional skill areas among students receiving special education services, English language learning services, and those receiving free and reduced meals.

Review of the Methodology

A quantitative quasi-experimental design was utilized to examine if significant differences existed between groups of students in the areas of social awareness, coping with anxiety, grit, and emotional regulation on a standardized measure of social emotional skills. The data included results from both fall 2018 and spring 2019 testing windows for the Panorama Social Emotional Skills Survey from a group of eighth-grade students. Three independent variables (IV) in the study were students' group status. The special education status had two categories—special education student and non-special education student; the English language learner status has two categories—English language learner and non-English language learner; and the free and reduced meal status also hadtwo categories—students receiving free and reduced meal and students not receiving free and reduced meals. The four dependent variables (DV) in the current study included social awareness, coping with anxiety, grit, and emotional regulation scores. An independent-samples *t* test was used to determine if significant differences existed between sub-groups of students and their peers for each of the four SEL skills assessed on the survey. When significant differences were found, Cohen's *d* was calculated to determine effect size.

Major Findings

Three research questions guided this study. The first research question was assessed by testing scores of social awareness, grit, self-regulation, and coping with anxiety between groups of students who received special education and students who did not receive special education services. Results indicated that students receiving special education services had statistically significant differences revealing lower self-perceptions of grit and emotional regulation, while their coping with anxiety scores were higher when compared with peers. The effect size for all three of these areas was small. There were no differences found for social awareness.

The second research question was assessed by testing scores of social awareness, grit, self-regulation, and coping with anxiety between groups of students who received English language learning services and students who did not receive English language learning services. Results indicated that students receiving English language learning services scored themselves higher in coping with anxiety when compared with peers. The effect size was small. There were no differences found for grit, self-regulation, and social awareness.

The third research question was assessed by testing the scores of social awareness, grit, self-regulation, and coping with anxiety between groups of students who received free or reduced meals and students who did not receive free or reduced meals. Student responses in the survey did not differ from their peers. There were no differences found between students who received free or reduced meals and those who did not receive free or reduced meals.

Findings Related to the Literature

This section examines the study's findings related to the literature. While articles about SEL are frequently found in educational literature, they are often related to academic achievement or are philosophical in nature. The relationship between social emotional learning and academic achievement became more evident in the literature beginning in 2015. Few studies examined the relationship between SEL and student subgroups.

The findings of the current study indicated students receiving special education services rated their skills in the areas of grit and emotional regulation as slightly lower than their peers. These results support the findings of the CORE (2016) districts study in which students with disabilities were found to have lower scores in the areas of growth mindset, self-efficacy, self-management, and social awareness than their peers. In a study of students with learning disabilities in four different special education settings, results indicated placement slightly impacted measures of social emotional skills, including social acceptance, friends, relationship quality, loneliness, depression, social skills, and problem behaviors (Wiener & Tardif, 2004). The results of the present study support the findings of Wiener and Tardif. However, Usher et al. (2019) did not find differences in the correlations of assessment scores for students in special education for grit and self-efficacy, which does not correspond to the results in the current study.

In the current study, no differences were found in the scores of students receiving free or reduced meals compared to peers. This finding compares favorably with results obtained by Usher et al. (2019). The authors examined the relationship between academic achievement and survey scores of grit, self-efficacy, and relationships and found positive

correlations between higher grit and self-efficacy scores when compared with achievement. However, they also found that students who were older and students who were categorized as having a lower SES demonstrated lower grit and self-efficacy scores which was not found in the current study.

Conclusions

This section provides conclusions drawn from the current study on the relationship between subgroups of students and their self-rated perceptions of social emotional skills as measured by the Panorama Student Survey. Included in this section are the implications for action and recommendations for further research. The final section ends with the concluding remarks.

Implications for Action

Based on the results of the study, District A, as well as other districts, could consider actions in several areas. This study suggests that eighth-grade students receiving special education services may perceive their SEL skills of grit and emotional regulation to be less robust than their peers. Information regarding perceived or actual deficits in those areas could be available to special education providers who could incorporate instruction and reinforcement of those skills into their instruction or therapies. Additionally, this study's results indicated that students who receive special education and English language learning services perceive their abilities to cope with anxiety better than their peers. Teachers and counselors may benefit from professional development

and training to understand and identify student SEL needs, as well as to incorporate SEL learning targets through specific lessons and incidental learning opportunities.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to investigate the differences between social emotional survey scores of students within subgroups and the scores of their peers. Future research could focus on various grade levels, including other middle, elementary, and high school grades. The examination of different social emotional constructs, school climate, and relationships within the school environment could also be investigated. Students in special education, English language learners, and peers could be surveyed or interviewed to obtain more information about their perceptions of academic and SEL competency and their perceptions of the items on the coping with anxiety scale.

Another area for future research would be to compare scores from groups of students over time to determine if changes occur in the development of student perceptions of social emotional competence. A longitudinal study could determine if skills improved over time with either indirect or direct, universal, or targeted instruction.

Further, studies utilizing groups of students from additional school districts, either from the same or different geographic areas, could provide information on a larger group of students with different backgrounds and increased diversity. Results from District A could be compared with results from other districts to investigate the impact of SEL programming or a lack of SEL instruction.

Concluding Remarks

As educators seek to find ways to help students achieve academically, socially, and equitably in an increasingly sophisticated and complex world, appropriate

assessment, instruction, and support of SEL skills may provide educators and students with opportunities for growth and development. While most educators would agree that instruction and support in the areas of SEL are beneficial to students, more studies are needed in the areas of assessment and effectiveness to provide information that educators can use to make decisions regarding instructional content and practices, SEL programming, and building and community supports. Questions remain regarding the efficacy of assessment and instruction, student developmental levels, teacher interest and competency in teaching SEL, and definition and selection of the many different constructs that constitute SEL.

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Appendices

Appendix A: District A IRB Approval

December 17, 2021
Dear Kristin:

I am pleased to inform you that your request to do research in the [redacted] School District concerning the potential similarities/differences of self-reported scores of eighth-graders on Panorama SEL) has been **approved**. We do have a copy of your application and your approved IRB form.

In any of your work, please do not make any reference to the [redacted] or any specific school. Please reference [redacted] as a "large suburban district in the mid-west" or a school as a "suburban school in the state of Kansas"– or some other reference name of your choice, but do not use the [redacted] name or any school names. Additionally, please do not use any student or staff identifying information.

Your study is of interest to the [redacted] and I look forward to reviewing your results when you have completed your work. Please forward a copy of your dissertation when it is complete.

Good luck with your research!

Sincerely,

[redacted]
Director of Curriculum and Assessment
rwilsonirc@olatheschools.org
[redacted]

Appendix B:

Baker University Institutional Review Board

December 9th, 2021

Dear Kristin Easley and Jim Robins,

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your project application and approved this project under Exempt Status Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Please be aware of the following:

1. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
2. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents of the research activity.
4. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.
5. If the results of the research are used to prepare papers for publication or oral presentation at professional conferences, manuscripts or abstracts are requested for IRB as part of the project record.
6. If this project is not completed within a year, you must renew IRB approval.

If you have any questions, please contact me at npoell@bakeru.edu or 785.594.4582.

Sincerely,

Nathan Poell, MLS
Chair, Baker University IRB

Baker University IRB Committee
Sara Crump, PhD
Nick Harris, MS
Christa Hughes, PhD
Susan Rogers, PhD