

WHAT DO SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING RESULTS MEAN FROM A  
TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE?

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to give more meaning to SEL survey scores from a teacher's perspective. SEL programs rely on assessing students' social and emotional competences using self-evaluation. However, self-evaluations may be inaccurate and misleading. When individuals rate themselves regarding their own behavior, participants may answer falsely on a rating scale. The research question of this paper is what do SEL post survey scores mean from a teacher's perspective? Fifteen middle school students were selected. Thirty teacher surveys and 29 teacher interviews were completed in order to gather contextual information and background knowledge regarding the students' SEL competencies. Several common themes emerged through teacher interviews. Students who improved their posttest survey scores after the implementation of the SEL intervention were described as perfectionist, they internalized their emotions, had low confidence, and had supportive parents. Students who remained constant before and after the SEL intervention demonstrated low confidence. Students who regressed following the SEL intervention demonstrated either high or low confidence and also lacked parent support.

*Keywords:* Social and Emotional learning, SEL, parent support, self-evaluation

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Disconnected family units, schedules packed with extracurricular activities, all mixed together with a large dose of technology is only a recipe for disengaged, stressed, and lonely adolescent children, which should be a cause for concern. Recent research has indicated that 60% of students have become severely disengaged from school, and even worse 30% of high school students are involved in several risk behaviors, such as substances abuse, violence, sexual activity, and attempted suicide (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger, 2011) Yet for the past decade academic skills remain the only measure of success for our educational system.

Disengaged students are not an issue that appeared overnight. Over the years, as a nation, we have always felt pressure in the educational arena to compete with other countries. The fear of losing the title as the most powerful country, drives many of our educational policies. This was the example in 1957 and Sputnik. The space race to the moon caused the society to panicked and pressed for more academic rigor (Suskind 2012). Again in 1983 in fear of our global competitors, the National Commission of Excellence in Education, shared its publication “A Nation at Risk.” (Gill and Schlossman 2003) which described why America was losing in our global competition. So again, academic rigor was the focus in school.

No Child Left Behind Act became the next attempt in educational reform (Zins 2004). When written on paper, it looked encouraging regarding academic excellence for all students. But in reality, it forced teachers and students to narrow their curriculum focus solely on academic achievement. Obsessed with high stakes testing caused our educational system to neglect teaching to the “whole child” since students, teachers, and administrators were punished

when test scores on standardized test did not meet an acceptable standard (Durlak 2015) (Zins 2004).

Nationwide, school districts determine the majority of their success on students' academic achievement, with state assessments as the main focus. Yet less than half of the 148,000 secondary students who completed a national survey regarding their academic success, felt they were successful in social skills such as decision making, empathy and conflict resolution. Only 29% of those students completing the survey thought their schools provided a caring, encouraging environment (Durlak, 2015). In addition, the National Center for Educational Statistics (2002) identified some of the major reasons for dropping out directly dealt with social and emotional aspects. The NCES found that 35% struggled with getting along with their peers, and 23% had difficulties of feeling left out and not belonging. Over half of the students who gave up on the educational system, indicated it was not due to the academic aspect. This is astounding considering society considers academic achievement as the ultimate goal of educational success. The main reasons students cited for dropping out of school was because they lacked the social and emotional competences. Students need to be explicitly taught how to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, as well as building positive relationships with others; all aspect of Social and Emotional Learning (Zins 2004).

In 1990, the intelligence quotient or IQ was the standard of success in life. Without question it was accepted that the higher the IQ, the better chance was that one would succeed in life. Yet in 1995, five years later, Daniel Goldman, first introduced a new way to measure life's success, called Emotional Intelligence, the title of his new book. Goldman asserted that emotions make you smart. Simply put, by recognizing your emotions as well as others, you can manage

your life and in turn become successful. Adding support to Goldman's theories occurred when Mark Greenburg of Pennsylvania State University, produced the first empirical data report assessing the results of a social and emotional learning school program. Data indicated that student achievement increased and students also improved their attention and working memory. These are both key functions of the prefrontal cortex, an area of the brain which changes with repeated experience. This was one the first major studies to show that the brain can learn new behaviors, that were once believed as merely personality traits (Zins and Elias 2007). As more students continue to struggle in school, school districts are beginning to realize that social and emotional learning must be addressed.

### **Overview SEL**

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process of managing and recognizing emotions, as well as learning how to solve problems effectively. SEL assist students effectively apply the knowledge to develop empathy, establish positive relationships, and to successfully handling challenging situations. Just as students learn traditional academic content, SEL skills are also explicitly taught, practiced, and applied. Over times these skills are refined and enhanced (Zins and Elias 2007).

### **Problem Statement**

With suicide rates increasing in a large suburban school district, the leaders began looking for answers. Teaching and assessing social and emotional competencies provides empirical data regarding improving students' connectedness and engagement at school, and in

turn increasing student achievement (Zins 2004). Regardless of the time commitment, neglecting other course resources, and the cost of social and emotional programs, school districts are beginning to realize the value and importance of the SEL. In order for students to be successful in school, as well as life, social and emotional learning skills must be incorporated into the educational curriculum.

The question still remains with SEL post survey scores, what do they actually mean? When student evaluate themselves, using surveys which can be misleading (Wood 1989), it is difficult to determine social and emotional intervention programs effectiveness. Also, causal relationships between the intervention program and the post survey scores without input from others are weak, (Maxwell 2004). Finally, to give more meaning to SEL post survey scores, teacher input is vital to understand the context of the score and to discover common themes. The context of this study is in a large Midwestern suburban middle school. Student self-evaluations were compared to the teacher survey regarding student SEL behaviors. In addition, teacher interviews were conducted regarding student classroom behaviors.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to give more meaning to SEL survey scores from a teacher's perspective. SEL programs rely on assessing students' social and emotional competences using self-evaluation. However, self-evaluations may be inaccurate and misleading. When individuals rate themselves regarding their own behavior, participants may answer falsely on a rating scale. This could be explained by several reasons: the social comparison theory (Wood 1989), socially

desirable responding (Crowne and Marlowe 1960), or core self- evaluation (Bono and Judge 2003). These are three major reasons why evaluating student behaviors with self-evaluation is not valid method.

A true method of evaluation would be to measure changes in the brain. Neuroscientific studies have discovered the brain plays a more vital role in social and emotional learning than once thought (Durlak 2015). Scientists know that each area of the brain, develops at specific points in childhood development (Goleman 2006). Children can be taught skills once thought as merely the “personality” of a child, such as dealing with emotions. The frontal lobe, which is responsible for a major part of emotional decision making, isn’t fully developed until the age of 14 for some teenagers, and could be as late as 18. This only supports that with proper emotional literacy development, the brain can easily be molded and shaped since it has not reached maturity (Goleman 2006).

The brain also deals with the self-regulation of emotion. The limbic system is a neurobiological system switchboard. When one impulse signals a connection, another connection is affected as well. The entire system overlaps another aspect of the larger neurological system. These impacts are lined up along a continuum from controlled to automatic. Therefore, depending on the experience, emotional connection in the brain will react accordingly (Durlak 2015). Furthermore, scientists have rewired the emotional regulation of the brain by using psychotherapy. Giving the brain more positive experiences in particular situations can lead the controlled system of the brain to self-regulate the automatic reaction. With psychotherapy, there can be significant improvements in the frontal lobe of the brain (Goleman 2006) reiterating that

emotional competences can be taught through experiences and more importantly, changes in emotional behaviors can be measured in the brain.

Another purpose for seeking a teacher's perspectives regarding SEL post survey scores are to form stronger causal relationships between the implemented SEL lessons and the post SEL student survey. According to the National Research Council's Scientific Research in Education Report, the strongest evidence for causation occurs in experiments, when the independent variable is manipulated and measure the effects on the dependent variable (Maxwell 2004). In SEL intervention programs, quantitative methods are used, however, without more information regarding the students' post SEL survey score; the scores are merely numbers. The outcome to an event also depends on the context as well as the process (Maxwell 2004). Therefore, the effect, or the SEL post survey scores, rely not only to independent variables, such as the scripted lessons, but the context of where the events occurs (Maxwell 2004).

Another purpose for this study is gather input and to gain insight through other sources. Because SEL programs use student self-evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the SEL intervention program, the survey scores may be misleading or students may report false information (Wood 1989). Researchers suggest measuring school wide SEL implementation programs through several different sources (Durlak 2017). CASEL, The Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, suggests that students, teachers, and even parents should provide input for effectiveness (Durlak 2017). By collecting teachers' perspectives

regarding student observations in the classroom, SEL post survey scores will have more meaning and allow teachers to address student needs better.

Seeing more students become disengaged learners, a large suburban district has selected a school wide social and emotional learning curriculum called Second Step®. This program has different lessons for each grade level and addresses all five competences promoted by Collaborative for Academics, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the nation's leading organization supporting the importance of SEL in public education curriculum. Second Step® addresses self-management, self-awareness, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness. By explicitly teaching the 5 social-emotional competences, Second Step® is designed to improve student's academic achievement and decrease problem behaviors (Children 2017).

The district used the survey created by Panorama Education. In the Panorama Student Survey, students were asked 34 questions over the 5 major social and emotional competences, grit, self-efficacy, social-awareness, emotional regulation, and classroom effort (Panorama 2017). The same test was given as a pre and posttest.

After analyzing the Panorama Survey student results of the large suburban middle school, a student sample was selected which represented the larger population of the middle school. Out of 15 students, I have nine (8) males, seven (7) females. Ten students are Caucasian; three (3) Hispanic, one (1) African American, and one (1) Asian student. Each of these 15 students had 2 teachers take the Panorama Survey about the student in their academic environment. Teacher interviews were conducted in order to obtain more information regarding the teacher's opinions

of the effectiveness of the SEL intervention. These results were analyzed to answer the research questions.

Because self-reporting surveys can be misleading (Wood 1989), causation between the program implementation and the student post survey results are weak (Maxwell 2004) and SEL survey results need additional input to give meaning the post survey scores (Durlak 2015), the research question is: What do SEL post survey scores mean from a teacher's perspective?

Through the research process data will also be collected and analyzed to answer the following sub questions: 1) What are the common themes of students who improved after the implemented the SEL intervention? 2) What are the common themes of students who remained constant before and after the SEL intervention program? 3) What are the common themes of students who regressed after the SEL intervention? 4) What are the common themes of students who scored themselves higher on the post SEL survey than their teacher did?

## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

### Overview

This study critically reviews student Social and Emotional Learning post survey scores in regards to the teachers' perceptions based on their observations in the classroom. Both pre and post survey scores were taken from students from a large Midwestern suburban district. Students participated in the social and emotional learning program called Second Step®. Even though there are numerous programs which address specific adolescent risk behaviors, Second Step® focuses on teaching all students' social and emotional competences rather than targeting a specific set of students. Second Step® is a school wide intervention program developed to help students become more successful in managing their social and emotional behaviors.

Social and emotional learning research is not only limited, but the research which has been conducted focused on academic outcomes and less attention was placed on actual student behaviors (Durlak 2015), (Zins 2004). Students first take a pre SEL survey. Then students participate weekly in SEL lessons. At the conclusion of the program, students take a post SEL student survey. Both surveys are self-evaluations from the students' perspective. Essentially students are evaluating themselves without feedback or input from others (Durlak 2015). Some students believed that they improved in their SEL competences by recording a higher score of the SEL post survey. Some students believed that they were unaffected by the program and their scores remained the same when comparing their pre and post SEL survey scores. Some students believed that their social and emotional skills regressed after participating in the in the interventions program according to their pre and post test scores but what do these post survey actually mean?

Each of these areas are important to examine, but is it also important to identify characteristics of improved SEL competencies. A student who can more successfully maneuver social and emotional skills easier than a previous attempt, would describe improvement. However, this is difficult because SEL improvement can look different depending on many different situations. For example, a student may push through a difficult problem. Or a student could successfully complete a project with a peer group. Improvement can even be when a student is able to acknowledge a person's point of view that is different from their own. If a student can perform any of these task easier that previous attempts, this is considered improved SEL. The focus of this research is to explore one of the main methods of measuring improved SEL competences, which is through student self-evaluation as well as seeking input from teachers in order to give more meaning to the SEL post student scores.

Since SEL surveys rely heavily on self-evaluation, it is important to seek input from teachers in order to give more meaning to the students' post SEL survey scores (Durlak 2015), By having teachers evaluate student behaviors in class as well as interviewing teachers, the SEL post scores have more meaning as well as understanding why students' self-evaluation and teachers' direct observations don't align.

Many problems arise when evaluating students' social and emotional competences. Since social and emotional learning programs are becoming more common, how do we know that they are making a difference? The first problem with evaluating students' social and emotional skills is that they are evaluating themselves (Crowne and Marlowe 1960), (Van de Mortel 2008), (Wood 1989). Students are only using their own perspective in regards to their knowledge of the

SEL competencies (Durlak 2015). This can lead to false and misleading survey results (Van de Mortel 2008).

The second problem is the lack of causal relationship between the SEL post survey score and the SEL program lessons (Maxwell 2004). Making inferences that the SEL post survey results were caused by implementing the SEL lessons is weak. There could be many other factors which could affect the SEL post survey score (Maxwell 2004) (Durlak 2015).

Finally, the third problem with SEL post survey results is the lack of seeking another point of view (Durlak 2015). Teachers observe students in classrooms when dealing with various types social and emotional behaviors. Teachers should be involved in order to give more meaning to the survey score. The “gold standard” of assessment when dealing with behavior is direct observation (Durlak 2015). Yet, this SEL program does not rely on outside observations, therefore it relies solely on the student self-evaluation.

### **Misleading Self-Evaluations**

The first issue significant to this study addresses self- evaluation. In studies dealing with behaviors, rating scale and inventories are used most often. Rating scales can be used numerous times with large numbers of subjects. They are simply a summary of certain types of characteristics regarding previously observed behavior (Durlak 2015).

However, rating scales can be misleading as well. When people rate themselves regarding their own behavior, they tend to be present a more positive image of themselves, this is referred to as socially desirable responding (SDR) (Van de Mortel 2008). There are several reasons why a participant may want to present false image. Some reasons a participant may want to “fake

good” to adhere closely to socially acceptable norms, could be to gain social acceptance, or to avoid criticism. On the other hand, the participant may actually believe the information they report is accurate, suffering from self-deception (Crowne and Marlowe 1960).

Social desirability (SD) scales can be used to detect, minimize, and correct for SDR in order to improve the validity of questionnaire based research. However, in a study with over 14,275 studies, only 31 questionnaires used social desirability scales. Moreover, out of the 31 questionnaires that used a social desirability scale, 43% or almost half discovered that social desirability responses influenced their results (Van de Mortel 2008). First this demonstrates that most studies do not conduct analysis using social desirability scales and moreover, those who do, discovered that almost half were influenced by biased self-reporting. Reiterating that SEL programs cannot rely solely on students’ responses only of self-evaluation. They are potentially allowing half of their data to be skewed by inaccurate self-reporting.

Another reason why participants might answer falsely on a rating scale, could be explained by the social comparison theory, first constructed by Festinger (1954). Social comparison theory states that people have a desire to evaluate their own capabilities and limitations. People need to evaluate their own opinions and abilities in comparison to other people. Festinger believed that people can fill this desire by measuring their attributes against social standards (Wood 1989). In one aspect this is a desirable attribute because people are willing to partake in a rating scale or survey, if they will be able to see how their results compare to others. However, if participants are self-evaluating their behavior and are aware of how other people behave, this could compromise the validity of the assessment. Participants could have

compared their own behaviors to those observed by others, and they might alter their answers in order to assimilate or to even stand out.

Another aspect that influences the validity of social and emotional effectiveness, refers to the concept called core evaluations (Bono and Judge 2003). Core evaluations are essential appraisals that individuals believe about themselves, others, and the world. More importantly, core evaluations impact people's appraisal subconsciously. Naturally, people have core evaluations in different domains, such as evaluation of others or society. However, early research discovered that core self-evaluations carry the most influence in the validity of assessments (Bono and Judge 2003). For example, in specific situations in which individuals are asked for genuine feedback regarding their behavior, subconsciously these evaluations are influenced by those deeper, hidden, thoughts. Moreover, this reiterates that if individuals are expected to self-evaluate their behavior on a rating scale, the theory based on self-core-evaluation will influence the reliability and validity of the assessment.

If self-evaluation isn't reliable, then why does it matter to have students evaluate themselves? According to John Hattie, the author of *Visible Learning*, self-reporting or evaluation is the most influential activity a student can do to improve student achievement. Hattie synthesized 800 meta-analyses related to student achievement and self-reporting has the largest impact with an average increase of 1.44 standard deviations unit above those students who didn't use self-evaluation regarding their academic achievement (Hattie 2008). Hattie suggests using self-reporting is a valuable tool when impacting academic achievement, therefore accurate self-evaluation should also impact student behaviors. However, because behaviors are more difficult to measure critics would argue that a triangulation of

measure would be the best method of measuring social and emotional competences since changes in behaviors are best observed by others (Durlak 2015). Therefore, teachers should be involved in the SEL evaluation in order to give more meaning to the SEL post survey score.

## **Causation**

The second issue significant to this study addresses causation. For the purpose of this study the meaning of causation (also referred to as 'causality', or cause and effect') is the influence that connects one process (the cause) with another (the effect). David Hume, the 18th century philosopher, was one of the first to develop the analysis of causality, which later formed the standard concept of causality. Hume's idea stated that we cannot directly determine the meaning of causal relationships (Maxwell 2004). Hume further explained that we can only explain causation through repeated observations. Single cases do not confirm causation. According to the National Research Council's Scientific Research in Education Report, the strongest evidence for causation occurs in experiments, when the independent variable is manipulated and measure the effects on the dependent variable. Experimental methods are the "gold standard" for causal investigations. In SEL intervention programs, quantitative methods are used, however, without more information regarding the students' post SEL survey score; the scores are merely numbers. According to Maxwell, the outcome to an event depends on the context as well as the process. Therefore, the effect, or the SEL post survey scores, rely on independent variables, such as the scripted lessons, but also the context of where the events occurs (Maxwell 2004). In this study, the context consists of not only the classroom, but also the areas that can influence the SEL behaviors such as home life. The independent

variables can differ considerably, which means causal relationships are weak. However, qualitative measures such as teacher interviews can give more meaning by investigating the students' context outside of the school day, as well as provide stronger causation through repeated themes.

### **Teacher Input**

The third problem the current SEL study deals with was the lack of teacher input regarding the post SEL survey scores. The SEL program uses self-evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the SEL intervention program. However, since survey scores may be misleading, researchers suggested measuring school wide SEL implementation programs through several different sources (Durlak 2015). Suggested areas to evaluate regarding effectiveness are school records, which record behavior referrals and academic success. Moreover, CASEL, The Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, suggests that students, teachers, and parents should provide input for effectiveness (Durlak 2015). In order to better understand the self-evaluation post SEL survey scores, teacher input through interviews is necessary.

### **SEL Emerges**

Recently Social and Emotional Learning has become more popular in education. With disconnected family units, schedules packed with extracurricular activities, all mixed together with a large dose of technology is only a recipe for disengaged, stressed, and lonely adolescent children, which should be a cause for concern. Recent research has discovered that 60% of students have become severely disengaged from school, and even worse, 30% of high school

students are involved in several risk behaviors, such as substances abuse, violence, sexual activity, and attempted suicide (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger, 2011) Yet, for the past decade academic skills remain the only measure of success for our educational system.

Disengaged students are not an issue that appeared overnight. Over the years, as a nation, we have always felt pressure in the educational arena to compete with other countries. The fear of losing the title as the most powerful country, drives many of our educational policies. This was the example in 1957 and Sputnik. The space race to the moon caused the American society to panic and press for more academic rigor (Suskind 2012). Again in 1983 in fear of our global competitors, the National Commission of Excellence in Education, shared its publication “A Nation at Risk” (Gill and Schlossman 2003), which described why America was losing in our global competition. So again, academic rigor was the focus in schools.

No Child Left Behind Act became the next attempt in educational reform. When written on paper, it looked encouraging regarding academic excellence for all students. But in reality, it has forced teachers and student to narrow curriculum to focus solely on academic achievement. Obsessed with high stakes testing caused our educational system to neglect teaching to the “whole child” since students, teacher, and administrators have been punished when test scores on standardized test have not met acceptable standards (Durlak 2015) (Zins 2004).

Research has focused on academic performance, rather than behavior influences. When 148,000 secondary students responded to a national survey, less than half felt they were successful in social skills such as decision making, empathy and conflict resolution. Only 29% of students thought their schools provided a caring, encouraging environment (Durlak,

2015). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2002) some of the major reasons for dropping out directly dealt with social and emotional aspects. In this report 35% dropouts reported they struggled with getting along with their peers, 23% had difficulties of feeling left out and not belonging. Over half of the students who gave up on the educational system, did not indicate it was due to the academic aspect. It was because they lacked the social and emotional competences. If it is difficult to stay in school, it is obviously difficult to focus on improving academic achievement (Zins 2004).

Moreover, recent research has discovered that a big push for academic rigor and achievement, may not have such a big impact on the success of students, as once believed. Studies have shown that the relationship between early educational achievement success have a relatively small effect on adult wages. Furthermore, success in skills such as executive functions and social and emotional competences explain more of the wage variance than academic achievement (Durlak 2015). This indicates that students who are more competent in social and emotional skills are more successful than those students who are simply just smart. Explicitly teaching and measuring students' social skills and emotional competences are no longer just "nice" addition to the curriculum, but an expectation and necessary component to public education. SEL is the missing piece to the success (Elias 1997).

### **Social and Emotional Learning**

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in its simplest form are the ways in which people manage and recognize their emotions, as well as solving problems effectively and establishing effective relationships (Zins 2004).

In 1994, the Collaborative for the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), noticed a need for social and emotional education. CASEL was founded to support schools and families to raise responsible and caring young people to be productive citizens in society. CASEL focuses on increasing awareness in the educational arena, but also the scientific community and the policymakers responsible for curriculum. CASEL wants to share the need for social and emotional, as well as the effects of SEL of children and adolescents. More importantly, CASEL's goals are to facilitate the implementation, the formative evaluation, and the systematic comprehensive social and emotional education programs beginning in pre-school continuing through high school. Through research, CASEL seeks theoretically based and scientifically sound social and emotional learning strategies and program design (Elias 1997).

According to CASEL, there are five key components that should be addressed. First, CASEL promotes self-awareness. Self-awareness is the understanding of our emotions in the moment, and having a realistic evaluation of our abilities, as well as understanding one's personal goals and values (Durlak 2015). The second focus is social awareness. Social awareness is having empathy or understanding others' perspective and emotions, as well as appreciating and interacting with other people from diverse populations. Social norms for behavior are also part of social awareness. The third, CASEL focus is on responsible decision making. Responsible decision making is using knowledge, skills, and attitudes to accurately assess consequences and risks which are involved with a course of action, respecting others, and accepting ownership of decisions. The fourth focus self-management skills are considered a key component in SEL. Self-management skills are persevering through difficult challenges, delay gratification while working on a goal, and regulating emotions in order to better manage a

situation. The last area of focus CASEL stresses is relationship skills. Relationship skills consist of establishing and maintaining positive relationships, as well as regulating emotions regarding relationships. Recognizing social norms resisting negative peer pressure, and negotiating solutions regarding conflicts are all aspects of fostering healthy relationships (Durlak 2015) (Zins 2004) (Ragozzino, Resnik et al. 2003).

SEL also provides students with short term outcomes and long term outcomes. When social and emotional learning is at the center of classroom and curriculum instruction, in a positive school climate, with family and community support, students reap benefits, both long and short term. Short term outcomes are positive attitudes toward their self and others, as well as positive social behaviors and relationships. Not only is academic performance improved but so is student conduct. Long term student outcomes consist of graduating high school and students becoming college and career ready. Moreover, students have reduced criminal behavior and become more engaged citizens (Durlak 2015).

**Social Learning.** Social and emotional learning has 2 large set of subskills, social skills and emotional competences. However, since the brain is a system of overlapping skill subsets, social and emotional skills intertwine making it even more difficult to assess students' progress. One key skill in social learning is called social information processing (Durlak 2015). Social information processing is the understanding the brain's ability to interpret, respond, and evaluate social interactions. This makes social informational processing a critical skill which must be examined in order to fully assess the impact of SEL interventions.

Social informational processing is vital not only in an academic setting, but also in a real world setting. Social informational processing is a complicated skill that most individuals can

execute without thinking (Dodge, Pettit et al. 1986). However, because emotions are tangled in all aspects of life, it's difficult to separate them even from our social arena (Elias 1997). It is beneficial to break down the process in order to understand and guide individual's to more social norm responses into its specific steps. By understanding the steps in the process, the area of need can be identified.

First, a person must be able to read the social cues given and then be able to mentally interpret and decode the meaning. Next, an individual must decide how to respond to the social cue according to the perceived meaning. Then the child evaluates the consequences to each of his behavior choices and finally after what behavior is chose, social behavior occurs. (Dodge, Pettit et al. 1986) This is a complex process which usually happens automatically. If one area of this process does not happen in the accordance to social norms, this can create a social problem or difficulty. For example, there are people who are very intelligent but make poor choices with their social lives because they fail to interpret the indented social cue. In turn, they make poor decisions because they incorrectly displayed the social norm, or they misinterpreted someone else's social cue. (Zins 2004).

In a real situation these skills happen very quickly and without conscious thought. This means explicitly teaching social competences is very difficult because they are measured and evaluated only in the particular situation which tends to be an artificial environment (Dodge, Pettit et al. 1986).

**Emotional Learning.** The second aspect of social and emotional learning is the emotional aspects. Centuries ago emotions were viewed as a disorganized thought that interrupted the brain thought processes (Salovey and Mayer 1990). When viewed from this

perspective, this clearly demonstrates why emotional competences are difficult to assess accurately. Scientists also know that any type of learning is a whole person experience, therefore learning requires many overlapping body systems to blend together for true learning to happen (Durlak 2015).

Currently, scientists state that emotions are responsible for motivating actions. Emotions dictate our everyday actions and allow us to make decisions based on feelings rather than logical pros and cons. (Zins 2004). This demonstrates even more why regulation of emotions is vital to positive life experiences.

Viewed as the motivators for human actions, emotions encroach into many subsections of the brain such as psychological, physiological, cognitive, motivational, and experiential (Salovey and Mayer 1990). Tangling even further the challenge in assessing student development of emotional competences. Emotions occur due to an internal or external event, which can be tied to either a positive or negative meaning for the person (Salovey and Mayer 1990). Emotions are powerful and influence a person's' actions, reasoning or logical thinking. This sparked Peter Salovey and John Mayer interest in emotions and they developed a theory that regulating emotions is an intelligence, a subset of social intelligence. They described emotional intelligence as the ability to monitor personal and others' feelings and emotions in order to interpret them and use the information gathered to guide personal thoughts and actions (Salovey and Mayer 1990).

## **Second Step®**

The district selected a school wide comprehensive, research based program called Second Step®. The district has currently been using the Second Step® in the elementary schools, but the

middle school program was just released in 2016. This program has different lessons for each grade level and addresses all 5 competences promoted by CASEL, the nation's leading organization supporting the importance of SEL in public education curriculum. Second Step addresses self-management, self-awareness, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness. By explicitly teaching the five social-emotional competences, Second Step is designed to improve student's academic achievement and decrease problem behaviors (Second Step 2017).

### **Program Implementation**

Empirical limitation research in SEL has been inadequate, and most of the studies that do exist, address programs embedded into the academic school day, rather than in study hall (Durlak, Weissberg et al. 2011). Programing should be carried out in a systematically and comprehensive manner (Ragozzino, Resnik et al. 2003). These lessons should be infused into the regular academic curriculum, in order for the SEL skills to be coordinated and reinforce one another (Zins 2004). Moreover, schools should not be viewed as a mechanism separate from society, but rather a community in itself. Successful school reforms address the needs of the learner in an authentic setting (Zins 2004). However, due to the lack of time and scheduling constraints many secondary schools, accommodate the SEL interventions into a study hall or otherwise, free time for students. Lack of focus and attention to details tend to make SEL instruction to be perceived as less important than other areas and therefore becoming less effective. (Elias 1997).

Moreover, these skills are not addressed across other curriculums or extracurricular activities making it difficult to generalize and maintain new skills. When a new SEL program is implemented, intended outcomes should be established for the school community. The program should then establish elements and components which will meet those goals. School wide programs are less effective when introduced as add-on activities, rather than an integrated component of the curriculum (Zins 1997).

Through research CASEL has discovered several ways in which SEL programs can positively impact academic achievement in grades P-12. First, students should apply SEL skills into their own personal lives (Ragozzino, Resnik et al. 2003). For instance, a student could think of academic behavior needs to be improved such as active listening. The student could then develop an “If, then” statement. “If I sit up and focus during class, then I will get better grades.” The student could anticipate challenges which may arise, such as not liking writing class and then identify ways to overcome those difficulties. Next, students could apply SEL directly to academic content, such as in a character in a novel or a group of people in history (Ragozzino, Resnik et al. 2003). Finally, teachers should use teaching and learning strategies that encourage social and emotional competences and academic learning (Ragozzino, Resnik et al. 2003). Using cooperative learning groups, peer tutoring, and establishing a respectful classroom environment will improve academic performance.

Most society agrees that children should be taught aspects of SEL and many view social and emotional learning as a component that enhances children’s health, safety, and citizenship. However, programs such as drug prevention, anti-bullying, and service learning projects are viewed as an added bonus rather than a core subject (Zins 2004).

## Changes in the Brain

With concerns about curriculum and schedule constraints, as well as ensuring the program is being implemented correctly for validity purposes, how do school districts know if SEL is benefiting students? School districts are hesitant to devote educational instructional time to activities that they cannot predict a clear benefit towards academic progress (Zins, Bloodworth et al. 2007). Furthermore, self-evaluations of students are unreliable ((Van de Mortel 2008).and lack strong causal relationships in measuring change in social and emotional behaviors (Maxwell 2004) which only leaves direct observations (Durlak 2015) Therefore in order to measure true behavioral change, one must examine the brain as well.

One could argue that social and emotional tendencies are specific to an individual, and a person's personality and emotional state are determined by genetics. Therefore, stating that a person is merely born with the skills for regulating their emotions and is not learned behaviors. This is partly true, however neuroscientific studies discovered the brain plays a more vital role than once thought (Durlak 2015). Scientists have measured that each area of the brain develops at specific point in childhood development (Goleman 2006). Scientists would argue that the temperament of a child does not determine his/her destiny. Meaning that children can be taught skills, once thought as merely the "personality" of a child. The frontal lobe, which is responsible for a major part of emotional decision making, isn't fully developed until the age of 14 for some teenagers, and could be as late as age 18. This only proves that with proper emotional literacy development, the brain can easily be molded and shaped since it has not reached maturity (Goleman 2006). Social and emotional competences could be learned just as any of the other core subject taught in school.

If schools are implementing social and emotional competences into an already full curriculum, where should districts focus their attention in order to truly influence changes in the brain? Neuroscientific studies have discovered when dealing with social and emotional competences, one area of focus should be self-regulation. This is a vital component of SEL. Self-regulation deals with the ways in which individuals manages their thoughts, feelings, and emotional states which also deals with a person's genetic makeup (Durlak 2015). Repeatedly self-regulation has been shown to predict academic achievement, more accurately than other child characteristics, such as intelligence. This demonstrates that if students can effectively manage their emotions, thoughts and feelings, they will be more successful in school. And more importantly, these changes can and have been measured in the brain.

A theoretical model of self-regulation implies that there are multiple contributing aspects of self-regulation which influence brain activity. Self-regulation is a neurobiological system switch board. When one call signals a connection, another connection is affected as well. The entire system overlaps another aspect of the larger system. These impacts are lined up along a continuum from the more overtly conscious and purposeful, to the more nonconsciousness and automatic. At one end, the conscious and purposeful activities are located, such as executive functions. Executive functions include such skills as working memory, impulse control, and attention flexibility. At the other end the biological aspects, genetic makeup, are located which control the automatic impulses (Durlak 2015).

Brain development occurs when new connections are made. With each new experience, the brain is being shaped not only cognitively but also emotionally. These changes affect the emotional profiles of self-regulation by using the both the biological aspects and experiences to

form connections and patterns between the brain's limbic system (Durlak 2015). Behaviors can be shaped by overriding the limbic system when given experiences to practice new connections. The limbic system can't be measured or seen in a normal classroom setting, yet students are expected to be learning ways to manage their feeling and emotions. Involving teachers in the evaluation process through surveys and interviews give more meaning from the SEL post survey score. By allowing teachers to have input on behaviors and emotions witnessed in the classroom, teachers can give more information to the student, to the parents, as well as the teacher.

For example, one study examined individuals suffering from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). This is when an individual's unconscious mind, overrides the conscious thought process, such as hand washing. A normal conscious thought would be to wash your hands a few times a day; however, the mind of someone struggling with OCD, has their unconscious mind over "self-regulate" their behavior. The frontal lobe which is responsible for unconscious behavior shows more activity than most when looked at in a PET scan. An OCD mind is fixated because the emotion of fear leads them to believe they will die of disease if they don't wash their hand hundreds of times a day. However, in a recent study 2 groups participated in a clinic to eliminate the emotion of fear in their brain. One group was given anti-anxiety drug, such as Prozac and the other group participated in psychotherapy group, a therapy for the brain. During psychotherapy, subjects were forced to take gradual steps to address the emotional roadblock. After the study both groups saw significant improvement in the frontal lobe of the brain. (Goleman 2006). This study reiterated that emotional competences can be taught through experiences and more importantly, changes in emotional behaviors can be measured in the brain.

Emotion and regulation activities are being controlled by both conscious and automatic neural activity. This indicates that only half of our response to self-regulation, comes from conscious control and the other half is based on personality or genetics. Ideally, this means when necessary, the brain can interject and “self-adjust” in order to maintain, alter or change an expected response to current situation. Moreover, this adjustment can happen at any level on the architecture of self-regulation (Durlak 2015). Therefore, when students are self-evaluating their social and emotional competences, the brain can interject and “self-adjust” their decision making skills. Their morals and values are challenging their answers. Furthermore, to answer the questions regarding social expectation, as in social desirable responding, students tend to answer in a more positive aspect (Crowne and Marlowe 1960). This illustrates that evaluation of behaviors should be considered from an outside observer in order to be reliable.

Genetics play a role in social and emotional learning. However, studies have shown that for individuals with a similar chemical genetic makeup, the environment is a vital component in decision making. John Gottman, the psychologist who led the research in early childhood emotions, said the environment is a key factor. Gottman stated that parents or caregivers are the key to modifying children’s given temperament. Parents mold their children’s emotional behavior by talking about their feelings, describing them, and by helping their children understanding them. When parents were able to assist in helping their children become better problem solvers regarding emotional predicaments, children were better able to suppress erratic emotions and therefore were better behaved (Goleman 2006). Therefore, if students were to be provided explicit instruction regarding emotional competences, students would be better at managing their behaviors and emotions. Better behavior in an academic setting is beneficial for

not only the individual, but for peers as well. As a member of the greater society, why would anyone want to deny a student a better opportunity to be more successful in life?

Current research literature suggests that individuals who have a personality type with high emotionality and a genetic background which is sensitive to dopamine, is linked to higher rates of poor mental and physical health, when in risky, unstable environments. Furthermore, individuals with the exact personality and genetic hormonal makeup will behave completely different in a safe, calm, and nurturing environment (Durlak 2015). This supports that an environment rich in promoting social and emotional competences are vital to help students who do not naturally have those innate abilities to self-regulate. But more importantly, the environment, not genetics or personality, can formulate and shape a person's social and emotional decision making. The environment can also influence the ways in which students' view their behavior. In other words, students perceive that they are performing in the alignment of social and emotional competences but in reality the peer pressure of social acceptances within their academic environment are misleading students. SEL programs don't measure changes in the brain, they measure changes in the environment. Therefore, self-assessment in the academic environment may be inaccurate.

Key outcomes of the program are not being measured with strong causation (Maxwell 2004). True behavior changes are measured in the brain. However, due to time constraints, money and other lack of other resources, this is not a probable method of measurement (Goldman 2006). Besides students' self-reflection, behavior changes must be related to other individual perceptions. (Durlak 2015).

## Conclusion

If SEL intervention lessons creates the real change then it must be compared to other outside observers, not only student self-evaluation. Many times rating scales are used to detect change in behavior. To be considered valid and reliable, rating scales should be used in addition to another assessment as part of a comprehensive study. The rater is usually part of the environment, such as the teacher in an educational setting. This gives a more comprehensive summary of skills due to direct observation, which is efficient for one component of a multiple source assessment. Using more than one informant is necessary for test validity to compare and rating results to direct observations (Durlak 2015). Informants are parents, teachers, students, and different situations initiate different social and emotional responses. So one informant may not see one type of behavior, where another informant may see it more often. For example, a teacher may observe different behaviors with attention span, and coaches may have a different perspective with teamwork. When gathering information, it is best to have several informants to provide a more complete view of the child's behavior in different situations and settings. Sometimes informants may have a discrepancy in agreement regarding behaviors. However, it is helpful in comparing behaviors which occur in several settings, or on the other hand in isolated situations. This can be beneficial in evaluation of social and emotional interventions. (Durlak 2015). Behavior changes are measured in the brain, but in an educational setting this is unrealistic (Goldman 2006), therefore, in order to determine the effectiveness of SEL interventions it is vital to gather outside observers to evaluate student behaviors.

As students continue to struggle with social and emotional problems a larger Midwestern suburban school district implemented a comprehensive social and emotional program. However,

with the lack of teacher input, strong causal relationships, and students using self-evaluation to report progress, more information is needed to give more meaning to the post survey quantitative scores.

### Chapter 3: Research Methods

This chapter discusses the methodology used to answer the following research questions: What do SEL post survey scores mean from a teacher's perspective? Also through the research process, data was collected and analyzed regarding four other sub questions: 1) What are the common themes of students who improved after the implemented the SEL intervention? 2) What are the common themes of students who remained constant before and after the SEL intervention program? 3) What are the common themes of students who regressed after the SEL intervention? 4) What are the common themes of students who scored themselves higher on the post SEL survey than their teacher did?

The primary research question sought to give more meaning to students SEL post survey scores. A quasi-experimental design method was selected because a random selection of students was not possible or practical when interviewing teachers. More specifically a nonequivalent group, quasi-experimental design was selected with a pretest-posttest component (Gibbons and Herman 1997). This design was selected because the school district administered a pretest to the entire student population in order to empirically assess students' knowledge of the social and emotional learning competences prior to administering Second Step®, the school wide intervention program. After 28 weeks of lessons, the student population was given the post survey to empirically assess students' knowledge. After applying for International Research Board approval, permission was granted to proceed the study (Appendix A). After comparing the pretest to posttest survey scores, four groups were formed. The four groups were nonequivalent since students were placed in groups according to posttest scores.

The research question is answered by examining average score on the Panorama Student Survey on the pretest and posttest. Surveys were used as a method of data collection because

surveys describe attitudes or opinions of a population using numbers (Creswell and Creswell 2017). The survey was administered to 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. The Panorama Survey has five major categories and each category is averaged into one collective score ranging from 1.0 to 5.0.

In order to give more meaning to the empirical data collected by the SEL post survey, teachers were also given surveys regarding students' SEL competences based on classroom observations. Each student had two teachers complete a Panorama Survey identical to the student survey that was just modified from a teacher's perspective. Teachers who had the student in class for a full year were selected to ensure a more accurate depiction of the student's observable behaviors. By gathering information from two sources, this creates data triangulation. Data triangulation requires a researcher to collect data on the same subject using several different ways (Johnson 1997). By collecting data from two teachers about the same student creates validity to the results. After gathering the results, the scores were averaged and the difference was calculated from the students' averages from the spring.

Next, following research protocol, teachers completed an interview consent form to gather more information (Appendix B). To give more meaning to empirical data collect on the SEL post surveys, teachers were interviewed to gather qualitative data regarding student SEL competences.

Teachers were selected regarding 2 criteria. Teachers had to have had the student for at least a year. And in some cases teachers who were selected had had the student for two years. This was because the teacher taught the same subject at every grade, such as Orchestra or Spanish. Also, the teacher had to be available. Some teachers moved out of district and were not able to be located.

Interviews were selected in order to better understand a specific social situations and group interactions dealing with social and emotional learning in the classroom. Furthermore, observing each student in their classroom was not possible which made interviews the method for collecting data. (Creswell and Creswell 2017). Face to face interviews were conducted with 26 teachers, with one interview conducted via email. Since the teacher had spent an entire year with the student, the teachers provided historical information regarding student behaviors. Another advantage regarding interviewing teachers occurred by being able to directly ask specific questions (Creswell and Creswell 2017). Semi structured interview were conducted. The interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed. In order to focus on a small number of themes, the data was “winnowed” by disregarding unnecessary parts (Creswell and Creswell 2017). Then the data gathered through the interviews, was compared, contrasted, and classified in order to explain and make sense of the student SEL post survey scores. The final step in analyzing the data was interpreting the results gathered or looking more closely at what can be learned from data (Creswell and Creswell 2017). The interpretation in qualitative research requires consideration of thoughts and ideas regarding the observer's point of view, other learned formal theories, context and environment, as well as personal values must be considered (Erickson 1985).

Through this process the information was aggregated to other common themes such as classroom effort, parent involvement, and student- teacher interpersonal relationships (Creswell and Creswell 2017). By selecting interviews as a research method, direct quotes are used to authenticate student behaviors observed in the classroom. Direct quotes add validity to the research results because there is little inferencing done by the researcher. Furthermore by

gathering data regarding student behaviors through teacher surveys and teacher interviews, the validity increases due to data triangulation (Johnson 1997).

The district selected a school wide comprehensive, research based SEL program called Second Step®. The district has currently been using the Second Step® in the elementary schools, but the middle school program was just released in 2016. This program has different lessons for each grade level and addresses all five competences promoted by Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, (CASEL) the nation's leading organization supporting the importance of SEL in public education curriculum. Second Step® addresses self-management, self-awareness, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness. By explicitly teaching the five social-emotional competences, Second Step® is designed to improve student's academic achievement and decrease problem behaviors (Second Step® 2017).

In this study, the implementation of Second Step® scripted lessons were taught every Monday, in the last class period of the day. The last period of the day is usually reserved for academic extension or support. Students typically finish homework or make up missing assignments. However, once a week teachers use the online resource to teach a 25 minute lesson with videos, discussion prompt, and writing responses.

Simple descriptive statistics were used for gathering data such as gender, demographics, economic status, and academics. For this study seven females and eight males were selected to maintain the same demographic make-up of our entire student population. Eleven Caucasian students were selected, three Hispanic, one African American, and one Asian. Four students on free and reduced lunch. Lastly, students were selected with the highest and lowest MAP score in each category. After gathering the results, the scores were averaged and the difference was calculated from the students' averages from the spring.

**Measures/Protocol/ Observations**

In the Panorama Student Survey, students were asked 34 questions over five major social and emotional competences, grit, self-efficacy, social-awareness, emotional regulation, and classroom effort. Each competence is taught through the SEL Second Step® program and measured by the following questions.

**Grit**

Grit defined by Panorama Education, is how well students can persevere through setbacks in order to achieve important long term goals. Researchers conceptualize grit as a courage to push through the emotion of fear, the fear of failure. Empirical research has indicated that grittier individuals persist through important life goals, such as academic tasks and graduation (Lucas, Gratch et al. 2015). Sample questions included:

How often do you stay focused on the same goal for several months at a time?

If you fail to reach an important goal, how likely are you to try again?

When you are working on a project that matters a lot to you, how focused can you stay when there are lots of distractions.

If you have a problem while working towards an important goal, how well can you keep working?

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 current goals?

Lesson such as Setting Goals, If-Then Plans, and Smart Goals all help student recognize the importance to breaking down large goals in to manageable tasks. Students also learn which behaviors will help them accomplish smaller components of a larger goal (Second Step 2017).

### **Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is how much students believe that can be successful in an academic setting (Pandora Education 2017). Self- efficacy encompasses task-completion competences and pushes an individual to persist in a difficult task. Indicators of individual motivational or goal attainment traits appear to be malleable and can change over time. More importantly, which demonstrates that students can learn and can acquire motivational traits. Therefore if individuals believe they can be successful in a particular task, studies show most likely they will be (Chen, Gully et al. 2004). Some sample questions include:

How confident are you that you can complete all the work that is assigned in your classes?

When complicated ideas are presented in class, how confident are you that you can understand them?

How confident are you that you can learn all the material presented in your classes?

How confident are you that you can do the hardest work that is assigned in your class?

How confident are you that you will remember what you learned in your current classes, next year?

Lessons such as Making Mistakes, Unhelpful Thoughts, Handling Rejection, help students identify that making mistakes is a vital part of learning and that negative thoughts can affect their decision making (Second Step 2017).

### **Classroom Effort**

Classroom effort is the measurement of how much effort student put forth into learning and school work. Classroom effort or engagement is the social and emotional competence which is the effect of several attributes present in a positive school climate. Research states, supportive student- teacher relationships and school community involvement all promote classroom engagement (Zins 2004). Therefore, if survey results indicate lower student engagement or classroom effort, a school community may want to investigate ways to increase positive relationships. Some sample questions include:

How often did you come to class prepared?

How often did you follow directions in class?

How often did you get your work done right away, instead of waiting until the last minute?

How often did you pay attention and resist distractions?

When you were working independently, how often did you stay focused?

Second Step helps foster a positive school climate, which builds stronger community relationships with several lessons. One lesson titled “Starting Middle School” helps 6<sup>th</sup> graders and new students understand that what they are feeling is normal and that there are people here to help. Seventh and eighth graders are given a lesson on helping others feel like belong in middle school. Using peer relationships to build a stronger school community among students (Second Step 2017).

### **Social Awareness**

Social Awareness is the ability of students to consider the perspectives of others and empathize with them (Panorama 2017). Social awareness is critical because it emphasizes skills that are needed for students to be accepted by their peers. Studies have shown that students with

appropriate social awareness not only respond positively to peers that praise and compliment, they also respond appropriately to constructive criticism and consider other people's perspectives. Being socially aware, means students can also recognize when they need help and how to appropriately ask for assistance (Zins 2004). Some sample questions include:

How carefully did you listen to other people's point of view?

How much did you care about other people's feelings?

How well did you get along with students are different from you?

How often were you polite to adults?

How often did you compliment others' accomplishments?

When others disagreed with you, how respectful were you of their views?

Personalities Change, Labels, Social Values, Positive Relationships, Making Friends, What Kind of Friend Are You, Relationships Change, Strengthening Friendships, and Negative Relationships are all lessons in the Second Step curriculum that focuses on social awareness. Learning how to be a good friend and maintain health relationships allows students to understand other people's perspectives and accept their differences.

### **Emotional Regulation**

Emotional regulation is the ability of students to regulate their emotions. The ability to use emotions to facilitate thinking may help students with which activity they should focus on, due to their feelings. Emotion Regulation Ability (ERA) allows students to control emotions to achieve long term goals, especially in difficult emotional situations, such as challenges and obstacles which prevent goal attainment (Ivcevic and Brackett 2014). If a student understands emotional vocabulary and emotional dynamics, this may help student to better communicate to others, as well as understanding the emotions of their peers. Moreover, if students learn how to

manage their emotions better, they can be better prepared to handle high anxiety situations, such as taking tests (Zins 2004). Just as with any situation, if students can predict their feelings during a particular situation, they can be proactive and develop skills to manage them. Some sample questions include:

How clearly were you able to describe your feelings?

How often did you remain calm, even when someone was bothering you or saying bad things?

How often did you keep your temper in check?

When everybody around you gets angry, how relaxed can you stay?

How often are you able to control your emotions when you need to?

Once you get upset how often can you get yourself calmed down?

When things go wrong for you, how calm are you able to remain?

Second Step focuses an entire unit on thoughts and emotions. Lessons such as The Role of Emotions, Handling Emotions, and Responding to Anger help students address such intense emotions during adolescents. Students learn to analyze how emotions affect decision making and to consider values when faced with making a decision in an angry situation (Second Step 2017).

To answer the third research question which sought to understand why students and teachers scored each other differently on the behavior survey, 27 teacher interviews were conducted. Some of the following questions were used.

What are your observations regarding Student A's, in your class?

How does he or she interact with others?

Do you think the student is engaged in class? What makes you think that?

What emotions, if any, have you seen the student express in class?

Can you describe the situation?

Think about the student working on a difficult project, describe their actions and emotions during this time.

Do you believe this student acts differently around other adults?

Does this student have other activities outside of school?

Are their parents overly involved?

Does the student have friends?

Does the student look interest in class? Do they come prepared?

How is your interpersonal connection with the student? Do know them, their likes, dislikes, hobbies, family?

## **Analysis**

Descriptive statistics and multiple regression analyses were formed to decide whether there is a statistically significant difference between students pre and posttest Panorama survey scores, controlling for factors such as demographics, socioeconomic status, gender, and academic achievement. Analyses were conducted on the teacher direct observation survey. It examined the difference between the student posttest survey score and the teacher's direct observation score, including demographics, socioeconomic status, gender, and academic achievement.

Interviews were then conducted with 27 teachers regarding the direct observation of student behaviors. Common themes were recorded and descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis were conducted to determine if there is a statistically significant similarity

between teachers. Other factors such as demographics, socioeconomic status, gender, and academic achievement were considered, with the biggest area being if the teacher scored the teacher higher or lower than the student.

## Chapter 4: Results

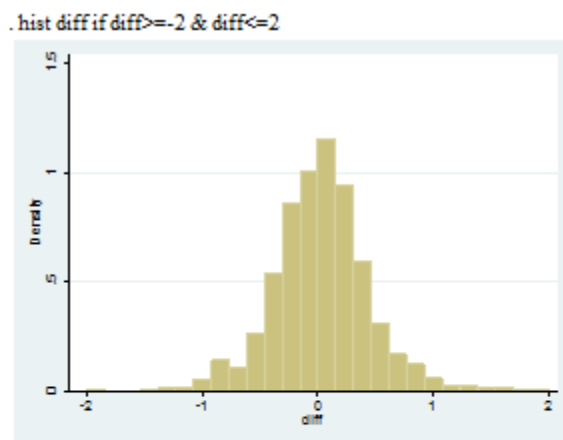
### Overview

This chapter is separated into three sections based on the research questions. The first section includes a summary of the descriptive characteristics for background information. Table 1 describes all student results who completed the pre and post survey divided into three groups based on posttest results. Table 2 describes which students were selected for the teacher surveys. Table 3 describes pre and posttest groups with student averages and group averages. The next section discusses the research question: What do the SEL results mean from the teacher's perspective? Table 4 describes the students' pre-post self-evaluation results compared to the school's demographics. Table 5 describes the students' self-evaluation vs. teacher direct observation averages. The last section discusses the research question: Are self-evaluations an effective way to measure student's social and emotional learning? The data gathered from the teacher interviews was analyzed by transcribing the interviews and recording reoccurring themes. Table 6 describes the students in this study and common teacher responses in the interviews. Table 7 is an overall summary of all findings at the end of this chapter.

### Summary of Descriptive Characteristics

This study takes place in a large suburban school district in the Midwest region drawing from a student population from nine middle schools, with approximately 6300 students in 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. The district has a 91.8 % graduation rate and a 98.4% attendance rate. Specifically, the study focuses on one middle school with 813 students enrolled. Figure 1 describes all 725 students who took both the pre and post survey. The spring and fall averages

were calculated. The surveys were measured on a 5 point Likert scale. The differences from the pretest and posttest averages were recorded and sorted in descending numerical order. The mean score of the pretest and posttest difference averages were calculated to .02 difference. The standard deviation was calculated to determine the distribution on data which was .43. Using  $\frac{1}{4}$  (.75) of the standard deviation range around the 0, which calculated to be -.1125 to 0.1125. Those students who recorded an average difference score between -.1125 to .1125 did not make any significant positive or negative change between the pretest and posttest survey. This is described as Group one in the study. Groups were developed to ensure the study investigated a wide variety of all students regarding their social and emotional growth. Student scores who were higher in the spring, indicating a positive growth in SEL development. This was named Group two. Group two were scores between .75 standard deviations and 1.50 standard deviations from the mean difference score of .2. The difference mean scores associated with .75 SD and 1.50 SD are from .338 and .680. Finally, Group three was calculated using the range -.75 standard deviations and -1.50 standard deviations from the mean score. Average pretest and posttest difference scores associated with this group were between -0.680 to -0.338. This is called Group three in this study. These were students who showed a lower score on the posttest and therefore indicated a decline with improvement from pre to post survey of their social and emotional skills.

**Diagram 1: All students' mean differences****Basic descriptives for diff**

```
. su diff if diff >= -2 & diff <= 2
```

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
diff	725	.0278138	.4341563	-2	2

Table 1 describes the demographic summary of the middle school. The middle school has 77% students who are classified as white; almost 10% are Hispanic; a little over 4% are African American; and about 3% are Asian. The school has 21% of the students on free and reduced lunch. Table 1 also describes the demographics of the school which was approximated in the study. Seven females and eight males were selected. Eleven Caucasian students were selected which corresponds to 77% students who are classified at the school. Two Hispanic students account for the 10% Hispanic population. There are a little over 4% African American students therefore one African American was chosen. The school also has 3% Asian so one Asian student was also selected for the study. Four students on free and reduced lunch were chosen which corresponds with the 21% of the school's population who also receive free or reduces lunches. In order to also account for student academic achievement when measuring SEL improvement, students were selected in each group with a high and a low test scores on the

MAP® Growth Assessment in Reading. The MAP® Growth is a district reading assessment with national norms. The MAP® Growth is given at least two times a year, usually in the fall and spring. It is a personalized test used to show personal progress and assist teachers in developing a more individualized instructional plan for each students. Since MAP® Growth does administer the assessment nationwide, there are performance norms associated with each grade level. In this study all learning levels wanted to be considered, so at least one student had a higher MAP® score and at least one student that was at the lower end of their grade level when compared to other students nationwide.

**Table 1: Middle school’s demographics**

	Middle School	%	Selected Students
Total students	813		15
Males	433	53%	8
Females	380	47%	7
White	626	77%	11
Hispanic	85	10%	2
Black	33	4%	1
Asian	27	3%	1
Free and reduced lunch	170	21%	4

Table 2 describes the criteria for selecting subjects. For further examination, five students were selected from each group, for a total of 15 students. Dividing students into groups regarding their change in their SEL posttest data ensures that a wide variety of students were selected for a more in depth examination. In each group five students were selected. Each student was selected

based on the group's mean difference score from pretest to posttest SEL survey. In Group 1 the difference mean score from the pretest to posttest was 3.89. Students selected in Group 1 also had a similar mean difference score on the SEL behavior survey as well. The mean difference score on the pretest and posttest of Group 2 was 3.56 on the SEL survey. Five students were selected for Group 2 also an average difference score of 3.5. For Group 3 the average difference score on the pretest and posttest SEL student survey was 4.07. An additional five students were selected from the student population with an average difference score from pretest to posttest was 4.07. Table 3 also addresses average difference scores of each of the groups. Group 1 or the students with almost little to no change in pretest to posttest scores also had the smallest difference between pretest and posttest SEL student scores. Group 2 or the group who had a positive change in the average difference scores from the pretest to posttest SEL survey, also had the highest average increase in scores from the pretest to posttest. Group 2 had an average difference between pretest and posttest as -.246. Since the posttest score was higher than the pretest scores this results in a negative score. Group 2 also the highest posttest average with a score of 3.916. However, Group 3 had the overall highest average pretest and posttest score averages. Group 1 demonstrated no change from pretest to posttest SEL survey and still had a higher posttest average than Group 3 or the group with declining posttest scores. Group 1 did not make any improvements from the pretest to posttest, they still scored higher than Group 3 which started out higher in the beginning on their SEL survey pretest.

**Table 2: Panorama SEL Pre and Posttest Group Scores**

	Mean diff. pre/post	Fall average student scores	Spring average student scores	difference
<b>Group 1</b> pre/posttest no change	3.89	3.84 3.88 3.84 3.82 3.8	3.78 3.88 3.82 3.88 3.74	
<b>Total group 1</b>		3.836	3.82	.016
<b>Group 2</b> pre/posttest positive change	3.56	3.04 3.9 3.82 3.77 3.82	3.42 3.42 4.3 4.26 4.18	
<b>Total group 2</b>		3.67	3.916	-.246
<b>Group 3</b> pre/posttest negative change	4.07	3.9 3.28 4.12 4.18 4.24	3.52 2.64 3.66 3.72 3.76	
<b>Total group 3</b>		3.944	3.46	.484

Table 3 contains descriptive characteristics of students as well as how successful they were in gaining knowledge on the social and emotion competences. In Group 3, 75% of free and reduce lunch students which showed regression from the pretest scores. More females showed improved knowledge. 57% of females improved on the SEL competencies whereas, only 12% of the males showed improvement. Furthermore, half of males showed a decline in SEL

competencies. Scoring high or low on the district achievement assessment, MAP, made no apparent difference regarding knowledge of SEL competencies. This only reiterates that SEL interventions benefit everyone (Elias 1997). Since 2000 the educational reform No Child Left Behind focused on assessment scores and academic achievement to measure the success of child (Durlak 2015) (Zins 2004). Yet research shows that individuals who experience academic success early in their educational career have a small effect on adult wages. Those individuals who demonstrate SEL competences have a larger salary than compared to those individuals who are successful just in academics (Durlak 2015). This indicating that the need for SEL to be taught in schools must remain.

**Table 3: Description of Each Group**

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
<b>Males</b>	38%	12%	50%
<b>Females</b>	28%	57%	14%
Free & reduced Lunch		25%	%75
Hispanic	50%		50%
White	36%	36%	27%
High Map score	33%	33%	33%
Low Map Score	33%	33%	33%

Table 4 describes the students' fall mean score on the SEL student survey. Table 4 also shows the students' spring mean score on the SEL student survey. The third and fourth column are results from a teacher survey. Teachers who had the students the previous year were asked to complete a survey identical to the students' survey. The survey was just reworded to reflect the

teachers' direct observation the student's behavior. Two teachers observed one student, for a total of 30 teacher surveys. The third column describes the first teacher's average difference score on the teacher's direct observation of the student behaviors. The fourth column describes the second teacher's average difference score of the teacher's direct observation of the student behaviors. The negative teacher mean score shows that the teacher ranked the student higher than the student did themselves. The student score was subtracted from the teacher's higher score which results in negative number. From the 30 teachers' direct observations survey scores, 21 teachers score the student higher than the student scored themselves. Only one pair of teachers didn't both agree on their survey averages. All other 14 pairs, either both agreed and ranked the student higher than the student did or both teachers ranked the student lower than the student did on the SEL survey.

This is critical for demonstrating the need for teacher input for validating observed behaviors. CASEL recommends that teachers and parents are consulted to evaluate the effectiveness of the SEL intervention program (Durlak 2015). It also strengthens causal relationship between the program lessons and SEL competences which are observed by different teachers. Causal relationship can be explained through repeated observations (Maxwell 2004). When several teachers observe the same behavior, this strengthens causation to understanding "why" the behavior occurred. Since two teachers, who teach different subjects, in different environments, with different student peers, report making the same observations, this can only solidify the causal relationship between observed behaviors and SEL competences. Involving two teachers for each student is important.

**Table 4: SEL Fall and Spring Average Scores**

Group	Student id #	Fall Average	Spring Average	teacher 1 average	teacher 2 average
1	551	3.84	3.78	-0.12	-0.73
	499	3.88	3.88	-0.2	-0.6
	514	3.84	3.82	0.06	-0.76
	445	3.82	3.88	-0.71	-0.73
	554	3.8	3.74	0.72	0.2
<b>Group</b>	<b>Group 1 Average</b>	<b>3.836</b>	<b>3.82</b>		
2	234	3.04	3.42	-0.82	-0.4
	244	3.9	3.42	0.04	1.37
	207	3.82	4.3	-0.4	-0.27
	186	3.77	4.26	-5.8	-0.81
	251	3.82	4.18	-0.72	-0.54
<b>Group</b>	<b>Group 2 Average</b>	<b>3.67</b>	<b>3.916</b>		
3	757	3.9	3.52	1.8	2.32
	813	3.28	2.64	-1.38	-0.83
	777	4.12	3.66	-0.48	-0.09
	769	4.18	3.72	0.67	0.67
	781	4.24	3.76	-0.01	-0.1
	<b>Group 3 average</b>	<b>3.944</b>	<b>3.46</b>		

**Understanding the meaning of Self-Evaluation post test Scores**

Table 5 describes the common themes observed in the teacher interviews. 29 teacher interviews were conducted to further understand the meaning of post self-evaluation survey

scores when measuring SEL. Scientists have indicated that the frontal cortex, which is responsible for a major part of emotional decision making is not fully developed until age 14 and in some children as late as age 18. This evidence proves that SEL skills can be taught and can influence students' emotional decision making (Goldman 2006). However, since measuring the brain isn't feasible in an educational setting, another method must be used. Interviews were conducted to understand why students would score themselves differently than a teacher's direct observations. CASEL, the leading organization in social and emotional learning suggests that both teachers and parents need to be involved with the evaluation process (Durlak 2015). Social and emotional curriculums rely on self-evaluations to determine effectiveness if students' self-evaluations do not align with teachers' direct observations, more information is needed. Teacher interviews were used to give meaning to the SEL post test results.

**Group 1:** There were five students in Group 1 who showed no change from the pretest to the post SEL student survey. Since SEL surveys rely heavily on self-evaluation, it is important to seek input from teachers in order to give more meaning to the students' post SEL scores. Eight interviews were conducted for the students in Group 1. Group 1 these students showed no change from pretest to the posttest survey, yet 4 out of 5 student ranked themselves lower than their teachers' direct observation in the classroom. By interviewing teachers, the SEL post scores have more meaning as well as understanding why students' self-evaluation and teachers' direct observation don't align. By interviewing the teachers, some common themes were discovered that give more meaning to the student score.

Group 1 were the students who didn't change from pretest to posttest survey score; however, teachers still discovered that students struggled with self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is

defined as the belief that one has the ability to be successful at a task according to Panorama® Education, which restates the importance of addressing emotions with SEL interventions. Demonstrating the feelings and emotions of self-efficacy can be displayed as having confidence. Having confidence is critical since emotions influence a person's actions, reasoning or logical thinking (Salovey and Mayer 1990). When students struggle with having confidence this can affect all aspects of a student's academic success. This indicates the importance of emotional learning and its purpose in educational curriculum. In Group 1, 80% of students displayed a lack of confidence in the classroom. A lack of confidence, can influence a student's perception of their attainment of social and emotional competences based on the Social Comparison Theory first constructed in the early 1950's by Leon Festinger. Festinger's first hypotheses was, "There exist, in the human organism, a drive to evaluate his opinions and abilities (pg. 117)." One way in which student determine their ability to do anything is through the comparison of others around them (Wood 1989). However, when students do not have the ability to directly evaluate someone's skills, their evaluations are subjective (Wood, 1989). These evaluations can be inaccurate or misleading.

When asked about a student's self- efficacy in an interview, the teacher explained, "He lacks grit and self-efficacy to complete tasks. In the correct environment, [the student] will have confidence. But he is very quick to shut down if he doesn't know the answer or is confused." If a student struggles with self-confidence, it will affect other areas such as grit. Students must be taught how work through a hardship (Second Step 2017). Regarding the same student, another teacher described the student's lack of confidence as avoidance by not drawing attention to himself and blending in.

I think he reminds me of a kid who would act like he knew, but might not and would be too afraid to ask for help. I don't think he wanted to bring attention to himself that he might

need help with something. I think he thought if you just stayed smiling in the back that no one would notice so to avoid any and attention to himself, a little defense mechanism. In fact, I don't remember a time when he asked for help.

The social comparison theory can skew a student perception of their social and emotional behaviors. In Festinger's Social Comparison Theory, people compare their abilities to those around them (Wood 1989). The teacher in the classroom observes behaviors compared to their peers, yet the student compares themselves to adults. For two particular students, teachers both agreed that this could explain more about the student post SEL survey scores. For example, one student seemed very comfortable talking with adults. The teacher explained,

She seemed to be a very mature child and she probably had a lot of experience talking with adults and she feels comfortable with them." This student's score on the SEL post survey were lower than the teacher's SEL post survey based on classroom observations. The teacher gave her explanation, "She could have been comparing herself to the way adults act rather than people her age act. She has high expectations because she is more mature.

According the Social Comparison Theory, people compare themselves to those around them. Therefore, if a student is around adults, it is logical that will evaluate their own behaviors compared to adults. Another student also has more responsibilities at home and the teacher described home life as:

I think she kind of had an adult role at home. When I have talked with [her] I know she has a little brothers and sister and even some nephews. I think that kind of gave her some maturity to be able to talk to adults more easily. Yet at the same time, give her a chance to just be a kid here at school not have to take on adult roles that she did at home.

Again if a student associates more with adults and adult roles, according to the Social Comparison Theory, students will evaluate their skills with the people they are around even in other environments. For example, a student was trying out for cheerleading, a sport that she had never participated in at school. Her teacher gave an example of Feininger's Social Comparison

Theory. “One time I saw her confidence dip was when she was trying out for cheerleading. She was nervous then, but I think that is normal for girls in middle school.”

Besides struggling from confidence, students in Group 1 also had mixed results regarding support at home. Two out of five had little or no support. One teacher provided an example to support her reasons,

She seems to miss school a lot more than I would’ve liked her to. Sometimes she would be slow into making her work up. She was very personable and friendly and I know she cared about school I’m just not sure how much support she got at home.

Understanding the student’s SEL post survey scores, means also examining what life looks after school. John Gottman, the leading psychologist in childhood emotions, states that environment is critical in shaping a child’s emotional behaviors. Teachers and parents should work together to help student develop their SEL skills. Teachers rely on parents to communicate, ask questions, and to attend parent-teacher conferences, in order to understand not only the SEL skills being taught, but to reiterate these SEL skills at home. Parents and caregivers provide important dialogue which help children better understand emotions (Goldman 2006). One teacher provided an example described why she believed the student had little academic support at home.

Another thing that really stands out was that he was gone for an extended period of time and if I remember he was at a wedding. I don’t think there was any communication to me that he was going to be gone. He just happened to mention it. So if I was a parent of a student who is taking them out [of school] and it was going to be out for quite a while, I would I have probably asked what they would be missing. What could they do to make it up? So in that sense there wasn’t any communication to me. Possibly showing that there wasn’t as much parent support as there could have been.

Another teacher described lack of support as,

I don’t remember having communication with her parents even when emails would go home about missing work and not hearing anything back from them. Usually you would

like to hear something like OK I'll make sure they get that turned in. That's kind of why I doubted she had any support from home. I don't think I saw them at conferences.

Parents mold their children's emotional behavior by talking about their feelings, describing them and helping their children understand them (Goldman 2006). However, if parents are not having these critical conversations at home, this is often left up to our educational system. Learning about the home life of students through the eyes of a teacher, gives new lenses to the SEL posttest survey scores as well as understanding why students score themselves differently than the classroom teacher observes in the classroom.

**Group 2:** There were five students in Group 2 who showed improvement on the post SEL student survey. Since SEL surveys rely heavily on self-evaluation, it is important to seek input from teachers in order to give more meaning to the students' post SEL scores. Nine interviews were conducted for the students in Group 2. Group 2 these students showed the improvement from pretest to the posttest survey, yet 4 out of 5 student ranked themselves lower than their teachers' direct observation in the classroom. By interviewing teachers, the SEL post scores have more meaning as well as understanding why students' self-evaluation and teachers' direct observation don't align. By interviewing the teachers, some common themes were discovered that give more meaning to the student score.

Eighty percent of Group 2 students also scored themselves as performing worse on their SEL post survey than what their actual teacher directly observed. What could be the reason? Three of the five students were described as very quiet, and reserved students by their teachers in the post survey interview. The teachers mentioned that they believed that the students internalize many of their emotions, making it difficult to directly observe. When asked why one teacher said, "I don't see very many of her emotions. She has excellent emotional regulation-

too good. She internalizes a lot of her feelings. I think because she wants to blend in. She doesn't like drawing any attention to herself'

Another teacher explained:

I think we are all harder on ourselves when we do self-evaluation, we are all harder on ourselves, than someone who is observing us from the outside. That's because we internalize everything and I could see the student doing that.

One idea to help explain the internalization of student emotions, is the concept of socially desirable responding. This occurs when students want to gain social acceptance or to avoid criticism (Van de Mortel 2008). Teachers made comments about not being able to really see the students' emotions, therefore they couldn't observe them. According to the theory social desirable responding, students internalize their behaviors, thoughts and emotions in order to fit the social norms and to gain social acceptance (Van de Mortel 2008). Therefore, when students do not want to be subjective to the criticism of their peers, then it seems logical that student behaviors are described as blending in and trying to go unnoticed.

Another common theme among Group 2 which teachers mentioned in their interviews was that when students completed self-evaluations they were harder on themselves. "She is very quiet, a thinker and introspective. She is hard on herself." One teacher described being hard on herself as, "When she evaluates herself, she uses really high standards." A math teacher mentioned that she thought it was typical behavior, "In general, people are probably a little harder on themselves than what other people observe, particularly with middle school students." Several teachers described an observation of a student being hard on themselves. For example, "She didn't want to make any mistakes. She always wanted to do her best. And she would ask questions if she didn't understand because she wanted to do well and wanted to do it right the

first time.” Another teacher stated, “He was the type that he always needed to improve, and he always needed to do more, to be better.” Another student was described as, “I think it is mostly to do with how she is, how she is hard wired as a person. I think it’s because she is kind of a perfectionist. I think she is a little too hard on herself.”

Core evaluation are appraisals that people make subconsciously (Bono and Judge 2003). The idea of always trying to do more was another common theme reiterated by several teachers during their interviews. Several times the word perfectionist was mentioned. The Merriam-Webster dictionary describes perfection is an unsurpassable degree of accuracy or excellence. Students are striving to reach an unattainable goal of being perfect. They are attempting to cross a finish line that doesn’t exist. One could argue that being a perfectionist and having the drive to be more, would merely be part of a student’s personality. However, scientists have measured that each area of the brain develops at a particular point in childhood development (Goldman 2006). Each person is born with certain traits but it does not mean their temperament determines his or her destiny. Children can be taught new or better ways to handle their SEL competences (Goldman 2006). A student seeking an unrealistic goal may never be successful; therefore, it is necessary to address these shortcomings. According to researchers, this underlying idea of failure can affect a student’s subconscious self-evaluation. A teacher was asked what being a perfectionist looked like in her class.

She [the perfectionist] expects herself to produce only work that is in their mind perfect. In their mind exactly what should be done and kind of without regard of outside opinions. So even if I say, right here- what you have is good. She sees it as- I made a mistake and it’s not perfect. So I don’t think it is good.

One teacher gave an example how a student displayed perfection attributes in class:

So for example if she is supposed to write a couple of sentences in Spanish, and at this point I tell them that grammar doesn't necessary have to be perfect? If she sees that there is an error in her sentences, she thinks she did it wrong and the whole thing was not good because, you know it's not perfect.

Again, a student's core evaluation can subconsciously affect other aspects of their life. For example, one teacher explained that even the actions of others, out of the student's control can negatively impact a student's self-evaluation. A teacher explained,

I think being a perfectionist kind of actually makes them feel worse about themselves. I think about her making friends. She sort of expects it to go a certain way, and if somebody doesn't invite her somewhere, or makes a friend here, it can be taken the wrong way out of context. She can put it back on herself, or blame it on herself when it probably had nothing to do with her.

Subconsciously students are evaluating all of their thoughts and actions, according the core evaluation theory. Therefore, when students are asked to complete a formal evaluation on their social and emotional behaviors, one could understand why a student may score themselves lower than an outside observer, such as a teacher.

When students set these high standards, this can also a negative effect on a student's self-confidence. In fact, in all teacher interviews regarding Group 2 students, the students who improved on the SEL competencies on post survey, explained the student's score by mentioning that the student was lacking self- confidence. Confidence is measured on the SEL student survey through self-efficacy competences. On the Panorama® Education Survey ask students are asked to answer questions related to how much they believe they can succeed academically. Research indicates that students who self-report higher levels of self-efficacy tend to be more successful not only in but later in life as well (Panorama 2017). Teachers were asked to describe a student

under each of the five SEL competencies and how they compared with the other students. One teacher responded,

Self-efficacy? Does she have confidence in herself? Did she show that? No. no. I think that [self-efficacy] is lower than her classmates. I think she really lacked confidence and that was one of the reasons why she didn't have friends. I don't think she was confident in her social interactions with her classmates and in her academics. She just kind of wanted to be there and get the work done but not stand out in anyway.

Another teacher was asked if a student displayed the actions that indicated the desire to do well in school? The teacher stated,

Yes, I do think she takes pride in her work and wants to do well. I don't think she thinks; she is capable of doing well. The student can do better than what she thinks she can. She just lacks in self-confidence.

What causes students to have unrealistic goals? Why do students believe that are not perform as well as they think they are? Some teachers believe it is because students lack context. Students are not able to look at a larger population as a whole and evaluate themselves. They have limited background knowledge. One teacher describes a student's lower self-evaluation because of his narrow perspective:

I wonder if part of it is, that I have the bird's eye view of students, to see how other students are acting. I have that perspective of the students who are not on task, who are not mature, who are full of emotions. So where as I see how high he is compared to his peers, he doesn't have a top down perspective that I do. I think he just perceives his behavior as expected and normal. Whereas I had the perspective to see what other 7<sup>th</sup> graders are capable of.

Again student score themselves lower because they are lacking context and view their behavior as the standard and not the exception. One teacher gives more meaning to the student's score by describing her behavior in just his class rather than all her core classes.

Of course she's looking at this in context of all her classes in general and I'm looking at this through the lenses of a band teacher. So maybe there is a difference in what she sees from her side of things versus me. I see her doing things in band when she comes, and when she comes into class she was maybe a little higher functioning than her overall view of herself [in her other core classes].

The teacher interviews give meaning to the student self-evaluation posttest survey on Social and Emotional Learning competences. With Group 2 these students showed the greatest improvement from pretest to the posttest survey. Yet, 4 out of 5 student ranked themselves lower than their teacher direct observation in the classroom. By interviewing teachers, the SEL post score has more meaning because of the theories which can help explain the student SEL post survey score.

**Group 3:** There were five students in Group 3 who showed a regression from the pretest to the post SEL student survey. Since SEL surveys rely heavily on self-evaluation, it is important to seek input from teachers in order to give more meaning to the students' post SEL scores. Eight interviews were conducted for the students in Group 3 By interviewing teachers, the SEL post scores have more meaning as well as understanding why students' self-evaluation and teachers' direct observation don't align. Some common themes were discovered that give more meaning to the post SEL survey student score.

In Group 3, the students who regressed on the SEL posttest, also had their teachers share a wide range of characteristics, giving more meaning to their lower post survey scores. After the teacher interviews, three out of five students were described from their teachers' perspective as lacking confidence in the classroom. Students in Group 3, not only participated in the school wide SEL intervention program, but they also didn't improve their social and emotional skills. Struggling with SEL concepts could lead to a lack of confidence. Having a lack of confidence

could be explained by the concept called Core Self-Evaluations. These evaluations are appraisal that people believe about themselves (Bono and Judge 2003). One SEL competence focused on in the Second Step® program was self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief that a person can be successful (Panorama 2017). As a student in Group 3, who regressed in obtaining SEL skills according to their posttest, self-efficacy could be a skill which has regressed or was not fully developed. A Core Self-Evaluation with a student who has not developed the skill of self-efficacy, could explain the reason for a student's lack of confidence. Some teachers described a student's lack of confidence as, "I think he feels that he does worse than he actually does. I'm sure he thinks he asks a lot of questions, which he might see as a negative. Like he doesn't know anything." Another teacher described a student's self-efficacy as, "School was hard for her. She didn't ask questions. She was very quiet and shy.... I thought she wanted to do well. I mean she listened in class, but just wasn't confident to speak up if she needed help." Finally, self-efficacy was observed in a student as, "He always struck me as being fairly modest, in sort of self-deprecating sort of way.... Maybe he deserves to exude a little more confidence than he actually did sometimes."

Another teacher stated, "I always wondered if he gave himself enough credit." He went further on to explain, giving an example,

I could probably still find some samples on google classroom.... At 7<sup>th</sup> grade at a minimum kids have to play 6 different scale playing assignments and they are spread out across the quarter, nearly every time [the student] would score a perfect or nearly perfect score. And this is one of the few areas in band that we can grade objectively. It is the right note or it's not, either the tonguing or the articulation is right or it is not, or the rhythm is steady or it is not. And he would score perfect or nearly so, all the time. So I really don't think he's not giving himself enough credit.

The theory of Core Self-Evaluation could give more meaning to students who display the lack confidence in the classroom. These self-appraisals subconsciously appear in the classroom, where teacher can observe the actual behaviors. However, the internal thoughts are still unknown, as a teacher explains, “[Students] are harder on themselves because they know what their own thoughts are- which we don’t have access to. But ultimately they are actually doing better than they think they are.”

In Group 3, the students who demonstrated a regression in SEL skills had two students who lacked confidence, but those same students also had parent support at home. John Gottman, the leading psychologist regarding children’s emotions, states that individuals who have a similar chemical genetic makeup who must make a decision, vary their choices depending on their environment. In supportive environments where parents and care giver and able to help and assist their children how solve their problem and management their emotions, children are observed being more successful (Goldman 2006). This is makes since. If students come from a home life where emotions are discussed and acknowledged, then students might be able to better behavior and emotional decision. Some teachers described supportive parents as,

She was always at conferences and was interested in how he is doing. She doesn’t seem uncomfortable when I tell her things he is doing, or things he isn’t doing. His mom is pretty aware of how he is doing. Pretty involved. She would be supportive if he had concerns in the classroom.

Another teacher thought a student’s success in school had to do with his supportive parents,

I would say yes his parents do support him. Because I know he does have some siblings, that were also in band, and all three of them had strong work ethic. I wouldn’t have to remind them or ask them to stay on task or actually accomplish whatever is that we are working on. They would pretty much take care of it. [The student} was the same way, but he would go about it a little more quietly.

If all members of the same family also demonstrated a strong work ethic and have successful self-management skills, this would support scientist theory that the environment is a key factor in understanding emotional behaviors (Goldman 2006). If parents and care givers are discussing social and emotional skills at home, this would appear to be beneficial.

Group 3 consisted of students who scored lower on the posttest SEL survey after 28 weeks of social and emotional intervention instruction. Group 3 also had two of the five students described as being overly confident by their teachers. This was the only Group that had students described as being overly confident. One teacher describes a student as being over confident because he doesn't recognize the importance of self-management. "I think he has a lot of self confidence in himself because he doesn't see things the way I see them. He doesn't think that they are challenges for him."

When students rate their own behavior, they might portray a more positive image of themselves, according to theory called Socially Desirable Responding (Van de Mortel 2008). Student who are struggling with Social and Emotional competences might have several reasons why they would display being over confident or portraying a false image. One reason might be to "fake good" to adhere more closely to socially acceptable norms or to fit in with other student groups (Van de Mortel 2008). Several teachers shared their perspective of students' observation where students were attempting to adhere to the social norm. "He wants to look good. I think he is one of those kids who is not willing to see and address his issues. Or to admit to his faults. That is hard for some people." Another teacher described being "fake good" as, "He wanted to be that cool kid.... he wanted to be in the perceived popular group. But he was incapable of making friends or keeping friends." Finally, a teacher mentioned,

He would try to act like he was Mr. Cool guy and then some of the things he would say, that he thought were obviously funny. Others would look at him in a way that they wonder what the heck he was doing.

In Group 3, students showed no improvement on their post test scores, therefore interviewing the teachers gave more meaning to the students' lower SEL survey scores. When one teacher was asked about a student's overly confident personality, she explained the student simply didn't see behavior as a problem. "He didn't see that [being prepared] was such a big problem as I did, like not having his iPad charged, or forgetting his homework at home." When asked why the student didn't display appropriate self-management skills, she replied, "Maybe it hasn't been emphasized to him at home about the responsibilities of school and that this is his job right now and he needs to do well at it." A student's environment is critical to their social and emotional competences.

Parents and care givers are important in order to help and assist their children how to solve their problems and management their emotions. (Goldman 2006). This is makes sense. If students come from a home life where emotions are discussed and acknowledged, then student might be able to better navigate their behavior and emotional decision making.

Another common theme between the students who displayed overly confident characteristics, also had parents described as lacking support or follow through. If a positive environment can help student successfully navigate emotions, then a negative environment, might also have a negative effect on children learning to manage their social and emotional behaviors (Goldman 2006). When the teacher was asked if negative behaviors are learned or were supported as home, she responded:

Oh absolutely. I mean with mom helping him with his homework and doing all of these things for him. She is trying to teach him that you are never messing up so. She had excuses

too. Same thing. She realizes that she knows he needs to changes. Why did she make excuses? She didn't want to believe us.

I think part of it is his home life. Well, it leads to part of it, the over confidence. People are telling him, and he hears that he is doing a great job all the time a lot. I think he has inflated view of himself. What causes that? I think yeah, part of it is his home life.”

When a teacher contacted home about a student struggling with a social and emotional skill, such as getting along with others or social awareness skills, teachers described the parent who lacked support as,

Mom was almost defensive. In situations when we would contact her, email or phone call, I felt like she was always trying to make an excuses for him. He ADD, and that was always the reason why he did the things he did. I think she put up a good act as far as, we are going to follow through, we are doing to do this, and we are going to do that. But I'm not sure how much follow through at home. Therefore, I don't feel like her support was there. Mom say the right things no follow through to change a behavior. She would not come to Parent Teacher conferences.

Other parents show concern, but are not enough concern that they really want a different result. The accountability and follow through are not happening in this unsupportive family. For example,

I only remember meeting his parents at one of his conferences and I remember when I shared this information with them. They kind of shot him a look like we have gone through this before. So I think they are aware, but I don't know if they think it is a big enough concern to do anything about it.

Another teacher described unsupportive parents as, “I think that they show concern, but I don't think they are concerned enough to do anything about it. I think they ride it off as it is just typical behavior from a seventh boy.”

Group 3 showed signs of regression from the pre to posttest SEL survey. Students suffer from recognizing they have any areas of concern and try to “fit in,” while other students struggle

with having enough confidence to ask questions to ask for help. And furthermore, supportive parents can help student will accountability and follow through. And after interviewing their teachers, their SEL post survey scores have more meaning.

**Student Ranks Themselves Higher Than the Teacher/ Group 4:** After investigating the teacher survey scores, based on student behaviors in the classroom and comparing to the student self-evaluations of their SEL competencies, common themes were becoming apparent. Those four students were examined separately.

Fifteen students who were selected in order to understand their post SEL student survey. Two teachers for every student completed a SEL survey regarding the observed SEL behaviors in the classroom. There were four students who scored themselves higher on the post SEL student survey compared to their teachers' survey based on classroom observations. One may argue that if students are not honest with their self-reflection, why are students using it as a form evaluation? John Hattie, educational researcher who analyzed the best ways to improve student achievement, would counter that self-evaluation is one of the most influential activities to increase student achievement (Hattie 2008). Self-evaluation has the largest impact with an average increase of 1.44 standard deviations compared to those students who did not evaluate their behaviors (Hattie 2008). But since SEL surveys rely solely on self-evaluation, it is important to seek input from teachers in order to give more meaning to the students' post SEL scores. Eight interviews were conducted for the students who scored themselves higher on their post SEL survey. By interviewing teachers, the SEL post scores have more meaning as well as understanding why students' self-evaluation and teachers' direct observation don't align. Some common themes were discovered that give more meaning to the post SEL survey student score.

Two students were described as seeking positive attention from teachers. One teacher explained, “The student works to have a relationship with educators however, the relationship is not necessarily an academic relationship. He would be happy with attention from any adult.”

Another teacher described the student’s need for adult attention as:

[The student] was always really friendly and always like took an interest in how my weekend was. He would ask questions about me so. I think compared to most I have my students, we discussed things outside of classroom content more than I do with other students. I felt like he was more mature with his adult interactions. Like he would look them in the eye and make a socially appropriate comments.

Additionally another teacher said,

We have great relationship, anytime she sees me outside of school she always runs up and says hi. Umm. she comes in and is always friendly and wants to give me a hug when she gets her and when she leaves.

When asked if this was typical behavior for the student she responded, “I feel like he is like this with all his teachers. I mean just seeing him with [a teacher] and other teachers in the hall, I don’t think he treated me any differently than his other teachers.”

Interviewing teachers gives more meaning to the post SEL surveys by understanding student motivation for giving misleading scores on their post surveys. Two teachers shared their thoughts regarding why a student may continually be seeking positive attention from others, “Knowing him, I assume that his overly friendliness was because he was compensating for his lack of academic skill and holes.”

Another teacher responded,

[The student] is more focused on friends that her academics. Mainly because I never hear [her] talk about school. I mean I hear from other students; I should be working this. I have this coming up. If I didn’t know better, I would just think she comes to choir.

According to their MAP Growth® Assessment, the nationally normed assessment given to students twice a year, both students struggle academically scoring both in the 206 and 211, these scores are in the 30<sup>th</sup> percentiles among students their age nationwide. This would indicate both of these students tend to struggle academically in school.

According to the Social Comparison Theory first developed by Leon Festinger in 1954, people have the desire not only to evaluate themselves, but to compare themselves with others (Wood 1989). If a student knows that they struggle academically compared to their peers, the student may overcompensate in other areas, such as being friendly and seeking approval from trusted adults such as teachers. The Social Comparison Theory could also give some meaning to the reason why these students scored themselves higher on their post SEL self-evaluation, than their teacher did using direct observations. Students have a desire to compare their behaviors with other students in their class (Wood 1989). Therefore, students could be comparing themselves with their peers, and possibly recognizing the deficiencies in their behavior. According to their teachers they also seek attention and approval, which might lead students to assimilate to their peers. This might give more meaning to students who scored themselves higher on SEL post survey than the classroom teacher.

However, the two other students were described as attention seekers, but negatively. Their negative behaviors would draw the attention of teachers and peers because it was disruptive and sometimes disrespectful. Several teachers described the observed classroom behaviors, “So he tried by being funny, doing things that were funny, that say inappropriate things for attention. He was an attention seeker.” Another student was described as, “Sometimes he would say something funny to try and get the rest of the class to laugh. He would say

inappropriate comments at times... it would be those types of things.” And another teacher described a student as,

Someone in class would be happy with something that was going on in their lives or something that they did, and he would butt in and say he’s already done that 2 years ago. He was like a one upper. He would try to one up what they were excited about.

These students struggle with fitting in or belonging to a particular group. Therefore, in order to assimilate, the students seek approval from their peers, rather than adults. One way that they accomplish fit in, is by seeking attention through negative behaviors. Festinger’s Social Comparison Theory can explain this attention seeking behavior (Wood 1989). The Social Comparison theory states that students compare themselves to others. If a student seeks acceptance with a social group that the student believes they don’t compare to, naturally the student will behave in a manner in order to gain acceptance. One teacher explained why a student continued to behave poorly, “I think affirmation and to keep up his reputation of being a funny guy that makes everybody laugh.” To gain acceptance this student seeks approval through negative behaviors. This student struggles with social informational processing (Dodge, Pettit et al. 1986). Social informational processing requires students to read social cues, mentally interpret, and decode the meaning. Next, the child must decide how to respond to the social cue, according to the perceived meaning (Elias 1997). Students who seek attention perceive social cues such as, laughing and smiling, as positive affirmations, rather than laughing at someone’s immaturity. This indicates the reason why social learning should continually be taught in school. Students who struggle with peer acceptance need to be explicitly taught social cues and appropriate way to respond (Dodge, Pettit et al. 1986). By interviewing the teachers, the SEL post survey scores are given more meaning, as in why students seek attention in negative ways.

Not only do the student perceive that they are more successful in the SEL competencies than their classroom teachers, perhaps students might fabricate their scores for affirmation as well.

Another area that was a common theme, with those students who see attention in a negative way, is their lack of empathy. On the SEL survey empathy is measured through social awareness. Panorama Education ®describes social awareness as the ability to consider the perspectives of others and to empathize with them. Social awareness is critical because it emphasizes skills that are needed for students to be accepted by their peers (Zins 2004).

If a student is seeking approval from a particular social group, and chooses to get the group's attention through negative behaviors, lacking empathy makes sense. Studies have shown that students who struggle with empathy, a component of social awareness have difficulty with responding appropriately to constructive criticism, as well as accepting positive feedback and compliments from peers (Zins 2004). Students seek attention without regards to others feelings. Several teachers described students' behavior as:

He had social awareness, but I don't know how much he cared when he would hurt other people's feelings I think he was aware he was hurting their feelings, but I don't know if he cared enough to stop.

Another teacher described a student who lacked empathy as, "Most of time when a student sees that they are hurting someone's feelings, they will stop. Sometimes [the student] would just keep going until an adult would step in and tell him to stop." When a teacher was asked if they believed that the student knew he was hurting others, she responded, "I think he was pretty aware- I don't know how you couldn't be. But he was like, like he didn't really care how it truly affected others." Finally, a student was described as, "He wasn't very empathic. He would say inappropriate and hurtful things to kids, just to get attention from others in class. He didn't really care that he was being rude." Teaching empathy is a critical SEL competency addressed in

the Second Step® program (Second Step® 2017). On the other hand, if the SEL intervention is addressing empathy; how do the teachers know that the program is changing student behavior? Because behaviors are more difficult to measure, this makes an even stronger push to incorporate teacher input into the SEL evaluation process (Durlak 2015). Furthermore, by including teachers, this will strengthen causal relationships by having several accounts of a repeated behavior (Maxwell 2004). Therefore, teachers should be involved in the SEL evaluation since changes in behaviors are best observed by others (Durlak 2015).

Another common characteristic found with the students who scored themselves higher on the SEL post survey than their classroom teacher's observations was lacking grit. Grit defined by Panorama Education®, is how well a student can persevere through setbacks in order to achieve important long term goals. Researchers conceptualize grit as a courage to push through the emotion of fear, the fear of failure. (Lucas, Gratch et al. 2015). After interviewing the teachers to give more meaning to students' post survey scores, all students were described as lacking grit, "I think he struggled with grit. It wasn't like school wasn't hard for him. [The student] just did what he needed to, to get by and once it got challenging, he just kind of gave up." Another student was described as,

Grit is this one that comes to mind- she really doesn't want to push through. In my room if we are singing something hard, I will look over and she is not singing. Or, doesn't ask for help. A lot of kids will raise their hand and say I'm lost or I don't know where we are at in this part.

Another student had a great attitude, until he was faced with a challenge, "I feel like he kind of did his own thing and he was happy and confident being himself. He had a really good attitude. But when it came down to working he seemed to shut down more." Students who struggled with grit also had excuses to justify their behavior, "He had excuses for everything and I think it

impacted his grit. He was that kid at the end of the quarter who had missing assignments in all of his core classes.”

There was always a reason. I was at guitar lesson late last night and didn't get to do my homework or I went from this activity to this and didn't get time to do my homework, or I forgot to take something home, it was always something. No ownership.

Seeking attention for acceptance, as well having a fear of failure gives more meaning to the SEL post survey scores. No one wants to fail, but understanding how to deal with those feelings and emotions needs to be taught. By teaching emotional learning students address which internal or external event occurred to foster the fear of failing (Salovey and Meyer 1990). Those students who score themselves higher on their post SEL survey compared to their teachers might have contrived their success on the SEL post survey because they are not only seeking approval but moreover, they are scared of failing. By fabricating self-evaluation scores allows student to be successful and to obtain approval and attention from their teacher.

Environment is a key component in the development of social and emotional skills. Parents and caregiver who discuss emotions at home, have students who are more in social and emotional competences (Wood 1998). Therefore, parent support is critical for SEL development. Students who scored themselves higher on the SEL post survey as compared to their classroom teacher all lacked parent support. Teachers described parent support as: “At school when [the student] would have difficulty with his competences. She would he make excuses for his actions.” Another example was, “Mom says the right things but with no follow through to change a behavior. She would not come to Parent Teacher conferences.” Some students and parents shared the same behaviors, “She had excuses too. Same thing. She realizes that and she knows he needs to change.” Excuses occurred with parents too. “Mom was supportive but lacked follow through, discipline, made excuses for his behavior.” This reiterates

that the environment, or home life is critical for children to observe authentic social and emotional competences (Gottman 2006). When the teachers were asked what they believed caused this behavior, they responded:

Because he would be admitting he was at fault for something. He had a hard time admit he was wrong, or owning up to his choices that were not ok. I think it first probably started with his behavior at home.

Another teacher believed the parents' behavior caused the students behavior,

Probably a learned behavior, with the lack of getting to school on time and if that isn't important to mom or dad, or at least it doesn't feel like it. So if they are not making sure things need to happen, then she won't do that either.

When students don't observe appropriate social learning competences at home, it is understandable that they come to school lacking those same competences as well (Gottman 2006). Students need authentic and explicit lessons to reteach and reinforce appropriate SEL competences at school. By interviewing teachers, it gives more meaning to students' SEL post survey scores, by understanding why students struggle in specific areas and it also helps understanding why the students score themselves higher on the SEL post survey than their teachers did.

**Table 5: Overview of common answers**

	T score S higher	T scores S lower
	n=19	n=8
lacks confidence	42%	75%
involved parents	74%	12%
personality	32%	0
harder on themselves	32%	0

internalize emotions	32%	0
seeks attention	0	75%
learned behavior	26%	25%
over compensates	0	75%

Table 5 describes the common themes which reoccurred in the teacher interviews regarding student classroom behaviors.

**Table 6: Summary Analysis of All Outcomes**

	Students who evaluated themselves lower than the teacher	Students who evaluated themselves higher than the teacher
Group 1	4/5	1/5
Group 2	4/5	1/5
Group 3	3/5	2/5
Males	5/10	3/4
Females	6/10	1/4
Whites	*8.5/11	*2.5/11
Hispanic	2/2	
Black	1/1	
Free and Reduce lunch	2/10	2/4
Low MAP score	2/3	1/3
High MAP score	*2.5/3	*2.5/3
lacks confidence	8	6
involved parents	14	1
personality	6	0
harder on themselves	6	0

internalize emotions	6	0
seeks attention	0	6
learned behavior	5	2
over compensates	0	6

\*\* 1 student had 1 teacher higher and 1 teacher had one lower

In summary, Table 6 describes the overall data from the study. For example, most students score themselves lower than their teacher on the social and emotional posttest survey. Those who score themselves higher than their teacher do not see improvement from fall to spring on the SEL survey. Those with involved parents also tended to score themselves lower than their teacher saw them. Whereas seeking attention and over compensation is apparent in students that see their social and emotional behavior as better than the direct observation from their teachers.

## Conclusion

Group 1, the group who showed no change from the pretest to the posttest, did not show any significant results in any of the other categories. Through teacher interviews several common themes emerged such as lack of self-efficacy in Group 2, students who improved on their pretest to their posttest SEL survey, had several common attributes, such as 57% of Group 2 were girls. During the teacher interviews other themes reoccurred such as students internalizing their feelings. Students internalize their feelings in order to fit the social norms (Van de Mortel 2008). 80% of Group 2 students evaluated themselves lower than their teacher did. Students also were described as “being harder” on themselves because they were striving to be perfect. Group

3 students showed a regression in their SEL competencies. These students also had some common attributes, 50% of these students were males and 75% were student who received free or reduced lunch, indicating a low socioeconomic status. Through teacher interviews students in Group 3 had two distinct descriptions. Two students were described as lacking self- confidence, but had parents support at home. However, two students were described as being overly confident, and lacked parent support at home. Finally, the four students who self-evaluated themselves as higher than the teacher also had common themes such as attention seeking and lack of parent support. Also 75% were males and showed regression from the SEL pretest to SEL posttest survey.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

Chapter five is divided into three sections. The conclusion section which addresses results and outcomes organized by each research question. The study which explains the investigation as well as the problems in the literature and the ways in which the problems were rectified in the study. The next portion outlines limitations in the study which in turn could be used for area of future research. Finally, the implications section reports the findings with regard to how educators could use the results.

### **Conclusions**

This dissertation addressed this research question: What do SEL post survey scores mean from a teacher's perspective? Through the research process data will also be collected and analyze the following sub questions: 1) What are the common themes of students who improved after the implemented the SEL intervention? 2) What are the common themes of students who remained constant before and after the SEL intervention? 3) What are the common themes of students who regressed after the SEL intervention? 4) What are the common themes of students who scored themselves higher on the post SEL survey than their teacher did?

### **Group 1**

Group 1 were students who remained constant before and after the SEL intervention program. According to the teacher interviews, Group 1 students demonstrated low confidence. Teachers discovered that students struggled with self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief that one has the ability to be successful at a task, according to Panorama® Education. Demonstrating the feelings of self-efficacy can be displayed as having confidence. However, a lack of confidence, can influence a student's perception of their attainment of social and emotional

competences based on Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (Wood 1989). In Group 1, eighty percent of students displayed a lack of confidence in the classroom. Having confidence is critical since emotions influence a person's actions, reasoning or logical thinking (Salovey and Mayer 1990). When students struggle with having confidence this can affect all aspects of a student's academic success. This indicates the importance of emotional learning and its purpose in educational curriculum.

## **Group 2**

Group 2 were students who improved their posttest survey scores after the implementation of the SEL intervention. Several common themes emerged after teacher interviews such as students described as perfectionists. They internalized their emotions, had low confidence, and had supportive parents.

One theme that only appeared in Group 2 was that students seemed to be more critical of themselves. Students were described as internalizing their emotions. Students refrained from showing their true emotions. This is the concept of socially desirable responding. This occurs when students modify their behavior when they want to gain social acceptance or to avoid criticism (Van de Mortel 2008). Teachers made comments about not being able to really observe the students' emotions. According to the theory of social desirable responding, students internalize their behaviors, thoughts and emotions in order to fit the social norms and to gain social acceptance (Van de Mortel 2008). Students do not want to be subjected to the criticism of their peers, so they hide their feelings.

Several times the word perfectionist was mentioned when teachers described students in Group 2. The Merriam-Webster dictionary described perfection is an unsurpassable degree of accuracy or excellence. Students could be struggling with an unrealistic core evaluation. Core

evaluations are appraisals that people have subconsciously about themselves (Bono and Judge 2003). For example, Group 2 students could have a skewed core evaluation because they are striving to reach an unattainable goal of being perfect. Students are attempting to cross a finish line that doesn't exist. Unrealistic goals will then effect an individual's self-efficacy, or the belief that a person can achieve a goal (Panorama 2017).

One could argue that being a perfectionist and having the drive to be more, would merely be part of a student's personality. However, scientists have measured that each area of the brain develops at a particular point in childhood development (Goldman 2006). Just as someone maybe born with certain traits it does not mean their temperament determines his or her destiny. Children can be taught new or better ways to handle their SEL competences (Goldman 2006). A student seeking an unrealistic goal will never be successful; therefore, it is necessary to address these short comings. According to researchers, this underlying idea of failure can affect a student's subconscious self-evaluation. Core evaluations are appraisals that people have subconsciously (Bono and Judge 2003).

Another common theme which developed from teacher interviews for Group 2, was students lacking confidence. In fact in all teacher interviews, every student was described as lacking confidence. When students set these high standards, this can also be a negative effect on a student's self-confidence. Confidence is measured on the SEL student survey through self-efficacy competences. On the Panorama® Education Survey ask students are asked to answer questions related to how much they believe they can succeed academically. Research indicates that students who self-report higher levels of self-efficacy tend to be more successful not only in school but later in life as well (Panorama 2017).

Group 2 had the highest percentage of parent support as compared to the other groups. Parents mold their children's emotional behavior by talking about their feelings, describing them and helping their children understand them (Goldman 2006). However, if parents are not having these critical conversations at home, this may be left up to the educational system. Learning about the home life of students through the eyes of a teacher, gives new lenses to the SEL posttest survey scores as well as understanding why students score themselves differently than the classroom teacher observes in the classroom.

### **Group 3**

Group 3 are students who regressed after the school district implemented the SEL intervention. After teacher interviews, several themes emerged. Group 3 students demonstrated high or low confidence, and lacked parent support.

Three out of five students were described, from their teachers' perspective as lacking confidence in the classroom. Social comparison theory influences the way individuals evaluate their abilities on a self-evaluation. Also having a lack of confidence could be explained by the concept called core self-evaluations. These evaluations are appraisal and opinions that people believe about themselves (Bono and Judge 2003). One SEL competence focused on in the Second Step® program was self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief that a person can be successful (Panorama 2017). A Core Self- Evaluation with a student who has not developed the skill of self-efficacy, could explain the reason for a student's lack of confidence.

But those same students also had parent support at home. In supportive environments where parents and care giver and able to help and assist their children how solve their problem and management their emotions, children are observed being more successful (Goldman 2006). If students come from a home life where emotions are discussed and acknowledged, then

students might be able to better display behavior and emotional decision. If all members of the same family also demonstrated a strong work ethic and have successful self-management skills, this would support scientist theory that the environment is a key factor in understanding emotional behaviors (Goldman 2006). If parents and care givers are discussing social and emotional skills at home, this would appear to be beneficial

However, two out of five students were described as being over confident. This was the only Group that had students described as being overly confident. Student who are struggling with social and emotional competences might have several reasons why they would display being over confident or portraying a false image. One reason might be to “fake good” to adhere more closely to socially acceptable norms or to fit in with other student groups (Van de Mortel 2008).

On the other hand, those described as having overly confident characteristics, also had parents described as lacking support or follow through. If a positive environment can help student successfully navigate emotions, then a negative environment, might also have a negative effect on children learning to manage their social and emotional behaviors (Goldman 2006).

#### **Group 4**

There were four students who scored themselves higher on the post SEL student survey compared to their teachers’ survey based on classroom observations, named Group 4. These students, Group 4 also had similar themes uncovered with teacher interviews. Two students displayed positive attention seeking behaviors and two students displayed negative attention seeking behaviors. All four students lacked parent support at home.

The Social Comparison Theory could also give some meaning to the reason why these students scored themselves higher on their post SEL self-evaluation than their teacher did using

direct observations. Students have a desire to compare their behaviors with other students in their class (Wood 1989). Therefore, students could be comparing themselves with their peers, and possibly recognizing the deficiencies in their behavior or academically. Two students did this by showing positive attention seeking behaviors, such as engaging in conversation, helping the teacher, or being overly friendly. On the other hand, two students demonstrated negative behaviors. Their negative behaviors would draw the attention of teachers and peers because it was disruptive and sometimes disrespectful. These students struggled with fitting in or belonging to a particular group. Therefore, in order to assimilate, the students sought approval from their peers or adults.

These students struggle with social informational processing because they misinterpret (Dodge, Pettit et al. 1986). Social informational processing requires students to read social cues, mentally interpret, and decode the meaning. Then, the child must decide how to respond to the social cue, according to the perceived meaning (Elias 1997). This indicates the reason why social learning should continually be taught in school. Students who struggle with peer acceptance need to be explicitly taught social cues and appropriate ways to respond (Dodge, Pettit et al. 1986).

Environment is a key component in the development of social and emotional skills. Parents and caregivers who discuss emotions at home have students have more in social and emotional competences (Wood 1998). Therefore, parent support is critical for SEL development. According to teachers interviewed, students who scored themselves higher on the SEL post survey as compared to their classroom teacher all lacked parent support.

## **The Study**

This study examined a Midwestern middle school with 813 students enrolled. All students were given the pre and posttest. After calculating the total averages of both the pre and posttests, the differences were recorded and gathered into a histogram, to determine median score. The standard deviation was determined and three groups were formed. Group one were those students who showed no difference in their pre and post test score. Their pretest was the same as their post test score. Group two showed an increase from their pre to posttest scores. Group three showed a decrease in their posttest score, or no improvement after the intervention was administered.

Five students were selected from each group to ensure a variety of students were being selected for further examination. Then using the demographic makeup of the larger population, students were selected accordingly. Seven girls and eight boys, 11 whites, three Hispanic, one African American were chosen to replicate to the middle school's current population. Three students receiving free and reduced lunch were also selected to match the students free and reduced lunch percentage.

Thirty teachers completed a survey about a student's social and emotional competencies. Each student had 2 teachers complete a survey. 21 out of 30 teachers scored the student better than the student scored themselves.

14 out of 15 teacher pairs agreed on the behaviors exhibited by the students. However, the students didn't agree with the teachers, indicating that self-reporting for student behaviors may not be a trustworthy form of evaluation. The information gathered from teacher interview gave more meaning to the post SEL survey scores

## **Summary of Findings**

The pre and posttest survey scores indicated that 57% females appeared to be more successful on the posttest. Whereas only 12% of males improved in acquiring social and emotional competences. 50% of males showed a decline in SEL on the posttest. These percentages could indicate that personality or genetic makeup may play a role in SEL. However, 75% of free and reduce lunch students, also showed regression from the pretest scores. Perhaps indicating that environment, such as home life could also be an important factor to consider regarding SEL. Previous academic achievement didn't appear to affect the posttest survey scores. Students selected with both high and low achievement scores fell into each category. This would indicate that students on all achievement levels can be successful in acquiring social and emotional competencies.

In this study there were several areas in the research which needed to be modified in order to conduct this study. The three areas were: 1) self-reporting surveys can be misleading (Wood 1989); 2) causation between the program implementation and the student post survey results are weak (Maxwell 2004); and, 3) SEL survey results needs additional input to give meaning the post survey scores (Durlak 2015). These problems were considered and changed in order to conduct the study.

### **Self-evaluations are misleading**

The first area of concern was self- evaluation. When people rate themselves regarding their own behavior, they tend to be present a more positive image of themselves, this is referred to as socially desirable responding (SDR) (Van de Mortel 2008). There are several reasons why a participant may want to present false image. Some reasons a participant may want to “fake good” to adhere closely to socially acceptable norms, could be to gain social acceptance, or to

avoid criticism. In the study two teachers for every student completed a survey regarding the student's behavior in class. 14 out of 15 teacher pairs both agreed on their survey regarding students' knowledge on SEL competences. Therefore, by having two teachers evaluate each student not only helps validate the student behaviors, it also strengthens causation between observations and the students' knowledge of the SEL competences.

### **Causal relationship**

Another area in the study that needed addressing was the weak causation between the program implementation and the student post survey results. Scientists stated that individuals cannot directly determine the meaning of causal relationships (Maxwell 2004). Hume further explained that we can only explain causation through repeated observations. Single cases do not confirm causation. By interviewing two teachers for each student there were multiple accounts of observed behaviors not only by one teacher but by two different teachers regarding the same student. Repeated observations could explain causal relationships.

### **Teacher input**

Another issue with the study was lack of teacher input in the students' SEL post survey scores. SEL survey results need additional input to give meaning to the post survey scores (Durlak 2015). Moreover, CASEL, The Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, suggests that students, teachers, and parents should provide input for effectiveness (Durlak 2015). In order to better understand the self-evaluation post SEL survey scores, teacher input through interviews was conducted. There were 28 teacher interviews conducted to provide more information to the students' SEL post survey scores.

### **Implementation of Second Step®**

Another issue with this study was the validity of the implementation of the district adopted program, Second Step®. The program lessons were administered during the last period of the day, at a time students usually devoted to homework. SEL programs were designed to be imbedded into the school day, so students could experience and practice SEL skills organically (Durlak 2015). When placed at the end of day, not only do students feel as if it unimportant and not needed, but teachers feel that as well. Second Step® was viewed as “add on” and therefore the validity of the program could be compromised.

### **Limitations**

The largest limitation in this study was the number of subjects used to examine more closely. While many interesting findings were discovered, in order to apply the findings to other situations, many more students should be studied. This study can act as a starting point for future, more in-depth studies.

Another limitation regarding the study, was the convenience of students. Not only were students selected from one middle school, it was also the school district, where I was employed. Even though a wide range of students were selected for the study, using students from all over the state or nation would be interesting to see if the results would be similar. This also could be an idea for further research.

Another limitation was that classroom teachers were not discussing students that were currently in their classroom. The SEL post-survey was given in May, the collection of data was gathered in July, and selected of students occurred in September. Teacher interviews didn't occur until October, almost six months after they actually had that particular student in class. Some elective teachers such as cheerleading, orchestra, and band still had some of the specific

students in class, but most did not. Asking about students that are currently in a teacher's class could gather better qualitative data. Asking previous and current teachers would also be a consideration regarding future research. In a future study teacher surveys and interviews could be compared to behaviors and SEL competencies observed in class.

### **Suggestions for future research**

For future research, teachers could complete a pretest survey as well as a posttest of the regarding students in their class. This would help with causation between the program lessons given by the classroom teacher and the student's SEL competencies observed in the class. Both student and teacher survey scores at the beginning of the year could be compared with the survey scores at the end of the year. Areas of growth and areas of need could be recorded for reteaching and lesson design.

### **Implications**

Generally, most students do not lie on their self-reflection and it is a valid method of measuring student growth. Teachers should continue to use student self-evaluation since it has been shown to significantly improve student progress (Hattie 2006). If students incorrectly report their self-evaluation, they tend to be overly critical. This can be a cause for concern. Students who showed the most improvement on their SEL post survey, also demonstrated the lowest confidence as a group. Teachers also described most students in Group 2, as internalizing their emotions and feelings. Moreover, some students were described as perfectionists. In this group the students who appeared to be the most successful in SEL competences, internalized their behaviors in order to appear perfect. Yet, they still scored themselves as struggling in self-efficacy. It appears that students who are most successful need the most help with managing their social and emotional competences. Teachers should be aware of students who strive for

perfection. These students are continually setting up themselves with failure by attempting to reach unattainable goals.

Another area that educators could find beneficial from this study are dealing with those students who cause behavior problems by seeking attention in class. Findings from this study stated that they also lacked parent support at home. Therefore, if students seek attention in class, teachers should view their behavior as a need and not a problem. The students need adult affirmations at school, since they are not receiving it at home. Providing students with positive adult interaction could help the student's attention seeking behaviors.

School districts can use the results of this study in several ways. Districts can use teacher interviews is for Watch List students those students who administration and teachers already have a concern about. These students could be struggling with attendance, academic progress, or behavior. Districts should all have their teachers complete a survey or interview regarding the students SEL competences. Many times these aspects are discussed in intervention meetings. If there was a set of questions about SEL behaviors that can effect student performance, it could assist intervention teams with another area of support. Another use is to have two teachers complete a pretest survey on students at the beginning of the year and have those identical teachers complete a posttest survey regarding the same student at the end of the year. This would add to the causal relationship between the program lessons and SEL reported in observation (Maxwell 2004).

I would highly recommend that school districts investigate the validity of program implementation. Districts should begin with providing teachers with the research regarding the benefits of Social and Emotional Learning. School districts need teacher buy in, in order to understand the importance of the district adopted SEL programs. In middle schools, students

should have a class devoted to teaching the SEL skills to maintain the validity of the program. The lessons should be observed and teachers should be evaluated. Teaching SEL skills at the end of the day during a time usually devoted to homework, does not convey its importance. Furthermore if teachers don't view the content as being beneficial, then the delivery of the lessons could be compromised. If districts want to ensure the validity of the program, these steps should be considered.

I would recommend that school districts not only teach social and emotional skills, but they also need to evaluate student progress and report to parents. SEL should be reported like other subject areas. SEL should not be considered an extra time filler. In order to convince parents and educators it is important, SEL lessons should be graded. Social and emotional skills should be on the report card. If schools think it is important enough to devote time to the curriculum, then parents need to be aware of their child's progress. Teachers could assess students with a pretest. Teachers would then teach the skills students need. And finally, teachers would reassess. Small flexible groups should be formed for students. Taxpayers may argue that devoting the time to teach and evaluate each student is waste of time and a waste of money. Yet, studies show that students with these skills are proved to be more successful in life. If we know it is important, then as educators we should explicitly teach those skills. Throughout the years, academic rigor has clouded the judgement of policymakers who assume that parents are teaching social and emotional skills at home. Educators must assess the SEL need; teach the areas of concern; and then report progress to parents.

This study sought to give more meaning to the social and emotional posttest student survey by gathering input from the classroom teacher. Interviewing two teachers for each student strengthened causal relationships by including repeated observation in different contexts.

Lastly, self-evaluation can be viewed as misleading but by asking for teacher evaluations as well, more meaning is given to the empirical survey. Teacher evaluations allow educators to understand and give more meaning to the social and emotional learning of middle school students.

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## Appendix A

### Approval of Protocol



April 3, 2018

Lori Greeson

1809g822@ku.edu

Dear Lori Greeson:

On 4/3/2018, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Student vs. Teacher Perceptions of Student Behavior: After Implementing a Social and Emotional Learning Intervention Program
Investigator:	Lori Greeson
IRB ID:	STUDY00142071
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assent for Participation.docx, • consent parent/student, • consent teacher 3.30.docx, • Interview Questions.docx, • KU Human Research Protocol 8-17-1 2.pdf, • Panorama Olathe Fall 2017 SEL Skills Grades 6-12 PDF.pdf, • Research Protocol Greeson, • teacher survey.docx</li> </ul>

The IRB approved the study from 4/3/2018 to 4/2/2019.

1. Before 4/2/2019 submit a Continuing Review request and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure.
2. Any significant change to the protocol requires a modification approval prior to altering the project.
3. Notify HRPP about any new investigators not named in original application. Note that new investigators must take the online tutorial at <https://rgs.drupal.ku.edu/human-subjects-compliance-training>.
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported immediately.
5. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 4/2/2019 approval of this protocol expires on that date. Please note university data security and handling requirements for your project:

<https://documents.ku.edu/policies/IT/DataClassificationandHandlingProceduresGuide.htm>

You must use the final, watermarked version of the consent form, available under the "Documents" tab in eCompliance.

Sincerely,

Jocelyn Isley, MS, CIP IRB Administrator, KU Lawrence Campus

Human Research Protection Program Youngbetg Hall f 2385 Irving Hill Rd I Lawrence, KS 66045 | (785) 864-7429 | [research.ku.edu/hrpp](https://research.ku.edu/hrpp)

## Appendix B

### Teacher Interview Consent Form

Dear Teachers,

School districts are increasingly emphasizing the importance of social/emotional learning (SEL). In August 2017, the Olathe District Schools implemented an SEL intervention program, *Second Step*. It also adopted the *Panorama* survey, which would be administered to students in order to measure *Second Step's* effects. In concordance with this effort, I am interested in teachers' perceptions of students' self-evaluations on the *Panorama* survey. Do teachers' views of students' change agree with students' self-evaluations of their change? Are there discrepancies? If so, to what degree and why? Would you be willing to share your thoughts with me in a 30-60 minute interview? Participation is voluntary and you can exit the study at any time without negatively affecting our relationship. There are no right or wrong answers in the interview, as I simply wish to learn about your experiences and thoughts. Other than spending some of your time, there will be no risk to you. And even though your participation may not directly benefit you, your answers will help teachers and doctors understand how to develop better lessons and strategies, in order to help other students in the future. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed, with your permission. I will store all of the data collected during the study in my secure, password protected computer until the study is completed. I will then destroy the data. Responses shared during the interview will be kept confidential. I will not share any identifiable information at any point.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate in this study. I am doing this research as a requirement for doctoral program at the University of Kansas, and plan to share my findings with my committee. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at (913)485-5889 or [lgreessonmt@olatheschools.org](mailto:lgreessonmt@olatheschools.org). Feel free to contact my faculty supervisor Argun Saatcioglu at 1122 West Campus Road, JRP 407, Lawrence, KS 66045 or call (785)-864-1826.

Sincerely,  
Lori Greesson

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I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I received answers to any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional question about my rights as a research participants, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email [irb@ku.edu](mailto:irb@ku.edu).