The Role of Leadership in Social-emotional Learning Implementation: Making Sense of Social-emotional Learning Initiatives

Author: Sarah J. Hardy

BOSTON COLLEGE

Lynch School of Education

Department of Educational Administration and Higher Education Professional School Administrators Program

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION: MAKING SENSE OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING INITIATIVES

Dissertation in Practice by

Sarah J. Hardy

with Michael A. Caira, Jr., Deborah Langlois, and Donna M. McGarrigle

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Abstract

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by

Sarah J. Hardy

Dr. Vincent Cho, Chair, Dr. Elida Laski, Reader

Dr. Ingrid Allardi, Reader

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is an essential component of every student's education. District leaders play an important role in the development and implementation of SEL programs in schools. This qualitative case study explored the strategies used by district leaders in supporting sensemaking of SEL initiatives as they were implemented. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with district and school leaders, focus group interviews with teachers, and a document review. Findings revealed district leaders employed strategies in the broad areas of setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization (Leithwood et al., 2004). However, there was no district-wide, unified vision for SEL programming, and the majority of SEL reform was advanced by principals. SEL interactions mostly occurred between principals and teachers, and between members of the teaching staff. SEL interactions were focused on essential principles of SEL initiatives, procedural information about SEL implementation, and crisis-driven support for individual students. Some interactions supported sensemaking. One recommendation of this study is to set a district-wide vision for SEL learning to align practices and provide a framework for principal autonomy. This study also recommends establishing structures that support collaboration in order to promote sensemaking through SEL interactions.

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CHAPTER ONE[1]

DISSERTATION DESCRIPTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

For the last 20 years, educational reforms have focused on implementing learning standards and increasing accountability (Cohen, Fuhrman, & Mosher, 2007; Hargreaves & Ainscow, 2015). While these reforms led to gains in student achievement (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2003), the definitions of student readiness and success are expanding. Educators, legislators, and researchers have recognized the importance of non-cognitive skills for school success and longer term functioning (Zins & Elias, 2007). These constellations of 'soft' skills are commonly referred to as social-emotional competencies (Elias, 2013). In school, students develop these competencies through social-emotional learning (SEL) (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). SEL is the process through which people gain and apply skills that allow them to understand and regulate their own emotions, to apply empathy in interactions with others, and to successfully negotiate social problem solving (Zins & Elias, 2007). As such, SEL is increasingly considered essential to every child's education (Slade & Griffith, 2013).

While the concept of SEL is not a new one (Howard, Berkowitz, & Schaeffer, 2004), in recent years federal legislation, such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) brought SEL instruction to the forefront for educators and administrators. This national policy codified the requirement for educators to provide students with a well-

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[1] This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Michael A. Caira, Jr., Sarah J. Hardy, Deborah Langlois, and Donna M. McGarrigle.

rounded education and a school environment that enhances learning by attending to social-emotional as well as the academic needs of children. In an ongoing effort to address this reform movement, schools employ a variety of programs aimed at addressing discrete social-emotional issues such as substance abuse, conflict resolution, attendance, and character building (Greenberg et al., 2003). However, such stand-alone efforts often fail because they lack connection to a wider vision for SEL.

It is the responsibility of leaders to set direction in their districts, ensure staff development supports that direction, and create organizational structures that yield the desired results (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Therefore, leaders direct SEL implementation by establishing policies, setting vision, and creating strategic goals, all of which unite the many elements that comprise successful SEL programming (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Additionally, leaders can ensure the appropriate allocation of resources for staff development and for necessary organizational structures.

Although much research exists regarding the impact of leaders on teaching and learning (e.g., Blase & Blase, 2000; Marks & Printy, 2003), there is a dearth of research addressing how school and district leaders can best support implementation of SEL policy and initiatives. Educational leaders play an important role in providing the support and guidance needed to implement effective SEL programming (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Therefore, the broader aim of this project was to explore the role of school and district leaders in supporting implementation of SEL in public education.

Individual Studies and Conceptual Lens

This project examined specific aspects of SEL implementation and educational

leadership through four individual studies (Table 1.1). Each study established specific research questions and explored the implementation of SEL opportunities through a different conceptual lens. Table 1.1 lists each individual study and its corresponding conceptual framework. Collectively, the four views provided an understanding of the work done by school personnel to implement SEL in one district.

Table 1.1

Four Studies of the Role of Leadership in Social-Emotional Learning Implementation

Individual Study Title	Conceptual Lens	Investigator
One District's Approach to Professional Development	Self-efficacy and Professional Development	Caira, Jr.
Making Sense of Social-Emotional Learning Initiatives	Sensemaking	Hardy
Leadership and Classroom Learning Environment	Leadership Practices	Langlois
Principal and Counselor Practices to Support Social-Emotional Learning	Distributed Leadership	McGarrigle

Literature Review

The following review will familiarize the reader with the research literature used to inform our project. First, we define SEL, for the purpose of our project. Second, we present background information and research showing the importance of SEL on various student outcomes. Third, we examine the role of teachers in SEL implementation. Fourth, we review the literature regarding the role of leaders in developing and supporting SEL initiatives and improvements in schools.

Definition of Social-Emotional Learning

Elias (2006) calls SEL "the 'missing piece' in education, because it ...links academic knowledge with a specific set of skills important to success in schools, families, communities, workplaces and life in general" (p. 6). Throughout the research literature, the term SEL has various definitions and overlaps with a multitude of terms used in education, such as: character education, emotional literacy, whole child education, grit, and resilience (Elias, 2013). However, the commonality among terms is a focus on the development of essential social-emotional skills and the impact of these skills on student functioning and learning (Murray, Hurley, & Ahmed, 2015).

The inclusion of the word "learning" in the term "social-emotional learning" is intentional because it indicates social-emotional skills can be acquired (Oberle, Domitrovich, Meyers, & Weissberg, 2016). The term SEL recognizes the complex process involved in the attainment of social-emotional skills. As described by Elias and Moceri (2012), "[SEL] implies a pedagogy for building those skills and an intervention structure to support the internalization and generalization of the skills over time and across contexts" (p. 424). The importance of this skill development "over time and across contexts" highlights schools as a critical setting to foster social-emotional skills. In addition, these researchers recognized the importance of a range of people (e.g., teachers, parents, and peers) being involved in skill instruction, practice, and generalization of social-emotional competencies.

The definition for SEL from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was the most appropriate one for our project due to its framework for organizing social, emotional, and academic learning. According to

CASEL (2015), SEL is the process of teaching, practicing, and reinforcing five social-emotional competencies. Formally, this definition states that SEL is:

> The process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2015, p. 5).

Per CASEL's (2015) definition, the five identified competencies related to social-emotional health include: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. See Table 1.2 for the definition of each of these competencies.

Table 1.2

CASEL's Core SEL Competencies

Social-emotional competencies	Competency Definitions
Self-awareness	Recognizing one's emotions and identifying and cultivating one's strengths and positive qualities
Social awareness	Understanding the thoughts and feelings of others and appreciating the value of human differences
Self-management	Monitoring and regulating one's emotions and establishing and working toward achieving positive goals
Relationship skills	Establishing and maintaining healthy, rewarding relationships based on cooperation, effective communication, conflict resolution, and an ability to resist inappropriate social pressure
Responsible decision making	Assessing situational influences and generating, implementing, and evaluating ethical solutions to problems that promote one's own and others' well-being

Note. Adapted from "Effective social and emotional learning programs," by CASEL (2015).

The Importance of Social-Emotional Learning for Students

The impact of SEL on students is substantial. SEL influences academic achievement, school behavior, and life-long success (Zins & Elias, 2007). We discuss the impact of SEL on these areas of student functioning in turn.

Academic achievement. There is a growing body of research that points to the link between academic achievement and students' social-emotional development (Elias, 2009). A meta-analysis of 213 studies looked at the effectiveness of universal SEL programs and found SEL programming positively impacted a broad range of skills (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). An analysis of one subset of these studies revealed an 11-percentile point gain in the academic achievement of students taking part in SEL programming. Similarly, Payton et al. (2008) found up to a 17-percentile point increase in academic test scores for students involved in SEL programming. Another study examined reading and math standardized assessment scores and found a link between reading and math achievement and social-emotional competencies (Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, Hertzman, & Zumbo, 2014). The same pattern of results is evident for subgroups of students. For example, when only students from economically disadvantaged families are included, regular participation in universal SEL services is also linked to better development of social-emotional and academic skills (Zhai, Raver, & Jones, 2015). Thus, time spent on SEL, even when taken away from the core curriculum, is time well spent.

School behavior. The importance of SEL for students goes beyond the impact on academic achievement and includes improved behavior (Durlak et al., 2011). Shechtman and Yaman (2012) examined the effect of integrating SEL in literature instruction on

student behavior. Along with increased content mastery, students had commensurate improvements in their classroom behavior and motivation (Shechtman & Yaman, 2012). So too, implementation of SEL programming was found to reduce student antisocial behaviors (Frey, Nolen, Edstrom, & Hirschstein, 2005) and improve school conduct (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2011).

SEL can impact student behavior outside of the classroom as well. Even in less structured school settings, social-emotional skills play a key role. The use of explicit instruction in behavioral expectations coupled with positive adult reinforcement may lead to a reduction in undesired recess behavior (Lewis, Colvin, & Sugai, 2000) and improved hallway conduct (Oswald, Safran & Johanson, 2005). Thus, SEL is important to student success in a range of school settings.

While the presence of SEL programming can positively influence student behaviors (Brackett et al., 2011; Durlak et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2000; Frey et al., 2005; Oswald et al., 2005; Shechtman & Yaman, 2012), the absence of thoughtful SEL implementation comes at a cost. According to Blum, Libbey, Bishop, and Bishop (2004), without the development of social-emotional competencies, students lose interest in school over time. In addition, without sufficient social-emotional skills, students struggle to form functional relationships. Furthermore, as students' connections to school erode, so too does student academic achievement. Consequently, a failure to establish effective relationships may lead to school failure (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007).

Life-long success. In addition to the shorter term academic and behavioral benefits, skills gained through SEL are linked to better long-term outcomes for

students. Elias (2009) explained, "[SEL] is about teaching all children to have the patience, interest, and skills to think about the complex issues all citizens face and to have the knowledge, inclination, and skills needed for civic participation" (p. 840). The skills and dispositions necessary to participate in a democracy also lead to well-being and happiness (Cohen, 2006). Therefore, providing systematic and explicit instruction in SEL supports students in developing skills that are essential for long-term success in life (Zins & Elias, 2007).

Dodge et al. (2015) conducted a longitudinal study to determine the impact of an intervention program on kindergarten students with high ratings of aggressive or disruptive behavior. Half of the students, approximately 445 children, were provided instruction in social-cognitive skills and peer relationships. Eighteen years later, researchers examined the arrest rates, drug and alcohol use, and psychiatric symptoms of all participants. They found lower rates of externalizing and internalizing behaviors with individuals who participated in the intervention. Thus, investing in students' social-emotional development through SEL programming and initiatives can have both short term impacts (e.g. increased achievement and prosocial skills), as well as long term ones (e.g. reductions in negative adult outcomes).

Teacher's Role in SEL

Teachers play an important role in the successful implementation of SEL for students. Our review of literature revealed teachers promote SEL for students in three broad ways. First, we discuss teacher-student relationships. Second, we examine the importance of a positive classroom environment. Third, we present research findings regarding the effective implementation of SEL practices and programs.

Teacher-student relationships. Relationships play an important role in the cognitive and social development of students (Davis, 2003). Therefore, relationship development is instrumental in the implementation of SEL. According to Pianta (1997), positive adult relationships are important resources for student learning and development. In fact, students who learn from caring and responsive teachers were found to have a stronger work ethic and report a greater enjoyment of learning (Rimm-Kaufman, Baroody, Larsen, Curby, & Abry, 2015). Additionally, positive teacher-student relationships can lead to a decrease of externalized and internalized negative behaviors in children (Merritt, Wanless, Rimm-Kaufman, Cameron, & Peugh, 2012; O'Connor, Dearing, & Collins, 2011) and higher levels of prosocial functioning (Brock & Curby, 2014; Merritt et al., 2012). Warm and communicative relationships may also increase a student's social-emotional well-being (O'Connor et al., 2011). Positive relationships were found to be especially important for students with behavioral difficulties (Brock & Curby, 2014) and for those with a lower sense of self-efficacy (Martin & Rimm-Kaufman, 2015). So, although students enter school with a range of competencies, how teachers nurture these relationships has important implications.

Importance of a positive classroom environment. The relationships teachers establish with students are foundational in creating a positive learning environment. According to Elias (2006), "effective, lasting academic learning and SEL are built on caring relationships and warm but challenging classroom and school environments" (p. 7). Students learning in positive classroom environments were more secure, attended to their academics at higher rates, and communicated more positively with peers (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2015). Additionally, classrooms characterized by a positive climate

moderated the risk of early school failure (Hamre & Pianta, 2005).

Implementation of SEL practices and programs. While teacher-student relationships and classroom environments influence SEL, teachers also support SEL development through pedagogy and the explicit teaching of social-emotional skills through structured programs. The implementation of these programs has implications for their effectiveness. Researchers found teacher training in SEL programming led to increased program dosage and fidelity, which in turn, positively impacted students' emotional problem solving and emotional literacy (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012). Similarly, fidelity with and consistent implementation of an SEL program matters. As an example, Ottmar, Rimm-Kaufman, Berry, and Larsen (2013) examined the impact of the consistent use of Responsive Classroom, an educational approach focused on building a relationship between academics and SEL. They found this approach positively impacted the effectiveness of mathematics instruction, through student development of class rules, student choice in work, and regular modeling of classroom routines and expectations.

When weighing how best to develop SEL, it is critical to note that quick-fix, short-term, or isolated approaches are inadequate (Zins, Elias, & Greenberg, 2007). Thus, conveying the importance of SEL to staff prior to implementing new SEL initiatives is imperative in order to attain staff buy-in. Therefore, the role of leaders in SEL implementation becomes essential.

The Importance of Educational Leadership

As is true with all school reform, educational leadership plays an important role in the development and implementation of SEL (Kendziora & Osher, 2016). Although

research gaps exist regarding the impact of leadership in the effective implementation of SEL, leaders can move organizations forward by "influenc[ing] a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2016, p. 16). Setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization are three sets of practices through which leaders can facilitate change (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Setting direction. Creating a vision and articulating a plan to realize that vision are common practices among effective educational leaders (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Leaders help to establish a sense of purpose and meaning by placing organizational goals into a broader context for the staff (Honig, 2016). How leaders frame a policy highlights certain aspects of the reform. Leaders can best garner support for reform by helping staff understand how the change connects to current practice, why the reform is necessary, and why the particular reform was selected. A leader's ability to articulate a compelling vision for the organization can energize and motivate staff to engage in the organizational reform (Minckler, 2014). Several researchers found vision setting to be a collaborative process in schools that affects positive change (Devos, Tuytens, & Hulpia, 2013; Dinham, 2005; Silins, Mulford, & Zarins, 2002). Irrespective of how a vision is determined, it is ultimately a leader's responsibility to set the organizational vision and determine the organizational direction (Leithwood et al., 2004), whether as an individual process or a more collaborative one.

Developing people. Motivating and energizing staff is often insufficient on its own to sustain growth, as even motivated staff may not have the prerequisite skills to make progress with new organizational initiatives (Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015). However, participation in professional development can increase skills and efficacy of

staff (McKeown, Abrams, Slattum, & Kirk, 2016). When leaders provide teachers with targeted professional development, teachers are more likely to attempt new techniques and implement changes to their daily practices (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002). Educational leaders can support staff development by providing appropriate external professional development or by facilitating access to internal resources or expertise (Minckler, 2014). In the development of staff SEL, effective professional development and supportive coaching can increase the quality and quantity of lessons implemented with a new SEL curriculum (Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jacobson, 2009).

Redesigning the organization. Effective leaders establish the conditions that support staff towards meeting organizational goals (Dinham, 2005; Higgins, Ishimaru, Holcombe, & Fowler, 2012). Leaders can improve outcomes by creating the time and space for staff to work together and by establishing expectations for the work (Minckler, 2014). Leaders can also foster teacher collaboration as a norm of educator practice (Bruce, Esmonde, Ross, Dookie, & Beatty, 2010). Creating the appropriate structures and norms is particularly important for sustaining SEL initiatives due to the important role contextual conditions play in SEL (Ringeisen, Henderson, & Hoagwood, 2003).

Leaders can increase organizational capacity through the creation of innovative learning environments that support risk-taking and the development of new skills (Higgins et al., 2012). In a study of Australian secondary schools, teachers who took a lead role in increasing organizational capacity were recognized and reinforced by school leaders (Silins et al., 2002). Similarly, Dinham (2005) found high performing schools had school leaders who placed value on actively growing through innovation. These

leadership behaviors modeled for the staff the importance of growth and risk-taking in building organizational capacity.

A calm, well-structured environment is another organizational condition found to support reform initiatives (Leithwood, Steinbach, & Jantzi, 2002; Zins et al., 2007). A meta-analysis examining the impact of leadership found the creation of smooth, orderly school climates allowed increased learning for teachers and students, and thus contributed to greater organizational growth (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Leaders need to establish an educational climate of respect, care, and support to foster greater organizational growth (Minckler, 2014; Silins et al., 2002). Higher levels of administrative support were positively related to teacher efficacy and a greater breadth of teacher strategies (Bellibas & Lui, 2017). Creating appropriate organizational supports led to more effective implementation of SEL initiatives (Ransford et al., 2009).

Educational leaders have an important role to play in building their schools through improving an "organization's innovative capacity, teachers' working conditions, and smooth internal organizational functioning" (Witziers, Bosker, & Krüger, 2003, p. 416).

Conclusion

This literature review defines SEL as:

The process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (CASEL, 2015, p. 5).

SEL is dependent upon core social-emotional competencies: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.

Students' academic achievement, behavior, and future success are impacted by SEL.
Teachers are essential in creating positive relationships and building the environment
where SEL can succeed. School and district leaders might play a pivotal role by
supporting the work of teachers through vision setting, staff development, and the
promotion of positive organizational conditions for the implementation of SEL.

CHAPTER TWO[2]

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The purpose of this project was to explore the role of school and district leaders in supporting implementation of SEL in public education. This project utilized a qualitative case study methodology (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative data provides a rich description of "phenomena as they are situated and embedded in local contexts" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 20). Our research focused on one public school district. As a bounded system (Merriam, 2009), this district provided a useful context for examining the work of district leaders, school leaders, teachers, and counselors as they worked to support the social-emotional development of students.

Methodology

This project was conducted by four researchers investigating different aspects of the implementation of SEL (see Table 1.1). While our four individual studies shed light on specific approaches to the implementation of SEL, our collective work provided us insight into how a district can support such reform. We worked as a team in many aspects of the process including site selection, data collection, and analysis. In the following section, we identify the process used to determine the appropriate district for our project, define our common data collection process, and provide an overview of the

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[2] This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Michael A. Caira, Jr., Sarah J. Hardy, Deborah Langlois, and Donna M. McGarrigle.

data analysis used by the entire team. Data collection and analysis unique to the individual studies are reported in those respective chapters.

Site Selection

We conducted our research in a public school district located in the Northeast United States. For purposes of anonymity, we refer to the school district as Jamesberg. Two distinct criterion drove our site selection process. First, we identified a school district focused on developing and improving SEL programs and practices. During our initial site selection process, we discovered two documents that provided evidence of the Jamesberg School District's focus on SEL implementation: a health and wellness newsletter from June of 2016 and the superintendent's entry plan. Together, these documents indicated to us that Jamesberg was a district seeking to expand its SEL capacity.

Second, we wanted to conduct our research in a medium- to large-sized public school district. Presumably, a public school district of 5,000-10,000 enrolled students allowed for access to multiple schools of different grade levels and the potential to interview a large percentage of school leaders. We gathered information regarding student enrollment and school distribution from the state's education department website (School and District Profiles, n.d). According to the district and school profile, Jamesberg had a population of approximately 8,500 students and 14 schools (one preschool; nine elementary schools; three middle schools; and one high school).

Data Collection

This collaborative project utilized three sources for data collection: semi-structured individual and focus group interviews, as well as documents. We discuss these

sources in turn.

Individual and focus group interviews. We conducted semi-structured, in-person individual and focus group interviews from October to December of 2017. Conducting interviews allowed us to gather information through a focused conversation (Merriam, 2009). The semi-structured format provided a framework based on our research questions while allowing for flexibility in the exact wording of questions and question order. Below, we describe the development of interview protocols, the selection and recruitment of participants, and the interview process.

Individual and focus group interview instruments. Semi-structured interview protocols for administrators (see Appendix A), counselors (see Appendix B), and teachers (see Appendix C) were developed to explore SEL implementation. The protocols for administrators and teachers were created collaboratively by including specific questions to address individual studies as well as the broader purpose of the overall project. We field tested the protocols by interviewing school leaders, teachers, and counselors not connected to our research district. Based on the field tests, we adjusted the protocols for clarity and to ensure the interviews stayed within a 45 minute to one-hour time frame.

The final interview protocols contained questions about practices used by district and school leaders for SEL implementation. Additionally, we included questions about participation in and perceptions of SEL implementation activities. We also created questions to elicit information regarding how leaders set direction, developed people, and redesigned organizational conditions during the implementation of SEL.

Individual and focus group interview participants. We selected our participants

from four categories: district leaders, school leaders, teachers, and counselors. Using the district website, we collected the names and contact information of all district administrators, principals, and assistant principals. Based on the listed job descriptions, we targeted district leaders whom we presumed would be knowledgeable about SEL. We contacted seven district leaders and 21 school leaders through email and invited them to participate in an interview. Of these recruitment contacts, four district leaders and 13 school leaders agreed to participate.

We conducted focus group interviews with teachers. To do this, we gained permission from the principals of three elementary schools, three middle schools, and the high school to inform teachers about the focus group interviews and to share our contact information. Teachers were contacted by a member of our team with details regarding location and time of the focus group interviews. We held four focus group interviews with a total of fourteen teachers. Focus group interviews were held at two elementary schools (with two teachers and five teachers), one middle school (with two teachers), and one high school (with five teachers). Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 counselors from the elementary and middle school levels: five guidance counselors and five social workers (see Table 2.1). All interviews were recorded and then transcribed by a professional transcription service. Subsequently, transcripts were read in their entirety to check for accuracy.

Individual and focus group interview process. In order to ensure a calibrated interview process, the first five interviews were conducted in pairs. Afterward, we reflected on our use of questioning and prompting in eliciting interview data. Together, we reviewed the transcripts of the first several interviews to ensure questioning and

prompting for all questions matched the needs of the individual team members. Our

calibration provided us with confidence to move forward with interviews that were

conducted by individual group members. In total, nine interviews with district and

school leaders were conducted by paired researchers and eight interviews were conducted

individually. Three of the four teacher focus group interviews were conducted in pairs.

All 10 counselor interviews were completed by an individual researcher.

Table 2.1

Participants

Participant by Role	Number	Interview Type	Studies Using Data Source
District Leaders	4	Semi-Structured	Caira, Hardy, and McGarrigle
School Leaders ● Principals ● Assistant Principals	13	Semi-Structured	Caira, Hardy, Langlois, and McGarrigle
Counselors ● Guidance Counselors ● Social Workers	10	Semi-Structured	McGarrigle
Teaching staff ● Classroom Teachers ● Special Education Teachers	14	Focus Group	Caira, Hardy, and Langlois

Document review. We gathered a range of documents from the Jamesberg

Public Schools related to SEL implementation. The majority of the documents were

available on the district website. In addition, the superintendent presented us with

documents that were still in the working stage, most notably the strategic plan. See

Appendix D for a full list of documents and how they were supplied to us. Our review of

documents provided auxiliary information of the district's past and future plans for SEL.

All of the documents reviewed met one or more of the following criteria:

- Addressed some aspect of the social-emotional development of staff or students
- Addressed district or school policy or practices related to social-emotional health
- Articulated procedures for managing social-emotional health, either internally or in conjunction with external agencies
- Addressed communication on social-emotional health to families or the larger community
- Addressed some aspect of staff development related to SEL.

Data Analysis

As with data collection, the research team worked closely together in the analysis phase of the project. Specific questions in the common interview protocols were included to inform individual studies. Each team member read the entire transcript of district Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg and school leader interviews, allowing us to gain a broader understanding of how the district was supporting SEL implementation. In addition, each group member conducted an initial review of the documents to ensure the relevance of the information and data provided (Bowen, 2009). During our initial document review, we identified quotes or sections related to the research questions and conceptual lens of each study. Additionally, information gleaned from this first review was used in the implementation of the semi-structured interviews by contributing to our knowledge base about SEL initiatives in the district.

To ensure continual communication and build a common understanding, we entered the qualitative data into a shared Dedoose account (www.dedoose.com), a data management tool for organization, categorization, and coding of data. Dedoose, as well as the use of a common analytical journal allowed us to refine, reanalyze, and document our findings (Yin, 1981). For the journal, we utilized a common document to record and

share our thoughts, hunches, and wonderings as they came to mind throughout the data analysis process (Saldaña, 2009). Team members read and commented on the entries made by others. These two systems allowed the group members to track and share commonalities and disparities revealed in our individual analysis, which then informed our collective understanding.

Each researcher used two cycles of coding based on the research questions and conceptual lens of his or her study (see Chapter 3). The analysis for the central exploration of the role of district and school leaders in supporting implementation of SEL in public education was completed collaboratively. We began with compiling the findings from our individual studies. This allowed us to see the district implementation efforts from multiple perspectives and supported the analysis procedure. We then used our individual data to determine which (if any) findings were universal or particular to that study. This process allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of the data and allowed team members to review each other's coding cycles, increasing the reliability of our collaborative conclusions and impressions.

CHAPTER THREE[3]

MAKING SENSE OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING INITIATIVES

The development of social-emotional competencies should be a fundamental component of every child's education. Social-emotional competencies encompass a broad set of aptitudes and abilities in the areas of self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, and social problem solving (Gracyzyk et al., 2000). Possessing these competencies improves academic achievement and social functioning for students and supports positive long-term outcomes, including the ability to productively contribute to society (Elias, 2009).

Generating effective social-emotional learning (SEL) experiences for students is important and complex work. In Massachusetts, and at the federal level, several legislative acts have placed demands on public schools to consider the social-emotional needs of students in their planning (Citino, Bouvier, & Forman, 2015; Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016). Public school leaders in Massachusetts are increasingly adopting SEL policies and initiatives. Traditionally, district-level leaders are the unit of change responsible for organizing and directing wide-scale reform efforts (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010) including the establishment of SEL initiatives. However, school-based staff, such as principals and teachers, are the ones who implement new programs and practices. Therefore, the success of an SEL reform is dependent on the acceptance and understanding of school-based staff. According to Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer (2002)

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[3] This chapter was written individually by Sarah J. Hardy

"policy messages are not inert, static ideas that are transmitted unaltered into local actors' minds" (p. 392). Those implementing an initiative come to understand it and then act upon it through their preexisting knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes (Coburn & Talbert, 2006). Thus, district leaders directing implementation of SEL initiatives must employ strategies that allow school-based staff to make sense of the reform.

There is little research on the day-to-day work of district leaders or their interactions with school-based staff during SEL implementation (Honig, 2016; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the strategies district leaders use to support implementation of SEL initiatives through the lens of sensemaking. The study is guided by three research questions:

- What strategies do district leaders utilize to support SEL initiatives?

- What is the content of SEL interactions in the district?

- How do these interactions affect sensemaking of SEL initiatives?

Literature Review

In the sections to follow, I begin with an overview of the role of sensemaking in implementation, which provides a framework for my three research questions. Next, I present information about how district leaders can support implementation of initiatives. This provides background information about the strategies leaders employ and the content of interactions used by leaders. In the last section, I offer information about the role of interactions in implementation and sensemaking.

The Role of Sensemaking in Implementation

Sensemaking theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding how interactions between district leaders and school-based staff shape implementation of SEL

initiatives. Sensemaking is the process by which people attempt to understand reality by relying on past experiences while simultaneously incorporating new information (Weick, 1993). Sensemaking is a social process involving "language, talk and communication" (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409). It occurs when something new is introduced or noticed.

Sensemaking occurs as school-based staff learn about and try out new initiatives. Using their own knowledge and beliefs in the context of their environment, staff make sense of what is communicated to them (Spillane, Hallett, & Diamond, 2003). This results in the transformation of an initiative as it is implemented (Coburn, 2001). When planning for implementation, district leaders should consider the complexity of human sensemaking. This includes considering the way school-based staff will interpret information presented by district leaders or principals.

While school-based staff make sense of initiatives individually, Coburn (2001) notes, "The nature and structure of formal networks and informal alliances among teachers play a powerful role in shaping the sensemaking process" (p. 145). Spillane, Reiser, et al. (2002) explain sensemaking is aided by rich deliberations with colleagues and with staff well versed in the initiative. The interactions teachers have with district leaders and other school-based staff determine how they understand and carry out initiatives. Teachers with limited access to varying insights and perspectives do not implement an initiative the same way as teachers who have a richer social context (Spillane, Reiser, et al., 2002). Social interactions allow teachers to learn from each other, but they also make different interpretations of the initiative visible.

The presence of interactions alone does not guarantee school-based staff will

make sense of an initiative as district leaders intend. Sensemaking of school-based staff is shaped through the "nature, quality, and content of the interaction[s]" (Coburn, 2005, p. 501). The content of interactions during implementation will impact the success of policy implementation. Certain interactions are better for promoting sensemaking (Spillane, Reiser, et al., 2002). Interactions that allow school-based staff to see how the new initiative differs from their current practice, instead of seeing it as matching their current practice, are helpful in sensemaking. Also, interactions that capture the essential principles of the initiative support substantive change over superficial change (Spillane, Reiser, et al., 2002). Sensemaking is aided when the content of interactions includes communication about the rationale for change.

Sensemaking is particularly important to the success of initiatives which require a significant change in the knowledge or beliefs of the implementers (Spillane, Reiser, et al., 2002). SEL initiatives often ask teachers to change their beliefs and understandings about the social-emotional needs of their students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Additionally, SEL initiatives can require teachers to consider their own social-emotional competencies (Iizuka, Barrett, Gillies, Cook, & Marinovic, 2014). Sensemaking is more challenging when initiatives require complex change (Spillane, Reiser, et al., 2002). School-based staff, often unintentionally, try to protect their current understanding by incorporating only the parts of an initiative most closely aligned with their current knowledge and beliefs. District leaders can use respectful interactions to allow for an interchange and synthesis of ideas, leading to a changed understanding by both parties (Weick, 1993).

According to Anderson (1975), "Policy is made as it is being administered" (p. 79). Meaning no matter how well written or intended an initiative, implementation is the key to achieving the desired outcome. Implementation of SEL initiatives hinges on the sensemaking of school-based staff. District leaders can facilitate implementation through strong leadership practices, which I will describe next.

The Role of District Leaders in Implementation

When implementing initiatives district leaders have an array of strategies available to help staff make sense of the initiative. No research to date has focused on how district leaders impact SEL initiatives; therefore, the background literature to follow is based on implementation of a variety of initiatives. It provides, in general, information about the strategies leaders can use during implementation and about the content of interactions that enable sensemaking. According to Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anders, and Wahlstrom (2004), core leadership practices can be clustered in three broad areas: (a) setting direction, (b) developing people, and (c) redesigning the organization. In the following sections, I will share background literature explaining how each leadership area can be utilized by district leaders.

Setting direction. Change in schools is inevitable. According to Spillane, Gomez, and Mesler (2009), "policy is an attempt to harness and nudge the continuous unplanned change in local schools and schools systems in a particular direction" (p. 411). As such, district leaders set the direction for change through new initiatives. To be successful, leaders must clearly communicate a shared vision around common goals, creating high expectations (Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2014). According to Leithwood et al. (2004), "Having such goals helps people make sense of

their work and enables them to find a sense of identity for themselves within their work context" (p. 8).

Ellis (2016) found the successful implementation of a new teacher induction initiative was impacted by the development of a common understanding between the district leaders and the school-based staff. Establishing message pathways, in this case through the use of technology, allowed leaders to share information about the induction program. When messages about the program were delivered quickly and clearly, it allowed teachers to make sense of new information and build a common understanding. In this way, the frequency and content of district leaders' interactions with school-based staff was important to the sensemaking process.

Datnow (2000) performed case studies of 22 schools to examine the processes used by district leaders for reform efforts and to discover how and why school-based staff adopted the reforms. She found an interdependency between those promoting the reform and those adopting it. The case studies showed many reform efforts did not lead to significant change because school-based staff perceived the need to change as externally generated. The efforts of district leaders had not resulted in a shared vision. This also led to superficial compliance as staff selected the parts of a reform that best aligned with their current practices or beliefs. Thus, to enable sensemaking during implementation of an initiative, district leaders must ensure school-based staff feel that goals are group-based and driven by a common vision.

Similarly, Honig (2016), in examining the role of district leaders in supporting school-community partnerships, noted the importance of a common vision. She found implementation efforts were impeded by a lack of a shared vision among district leaders

about intended outcomes. When the role of district leaders was ambiguous to school-based staff, district leaders were not perceived as helpful. Additionally, when district leaders did not publicly endorse the common goals of the partnership, it had a negative impact on their relationships with school-based staff. This highlights the importance of the setting-direction leadership skills during implementation.

Developing people. Leadership practices in the area of setting direction are one set of skills district leaders use to influence the success of an initiative. Another set of leadership skills required are those that build the capacity and motivation of school-based staff (Leithwood et al., 2004). This includes building the knowledge and skills required for staff to implement a new initiative, as well as the dispositions needed to carry out their work successfully (Seashore Louis et al., 2014).

Honig and Rainey (2012) examined the role of district leaders in building the capacity of principals. They found challenging conversations were essential to helping principals grow in their understanding. For instance, the use of protocols to guide analysis of data was only useful when it led to complex thinking and reflective exchanges around the topic. Through interactions that pushed the understanding of principals, district leaders advanced the knowledge base and values of school-based staff. One type of interaction particularly helpful was district leaders revealing their metacognitive strategies and thereby modeling for principals not only the types of actions to take but why they are taking them. This leadership practice built the principals' understanding and impacted their disposition towards using protocols for data analysis.

Ellis (2016) found the disposition of individual teachers was the most influential factor during implementation of a teacher induction initiative. Teachers utilized the

resources of the program differently based upon the value they assigned to the program.
It appeared teachers assigned value to the program primarily based on their personalities
and individual attitudes. If practices utilized by district leaders did not harness the
motivation of school-based staff, little change was enacted.

Spillane, Diamond, et al., (2002) examined the role of district leaders in
supporting how principals and teachers perceived and made sense of accountability
policy. In each of the three schools studied, the policy was interpreted differently,
leading to a transformation of the policy as it was implemented. The values of the
principals influenced how they made sense of the policy, which in turn impacted their
decisions about applying the policy. The area of focus or the ways they implemented
were based on their disposition towards leadership and the skill set of their individual
staff. This highlights the importance of developing people as a key leadership practice.

Redesigning the organization. In addition to setting direction and developing
people, district leaders require a set of skills allowing them to redesign the organization.
This enables leaders to modify structures creating conditions that support learning
(Leithwood et al., 2004). Durand, Lawson, Wilcox, and Schiller (2016) examined the
role of district leaders in the implementation of the Common Core Standards in six
schools with higher than expected academic outcomes. They found the district leaders of
these successful schools anticipated the direction of reforms and developed
organizational capacity. Strong relationships between district-level and school-based
staff created a culture that facilitated development of new programs through regular
communication and proactive planning. These organizational structures also allowed

district leaders to bridge schools with external resources and information, while simultaneously protecting schools from external demands.

Another way district leaders can be instrumental in reform is by managing how information is shared with school-based staff and how time is allotted for reform activities. According to Datnow (2000), a timeframe for implementation should allow staff to assimilate new ideas, procedures, and materials. Additionally, when district leaders employ structures that promote challenging conversations, staff are better able to make sense of the initiative. Fruitful conversations between district leaders and school-based staff are critical in aiding the adoption process (Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012). Hence, leaders support sensemaking of new initiatives by establishing structures and timelines for communication that allow feedback to be given and information shared (Chrispeels, Burke, Johnson, & Daly, 2008).

In addition to considering structures for communication, structures created by a school's context will impact the importance or the prominence a new policy holds for the school (Spillane, Diamond, et al., 2002). For example, issues specific to a school, including the needs of students and the abilities of staff, will influence how they implement a new initiative. District leaders can play a role in helping school-based staff make sense of the change in light of their context. For example, in implementing an accountability policy focused on literacy and mathematics, one school chose to focus primarily on literacy because it was deemed as more relevant to the schools current needs (Spillane, Diamond, et al., 2002). This has implications for district leaders. When an initiative can be tied to the wants and needs of the school, it may be easier for the school to make sense of the change. Staff are more likely to be internally motivated to change

when they perceive the change as aligned with both a shared vision (Datnow, 2000) and their existing context (Spillane, Diamond, et al., 2002).

The creation of collaborative processes is another way leaders organize the structure of their district to support improvement. Datnow, Park, and Kennedy-Lewis (2013) studied the success of leaders in building teacher capacity to collaborate using data. They found the results were dependent upon the context because it determined how the teachers interacted with the initiative. This included the ability of the leader to frame the data as meaningful and the work as a collaborative responsibility. In other words, the structures leaders put in place impacted the success of interactions.

The Role of Interactions in Implementation

District leaders can have a profound impact on the success of an initiative when they utilize strategies that promote sensemaking interactions. However, interactions among school-based staff also impact the success of implementation. People change based on their interactions with others and are most strongly influenced by interactions with trusted individuals (Daly, 2010). The level at which information is understood and applied is dependent on the successful use of relationships to pass along the information. Interactions equal resources, and relationships or ties allow teachers to access resources. Collaborative relationships among school-based staff facilitate meaningful interactions.

When planning an initiative, the focus is often on procedural aspects of implementation such as arranging outside experts, formal professional development, or resources and tools needed. However, utilizing and strengthening the existing collaborative structures within schools should be considered (Daly, 2010). According to Peneul, Frank, and Krause (2010), using both formal and informal structures during

reform efforts by giving responsibility to multiple individuals will improve implementation efforts.

Understanding collaborative relationships helps leaders know where expertise is located and how it is shared within and across subgroups. Social interactions can work counter to the pressures being placed by leadership to enact change (Daly, 2010). Thus, leaders initiating change should consider the collaborative relationships that exist and how those relationships will facilitate the sharing of information, including shared skepticism or complaining. Leaders may need to establish new collaborative structures to allow for the flow of complex information or to capitalize on local expertise.

Having shared background information about sensemaking theory, leadership practices, and the role of interactions, I will next describe the methods used in this study.

Methods

This study is part of a larger one examining the role of leaders in supporting the implementation of SEL. Chapter Two provided information about study design, site selection, and interview protocols for the larger study. The following sections describe participants, data collection, and data analysis for the present study.

The purpose of the present study was to examine the strategies district leaders used to support implementation of SEL initiatives through the lens of sensemaking. The study was guided by three research questions:

- What strategies do district leaders utilize to support SEL initiatives?

- What is the content of SEL interactions in the district?

- How do these interactions affect sensemaking of SEL initiatives?

Data Collection

        This study utilized a document review, semi-structured interviews, and semi-structured focus group interviews to gather data. I will explain the data collection method for each in turn.

        Document review. During the fall of 2017, 18 documents were gathered to inform my research questions. From the district website, I gathered documents related to district and/or school goal setting or action planning, and documents that referenced SEL programs or initiatives. I also obtained district planning documents from district leaders and a few professional development schedules from principals and teachers. As I gathered documents, I compiled a list of the documents and their sources. A full list of the documents reviewed is available in Appendix D.

        Semi-structured interviews. As part of the larger study, I conducted semi-structured, in-person interviews (Merriam, 2009). Participants consisted of four district leaders and 14 building leaders. See Table 3.1 for information about participants.

Table 3.1

Study Participants

Participant by Role	Number	Data Source
District Leaders: • District-level Administrators • District-level Directors	4	Semi-Structured Interview
Principals/Assistant Principals	14	Semi-Structured Interview
Teachers • Classroom Teachers • Special Education Teachers	14	Focus Group Interview

Specific interview questions within the group interview protocol were intended to gather data for my three research questions. (See Table 3.2.) However, I read and considered the complete transcript of each interview. I aimed to gather data for research question one with questions about the strategies used by district leaders in the development and implementation of SEL initiatives. Research question two was addressed with questions about the content of SEL interactions in the district. I defined "content" as the substance of the communication. For example, this would include vision setting, instructional practices, pedagogy, or information about resources. Additionally, research question three was addressed by questions about the effectiveness of implementation strategies and SEL interactions in helping participants make sense of SEL initiatives.

Table 3.2

Alignment of Semi-Structured Interview Questions and Research Questions

Interview Question	Research Question(s)
1. What SEL initiatives has your school (or the district) implemented in the past two years?	One
2. Talk about how the initiative(s) was implemented? Probe for strategies and interactions used to: • Communicate purpose or goal of the initiative; • Develop knowledge base about the initiative • Communicate the plan for implementation; • Create structures to improve communication; and • Develop support systems during implementation.	Two & Three
3. Have teachers been afforded the opportunity to collaborate with peers regarding SEL?	Two & Three

Focus group interviews. In addition to the document review and interviews, I used four focus group interviews with 14 teachers to gather data related to my three research questions. An email was sent to all licensed teaching staff at four schools to solicit participation. I conducted focus group interviews at two elementary schools (with two teachers and five teachers), one middle school (with two teachers), and one high school (with five teachers). See Table 3.1 for details about participants.

The focus group interviews had three goals: (a) to determine implementation strategies and interactions in which teachers participated (research question one); (b) to elicit the content of SEL interactions with and among district leaders, principals, and teachers (research question two); and (c) to ascertain the effectiveness of the strategies and interactions in helping teachers make sense of SEL initiatives (research question three). Several questions within a semi-structured focus group interview protocol were used to elicit data related to my three research questions (see Table 3.3). Each focus group interview transcript was read and considered in its entirety.

Table 3.3

Alignment of Focus Group Interview Questions and Research Questions

Focus Group Interview Question	Research Question(s)
1. Talk about why your school implemented _____ (fill in with specific SEL initiative)? What were the hopes for the initiative?	One
2. Have you been afforded the opportunity to collaborate with peers regarding SEL?	Two and Three
3. Who is your "go to" person if you have a SEL question? And what do you talk to them about?	Two and Three

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of an examination of relevant documents and transcripts from semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. Two cycles of coding were utilized to code interview and focus group interview data (Saldana, 2009). I describe the procedures used below.

Analysis of documents. Documents were given an initial review as they were gathered. The initial review was cursory and used to identify the basic content of the document. This initial review was also used to build my background knowledge of the district. After I completed an initial coding of interview transcripts, I reexamined the documents. During this second review, I noted any mention of implementation of SEL initiatives, SEL interactions, or comments, ideas, or reactions related to SEL initiatives. This data was used to back up and explain statements made by participants and to provide additional information in the findings.

Analysis of interview data. To begin, I read all interview and focus group interview transcripts and coded excerpts based on categories related to my three research questions. For research question one, I coded any mention of strategies employed by district leaders in the implementation of SEL initiatives using broad categories informed by Leithwood et al. (2004) (i.e., direction-setting strategies, developing people strategies, and/or redesigning the organization strategies). Several other categories related to research question one emerged during coding: "District/Building Disconnect," "SEL Initiatives and Programs," and "Response to Crisis." I noted these categories once I had read several excerpts that referenced these concepts.

To address research question two, I labeled excerpts referencing specific interactions between district leaders, principals, and/or teachers involving SEL initiatives, programs, or practices. I coded these excerpts based on their content using categories informed by Spillane, Reiser, et al. (2002) (i.e. interactions supporting substantive change, communication focused on essential principles, rationale for the change shared, use of staffs' prior knowledge as leverage to represent new ideas.) I only noted interactions that actually happened and not hypothetical interactions.

To address research question three, I examined data for evidence of sensemaking. To code for sensemaking, I looked for excerpts where participants mentioned changes to their knowledge or understanding, changes in their SEL practice or philosophy, reactions to suggestions for change, specific actions they took based on what they noticed, or how they represented a new SEL idea. I included excerpts that framed both positive and negative responses.

Once initial codes had been applied, I reread excerpts to identify common themes in the data (Saldana, 2009). Specifically, I read all the excerpts related to strategies employed by district leaders in implementing SEL initiatives to identify which SEL initiatives district leaders were involved with and which strategies they employed. I also incorporated themes from excerpts coded "District/Building Disconnect," and "Response to Crisis" in this step. Next, I examined excerpts coded as SEL interactions, paying attention to the type of interaction described. I reorganized SEL interactions by type of interaction (formal or informal) and then examined each category for patterns related to the content of the interactions. Finally, I sorted "sensemaking" excerpts by the SEL initiative or support referred to by the participant. I also sorted "sensemaking" excerpts

by the ways sensemaking showed up in the response (for example: change in belief, change in practice, push back, etc.). I considered the effect of the interactions on sensemaking based upon how the participant interpreted, adopted, or rejected SEL information, practices, or philosophies. Using the themes developed with each research question, I produced the findings described below.

Findings

This qualitative case study used the lens of sensemaking to examine the leadership strategies and SEL interactions evident in the district. In order to address my three research questions, I first describe the leadership strategies used by district leaders to implement SEL initiatives. Second, I describe the content of SEL interactions in the district. Third, I describe what these interactions reveal about sensemaking of SEL initiatives in the district.

Leadership Strategies Used by District Leaders

My first research question sought to identify strategies district leaders used to support implementation of SEL initiatives. Identifying these strategies was important in understanding how the district planned for implementation. Therefore, using the core leadership practices identified by Leithwood et al. (2004), I looked for specific instances when district leaders set direction, developed people, and redesigned the organization to support SEL initiatives. Interviews revealed district leaders had direct planning responsibilities for one district-wide SEL initiative: Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Interviews also revealed district leaders provided indirect assistance for over 20 SEL programs, initiatives, and supports implemented by principals. Below I

describe the strategies district leaders used to plan and implement PBIS and to support the many individual principal-led SEL initiatives.

PBIS implementation. According to principal and teacher interviews, implementation of PBIS began in 2010 in a few pilot schools. None of the current district leaders were involved in the initial implementation. Since 2010, PBIS was rolled out in each elementary and middle school. District leaders utilized several strategies during the planning and implementation of PBIS. The initial strategy used by the district leaders was to develop people through a series of multi-day trainings. This was important in building their knowledge base about the initiative. According to several participants, the May Institute trained staff who agreed to be PBIS coaches. One principal described an additional PBIS training that occurred during the summer months before PBIS was rolled out.

Although training of staff in PBIS was evident, a district-wide vision for PBIS was not mentioned in any interview. When directly asked about the district vision for PBIS, several teachers said it was never communicated to them. This included a teacher serving on the building-based PBIS committee. This is important to note because direction setting strategies enable staff to develop a common understanding of an initiative (Leithwood et al, 2004), which is essential for sensemaking. There was evidence of direction-setting strategies aimed at the building level. One principal mentioned an initial PBIS training allowed time for teams to "come up with core values" for the school. Additionally, one elementary school's website described how the school's core values were established at a summer training.

Despite the lack of district-level direction setting strategies, district leaders used redesigning the organization strategies when planning and implementing PBIS. The district created and funded a coaching structure to support implementation in the schools. When asked to discuss PBIS implementation, most principals identified a building-based coach who led a building-based committee. They explained how the building-based coach worked in conjunction with the district-level coach to keep PBIS on track. After the initial implementation plan, the district passed responsibility for guiding PBIS to the coaches with support and input from principals. The district also continued to support PBIS by funding the coaching stipends and providing release time for teachers on the building-based committees to attend regional PBIS meetings, as indicated in teacher focus group interviews. Creating a networked structure to support PBIS led to the continued use and development of PBIS in the district.

Principal autonomy and SEL initiatives. Whereas district leaders played a direct role in the development of PBIS, evidence of strategies used by district leaders to plan and implement other SEL initiatives and programs in the district was minimal. Instead, interview data revealed the bulk of the planning and implementing of SEL programs and supports was guided by principals working with their staffs. When asked about current SEL initiatives, most principals talked first about PBIS, but then talked about a variety of SEL programs or practices they were implementing in their individual buildings. Several principals talked directly about the autonomy they had been granted by the district to make decisions about which SEL programs to implement. Besides assistance with securing grants to fund training, these principals reported receiving little support or interference from district leaders.

Principal autonomy was coupled with a lack of direction-setting strategies in the area of SEL initiatives by district leaders. This is important to note because it means the district lacked influence in setting the vision for SEL practices. Only one participant, a district leader, mentioned the district five-year strategic plan created in 2014. The district leader described the plan as having great vision and goals, but said it was "…very complex and layered, and maybe a little unattainable." Review of the strategic plan revealed no goals or action items related to SEL programs or practices.

In the vacuum of direction-setting strategies by district leaders, principals addressed SEL needs within their schools by adopting SEL curriculum, such as Restorative Circles and Responsive Classroom. Many principals talked about the need to move ahead with SEL programs because their teachers and students needed the support, and they could not wait for the district to initiate. In the absence of district leadership, building principals stepped forward and set direction for their individual schools.

Although principal autonomy was consistently reported, there were divergent views on why it existed and what to do about it. Several district leaders expressed concern that building principals were implementing SEL programs on their own. One district leader questioned the value of the programs initiated by the principals: "Here's the problem. Nobody's been trained, [SEL programs are] not being implemented with fidelity or regularity… and nobody's measuring anything." Yet another district leader commended principals on understanding the needs of their schools and taking the initiative to move forward. This indicated district leaders held different attitudes about principal autonomy. These divergent views on autonomy could result in district leaders

approaching the issue in different ways and having differing opinions about how, or if, they should intercede.

District strategic plan development. Worthy of note is the fact the district entered a period of significant change in the spring of 2017 with the arrival of a new superintendent. When asked to discuss the change in leadership, most participants talked about how district leaders, under the direction of the new superintendent, were trying to fix the lack of consistency in SEL practices across the district. Featured prominently in this conversation was ongoing work to develop a district strategic plan. Based on an agenda from an administrators' retreat in August 2017, the building and district administrators were charged with identifying action steps for high leverage goals. Review of an initial draft of the plan revealed one of the high leverage goals identified by the new superintendent was to "promote academic achievement and social-emotional growth for all students."

SEL Interactions

In addition to examining the strategies used by district leaders to implement SEL initiatives, as previously described, I also examined the content of SEL interactions in the district. In order to answer research question two, I looked for times when participants described receiving information about SEL initiatives or practices and times when participants described exchanges with others involving SEL topics. SEL interactions were important to consider because they revealed the ways SEL programs and practices were actually implemented. My examination showed the presence of both formal and informal SEL interactions. I next describe the content of both types of interactions.

Formal SEL interactions. There were a number of formal SEL interactions present in the district. Formal SEL interactions occurred in the form of lecture-style professional development, SEL trainings, and various types of regular meetings. In general, the content of these SEL interactions focused on communicating the essential principles of an SEL initiative or concept. However, this varied slightly based on the type of interaction, as I will explain below.

Lecture-style professional development. The content of lecture-style professional development was aimed at widening staff understanding of SEL concepts. Noted in interviews with district leaders, principals, and teachers, and also present in professional development agendas, were a variety of lecture-style events covering topics such as the impact of trauma, the uses of mindfulness, ways to support students with emotional disabilities, and responses to student misbehavior. These presentations were not tied to a particular initiative; instead, they contained information relevant to the general expansion of SEL knowledge of staff. They demonstrated the work of district leaders and principals to develop people's understanding of broad SEL topics.

SEL program trainings. Another type of formal SEL interaction present in interview data and district documents was SEL program trainings. Participants mentioned trainings in PBIS, Responsive Classroom, Summit, and Restorative Circles and talked about how the vision of the programs was incorporated in the trainings. For example, a few principals remembered being asked to develop a vision for PBIS at their particular school. This was incorporated as part of a more comprehensive training in PBIS. In another instance, training in Summit, a personalized learning platform, addressed the vision of the program. Teachers participating in the training were asked to

consider the skills and abilities they wanted students to develop in school. This activity included both academic and social-emotional competencies. These formal interactions were used by principals to set direction with staff for SEL initiatives.

Another example of SEL program training was shared by a teacher who participated in a four-day, intensive training for Responsive Classroom. Her description was important because it provided a clear example of an implementation activity utilized with teachers. She explained the focus of the training, stating, "It was really about teacher language, the fact that we don't always need these tokens and rewards, but how to create a positive community among the kids so everyone feels comfortable." Different from the lecture-style professional development, SEL program trainings contained not only information about essential principles but also addressed the visions of the programs.

Meetings. Other SEL interactions occurred during staff meetings, PBIS committee meetings, and guidance meetings. Meetings were important to consider as they provided evidence of how principals actually implemented SEL initiatives. The content of SEL interactions in meetings varied by meeting type. Some staff meetings mentioned were focused on general SEL concepts. For example, a principal and several teachers discussed a staff meeting centered on an article about psychological safety. Other staff meetings were used to build staff knowledge about an SEL initiative as part of the implementation process. Several principals mentioned using staff meetings to model a component of a program and having staff participate in that component during the meeting (e.g. Responsive Classroom's morning meeting; Restorative Circle's group circle).

Although content in staff meetings was related to general SEL concepts, it was unclear if the specific goals or outcomes of implementation were stated to teachers. A teacher said this of her principal's message about implementation of Responsive Classroom during the meeting: "She's been helpful trying to get everybody some knowledge about [Responsive Classroom], and then she's letting people try out the components that fit in their comfortable level."

Most principals and some teachers talked about monthly PBIS committee meetings. The content of the meetings, according to participants, was to plan for PBIS implementation. Information shared in interviews indicated meetings were used to monitor student discipline data as a means of deciding which PBIS lessons to introduce. These lessons followed up on previous lessons about school-wide expectations and incentive systems. This type of meeting allowed for ongoing implementation of PBIS.

Informal SEL interactions. In addition to formal SEL interactions, interview data also revealed informal SEL interactions in the form of conversations. The content of these SEL interactions was focused on individual student issues or individual teacher needs in responding to specific situations. Informal SEL interactions were used by principals and teachers alike. These informal interactions reveal how conversations were used to aid in SEL implementation.

Principal and teacher conversations. When asked to discuss how they supported development of teacher SEL practices, most principals referenced individual and ongoing conversations as a key tool. The content of conversations between principals and teachers included the goals of student discipline, alternatives to punitive punishments, language to use with students regarding behavioral expectations, and the impact of

teacher language on students' feelings and performance. One principal talked about using student engagement data in conversations following observations to help teachers see the need for change. Most principals reported having conversations with teachers as situations arose. Although the content of conversations supported teacher SEL practices, it was unclear if principals entered conversations with that intent. Conversations appeared motivated by the need to address ongoing issues. This could be related to the lack of a unifying vision for SEL practices in the district.

Teacher conversations. Teachers utilized conversations to gain support in the area of SEL strategies and practices. Most teachers reported going to guidance staff for help with student social-emotional needs. Although some interactions were used to elicit advice, more often teachers mentioned a request for support for a student. Teachers also mentioned conversations with fellow teachers about SEL topics such as managing student behavior, implementing specific SEL programs, and getting additional resources. The opportunity for conversations was reported to be "on-the-fly" or as needed. Teachers did not report regular or formal structures for collaborating about SEL topics.

Next I will share how both formal and informal interactions affected teachers' sensemaking of SEL initiatives.

Sensemaking about SEL Interactions in the District

Sensemaking occurs when individuals notice something new or different in their environment (Weick, 1993). Sensemaking is an active process in which prior knowledge and context are used to make sense of the new information (Spillane, Reiser, et al, 2002). One way this happens is through interactions with others. Research question three asked about the effect of SEL interactions on sensemaking. In the preceding section, I

identified a number of SEL interactions that occurred in the district. To answer research question three, I next examine how those interactions affected sensemaking of SEL initiatives by principals and teachers.

Making determinations about sensemaking was not straightforward. It required considering how the content of SEL interactions related to what participants said about changes in their understanding, practices, feelings, or thinking. As such, I have limited my findings in this section to include only instances where I could substantiate my conclusions with data points about both interactions and the reaction of participants to those specific interactions. Those included the following: a particular lecture-style PD, one instance of an SEL program training, and interactions involving PBIS.

Sensemaking of a lecture-style professional development. One event mentioned by many participants was a presentation delivered in the fall of 2017. Dr. Mitch Abblett was brought in by district leaders for two presentations to the entire faculty about student social-emotional needs. District leaders described this professional development as important to the work of moving the district forward because it gave a consistent message about SEL. One district leader described the PD this way:

> The intent is he's coming back for our next two full-day PDs to continue that message. So everyone had to participate in a two-hour session with the superintendent saying, "This is what we're focusing on." So I think everyone has a lot of hope that we're going to get there, but we're just not there yet.

Most principals had a more measured response to the PD saying the topic was good, but unsure if the time was well spent. Representative of the group, one principal stated, "It's the beginning of a process of workshops that are going to happen throughout the year. The district is trying to do more to help with the social emotional piece." To

the contrary, most teachers mentioned Dr. Abblett's presentations, but did not endorse the

sessions as helpful. One teacher called them "a waste of time." Several teachers

mentioned a lack of practical content left them feeling perplexed: "The perspective's

great, but what can I do now?"

Based on this data, it appears teachers did not make sense of the information

presented by Dr. Abblett in the way intended by district leaders. Although teacher data is

based on only 14 participants, they represent four schools and three grade spans. Not one

of the 14 teachers spoke of the lecture in terms of defining an SEL vision for the district

or getting everyone on the same page, which was the intent of district leaders.

Additionally, several teachers mentioned the lack of applicability to their work as a

barrier to incorporating the content. Sensemaking is impacted by how new information is

incorporated into current context. The content of the lectures with Dr. Abblett did not

allow teachers to envision how it connected to their practice.

One teacher shared a comment the superintendent made during his introductory

remarks prior to Dr. Abblett's presentation, which provided an example of content that

led to sensemaking. She said:

> The thing that stuck with me was what the superintendent said about the
> percentage of kids that said they didn't feel valued or recognized here. That was
> heartbreaking. So the next day in class I was thinking, "Okay, am I saying hello
> to every kid? Am I interacting with every kid in my class at least once in a
> positive way to let them know that I'm here?"

She was referencing survey data shared by the superintendent that identified teacher-

student relationships, school belonging, and school engagement at the secondary level

(grades 6-12) as areas for growth. The survey also indicated that 68% of secondary

students reported not feeling connected to adults at school. The teacher's remark

provides an interesting insight because she identified how she changed her practice, an indicator of sensemaking. The statement by the superintendent connected directly to her students, allowing this teacher to integrate the idea into her practice. However, the subsequent training with Dr. Abblett did not have the same effect on her sensemaking as the content lacked a connection to her context.

Sensemaking of an SEL program training. A singular example gives evidence of the possibility for SEL program trainings to help teachers make sense of SEL initiatives. A teacher who went through a four day intensive training for Responsive Classroom was able to articulate the difference in her understanding about the goals of classroom management. She credited the four day intensive training with helping her shift her understanding of the SEL supports students need. The difference between this training and others mentioned by teachers was a clear focus of the training on the specific aspects of the program, how they would support SEL development of students, and how to implement them. This teacher also reported having opportunities to talk with fellow colleagues who attended the training, and she was part of a group that created a presentation for the entire staff. In its entirety, these interactions allowed her to take in the new content of an SEL program, understand how it differed from her past practice, and implement the key components of the program in her classroom.

Sensemaking about PBIS components and purpose. Of the 20 SEL programs mentioned in interviews, PBIS was the only one talked about by every principal and every teacher at the elementary and middle school levels and by all the district leaders. Analysis of the strategies and interactions used to implement PBIS revealed some areas of consistent understanding about PBIS by both principals and teachers, especially in

regards to the components of the program. However, buy-in regarding the value or use of PBIS differed. Below I will explain how each group of participants made sense of PBIS.

Principal sensemaking of PBIS. Principal interviews revealed principals had made sense of the structures and procedures associated with the program in all elementary and middle schools. This was revealed by their detailed descriptions of the implementation process and core components of the program, indicating they had incorporated these elements into their understanding. Principals also revealed sensemaking about the value and use of PBIS as an SEL support. Most principals talked about PBIS being a great way to teach students behavioral expectations. However, one principal shared, "As a school, we have really recognized that PBIS is not enough, and that we need to have a skills piece to our program to really fill it out." This was supported by the concerns expressed by other principals about the need for more comprehensive SEL programming. Sensemaking is an active process, and as principals implemented PBIS, they noticed how it interacted with the context of student needs in their schools and formed conclusions about its usefulness.

Teacher sensemaking of PBIS. Teachers seem to have made sense of the logistics and procedures of PBIS, but not necessarily the purpose and vision of the program. When asked about the vision behind PBIS, several teachers said it was never explicitly explained to them. One teacher added that it was embedded within lessons. This teacher and several others talked about their schools' PBIS core values. Most teachers felt staff bought into the values. One teacher reported hearing staff use language from the values with students when they corrected behavior. However, this teacher and

another teacher at the same school admitted that using this language with students did not seem to change behavior.

Although teachers, for the most part, understood PBIS procedures and processes, many of them questioned if the program met the needs of students. It did not appear that this was due to lack of understanding about PBIS. Instead, when teachers took in information about PBIS and tried to incorporate it with their existing understanding of what students needed, they found PBIS lacking in several regards. The teachers in one school talked about the changing needs of their students and how PBIS did not provide instruction in areas that students needed to be successful. Talking about the effectiveness of PBIS, one teacher said, "There's activities to keep the kids quiet in the lunch room, but it's not enough. It's not enough for those kids that are in crisis. It's not enough for a whole group. It doesn't go deep enough." Teachers in another school mentioned that PBIS was good for behavioral expectations, but PBIS did not teach students why or how to behave. One principal voiced similar concerns about PBIS saying, "It has its place in our school culture, but to me it's not about social-emotional learning. It's a small part of it, but it's not focused on building relationships." These examples do not mean staff did not make sense of the PBIS initiative. In contrast, staff recognized PBIS was not a comprehensive program that would meet all the SEL needs of their schools.

Discussion

This study's purpose was to examine strategies used by district leaders in the implementation of SEL initiatives. I examined SEL interactions and how those interactions affected the sensemaking of staff about SEL initiatives. Findings revealed district leaders employed some strategies in the broad areas of setting direction,

developing people, and redesigning the organization (Leithwood et al., 2004). However, the majority of SEL reform was advanced by principals. There was no district-wide, unified vision for SEL programming. A variety of SEL interactions were present but appeared to have had a mixed impact on sensemaking. Below I describe implications of these findings in light of current research and suggest possible next steps. Finally, I offer some limitations on the findings of this study.

Setting Direction Strategies

Creating a vision for SEL programming that includes the needs and perspectives of all stakeholders is an important responsibility of district leaders (Oberle, Domitrovich, Meyers, & Weissberg, 2016). The district in this study failed to communicate a unifying vision for SEL priorities, which led to school-based implementation of an assortment of SEL programs and practices. This fragmented approach is a common pitfall in districts lacking a strong unifying vision for SEL implementation (Cohen, 2006; Zins & Elias, 2007). The resulting system was comprised of disconnected, short-term programs with no link to a shared understanding of the meaning of SEL or the developmental trajectory for SEL instruction (Elias & Moceri, 2012). This approach is problematic because it leads to gaps in the content presented to students and inconsistency in the SEL practices used to teach them. It is also problematic because it allowed the district to function like many smaller districts within one.

Although district leaders are responsible for the education of all students, traditionally-marginalized students in particular rely on schooling for the crucial role it plays in their cognitive, social, and emotional development (Milner, 2013). As such, district leaders have a moral imperative to set a clear vision for comprehensive SEL

programming in their districts. This can be accomplished through strategic planning and a clearly articulated vision for SEL programming, which was beginning to happen in the district during the course of this study.

Due to the vision of the new superintendent, the district was poised for a change in how SEL programming was planned and implemented. With the introduction of an SEL goal in the district strategic plan, the superintendent asserted an expectation the district would take a more prominent role in SEL reform. Although no one program or approach will meet the needs of all schools, a unifying vision for how SEL initiatives are selected and utilized will help align district-wide efforts and planning (Oberle et al., 2016).

Developing People Strategies

In addition to direction setting, district leaders are responsible for developing staff knowledge base and skills so they can implement a comprehensive SEL program. This includes helping staff understand the many components of a robust SEL program and how those components support student academic achievement and social functioning (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). SEL interactions in the district reveal a focus on addressing student behavior and supporting students in crisis, which is only part of a comprehensive approach. Lacking in SEL interactions was a discussion of the social-emotional competencies students need and how to develop them (Elias, 2009).

Promising for district leaders is the fact that principals and teachers are looking for SEL programming that extends beyond the behavioral focus of PBIS. It will be tempting for district leaders to focus only on the addition of an SEL curriculum.

However, in addition to a curriculum that explicitly teaches social-emotional competencies, teachers need development in embedding SEL practices into academic content and interactions with students (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007). Implementation of an SEL program can be paired with explicit professional development in how students master social-emotional competencies in school. These skills can be more challenging to develop because they require a deeper level of sensemaking by staff than program logistics. As such, the structures available to support the reform will be important.

Redesigning the Organization Strategies

In addition to utilizing strategies in the areas of setting direction and developing people, district leaders play an important role in ensuring the structure of an organization can support reform (Seashore Louis et al., 2014). In Jamesberg's existing structure, principals were the key decision-makers. This was viewed as problematic by district leaders who worried about the lack of cohesion in the district. However, there are benefits to allowing schools the flexibility to respond to the students and the context in front of them (Datnow et al., 2013).

Weick (1976) argued that "loosely coupled" organizations, such as districts where schools have autonomy, are not inherently problematic. Autonomy promotes efficacy, a key component for successful implementation of any reform. Principal autonomy in the present study has allowed principals to operate with relative freedom in deciding which SEL programs to pursue. In fact, principals have shown an ability to support SEL implementation in the absence of any district level structures. The lack of clear direction setting by district leaders did not diminish the determination of principals to examine and

address the SEL needs of their schools. Being loosely coupled with the district has also insulated schools from the inconsistency which can occur with multiple changes in superintendents.

In moving ahead, district leaders should consider a structure that supports schools without stripping them of all autonomy. This could be accomplished by establishing and communicating a clear district vision for SEL, as discussed above. Articulated goals should connect to the experiences and needs of school-based staff. This would allow individual schools to customize their approach within the framework established by the district.

Organizational factors such as structures for collaboration and opportunities for local ownership impact the success of an SEL initiative (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003). These are the types of structures district leaders should consider developing. SEL interactions in the district did not support meaningful collaboration about SEL programming or practices. Teachers had "go to" people for support with daily work or crisis support but not a collaborative structure to support proactive and reflective SEL practices. Working with building principals, district leaders could be instrumental in establishing regular and planned opportunities for teachers to collaborate about SEL topics in a manner that promotes professional growth and increases internal drive for change (Datnow, 2000).

The district is poised to take the next steps of SEL implementation, and district leaders will be instrumental in deciding what those next steps will be. Successful implementation relies on creating and supporting interactions that will foster staff

sensemaking of the district's vision for SEL and the initiatives needed to reach that vision.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the difficulty of securing focus group interview participants, resulting in only 14 teacher participants. The limited number of participants means the study findings cannot be generalized. However, the sample represented teachers from the elementary, middle, and high school levels and from four different schools. This means findings show a representation from each level in the district. Another reason the results of this study cannot be generalized is the possibility of self-selection bias, meaning teachers may have participated because they had strong feelings or opinions about SEL efforts in their schools and the district.

Another limitation was two key district leaders had recently left the district, leaving only four district leaders available to interview. The four district leaders had varying experience in the district, but at the most, had three years of experience in their current roles. This limited my access to information about the district's role in SEL implementation. To compensate, I relied on information shared by principals about their experiences with district leaders. However, principals were not necessarily privy to the rationale and process for SEL planning employed by district leaders. This means I may not have captured all the strategies used by district leaders.

A final limitation was related to the design of the study. Determining the effects of SEL interactions on sensemaking proved more difficult than anticipated. When asked about interactions, participants rarely articulated detailed information about the content of their interactions. Even when prompted for more detail, reports of interactions revealed

mostly superficial details related to the logistics of the SEL programs being discussed. However, sensemaking is about a deeper understanding of an initiative. It was difficult for participants to talk about sensemaking because we are not always aware of sensemaking as it occurs. It may be helpful for future interview questions about sensemaking to ask about understanding prior to an interaction in order to gauge the participant's changed practice. Additionally, the documents reviewed did not reveal the sensemaking of staff about SEL initiatives. I addressed this limitation by reducing the scope of research question three to SEL interactions that had multiple data points and in which interview data was sufficiently descriptive. Future research about sensemaking could include a review of documents such as email and meeting agendas. Similarly, an observation of a child study team meeting could be a valuable data source.

Conclusion

Schools cannot meet their primary function of educating students and preparing them for their "complex roles as citizens in our democracy" (Elias, 2009, p. 831) without developing students' social-emotional competencies. Although this obligation extends to all educators, district leaders have significant influence on the quality and effectiveness of SEL instruction.

This study suggests that district leaders need to be active in the visioning and the planning of SEL initiatives. Without direction from district leaders, building leaders may assume responsibility for setting vision, preventing a cohesive district vision. Additionally, as district leaders plan for SEL reform, they should consider how staff will make sense of the reform. Considering how to develop staff knowledge must be coupled with attention to structures and interactions that support substantive change (Spillane,

Reiser, et al.). When district leaders understand their moral imperative to promote both academic achievement and social-emotional competency, they can successfully transform the SEL practices in a district and provide all students with the education they deserve.

CHAPTER 4[4]

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of school and district leaders in supporting implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) in public education. To do so, we examined the role of district leaders in establishing SEL initiatives (Hardy, 2018), the district's approach to SEL-related professional development (Caira, 2018), the practices of principals and counselors (McGarrigle, 2018), and the practices of school leaders in supporting teachers to build a positive learning environment (Langlois, 2018).

We begin the following chapter with an observation of the district's strengths as related to SEL. Next, we discuss how the narrow view of SEL articulated by school and district leaders could hinder forward progress in this initiative. Finally, we explore the status of SEL implementation in Jamesberg through the lens of the three leadership practices outlined by Leithwood et al. (2004): setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization.

District Strengths

From the beginning of our exploration of the Jamesberg district, the importance placed by district and school leaders, as well as teachers and counselors, on the academic and social-emotional well-being of their students was clear. Renewed commitment to SEL programming was fueled, in part, by the entry of a new superintendent in April

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[4] This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Michael A. Caira, Jr., Sarah J. Hardy, Deborah Langlois, and Donna M. McGarrigle.

2017. In multiple individual and focus group interviews, educators in Jamesberg expressed faith that under his leadership the district would not only improve but thrive. While all parties acknowledged there was much work to be done, specifically in the area of SEL, there was a feeling of optimism for what lay ahead.

Even before the start of the new superintendent's tenure, the district was interested in providing social-emotional support to its students. This was evidenced by the use of two outside resources to garner information about the district's SEL practices. In 2016, the district hired the Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning (CASEL) to generate a report assessing the district's SEL readiness and engagement. In addition, in the spring of 2017, employees, students, and families participated in a survey assessing perception of school climate and safety, student engagement, and student-teacher relationships. Finally, the new superintendent brought in a consultant who specialized in SEL methodology to work with him and his leadership team during his initial district takeover. District and school leaders used the data gathered from these reports as a resource when drafting a district strategic plan that prominently featured SEL. The details of this process are just one of many examples demonstrating the strong investment educators in Jamesberg had in the success of their students.

Social-Emotional Learning is Bigger Than You Think

SEL has garnered increased attention in the field of education in recent years (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Slade & Griffith, 2013; Zins & Elias, 2007). As a result, public schools have implemented a variety of SEL programming. The strongest SEL reforms include a comprehensive, multifaceted approach (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003). However, Jamesberg's approaches to SEL implementation were based

on a narrowly scoped definition of SEL, which resulted in a fragmented program (Hardy, 2018). We noted gaps in two specific areas. First, although research indicates that SEL should be part of programming designed for all students (Durlak et al., 2011; Elias, 2009; Payton et al., 2008), we did not find this to be the case in Jamesberg. Second, a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to SEL includes the creation of safe, caring learning environments (Durlak et al., 2011; Elias, 2006). Yet, in Jamesberg, creating positive learning environments was not viewed as part of SEL implementation (Langlois, 2018). We discuss the significance of these two areas of concern in turn. Furthermore, we make research-based recommendations for the district regarding potential next steps in both areas.

Social-Emotional Learning is for Everyone

Multiple studies exist supporting the importance of instructing all students in social-emotional competencies for academic and life-long success (Durlak et al., 2011; Elias, 2009; Payton et al., 2008). Whereas, in Jamesberg, we found staff were primarily focused on the aspects of SEL that supported students with deficits in social-emotional or behavioral skills (Hardy, 2018). Missing from SEL programming in Jamesberg was an understanding of the social-emotional competencies all students should be acquiring. Evidence-based SEL curriculum is one way all students can be exposed to SEL content (Low, Cook, Smolkowski, & Buntain-Ricklefs, 2015; Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). Jamesberg had some explicit social-emotional skill instruction in place (McGarrigle, 2018). However, research indicates SEL practices should also be embedded in academic instruction to capitalize on the connection between emotions and learning (Kress, Norris, Schoenholz, Elias, & Seigle, 2004). Beyond the training provided to a few teachers

regarding the incorporation of Responsive Classroom (Caira, 2018), Jamesberg staff rarely referred to embedded SEL instructional practices. Embedding SEL practices into academic instruction ensures all students acquire and practice these skills in their daily contexts (Elias, 2006). Later, in the recommendation section, we make suggestions for how leaders in Jamesberg could approach this work.

Another way schools ensure SEL instruction reaches all students is by using counseling staff (i.e. guidance counselors and social workers) in a systematic way to teach, model, and practice social-emotional competencies for all students (Flaherty et al., 1998). However, our findings indicated some counseling staff in Jamesberg spent a large amount of time responding to students in crisis (McGarrigle, 2018). As a result, some counselors were less involved in proactively supporting SEL for all students. Because of this, only some students in Jamesberg benefited from the support this specialized staff can provide. We make recommendations regarding the utilization of counseling staff at the end of the section.

Social-Emotional Learning Includes Creating Safe, Caring Learning Environments

In addition to understanding that SEL instruction is for everyone, a comprehensive definition of SEL recognizes the role of safe, caring learning environments in the development of social-emotional competencies (Durlak et al., 2011). Healthy teacher-student relationships allow students to learn about and practice social-emotional competencies and also increase student engagement and motivation to learn (Anderman, Andrzewjewky, & Allen, 2011; Elias & Moceri, 2012). At least two schools in the district were implementing a Responsive Classroom approach (Caira, 2018), which develops students' social-emotional competencies through the establishment of a positive

classroom and school environment (Abry, Rimm-Kaufman, Larsen, & Brewer, 2013).

However, the only systematic, district-wide programming in place to address learning

environments was Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (Hardy, 2018;

McGarrigle, 2018). PBIS has been shown to increase school attendance (Freeman et al.,

2015) and student compliance with behavioral expectations (Lewis, Colvin, & Sugai,

2000). Yet, PBIS is only one component that contributes to creating a positive and safe

learning environment (Cohen, 2006; Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010).

In addition to establishing behavioral expectations, another aspect of creating

safe, caring learning environments is the establishment of positive teacher-student

relationships (Skiba, Ormiston, Martinez, & Cummings, 2016). As such, an

understanding of the comprehensive meaning of SEL includes the role teacher-student

interactions play in SEL development (Klem & Connell, 2004). Although research

indicates students are most able to learn when they feel safe, competent, and autonomous

(Brooks, 1999), this concept was not included in most leaders' or teachers' definition of

SEL (Langlois, 2018). Instead, establishing positive classroom environments was more

often brought up in relation to problematic student behavior. This reactive way of

approaching positive environments highlighted how many leaders thought of SEL as

implementing a prescribed program or curriculum, instead of a set of skills to be

embedded into teacher-student interactions and academic content (Langlois, 2018). The

section to follow contains recommendations for next steps.

Recommendations to Expand Understanding of Social-Emotional Learning

Broadening the definition of SEL in Jamesberg is an essential next step for

leaders. Below, we outline recommendations in two areas: expanding the focus of SEL

instruction to *all* students and including the establishment of safe, caring learning environments as part of SEL programming.

First, through policy and practice, leaders should seek to establish SEL as a component of instruction essential for all students in the district (Zins & Elias, 2007). One way to approach this task would be to outline a developmentally appropriate scope and sequence for social-emotional competencies (Elias & Moceri, 2012). Including a list of expected SEL instructional practices would help staff understand how SEL should be embedded into their daily instruction with all students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Training curriculum leaders regarding how social-emotional competencies are embedded in instructional practice is another possible avenue. As academic curriculum is implemented, curriculum leaders could facilitate embedding SEL practices into unit design. The key task for leaders in Jamesberg will be to shift the thinking of principals and teachers to see SEL as a core component of programming for *all* students.

In addition, we recommend that leaders in Jamesberg examine the roles of counseling staff within their schools. Articulating a clear definition for their roles would be a first step. As part of that work, leaders might consider how counseling staff could be used to provide explicit instruction to students in a proactive manner instead of a reactive one (Zins & Elias, 2007). For example, leaders could facilitate the creation of a schedule for counseling staff to provide direct instruction in social skills to students. These supports would allow the district to best utilize counseling staff.

Our second recommendation regards building safe, caring learning environments as part of the district's approach to SEL programming. We suggest the leaders of Jamesberg expand the understanding of SEL to include the ways adults interact with

students and the relationships they form. While school leaders support teachers in building these relationships, they do so in reaction to problems, versus as proactive professional development (Langlois, 2018). A critical step in this process is through the identification of the school environment as a part of SEL implementation (Elias, 2009). PBIS has taken root in the district. Thus, if leaders continue to support the systems and practices provided through PBIS, schools will benefit. However, district leaders should help school leaders and staff expand their understanding of the elements of a safe, caring school environment, including how the school environment can be used to provide coordinated supports for students (Slade & Griffith, 2013). One way to accomplish this is to include a specific action item in the strategic plan addressing the creation of a common definition and understanding of a positive school environment. Furthermore, leaders can provide professional development opportunities for teachers that are directly related to building positive classroom environments (Caira, 2018). Ultimately, if school leaders and teachers hold a more comprehensive and proactive approach to SEL programming they will be able to support the success of all students.

Setting Direction

As seen in this project, staff in Jamesberg were invested in the social-emotional needs of their students, but had a narrow definition of SEL. In addition to having a comprehensive understanding of SEL, effective educational leaders utilize a set of leadership skills aimed at setting direction in their schools and districts (Leithwood et al., 2004). These skills enable leaders to direct efforts through the establishment of a clear, shared vision and the development of group goals that define high expectations (Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2014). However, outside of the PBIS

initiative, Jamesberg lacked district-wide priorities or actions steps for change related to

SEL implementation. Without consistent priorities and goals, there was limited cohesion

in SEL instruction. Instead, most SEL initiatives were fueled by individual principals

(Hardy, 2018; McGarrigle, 2018).

The creation of a unified district vision is particularly important for successful

SEL implementation, because it brings cohesion to the variety of programs, practices, and

interventions required for a comprehensive approach (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). The

lack of a unifying vision in Jamesberg led to an uneven application of SEL programs and

practices across the district (Hardy, 2018), as well as the trainings that were offered to

teachers regarding SEL practices (Caira, 2018). Next, we will discuss implications in

two areas: the impact of school autonomy and the need for aligned goal setting. Finally,

we will follow with recommendations for the district in the area of direction setting.

School Autonomy

Without a clear, shared vision, the adoption of SEL programs in Jamesberg was

primarily initiated by school principals (Hardy, 2018; McGarrigle, 2018). School leaders

established a range of SEL curricula and practices based on the needs of their individual

buildings and their particular interests and beliefs. According to Honig (2016), context is

important to consider when implementing a new initiative, but in Jamesberg, the district

context was not considered. Instead, principals worked autonomously from the building-

centric contexts of their individual schools when framing SEL initiatives. While this

autonomy provided building leaders the freedom to address the SEL needs in their

school, it also resulted in inconsistencies among schools, particularly in the area of

training (Caira, 2018) and support of teachers in building positive learning environments

(Langlois, 2018). Many of the school leaders interviewed expressed concern over the lack of funds and opportunities for new teachers to be trained in SEL programs. While school leaders strove to provide effective in-house professional development, keeping new staff trained on previously introduced SEL programs was problematic. New teachers did not always have access to the same level of training as teachers who had been in district when that program was first introduced and there was not a system to address this gap. This inconsistency of training led to inconsistency of implementation. For some schools, it also meant no SEL programming beyond PBIS. In the recommendation section, to follow we make suggestions for establishing a clear, shared vision.

Developing Group Goals

Establishing a clear, shared vision is only one part of setting direction. Leaders must also use that vision to fashion group goals with high expectations for staff (Leithwood et al., 2014). This is often accomplished through the use of strategic planning. A strategic plan assists in setting the direction of a district; it provides shared goals as well as a roadmap for meeting those goals (Seashore Louis et al., 2014). Jamesberg had a team of district and school leaders charged with developing a district strategic plan. Directed by the superintendent, the plan included a goal to integrate SEL into instructional practices (Hardy, 2018). The committee was charged with creating the necessary action steps to realize this goal.

Recommendations for Setting Direction

Given the importance setting direction plays in the success of reform, we have three recommendations for next steps. First, we recommend the goals and action steps

outlined in the strategic plan address a comprehensive meaning of SEL. As detailed

previously, this would include a focus on SEL instruction for all students and the

inclusion of safe, caring learning environments (Elias et al., 2003).

     As indicated by Elias et al. (2015), vision setting allows leaders to take a variety

of SEL programs and practices and help staff understand how they relate to each other.

Therefore, our second recommendation is that district leaders take a detailed inventory of

SEL programs currently in place. This inventory will enable district leaders to decide if

specific programs should be brought to scale across the district (Elias et al., 2003).

Furthermore, leaders in Jamesberg can use the information to determine which programs

to support with trainings for new teachers.

     A collaborative process for vision setting yields an effective planning process

(Devos et al., 2013; Silins et al., 2002). Therefore, our third recommendation is for

leaders to ensure the vision set for SEL is truly a shared one. The superintendent brings a

passion for SEL instruction to the district. Yet, before he arrived, principals and staff

were invested and working hard to address the SEL needs of their students. Many school

leaders had established SEL programming in their individual schools (Hardy, 2018). As

a vision for SEL is established in the district, it should include the input of all educators

in Jamesberg. It will be important to ensure staff understand the visioning process and

are given a way to actively participate in the creation of action steps. Shifting from

complete principal autonomy to a district-led vision will present challenges. Consistent

and transparent communication around vision setting will be an important tool in

bringing all stakeholders into this work and ensuring the vision is truly shared among all

of them.

Developing People

Setting direction enables a school district to set a vision for reform and outline goals and action steps related to that vision. In conjunction with setting direction, developing people propels reform efforts because it allows leaders to build the capacity of staff to carry out the reform (Leithwood et al., 2004). Seashore Louis et al. (2014) found targeted staff development builds knowledge and skills and positively influences the attitudes of staff members in carrying out organizational goals. As such, a focus on developing people will be essential for leaders in Jamesberg as they work to improve SEL in the district. Below we offer perspectives on the role of professional development in change and the instructional methods that lead to effective professional development. Further, we put forth recommendations for next steps in the area of developing people.

The Role of Professional Development in Change

According to Ransford et al. (2009), effective professional development can have a direct impact on the quality and quantity of lessons implemented when introducing specific SEL curricula. As such, targeted professional development can lead teachers to attempt new practices and implement changes to their everyday teaching (Desimone et al., 2002). Teachers in Jamesberg reported a general dissatisfaction with the district professional development around SEL (Caira, 2018). For instance, the introduction of SEL programs in Jamesberg was not often paired with sufficient training. In some cases, school leader support for teachers in building positive relationships was not seen as professional development so no programing existed to support the work. School leaders instead responded individually to teachers struggling in this area (Langlois, 2018). Research shows insufficient training may lead to deficits in program fidelity and

negatively influence students' emotional problem solving and emotional literacy skills (Reyes et al., 2012).

Instructional Methods of Effective Professional Development

The instructional methods used to implement professional development affect the outcomes. Effective professional development includes the active participation of those involved, and it requires access to relevant tools and content applicable to teachers' practices (Bruce et al, 2010; Desimone et al., 2002; Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005). Therefore, professional development where teachers are not simply listening, but performing tasks related to learning, increases the impact of the learning on teacher performance (Desimone et al., 2002; Ingvarson, et al., 2005). However, relevant SEL-related professional development that included active participation was rarely reported in Jamesberg (Caira, 2018). While the district partnered with outside organizations and hired expert lecturers, teachers did not have access to instructional coaches regarding SEL practices and methodologies. Supports such as coaches have been found to improve teacher confidence during SEL implementation (Ransford et al., 2009). Ultimately, when provided with targeted professional development, teachers are more likely to attempt new practices and implement changes to their everyday teaching (Desimone et al., 2002). Consistent with Bruce et al. (2010), we found that without involvement in direct experiences, embedded into everyday teaching, teachers reported feeling disconnected from many professional development offerings. As such, we make recommendations for future practice related to developing people.

Recommendations for Future Practice in Developing People

When defining the vision and goals for SEL, the district will inevitably identify

areas requiring professional development. As informed by our collaborative findings and the research literature, we have two recommendations for leaders as they consider the work of developing people. First, we recommend district leaders perform an assessment to examine professional development needs (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Second, we recommend district leaders establish a professional development plan that coincides with a cogent strategic plan and accounts for information gathered through the needs assessment. We will discuss these two recommendations in turn.

      A leadership driven assessment. The results of our collaborative findings provided evidence that the Jamesberg administration and teaching staff are committed to the academic and social-emotional needs of their students (Caira, 2018; Hardy, 2018, Langlois, 2018; McGarrigle, 2018). In order to capitalize on the staff's commitment, we recommend district leaders perform a review of professional learning needs (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). The purpose of the assessment would be three-fold. First, district and school leaders should carefully review and consolidate the information contained in the CASEL report and the survey from spring 2017 assessing perception of school climate and safety, student engagement, and student-teacher relationships. These data sources provide valuable information from teachers and counselors regarding specific areas related to SEL in which they would like support. Second, the assessment could identify staff knowledge and skills related to SEL goals articulated in the district strategic plan (Seashore Louis et al., 2014). Third, district and school leaders could evaluate current professional development as it pertains to the action steps in the new strategic plan and consider ways to incorporate active participation and relevant content in future SEL-related professional development opportunities (Desimone, et al., 2002; Ingvarson, et al.,

2005).

      Creation of a professional development plan. Using the information from the assessment, we recommend district and school leaders collectively create a professional development plan. The collaborative plan would ensure the information derived from the assessment is used in clear and actionable ways to develop staff in the area of SEL instruction. We recommend two areas for leaders to consider as they develop the professional development plan.

      First, in order to ensure the success of the professional development plan, it should be paired with a strong vision for SEL implementation and designed to build the knowledge, skills, and disposition of staff required for the successful execution of SEL practices (Seashore Louis et al., 2014). Specifically, the content outlined in the professional development plan should be relevant to the context of teachers (Datnow, 2000). This can be accomplished by addressing areas identified in the assessment and by linking the content of professional development to staffs' prior knowledge and building-based goals (Desimone et al., 2002). Relevance can also be created by ensuring the content of professional development includes how to apply the essential elements of the concept, and how to address any problems that arise (Durlak, 2016).

      Second, in considering the instructional practices outlined in the professional development plan, leaders should seek ways to promote active participation (Desimone et al., 2002; Ingvarson et al., 2005) and allow time for staff to reflect and absorb the material (Kendziora & Osher, 2016). According to Bruce et al. (2010), active participation includes providing and receiving feedback. One way this could be accomplished is by providing additional opportunities for teachers to participate in peer

observations. School leaders should ensure peer observations are paired with time for discussion and reflection (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016).

Furthermore, active participation relies upon engagement with specific instructional strategies and allows teachers time to reflect and connect their learning to their practice (Bruce et al., 2010, Desimone et al., 2002). One mechanism for reflection and making connections is through the supervision and evaluation process. This process allows leaders to provide specific and meaningful feedback to teachers. However, our collaborative findings did not show evidence of the supervision and evaluation process as a source of professional development for SEL (Caira, 2018, Langlois, 2018). Therefore, we recommend training and encouraging administrators to provide targeted feedback related to SEL along with time for collaborative reflection.

Redesigning the Organization

In addition to setting direction and developing people, an important aspect of effective educational leadership is the ability to build organizational structures that support learning (Leithwood et al., 2004; Witziers et al., 2003). This requires the creation of structures that support and encourage the growth of staff members to integrate new learning into their current practice (Elias, 2006). Jamesberg had successfully created structures to support SEL growth through its PBIS initiative. To build on this preliminary work, we have identified two focus areas for leaders: effective support structures and ongoing collaboration (Leithwood et al., 2003). At the end of the section, we present recommendations for school and district leaders.

Effective Structures to Support Social-Emotional Learning

Creating the right structures to sustain SEL initiatives is a challenge for school

systems (Elias et al., 2015). To determine the right structures to support SEL efforts, districts should consider the contextual variables and internal expertise (Elias et al., 2003; Minckler, 2014). Jamesberg was successful in integrating PBIS in all the elementary and middle schools through the use of a district-wide tiered support structure (Hardy, 2018; McGarrigle, 2018). This structure supplied an implementation framework that was flexible enough to allow schools to individualize the program based on their schools' needs. Although PBIS was an incomplete response to a more comprehensive SEL system, this program was successfully embedded in these schools through the multi-pronged structures created to implement and sustain it.

In contrast to the support structure of the PBIS initiative, the support structures of guidance counselors and social workers were not consistent across buildings (McGarrigle, 2018). Most schools had a support model that aligned with the training and expertise of each discipline (Flaherty et al., 1998). A few schools recently shifted to a model where the roles and responsibilities of guidance counselors and social workers were interchangeable. Instead of differentiating the roles based on level of student need, the roles were assigned by grade level. Both models have their benefits and drawbacks, dependent upon school and district context (Datnow, Park, & Kennedy-Lewis, 2013; Robinson et al., 2008). However, in Jamesberg the support model that differentiated roles based on the training and expertise of counselors had been well-established and aligned well with the PBIS tiers of support. There was concern among several counselors and administrators that the shift to a grade level model would not effectively support all students.

Collaborative Processes

Another organizational mechanism to support SEL implementation is to create structure in the school schedule that allows for and even encourages collaboration (Minckler, 2014). Research has shown that providing staff members with the opportunity to collaborate is a powerful way to develop staff (Bruce et al., 2010; Desimone et al., 2002) and meet organizational goals (Leithwood et al., 2014). The district recognized and responded to this need for the counseling staff by building a collaborative structure for sharing expertise and effective practices (McGarrigle, 2018).

As found throughout this project, teachers, too, yearned for additional opportunities to collaborate in order to increase their skill set and receive emotional support from peers (Caira, 2018). Most teachers identified seeking out support for SEL challenges through impromptu conversations with counselors, peers, or principals (Caira, 2018, Hardy, 2018; Langlois, 2018). Specifically, teachers discussed positive interactions with support staff as a means to growing one's efficacy. When teachers felt supported by their colleagues, they felt more confident in their own abilities (Caira, 2018).

Although these conversations were helpful, teachers reported wanting a more formal structure for collaboration (Caira, 2018). This is consistent with research that shows the integration of SEL practices into a teacher's skillset increases when collaboration is a standard practice (Berzin, O'Brien, & Tohn, 2012; Guo, Justice, Sawyer, & Tompkins, 2011).

Recommendations for Organizational Structures

As informed by our collaborative findings and the research literature, we have

two recommendations for leaders as they consider the work of redesigning organizational structures. First, we recommend leaders review the roles and responsibilities of guidance counselors and social workers to ensure that structures support the SEL needs of schools and the district. Clear, consistent structures and operating procedures (Leithwood et al, 2007) help organizations run more efficiently and allow all organizational members to understand how to best access supports. As part of the review process, we recommend establishing clear job descriptions and role expectations in order to clarify and strengthen the existing student support systems. Additionally, this clarity could lead to collaborative relationships among these professionals in order to create a responsive support structure that serves all students (Flaherty et al., 1998). Leaders could utilize the already established guidance meetings as a time to gather and analyze a list of duties, tasks, and responsibilities for each role.

Second, we recommend leaders establish a schedule that allows for collaboration between teachers regarding SEL. In addition, providing teachers with a protocol for collaborating about SEL will keep discussions focused and productive. Creating a formalized structure to allow development of collaborative, collective teams in schools can convey a sense of organizational stability and clarity of purpose. For staff, this can lead to higher levels of connectedness, collegiality, trust, and mutual respect (Bellibas & Liu, 2017). Student outcomes in schools that build in collaborative structures for staff include higher achievement (Dinham, 2005), engagement, and participation (Silins et al., 2002).

Conclusion

The awareness of social-emotional learning (SEL) as an essential aspect of

education is growing. District and school leaders are increasingly aware of the need to provide programing and support for teachers in order to meet the needs of students. Therefore, the broader aim of this project was to explore the role of school and district leaders in supporting implementation of SEL in public education. Our research project focused on one district from four different perspectives: the role of district leaders in establishing SEL initiatives, the district's approach to SEL-related professional development, the practices of principals and counselors, and the practices of school leaders in supporting teachers to build a positive learning environment.

In Jamesberg, we found a district with a strong investment in the academic and social-emotional well-being of their students. Overall, the district's approach to SEL implementation was narrowly defined. While many programs and initiatives existed, there lacked a unifying district-wide vision for SEL programming. Professional development for SEL was evident but did not adequately meet the needs of the district. Finally, we found evidence of some organizational structures to support SEL.

The three leadership practices outlined by Leithwood et al. (2004) (setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization) established a framework for future recommendations.

The commitment of the new superintendent and the on-going strategic planning reflected the district's commitment to incorporating SEL into the practices of all staff. Staff investment in the academic and social-emotional well-being of students, along with a leadership team focused on making district-wide improvements, provided a sense of hopeful optimism for Jamesberg and the future implementation of SEL.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol: Administrators

1. What SEL initiatives has your school (or the district - for district leaders) implemented in the past two years?

    a. **Probe** (for District Leaders): What levels/schools implemented the initiative(s)?

2. Talk about how the initiative(s) was implemented?

    a. **Probe**: What strategies were used during implementation to help building-based staff understand the purpose or goal of the initiative?

    b. **Probe**: What strategies were used during implementation to help building-based staff develop their knowledge base about the initiative?

    c. **Probe (**for District Leaders): How was the plan for implementation communicated to school-based staff?

    d. **Probe** for (District Leaders): What structures were used or created to improve communication between district leaders and school-based staff and/or among school-based staff?

    e. **Probe**: What support systems (if any) were put in place to help building-based staff during adoption of the SEL initiative?

3. What professional development has occurred regarding SEL?

4. Have teachers been afforded the opportunity to collaborate with peers regarding SEL?

5. Has confidence improved due to participation in SEL related PD?

6. How do you define a positive classroom learning environment?

    Potential categories of answers include:

    1. Clear signs of rituals and routines/organization

    2. Instructional strategies for engagement

    3. Social emotional (teacher/student interactions, teacher sensitivity, regard for adolescent perspective)

    Interviewer: *I'd like for us to focus on the social-emotional aspects of the classroom environment for the next three questions.*

7. What skills do teachers need in order to build positive relationships with students?

      Probe: Can you give me an example?

8. What skills do teachers need in order to build positive relationships between students?

      Probe: Can you give me an example?

9. In what ways have you successfully supported a teacher struggling to build a positive relationships with and between students? In what ways have you not been successful?

      Look for professional development, coaching feedback (specifics) and evaluation.

10. What are the biggest challenges you've faced as you support teachers in this area?

11. Can you talk to me about the ways you support staff or students social-emotionally?

12. Talk to me about your work with your counselors.

      a. **Probe**: Do you meet regularly? How often?

      b. **Probe**: How does the communication work between you and the counselors?

13. What impact does trust have on how you work with your counselors? Teachers?

      a. **Probe**: Talk to me about the ways you built trust as an administrator

      b. **Probe**: What have been barriers, if any, you have experienced in building trust?

Appendix B

Semi-structured Interview Protocol: Counselors

Background Data

I/we'd like to start by learning a little more about you.

1. What is your role in this school?
2. How long have you been in this role?
3. Have you worked in other school systems?

SEL Initiatives

1. Can you tell me about the ways you support SEL in your role?
2. Have there been any initiatives in this school/district to develop SEL? Can you talk to me about them? What was your involvement?
3. Talk to me about your work with students? What does that look like? What goes well? What makes that work challenging?
4. Tell me about a time you worked with a student that had a big impact on your personally or professionally?
5. Talk to me about your work with teachers. What goes well? What makes that work challenging?
6. Talk to me about your interactions with administration? How do the communication channels work?
7. Who do you go to for advice/support?
8. What impact does trust have on your work with students? Teachers? Administrators?

   Probe: Talk to me about how you go about building trust?

9. What's missing in this building/district? What would make this a better place for staff and students?
10. Have you been involved in providing any professional development for teachers?
11. Have you attended any professional development recently?
12. What motivates you in this work?
13. Where do you see yourself professionally in the future?

Appendix C

Focus Group Interview Protocol

The Impact of Educational Leaders on SEL Implementation

1. Has this school (or district) provided any professional development on social-emotional learning? If so, what was (or is) your involvement?

2. Talk about why your school and district implemented _____ (fill in with specific SEL initiative)?

  Probe: What were the hopes for the initiative?

3. Have you been afforded the opportunity to collaborate with peers regarding SEL?

4. How confident are you regarding SEL centered practices?

  a. **Probe:** Has your participation in SEL centered PD changed your practice in any way?

  b. **Probe:** Has your confidence improved due to your participation in SEL related PD?

  c. **Probe:** How has your understanding of SEL changed or developed?

5. Do you actively research SEL or attempt to incorporate SEL activities/strategies into your everyday practices?

6. Tell me about a meaningful experience you had that has impacted the way you incorporate SEL practices.

7. How do you define a positive learning environment?

8. What skills do you, as a teacher, need in order to successfully build a positive learning environment in your classroom?

9. What supports has your principal offered to you to support your growth in building a positive learning environment in your classroom? (Possibilities might include: feedback, peer-to-peer observations, professional development)

  Probe: Did you find any of the supports helpful or effective? If so, please explain how. If not, please explain why not.

Appendix D

Documents

Agenda from Administrative Leadership Retreat on 8/24 and 8/25

Attendance Initiative Overview

Collective Turnaround Plan for three elementary schools

Content from Health and Wellness Website

District Strategic Plan dated March 2014

District Panorama Key Insight Report – spring 2017

Draft of District Strategic Plan dated January 2018

Educational Visioning Community Forum Events flyer

Final FY18 Budget Book

Health and Wellness Newsletter – June 2016

Metro West Health Survey

Multi-year strategic planning working documents for 4 standards

PBIS Information from Elementary School Website

PBIS Information from Middle School Website

PowerPoint from 2016 PBIS training by the May Institute

Professional Development Day Plan for March 1, 2016

Redacted teacher evaluations

School Improvement Template and Guidance Document

SEL rating for GLIMS

SEL Readiness and Engagement Analysis – by CASEL Nov. 2016