Socially and Emotionally Competent Leadership: Making Sense of a District-wide Focus on SEL

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SOCIALLY AND EMOTIONALLY COMPETENT LEADERSHIP: MAKING SENSE OF A
DISTRICT-WIDE FOCUS ON SEL

Dissertation in Practice by

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Socially and Emotionally Competent Leadership: Making Sense of a District-wide Focus on SEL

by

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, district leaders are the initiators of large-scale reform efforts including the establishment of social emotional learning (SEL) initiatives. However, school-based leaders also bear the responsibility of implementing the programs and practices associated with such district-wide initiatives. While there is a significant body of research on strategies leaders can use during the implementation process, as well as the content of those strategies that enable sensemaking, there is little information about what district and school leaders should do to ensure successful implementation of social emotional learning (SEL) initiatives. Further, no research to date has focused on the manner in which district leaders support school-based leaders as they make sense of a district-wide focus on SEL, and how such a focus on SEL shapes school-based leadership practices.

This study is part of a larger qualitative case study about leadership practices that model SEL competencies for adults or, promote the social and emotional learning for teachers and other staff, and the way those leadership practices shape a district and its schools in a Massachusetts public school district. The purpose of this individual study was to examine, through the lens of sensemaking, how district leaders supported school-based leaders as they made sense of a

district-wide focus on SEL, how a district-wide focus on SEL shaped school-based leadership

practices, and which school-based leadership practices, if any, modeled SEL competencies.

Findings indicate that district leaders supported school-based leaders' sensemaking by

articulating a clear mission and goals, providing structures that fostered collaboration, and

supporting professional development. However, the school-based leaders' sensemaking could be

deepened through greater opportunities to share their learning through collaboration. School-

based leaders acknowledged that a district-wide focus on SEL shaped their leadership practices,

namely that SEL serves as the foundation from which they lead. More specifically, all

respondents mentioned leadership practices associated with the competencies of social

awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Implications suggest successful

implementation of district-wide SEL initiatives relies on district leaders creating and supporting

interactions that will support school-based leaders' sensemaking of a district-wide focus on SEL.

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possibly finish this work. You listened when I needed to vent. You made me laugh when I could

not find anything funny. For all that and more, I thank you.

DEDICATION

My sister Leslie Ann is my angel. While academically gifted, she struggled socially and emotionally as a young woman. She had a tough exterior, but was the kindest, gentlest, most giving young woman I had the privilege of knowing. In one of our final conversations twenty years ago she said to me, "Please be the teacher to your students that I never had." Her words continue to guide and inspire me. She has placed many students in my path, particularly Tatianna Jean-Noel and Arianna Viera, who continue to remind me why I entered the field of education, and how important it is to truly care for our students as human beings. Thank you, Leslie Ann, for being the wind beneath my wings. I dedicate this work to you.

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CHAPTER ONE[1]

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Opportunity and achievement gaps continue to challenge the educational system in the

United States, as it struggles to balance a student's academic, social, and emotional skills.

District and school-based leaders face the difficulties of monitoring expectations related to

increased academic rigor while developing emotionally stable and healthy students. To address

student and systemic educational challenges, social and emotional learning (SEL), as a

conceptual framework, has gained traction in the field of education. Dusenbury et al. (2015)

define SEL as:

> the process through which children and adults acquire 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. Social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student and
> citizen. (p. 2)

The ever-expanding body of research available supports the benefits of students having strong

SEL competencies (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones, D. et al., 2017; Zins et al., 2007). Research shows

that SEL has positive effects on a student's physical health, academic achievement, and lifelong

success (Jones & Kahn, 2017; Taylor et al., 2017; Zins et al., 2007). The Collaborative for

Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) highlights five competencies, including

self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-

making (CASEL, 2017) necessary for students to develop college and career readiness.

Numerous studies suggest that high-quality SEL programs in schools do matter, and that students

with SEL competencies are better able to manage their emotions and problem-solving skills as

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[1] This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach to this project: Michele
Conners, Mark Ito, Adam Renda, Geoff Rose, and Donna Tobin.

well as engage in more positive behaviors with fewer conduct and internalizing problems (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones., D. et al., 2017; Hagood, 2015; Zins et al., 2007). Due to the development of SEL competencies that promote health and wellbeing, student learning improves.

Knowing the benefits for students, district and school-based leaders work to put SEL initiatives into place. Adelman and Taylor (2000) argue that if schools and leaders focus only on instruction to help students obtain academic success, they will not effectively educate the whole child. Many states, like Massachusetts, encourage the inclusion of SEL competencies as part of their core curriculum expectations. Additionally, the federal law, *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), requires educational leaders to provide the necessary support in developing a student's SEL competencies that prepare them for success in college and career. These mandates call for schools to implement SEL; however, federal and state mandates focus primarily on developing student skills only and not the adults who influence them daily, including their social and emotional development.

Limited in the research is a focus on SEL competencies for adult staff. Long (2019) reminds us that, "unless they [districts] also address the SEL needs of teachers, especially those experiencing stress, poor working conditions, and classes with many historically underserved students—long-term, systemwide gains for students are less likely" (p. 1). Further complicating the matter, research shows that teacher stress, burnout, and low job satisfaction are formidable challenges in our nation (Beltman et al., 2011; Bobek, 2002; Greenberg, et al., 2016). Educators feel increasing pressure to strengthen relationships with all students, especially those that are marginalized, disenfranchised or disengaged. It is unclear, however, the degree of training and

support available to educators, as well as how much care is being given to their own social and emotional health in the process.

Few studies have investigated the extent to which leaders in schools promote SEL through their own actions and behaviors (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Buchanan et al., 2009; DePaoli et al., 2017). While some staff, including teachers and mental health staff, recognize that children benefit from developing their SEL competencies and skills, educators are generally not intentionally shown or explicitly told by leaders how to develop these competencies in their own practices. Due to this lack of knowledge, staff feel the overall stress, as they are expected to foster an environment in which they possess and model SEL competencies themselves. However, leaders play an important role in influencing the behaviors of their staff (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Minckler, 2014; Spillane & Lee, 2014). We explore this further in our literature review.

The impact of SEL is widespread; thus, we argue that it is critical and essential that district and school leaders model the SEL competencies that shape varied aspects of their schools and/or promote opportunities that develop the SEL competencies of all members of their community. The following overarching research questions guided our work: 1) What leadership practices model SEL competencies, or promote SEL opportunities for staff? and 2) How do these leadership practices shape a district and its schools? For the purpose of our study, we identified practices that modeled (i.e. displayed and demonstrated) SEL competencies. Additionally, we also identified practices that promoted (i.e. actively encouraged) opportunities for staff to develop their SEL skills. Table 1.1 summarizes our focus areas of study by researchers.

Table 1.1

Researcher and their individual focus area of study.

Researcher	Conceptual Frameworks	Focus of study
Conners	Sensemaking (Weick, 2009)	District-wide leadership practices that supported sensemaking on SEL for school-based leaders, and how its focus shaped school-based leadership practices.
Ito	Distributed Leadership (Spillane et al. 2004)	School-based leadership practices that modeled SEL competencies, as they shaped adult collaboration.
Renda	CASEL (Casel, 2017)	School-based leadership practices that promoted SEL opportunities, as they shaped mental health staff.
Rose	Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977)	School-based leadership practices that modeled SEL competencies, as they shaped collective efficacy.
Tobin	Prosocial Classroom (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009)	School-based leadership practices that promoted SEL opportunities, as they shaped staff resilience and well being.

Literature Review

The following literature informed our study by supporting our argument to integrate the SEL competencies into leadership practices. We present our review in two sections. In the first section, we focus on SEL competencies for students and adults that include the social and emotional intelligences, SEL competencies in schools, the identification of key SEL competencies and skills (CASEL, 2017), and SEL for district and school-based staff. In the second section, we explore the literature that further supports our research questions, focusing on leadership in districts and schools that include emotional intelligence, theories and practices such as transformational, distributed and social capital; and finally, social and emotional leadership.

This final topic bridges the gap between what we know is good for students and adults, and discusses social and emotional competent leadership.

SEL Competencies for Students and Adults

This section describes a brief history of the social and emotional intelligences and how it set the foundation for developing CASEL's competencies framework. We also discuss the benefits of SEL competencies for students. It is important to lay this groundwork, as our group and individual studies use the CASEL competencies and skills to analyze the identified leadership practices. The work of CASEL furthers our emphasis on the importance of SEL for students' academic learning and personal health, and also provides insight into the limited research on the adults, including the leaders and staff who work with those students.

Social and Emotional Intelligences

The history of SEL dates back at least a century, as seen in the work of researchers on emotional intelligence and social intelligence. Thorndike introduced social intelligence in the 1920's and framed this concept as the ability to act wisely in human relations (Thorndike & Stein, 1937). Salovey and Mayer (1990) extended this research on social intelligences to focus more specifically on individual self-awareness and self-management skills related to one's emotions. They explicitly defined emotional intelligence (EI) as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189). Goleman (1996) increased the prevalence of this concept by providing a research-based argument for the importance of EI, how it can be developed throughout life, and the need for our society to increase our focus on emotional literacy.

Additionally, Goleman (2006) stated that the initial intent of EI was to "focus on a crucial set of human capacities within us as individuals, our ability to manage our own emotions and our inner potential for positive relationships" (p. 5). From these theories of social and emotional intelligences, the four domains of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management emerged (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008). These four domains laid the groundwork for the five core competencies defined by CASEL. Traditionally, these competencies have been applied to the emotional health and wellbeing of all people.

SEL Competencies and Schools

CASEL, an organization developed in 1994 to specifically consider the needs of social and emotional development programming in districts and schools, created a framework for SEL in educational settings. Each piece of the framework addresses the mental health needs of children and the fractured response to those needs in schools (Elias et al., 1997). Research affirms the positive influence this approach has on students and schools. It makes sense that when schools have structures and supports in place to meet the needs of the whole child, students perform better academically, relationships are stronger, and behavioral issues decrease. It follows then that the purpose of CASEL's framework is to "establish high-quality, evidence-based SEL as an essential part of preschool through high school education" (Elbertson et al., 2010, p. 1017). Increasingly, schools became responsible for more than just a student's academic performance.

More specifically, CASEL defined five core competencies within its framework that provided educators a common understanding about the knowledge and skills students and adults needed (Table 1.2). In addition to the four competencies originally established by Goleman (1996), CASEL added "responsible decision-making" as a fifth. With this additional competency, CASEL showed us that SEL is needed to "enhance students' capacity to integrate

skills, attitudes, and behaviors to deal effectively and ethically with daily tasks and challenges.

Like many similar ones, CASEL's integrated framework promoted intrapersonal, interpersonal,

and cognitive competence." (CASEL, 2017). Table 1.2 defines the core competencies in detail.

Table 1.2

A Definition of CASEL's Core SEL Competencies

SEL competencies	Definition of competency
Self-awareness	Recognizing one's emotions and identifying and cultivating one's strengths and positive qualities
Self-management	Monitoring and regulating one's emotions and establishing and working toward achieving positive goals
Social awareness	Understanding the thoughts and feelings of others and appreciating the value of human differences
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

Source: CASEL, 2017

Research supports the need for districts and schools to focus on developing competencies

as part of their students' overall academic, social, and emotional growth (Taylor, et al., 2017;

Elias, 2009). Zins et al. (2007) stated, "[SEL competencies] are particularly important for

children to develop because they are linked to a variety of behaviors with long-term

implications" (p. 192). These behaviors includeanxiety disorders such as depression, eating

disorders, attention-deficit/hyperactivity, substance use disorders, truancy, dropping out of

school, teen pregnancy, bullying, and violence (Elias et al., 1997). When these behaviors go unaddressed and their effects not considered, they compromise a student's academic learning. Zins et al. (2007) maintains that our educational system must support students holistically in order to address the SEL challenges that obstruct students' abilities and capacities to connect to and perform in schools. Research over the past decade claims that students *with* SEL competencies have increased academic achievement, enhanced problem-solving skills, and higher levels of engagement in more prosocial behaviors with fewer conduct and interpersonal problems (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones, et al., 2017; Hagood, 2015). In summary, research shows that students' academic learning strongly benefit from the development of SEL skills, as healthy, attentive children focus more on classroom content.

Dusenbury and Weissberg (2017) support these findings. A meta-analysis of follow-up studies of 82 SEL interventions found the benefits of SEL to be durable over time and across diverse samples. Specifically, SEL programs and interventions implemented at the elementary school level effectively promoted academic achievement, improved positive behaviors, and reduced conduct issues. As evidenced by follow-up interviews, students continued to show positive achievement, and that they used SEL competencies after graduating from high school. Learning SEL competencies benefited students not only in the classroom, but also in their ability to be college and career ready for the future.

An additional study of 753 children from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods showed that, "perceived early social competence at least serves as a marker for important long-term outcomes and at most is instrumental in influencing other development factors that collectively affect the life course" (Jones et al., 2015, p. 2289). These outcomes included a greater likelihood

of graduating from college, more positive work and family relationships, better mental and physical health, and reduced criminal activity (Jones, et al., 2015; Jones & Kahn, 2017).

Our review of these empirical studies strongly suggests that educating our students on SEL competencies, supporting students to practice them, and allowing students to experience the long-term benefits of their impact are essential to success in today's schools. However, SEL development in adults, as it relates to improved relationships, productivity, and feelings of satisfaction in the workplace, is not a priority in leadership practices or research (Patti et al., 2015; Brackett & Salovey, 2006). We assert that adults can benefit from the acquisition of these competencies, especially knowing that if leaders and staff model and/or promote them, then students are ultimately more likely to internalize their importance, and use them to their advantage, too.

SEL for Staff

Further bolstering our argument for the systemic integration of SEL for adults in districts and schools, research conducted through CASEL maintains that district and school-based staff must develop their own SEL competencies. In support of these competencies as necessary in the workplace, CASEL (2017) stated that individuals need "…the ability to use SEL practices in life and on the job" (p. 1). With an increased focus on SEL in schools, the field of education needs all stakeholders, specifically leaders, teachers, and mental health staff, to continue to develop their own SEL competencies as well as be given the professional training to do so.

Brackett et al. (2010) conducted a quantitative study in England that measured 123 teachers' emotion-regulation ability (ERA). Specifically, these researchers found a positive relationship between the emotion-regulation abilities of teachers and their job satisfaction as well as their sense of personal accomplishment. Moreover, they found that teachers with higher ERA

experienced greater levels of principal support and had better relationships with colleagues. Additionally, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) acknowledge that research (Goleman, 1996) over the past few decades has informed the education profession to promote teachers' SEL competencies. However, Sutton and Wheatley (2003) point out that, "researchers also know little about how teachers regulate their emotions, the relationship between teachers' emotions and motivation, and how integral emotional experiences are in teacher development" (p. 328). Although current studies stress the importance of SEL for teachers, our study examines the need for SEL competencies to be displayed, demonstrated and actively promoted by district and school-based leaders, as they influenced the members of their organizations, including mental health staff.

In consideration of the impact teacher SEL training has on students, Reyes et al. (2012) conducted a study that involved 812 sixth grade students and their teachers from 28 elementary schools in a large urban school district in the northeastern United States. This study categorized teachers by their degree of resistance or acceptance to teaching SEL programs and named them low-, medium- and high-quality implementers. Analyses revealed that teachers who received more training and delivered more lessons, or were high-quality implementers, had more positive outcomes and felt more efficacious in their work. These findings showed that teacher beliefs, along with training and program fidelity, impacted SEL interventions and the students who received them. Leaders played an important role in ensuring that all staff received the training that they needed.

We argue that leaders need to engage in practices that model SEL competencies and/or promote opportunities for staff to develop their own skills, which ultimately impact student achievement. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) remind us that "teachers influence their students

not only by how and what they teach but also by how they relate, teach, and model social and

emotional constructs, and manage the classroom" (p. 449). That being said, limited research

provides evidence of effective pre-service and professional development opportunities focused

on staff competencies (Brackett & Salovey, 2006). Due to the importance of SEL in schools, and

the need for professional training, our study examined leadership practices and how they shaped

adults' work in a district and its schools.

SEL Competencies and Leadership

In our research, we explored the integration of SEL competencies and leadership theory.

The following section describes how social and emotional intelligences connect to leadership,

how leadership theories and practices lay the groundwork for capability and capacity building

(Cohen et al., 2007), and how social and emotional leadership is in its nascent stages. We

explored the topic of leadership, as it supports our argument in understanding more deeply how

leaders employed socially and emotionally competent practices in a district and its schools.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Leadership

The focus on EI, a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's

own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's

thinking and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), gained strong momentum from the research of

Goleman (2006) on emotional literacy. Since the inception of this concept, numerous studies

emerged related to EI, including the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership

(Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002; Boyatzis et al., 2011; George, 2000; Siegling et al., 2014; Walter et

al., 2012). For example, Hur et al., (2011) conducted a quantitative study that exclusively utilized

questionnaires to explore how emotional intelligence related to leader effectiveness, team

effectiveness, and organizational climate. The findings revealed that followers who rated team

leaders as more emotionally intelligent also rated them as more effective at shaping a positive climate in the organization.

Initially, corporate organizations conducted much of this EI research by seeking to align the EI of leaders with their overall performance. Over the past two decades, however, this work has found its way into educational leadership practices. As Moore (2009) cites in her work on school reform, "EI can be the difference between a high performing school and a low performing school, and leaders who possess high levels of EI are more skillful in leading change and cultivating commitment among their staff" (p. 23). Cai (2011) also examined empirical studies published between 1996 and 2011 to explore the relationship between the EI of principals and the turnaround of low performing schools. While Cai acknowledged further investigation was needed, he concluded that the higher the school leader's EI, the more likely teachers collaborated with each other and the greater prevalence that the leader demonstrated transformational leadership behaviors (e.g., idealized influence and intellectual stimulation). Lastly, evidence also suggested that the higher a principal's EI the greater likelihood that they utilized positive interpersonal skills including communication, conflict management, and stress management.

Also, several studies described the relationship between leadership and EI (Palmer et al., 2001; Gardner & Stough, 2002). For example, Palmer et al. (2001) concluded that the foundation for competency of transformational leadership is a person's skill to manage and monitor the emotions of themselves and others. Relatedly, Berkovich and Eyal (2015) conducted a narrative review of 49 peer-reviewed studies published between 1990-2012 that focused exclusively on educational leaders and emotions. In their analysis of quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods studies, the researchers identified three main themes across the literature including

leaders' behaviors and their effects on followers' emotions; leaders' emotional abilities; and leaders' emotional experiences and displays of emotions. While these themes helped researchers better understand the importance of EI and leadership, we argue that schools and districts are complex systems that require not just the development of an individual leader's skills, but more importantly, the collective skills of many.

Leadership Theories and Practices

Strong educational leadership highly impacts student academic achievement (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Principals are instructional leaders, and through their directive, they set teacher expectations and influence classroom activity that impacts student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Branch et al., 2013). That being said, leaders are not only responsible for individual and collective academic successes but also ensuring the infrastructure to support these successes. Furthermore, leadership practices—what leaders think and do within the social contexts of schools—allow adults and students to grow. By extension, transformational and distributed leadership practices can be critical to the growth, progress, and success of both students and adults, and social capital theory strongly supports the benefits of colleagues interacting, supporting, and strengthening their work. Each of these theories value human relationships and encourage the development of capabilities and capacity building within the organization.

Transformational Leadership. Burns (1978) introduced "transformational leadership," as a theory based on relationships and meeting the needs of followers to help foster change within an organization. A transformational educational leader delivers a mission-centered emphasis on setting direction and vision, a performance-centered emphasis on developing people, and a culture-centered emphasis on redesigning the organization (Leithwood, 1994;

Marks & Printy, 2003). Bass (1998) used transformational leadership as a lens to view organizations, specifically how leaders impacted the behaviors and feelings of other members within the organization. Furthermore, Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) extended the transformational model to include seven dimensions: (1) build school vision and establish school goals; (2) provide intellectual stimulation; (3) offer individualized support; (4) model best practices and important organizational values; (5) demonstrate high performance expectations; (6) create a productive school culture; and (7) develop structures to foster participation in school decisions.

In their study, Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) examined the practices of leaders in twelve Ontario schools that displayed effective collaboration. They found that principals who utilized transformational leadership such as developing people, and setting vision, better assisted in the development of collaborative school cultures. By extension, Northouse (2016) proclaimed that transformational leaders are "concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long term-goals. It includes assessing followers' motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings" (p. 161). This focus on understanding the emotions of others and the relationships between leaders and followers reflected the integration of SEL competencies with the dimensions of transformational leadership.

Hackett and Hortman's research (2008) sought to understand a relationship between SEL competencies and the behaviors associated with effective leadership performance. In this study, researchers analyzed any relationships between the four domains of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management and four transformational leadership behaviors. Specifically, researchers focused on the dimensions of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. With data collected from self-reports of both instruments, they found that emotional competencies were

related to these transformational leadership dimensions. Thus, it makes sense for researchers to explore how leadership practices, such as those identified by the transformational leadership theory, model or promote SEL competencies.

Furthermore, in relation to transformational leadership focused on developing people, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) asserted that "capital has to be shared and circulated" and further state that, "groups, teams, and communities are far more powerful than individuals when it comes to developing human capital" (p. 3). This focus on developing people through collaborative structures relies on leaders utilizing, modeling, and promoting the SEL competencies of social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. In addition to transformational leadership, social capital theory further extends the fundamental importance of colleagues' relationships to support their work.

Social Capital. Bourdieu (1985) and Coleman (1990) first introduced the social capital theory by acknowledging that the relationships and interactions between people can serve as a resource for them. Leana (2011) conducted a large-scale, quantitative study in New York City that analyzed the work of staff in relation to student achievement. Leana found that "teachers were almost twice as likely to turn to their peers as to the [outside] experts designated by the school district, and four times more likely to seek advice from one another than from the principal" (p. 33). Moreover, when teachers engaged in more frequent conversations and expressed positive relationships with their peers, students showed higher achievement gains. This showed the importance of collegial relationships grounded in trust and sharing of practices to support improvement as well as the understanding that the formal school leader cannot solely bear the responsibility of supporting and coaching staff.

In addition to Leana's findings, Minckler (2014) enhanced social capital theory by emphasizing that strong relationships provide value to individual members and the collective organization. In her quantitative study, Minckler (2014) explored the relationship between school leadership and the development of teacher social capital through a convenience sample of thirteen schools in two school districts in southeastern United States. One major finding of this study suggested that the transformational leader played an essential role "in developing the structures, both physically (e.g., shared scheduling time) and culturally (e.g., norms of collegiality) that create opportunities for groups of teachers to work together to create and use teacher social capital" (p. 672). This shows that formal leaders play an important role in creating essential, supportive contexts for leaders and staff to interact within the school day.

Distributed Leadership. Distributed leadership theory focuses on how multiple leaders in an organization interact with others in a specific context to create leadership practices. Spillane et al. (2004) states, "rather than seeing leadership practice as solely a function of an individual's ability, skill, charisma, and/or cognition, we argue that it is best understood as a practice distributed over leaders, followers, and their situation" (p. 11). This theory supports the importance of increasing capabilities and capacity for change within the organization by considering the relationship of multiple leaders and followers, and their activities. As defined by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), capabilities are more than just having "adequate ability," but rather the possession of "attributes required for performance or accomplishment" (p. 55). Additionally, Mullen and Jones (2008) referred to capacity in their work as "enabling the growth of teachers as leaders who are responsible for their actions" (p. 329). In many schools, leadership is not just the job of one person, but rather a "web" that includes district, school, and teacher leaders engaged with a variety of different colleagues and contexts.

In considering a distributed leadership model, we argue for the importance of knowing where the key relationships reside and understanding how leaders emerge from amongst the staff. When leadership is viewed from a distributed perspective, the analysis of power relationships inevitably changes (West et al., 2000) and distinctions between leaders and followers blur (Gronn, 2003). Staff leaders, who are content experts (e.g., subject-area teachers), do not always hold positional authority such as that of a supervisory administrator. This means that an evaluative approach during interactions is not the driving dynamic between them. Due to this potential dynamic, staff leaders influence the organization's leadership practices by focusing on those skills (e.g. listening) that enhance relationships between colleagues.

In one empirical study, Timperley (2005) observed literacy instruction in seven elementary schools and examined its impact on student achievement. Timperley found that the followers who did not respect their designated positional leaders, sought out their peers as teacher leaders. These teacher leaders were not appointed by the school or district, but organically rose as leaders within the situations in which they worked with colleagues. Followers selected colleagues based on camaraderie and like-mindedness (i.e., not necessarily content expertise) which ultimately led to ineffective leadership practices. We acknowledge that this research showed that peer interactions did not result in positive outcomes that impact productive adult collaboration and student learning.

In much of our research, we identified leaders as both those who were hired and appointed formally and those who assumed the role amongst their colleagues informally. We also considered the leader's level of administrative and/or content expertise in relation to those staff members following them. In a distributed framework, the interdependencies between leaders, followers and a situation, and who the follower sees as a leader, can influence what

leadership practices emerge. For leaders to act in ways that support increased staff effectiveness, they must consider their practices, and how they foster situations that build capabilities and capacity amongst staff (Cohen et al., 2007). We believe that socially and emotionally competent leadership practices will result in stronger collaborative and collegial relationships that yield greater feelings of sensemaking, collective efficacy, resilience and well-being.

Socially and Emotionally Competent Leadership

Due to the importance of SEL competencies in adults, and the role leaders play in building staff capabilities and capacity within their districts and schools, we turn to the current literature on leadership development that integrates SEL into its practices. Goleman's work (2006) deepened our research by naming explicitly that social intelligence should be included when thinking about effective leadership practices. Goleman (2006) observed that "a more relationship-based construct for assessing leadership is social intelligence, which we define as a set of interpersonal competencies" (p. 76). This construct considers how the actions of leaders, and their relationships with staff, impact a school environment.

Relatedly, Berg (2018) distinguished that leaders should "engage in collaborative problem solving around key school-wide issues, using protocols that engage team members in generating multiple perspectives . . . and resolving decisions in a way that allows everyone with relevant knowledge to contribute" (p. 83). This illustrates how leadership practices that modeled SEL competencies enhanced opportunities for collective decision-making amongst staff, and how it allowed for shared responsibility in reaching district and school goals. In response, we explored further how school communities are shaped by district and school-based leadership practices that may, or may not, model and/or promote social and emotional competencies. We

seek to deepen knowledge in this field about how these socially and emotionally competent leadership practices existed within various aspects of a district and its schools.

Administrators build their organizations by sharing leadership responsibilities with their staff. Patti et al. (2015), stated, "school leaders have a great opportunity to impact student growth and achievement by shaping a culture that cultivates motivated, engaged, and effective teacher leaders" (p. 438). Additionally, they asserted that districts and schools must invest in high quality leadership development to create and sustain teacher leaders and school success (Patti et al., 2012; Sparks, 2009). As described, transformational leadership, social capital and distributed leadership all argued in favor of building staff capabilities and capacity throughout an organization. Furthermore, we argue that as leadership responsibilities spread, administrators build structures within their schools that allow for staff to work independently of them, and that staff consider both their own personal well-being and that of others.

Conclusion

Prior research on social and emotional intelligences and learning has established the importance of SEL for students, both in terms of personal health and academic learning. Yet little of this research has focused directly on the adults that work with these students. School-based staff face increasing pressure to serve as role models to students in the ways in which they behave and possess the core competencies expected in their practices. In support, district and school-based leaders recognize the need to strengthen the SEL competencies of adults, although further research is needed to understand the most effective practices to move the work forward.

The importance of district and school-based leadership is seen both in theory and practice. Transformational and distributed leadership theories both place an emphasis on leaders developing people and/or practices within the organization, and social capital theory highlights

the importance of understanding the working dynamic between them. Leadership practices, as they are implemented in districts and schools, are important in shaping the ways in which adults feel, act and perceive their work in schools.

As we continue to implement education reforms intended to close achievement gaps, we strongly believe in the need to prioritize a focus on the development of socially and emotionally competent leadership. Cherniss (1998) writes that "to be successful, educational leaders must be able to forge relationships with many people. They need to be mediators and mentors, negotiators and networkers. In short, educational leaders need to be more emotionally intelligent" (p. 26). We argue that leaders need to integrate SEL competencies into their leadership practices that influence staff behaviors. Although research is currently limited, our study contributes to the field by exploring how SEL competencies are integral components of what leaders think and do, and how they understand and shape their staff's work.

Our research study focused on both social and emotional learning and leadership by identifying key leadership practices, understanding how these practices modeled and/or promoted SEL competencies and skills for adults, and further showing how these practices shaped a district-wide focus on SEL, collective efficacy, adult collaboration, staff resilience and wellbeing, and the work of mental health staff. We aimed to contribute to the SEL field by understanding the actions of leaders and how they shaped a district and its schools. The goal of our study was to encourage leaders to integrate social and emotional learning competencies into their practices in order to support the positive perceptions, sensemaking, productivity, and wellbeing of adults.

The research questions for our individual studies, as outlined in Table 1.3, reflect how each piece of our work contributes to the greater field.

Table 1.3

Overview of research questions by individual researchers

Name	Individual Research Questions
Conners	1. How do district leaders support school-based leaders as they make sense of district-wide focus on SEL? 2. How does a district-wide focus on SEL shape school-based leadership practices? 3. What leadership practices, if any, model social and emotional learning competencies?
Rose	1. What school-based leadership practices, if any, model social and emotional learning competencies? 2. How do these school-based leadership practices shape the sources of collective efficacy?
Ito	1. What school-based leadership practices, if any, model social and emotional learning competencies? 2. How do these school-based leadership practices shape the ways in which adults collaborate?
Tobin	1. What leadership practices develop and support the resilience and well-being of school-based staff? 2. How do these practices relate to promoting SEL opportunities for staff in school settings?
Renda	1. How do school-based leadership practices promote social and emotional learning opportunities for mental health staff in schools? 2. How do these school-based leadership practices shape the work of mental health staff in schools?

CHAPTER TWO[2]

Research Design and Methodology

Our study identified leadership practices that modeled social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies, and/or promoted SEL opportunities for adults, while investigating how those leadership practices shaped a district and its schools. While our collective study examined this phenomenon, our individual studies examined leadership practices through a variety of theoretical and conceptual lenses (see Table 1.1).

This chapter outlines the methodology of our larger, collective study. Collaboratively, the team of five researchers designed the protocols for collecting and analyzing semi-structured interview data. Data collection and analysis unique to the individual studies are outlined in those respective chapters. The sections to follow describe our individual researcher positionality, the overall study design and site selection, our common data collection procedures, and an overview of the data analysis the team used.

Researcher Positionality

As a team of researchers conducting a qualitative case study, we recognize that we are the data collection instrument. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that our backgrounds and experiences are important variables that may affect the research process. We are all district or school-based leaders, in public school districts in Massachusetts, with a belief in the importance of socially and emotionally competent leadership practices. It is because of this belief that we seek to understand how leadership practices model and/or promote SEL competencies and skills for adults, and further investigate how those practices shaped a district-wide focus on SEL, collective efficacy, adult collaboration, staff resilience and wellbeing, and the work of mental

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[2] This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach to this project: Michele Conners, Mark Ito, Adam Renda, Geoff Rose, and Donna Tobin.

health staff. This reflects the likelihood that our own subjectivity could come to bear on our

study and report findings. The data collection and analysis methods described below demonstrate

the steps we took to remain objective throughout the process and present trustworthy findings.

Study Design

In order to identify leadership practices that modeled SEL competencies, and/or

promoted SEL opportunities for adults, while investigating how those leadership practices

shaped a district and its schools, we utilized a qualitative case study methodology. The

qualitative case study method suited our research process because our unit of analysis was a

single school district in Massachusetts, or a bounded system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). More

specifically, we employed an instrumental case study. Stake (1995) defines an instrumental case

study as one in which the issue is dominant, and studying the organization will enable the

researchers to gain insight into a particular issue, redraw generalizations, or build theory. Thus,

this methodology was appropriate for our study, because investigating the *issue* of leadership

practices that modeled SEL competencies, and/or promoted SEL opportunities for adults, was of

greater significance than investigating the *case*, or the school district as a whole (Stake, 1995).

The instrumental case study method enabled our team to provide a narrative, or "thick

description" (Mills & Gay, 2019, p. 8) of the school district in relation to our research questions.

Site Selection

Recently, the National Association of State Boards of Education highlighted

Massachusetts as a state committed to social emotional learning (SEL) for both students and

adults (Long, 2019). Supporting students' SEL is one of five Core Strategies identified in the

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) Strategic Plan

(2018). While adults are not specifically mentioned in the plan, Massachusetts' standards for

High Quality Professional Development require professional learning experiences to be

grounded in strong SEL practice (Long, 2019). A recent study on SEL initiatives, which included

Massachusetts, found that SEL initiatives must be "championed at the district level and tailored

to each local context, in order to build on existing success" (*Opportunities for Massachusetts,*

Lesson for the Nation, 2015, p. 16).

Given that SEL is a DESE priority for school districts, the research that supports the

importance of developing SEL in educational leaders and students alike, and our roles as

educational leaders in Massachusetts school districts, we felt it was important to examine the link

between SEL and leadership in a school district in Massachusetts. This interest led to our goal of

investigating leadership practices that modeled SEL competencies, and/or promoted SEL

opportunities for adults. Therefore, a key criterion in selecting an instrumental case for our

research was that the district demonstrated a focus on SEL, specifically a mission, vision, and/or

strategic plan that articulated a focus on SEL across the district. We conducted our study in a

mid-sized school district of 10-15 schools with a multi-tiered leadership structure across the

district and its schools. Specifically, our instrumental case study took place across six schools

within a suburban school district of approximately 6,000 students and 410 teachers.

Data Collection

As a qualitative methods approach, our individual studies relied on data collection from

document reviews, a questionnaire, observations, and semi-structured interviews. Table 2.1

outlines the data collection methods utilized by each researcher for their individual study. The

variety of data collection formats enabled us to both confirm and triangulate findings during our

data analysis, as well as enrich our collective understanding of the research problem within a

specific district context (Creswell, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Across all studies, we used

semi-structured interviews. Sub-study specific data collection and analyses methods for

document reviews, observations, and the questionnaire are found in the respective chapters of

those researchers who utilized each data source (see Chapter 3).

Table 2.1

Overview of data collection methods by individual researchers

Data Collection Method	Researcher
Semi-structured interviews	Conners, Ito, Renda, Rose, Tobin
Questionnaires	Ito Renda, Rose, Tobin
Document Review	Conners, Renda, Tobin
Observations	Ito, Rose

Semi-structured interviews

We conducted semi-structured, face-to-face individual interviews from September 2019

to December 2019. Table 2.2 lists interview participants by position, and the studies that utilized

each data source. The use of our semi-structured interview protocol allowed flexibility to

respond to the interviewee with additional probing questions as the dialogue occurred (Merriam

& Tisdell, 2016). The interviews helped us gain an understanding of the extent to which a

district-wide focus on SEL influenced leadership practices across multiple domains. The focus of

the interviews enabled interviewees to highlight their experiences around leadership practices,

and their perceptions of how leadership practices shape a district and its schools, specifically

around a district-wide focus on SEL, collective efficacy, adult collaboration, teacher resilience,

and the work of mental health staff. The interview protocol ensured consistency in the process,

and our research team utilized the protocol with all interview participants and ensured that we asked the same questions of each participant.

Table 2.2

Interview Subjects

Participant by Role	Number	Researchers who Utilized Each Data Source
Superintendent of Schools	1	Conners
Director of Social Emotional Learning	1	Conners
School-based Leaders	9	Conners, Ito, Renda, Rose, Tobin
Teaching and Learning Directors	3	Conners
Teachers	20	Ito, Renda, Rose, Tobin
Mental Health Staff	10	Ito, Renda, Rose, Tobin

Semi-structured interview protocol. We developed semi-structured interview protocols for district leaders (see Appendix A), school based-leaders (see Appendix B), and teachers and mental health staff (see Appendix C) to explore the extent to which a district-wide focus on SEL influenced leadership practices from the perspectives of both school-based leaders and other school staff, specifically teachers and mental health staff. We developed the protocols collaboratively by including specific questions to address our individual studies as well as the broader focus of the larger study. We piloted our interview protocol with district leaders, school-based leaders, and teachers outside our case study district. This process ensured that our interview items were clearly and respectfully worded in an effort to elicit relevant responses.

Additionally, piloting the protocol helped us identify and correct potential problems and ensure we stayed within a one-hour time frame (Singleton & Straits, 2018).

Participant Selection. To select participants, we used purposeful sampling, which is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). This method of sampling is most effective when a limited number of people can serve as primary data sources due to the nature of study. Utilizing purposeful sampling, we selected our interview participants from four categories: district leaders, school-based leaders, teachers, and mental health staff. Purposeful sampling helped us discover, understand, and gain insight from a sample of participants from whom we felt the most could be learned relative to our research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because we focused on leadership practices, it was important to not only interview district and school-based leaders, but also teachers and mental health staff who work with those leaders. The interview participants reflected a typical sample of district and school-based leaders, as well as teachers and mental health staff, that were common to public school districts in Massachusetts.

Participant Recruitment. In August, we met with the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Director of Special Education, and the Director of Social Emotional Learning and School Counseling. This afforded us the opportunity to discuss the scope of both our collective and individual studies, as well as who they felt should be interviewed at the district level. After meeting with the Superintendent's leadership council to explain our study needs and gather information on the various populations of each school, we selected four of the six elementary schools, and both middle schools, for the study. We focused on the four elementary schools based on district programs housed within the schools, as well as student demographics,

providing us a diverse student population. Research team members coordinated their independent

school visits with the principal in each building. We contacted each of the six school-based

leaders through email, explained the scope of our collective and individual studies, and invited

them to participate in a series of interviews. All six school-based leaders agreed to participate.

All interview participants received a confidentiality statement and signed an informed consent, at

the time of the interview.

      Interview Process. Given the nature of our individual studies, each school-based leader

was interviewed twice, once by a pair of researchers and once by an individual researcher. This

ensured all of our individual questions were addressed in addition to our collective questions, as

well as a means to ensure consistency in our interview process. On average, the interviews lasted

40-60 minutes. We recorded and transcribed all interviews and reviewed transcriptions for

accuracy. Since only one researcher collected data specific to district leaders, that round of

interviews was completed prior to interviewing school-based leaders. This enabled the other four

researchers to complete their interviews with school-based leaders first, share the transcripts

from those interviews with the individual researcher, and provide that researcher an opportunity

to focus on questions related to her individual study. Throughout the interview process, we

shared our interview transcripts and checked in as a group to ensure our use of questioning and

prompting was eliciting the data necessary to explore our research questions.

Data Analysis

      Creating meaning and making sense of the data is the main purpose of qualitative data

analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). According to Creswell (2014), data analysis consists of "...

'taking the data apart' to determine the individual responses, and then 'putting it together to

summarize it'" (p. 10). Data analysis guided our identification of leadership practices that

modeled social and emotional learning competencies, and/or promoted social emotional learning opportunities for adults. Further analysis supported our work to investigate how those leadership practices shape a district and its schools. Ongoing data analysis required us to continually revisit and reflect upon the data we collected (Creswell, 2014). Further, data analysis involved assigning meaning through codes, themes, or other categorization processes, as we moved through the data and towards the answers to our research questions (Saldaña, 2016). Individually, researchers kept analytic memos to document the coding process, field notes, and reflections to aid in a thorough understanding and analysis of our data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Creswell (2014) suggests including the following steps in the process of qualitative data analysis "...(a) organizing and preparing the data for analysis, (b) gaining an overall sense of the information by reading through data, (c) coding the material into categories, using a descriptive term to label the topics, and (d) using the coding process to produce an explanation of the background or people as well as categories or themes for analysis" (p. 193). Following these steps, or variations thereof as appropriate for each individual study, provided us with a structured process of analyzing the textual data we collected. Specific data analysis processes, connected to our individual studies, can be found in the corresponding chapters, as each researcher employed a variety of methods and coding processes to analyze their data based on the research questions and conceptual framework of their study (see Chapter 3).

The CASEL framework (Figure 2.1) provided a model for our unit of analysis, and conceptually grounded our individual studies. The five CASEL competencies (see Table 1.2) served as the lens for identifying leadership practices that modeled or promoted SEL competencies, guided and facilitated our understanding of the data, and established our initial categories for data analysis. After transcribing the interview data, each researcher read through

the transcripts and identified leadership practices, defined as what leaders think and do. Once the

leadership practices were identified, we applied our *a priori* codes to those practices for our

initial cycle of coding. Our *a priori* codes, or the codes we identified before examining our data

(Saldana, 2016), are based on the skills and competencies within the CASEL framework: self-

awareness (SA), self-management (SM), social awareness (SOA), relationship skills (RS), and

responsible decision-making (RDM). We re-examined the initial categories to further focus our

data to reveal subsequent patterns or categories. Re-examining the initial categories helped us

understand if the identified leadership practice modeled (i.e., displayed or demonstrated) or

promoted (i.e., actively encouraged) SEL competencies. Our coding manual can be found in

Appendix D.

Since each researcher identified their individual conceptual framework and research

questions, additional coding was completed specific to the individual study (see Chapter 3).
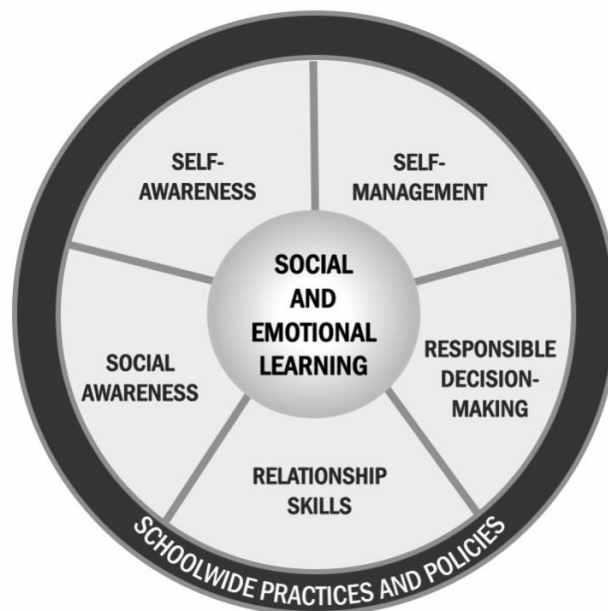

Figure 2.1. CASEL Social Emotional Learning Framework, 2017

Triangulation. Across the five individual studies, data collection methods involved semi-structured interviews, document review, observations, and a questionnaire. Given the variety of data collection methods, we were able to compare and cross-check our data with one another, providing both investigator and data triangulation (Merriam, 2009). Triangulation involves researchers' (investigators') cross-checking information and conclusions with one another through the use of multiple procedures and sources (data) (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The use of multiple methods of data collection within and across our individual studies enabled us to confirm information we heard in interviews alongside information we read in documents, witnessed in observations, or gathered through questionnaires during the course of our individual data analysis. The ability to triangulate our data and findings was one way we addressed the trustworthiness of our findings.

Trustworthiness. As a team of researchers, we took several steps to ensure our findings were trustworthy. Merriam (2009) and Mills & Gay (2019) suggest multiple strategies to support trustworthiness. Among those strategies, we identified triangulation, adequate engagement in the data collection, researcher's position (reflexivity), peer review, and rich, thick descriptions as those strategies that support the trustworthiness of our study.

As discussed previously, we triangulated our data through the use of multiple investigators and data collection methods. We engaged deeply in data collection from September through December 2019 through the semi-structured interviews, document review, observations, and questionnaires to ensure our data was saturated. We recognized data saturation when we began to see and hear the same information repeatedly and were not uncovering any new information (Merriam & Tisdell 2016).

Lincoln and Guba (2000) define reflexivity as "the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher" (p. 183). As a team of district and school-based leaders, we recognized that we hold assumptions about educational leadership, and that those assumptions could have an impact on our role as a human instrument in the research process, so it was important that we engaged in ongoing discussions central to our assumptions and biases.

Because this study was conducted by a team of researchers, peer review was ongoing. Throughout the course of data collection and analysis, we discussed the processes we were following, compared our emerging findings against the raw data, and developed tentative interpretations of those findings. These ongoing, evolving discussions enabled us to identify gaps in our understanding of the data as well as confirm our common findings across studies.

Finally, our study created a "rich, thick description" (Merriam, 2009) of how a school district's leadership practices modeled social emotional learning competencies, or promoted social emotional learning opportunities for adults, and how those practices shaped the district and its schools. This description of the study's setting, participants, and findings support the possibility of the study "transferring" to other settings (Merriam, 2009).

CHAPTER THREE

Statement of Purpose/Research Question

Traditionally, district leaders are the initiators of large-scale reform efforts (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010), including the establishment of social emotional learning (SEL) initiatives. However, school-based leaders bear the responsibility of implementing the programs and practices associated with such district-wide initiatives (Louis & Robinson, 2012). Yet, adopting standards and implementing a program alone will not change schools or increase student achievement. SEL must be viewed as a critical teaching and learning component if we expect to shape the climate and culture of the schools in a manner that embraces SEL for adults and students alike (Philibert, 2016). Therefore, the success of a district-wide focus on SEL is dependent upon those implementing the initiative at the building level.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do district leaders **support** school-based leaders as they make sense of a district-wide focus on SEL?

2. How does a district-wide focus on SEL **shape** school-based leadership practices?

3. What leadership practices, if any, **model** SEL competencies?

Literature Review

The following sections examine the literature in three areas. I begin with an overview of sensemaking as a conceptual framework and as the foundation for my first research question. Next, I present literature about SEL and its impact on school-based leadership practices. Finally, I examine literature supporting the importance of leadership practices that model SEL competencies. The reviewed literature lays the groundwork for my research questions.

Conceptual Framework: Sensemaking Theory

Simply stated, sensemaking concerns the actions people take to make sense of a situation (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Sensemaking did not emerge as a topic of study until the late 1960's, when it was introduced by Karl Weick. A means of understanding in order to take action, sensemaking refers to how we structure new information in order to act upon it (Weick, 2009). Weick describes sensemaking as a process that, "involves turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action" (Weick, et al., 2005), p. 413). Over the past two decades, there has been an increasing focus on the social processes through which sensemaking occurs (Maitlis, 2005). For example, Weick et al., (2005) explained that sensemaking unfolds "in a societal context of other actors . . . and involves language, talk, and communication" (p. 409). Along similar lines, Maitlis (2005) describes organizational sensemaking as a "fundamentally social process" in which "organizational members interpret their environment in and through interactions with each other, constructing accounts that allow them to comprehend the world and act collectively" (p. 21). As a conceptual framework, sensemaking is suitable for "studying what goes on in the heads and hearts of leaders as they deal with both daily organizational life and with the crises and surprises that inevitably surface" (Fulton, 2005, p. 4). Applying this framework, this study examined the way district leaders supported school-based leaders as they made sense of a district-wide focus on SEL.

Educational researchers commonly use a sensemaking framework to construct an understanding of policy changes, curriculum reform, and the implementation of new initiatives as well as consider how district initiatives may affect school leaders (Louis & Robinson, 2012). Sensemaking begins when there is an event that forces people to pay attention and act, and therefore enables leaders to have a better grasp of what is occurring in their environments,

facilitating other leadership practices and activities. Within this capacity, leaders can arrive at plausible understandings and meanings of new information or ideas, test them with others through their leadership practices, and refine their understandings of the new information or idea (Ancona, 2012). Sensemaking is particularly important to the success of initiatives that require a shift in the knowledge, beliefs, and/or practices of the implementers, such as a district-wide focus on SEL (Spillane et al., 2002).

When districts present initiatives that are expected to be implemented by school leaders, the school leader's way of operating is interrupted, causing an emotional reaction, which triggers sensemaking (Weick, 2009). When leaders are confronted with a new set of policies, practices, or understandings, their interpretations will determine whether they engage in significant change, incremental change, or resistance (Louis et al., 2009). As members of an organization encounter such interruptions, school leaders seek to clarify what is happening by taking and interpreting cues from their surroundings and their district leaders. Interpreting such cues serves as the basis for making sense of the occurrence (Maitlis, 2005; Weick et al., 2005; Weick, 2009). As a social process, sensemaking involves multiple actors and relies on communication among and interaction between those actors (Maitlis, 2005; Taylor & Van Every, 2008; Weick et al., 2005).

The interactions school-based leaders have with district leaders determines how school-based leaders understand and implement district-wide initiatives. These interactions allow school leaders to learn from district leaders. At the same time, the content of interactions during implementation will shape the success of the initiative. Interactions that allow school-based leaders to see how the new initiative differs from their current practice, instead of seeing it as matching their current practice, are essential to sensemaking. Additionally, interactions that encompass the key principles of the initiative support substantive, over superficial,

implementation of the initiative (Spillane et al., 2002). Interactions between and among district and school-based leaders can take many forms. In analyzing the data collected for my first research question, "How do district leaders support school-based leaders as they make sense of a district-wide focus on SEL?" I sought to uncover and name those interactions that highlight the extent to which district leaders support the sensemaking process of school-based leaders.

The District's Role in School-based Sensemaking

A critical aspect of leadership work is supporting a group as they develop shared understandings of the organization and its goals, which helps frame a sense of purpose or vision (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). When complex change is required, sensemaking becomes more challenging and requires significant support, as the process of interpretation and making meaning in order to learn requires individuals and groups to engage with one another on an ongoing basis (Patriotta & Brown, 2011). Spillane et al. (2002) emphasize the importance of giving people affected by change initiatives sufficient time for sensemaking of the new expectations. SEL initiatives often ask leaders to shift their understanding about the social and emotional needs of their students and staff, as well as consider their own SEL competencies, in order to learn (Catino & Patriotta, 2013; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

For school leaders to make sense of district initiatives, it is important that district leaders articulate the need for such an initiative by providing a rationale for change and communicating a clear vision about common goals (Taylor & Van Every, 2008). When communicating a clear vision around common goals, open, ongoing communication between district and school leadership is critical. Taylor and Van Every (2008) place emphasis on communication during the process of sensemaking:

> We see communication as an ongoing process of making sense of a set of circumstances in which people collectively find themselves… sensemaking, to the extent that it involves

communication… draws on the resources of language. As this occurs, a situation is talked into existence and the basis is laid for action to deal with it. (p. 58)

Researchers have observed occasions where, as district leaders have presented initiatives, they tend to reinforce positional authority (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000), develop policies that compete with school goals (Spillane, 2000), and promote district over school goals and strategies (Honig, 2003). This is concerning, as the message school-based leaders receive about support and expectations around the implementation of initiatives from district leaders, shapes the school-based leaders' sensemaking. When district leaders support the process of sensemaking by school-based leaders, strategic change can be accomplished; when district leaders are successful in influencing the sensemaking of school leaders, school-based leaders are motivated to make changes in their own roles and practices (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

Spillane et al. (2002) examined the role district leaders played in supporting principals and teachers as they made sense of the implementation of accountability policy. The new accountability policy was interpreted differently in each of the three schools studied. As a result, the policy was transformed, and looked different, as it was implemented in each school. The prior knowledge, skills, and experiences of the principals influenced how they made sense of the policy, which influenced how the policy was implemented. The way each principal implemented the accountability policy directly connected to their disposition towards district leadership.

Educational leaders, by their hierarchical position, are "provided with a distinctive opportunity to influence the sensemaking of others . . . [their] leadership actions attempt to shape and interpret situations to guide organizational members into a common interpretation of reality" (Smircich & Morgan, 1982, p. 263). School leaders' responses to initiatives reflect a complex interaction between their understanding of the initiative, perception of support, the district's

context in which those initiatives are situated, and their own leadership beliefs and practices (Louis & Robinson, 2012). Successful leaders develop districts and schools as organizations that support the performance of administrators, teachers, and students, keenly aware that "Everyone has a stake in the education of our children . . . [and] people who work in schools and people who study schools know that leadership makes a difference" (Wahlstrom et al., 2010, p. 103). During any systemic change, the organization's leaders are pivotal to the initiative's success (Elmore, 2004).

To understand the way in which a district-wide focus on SEL shapes a district and its schools, district leaders must consider how school-based leaders being asked to implement change make sense of the initiative. This includes the ways in which school-based leaders think about SEL and the ways in which their beliefs may have changed during the sensemaking process (Spillane et al., 2002). How a school-based leader interprets an initiative is a function of what he/she believes, understands and values. When a district initiative is judged to be consistent with a school leader's prior understandings, implementation of that initiative may occur seamlessly. When there is a gap between the initiative and the school-based leader's understanding, the way the district leadership supports the school leader's sensemaking is imperative for successful implementation to occur (Louis & Robinson, 2012).

School-based leaders engage in sensemaking at several levels, but at the individual level, they make meaning of a district-wide focus on SEL based on their beliefs, knowledge, and prior experiences. While there is a growing body of research highlighting strategies leaders can use during reform and policy implementation, as well as the context of those strategies that enable sensemaking, there is no research that examines the way district leaders support school-based leaders as they make sense of a district-wide focus on SEL. I argue that for a district-wide focus

on SEL to be effective in schools, school-based leaders need opportunities to deepen their

sensemaking in a way that both builds their knowledge of SEL and enables them to deepen their

own SEL competencies, leading to leadership practices that reflect those competencies (Catino &

Patriotta, 2013; Jones et al., 2018).

SEL and School-based Leadership Practices

The way school leaders make sense of a district-wide focus on SEL will shape the nature

of their leadership practices (Catino & Patriotta, 2013). Effective schools – those that prepare

students not only to achieve in school but also to achieve in life – are finding that there is a

correlation between SEL competence and student achievement (Durlak et al., 2011). However,

planning, implementing, and sustaining SEL initiatives requires leadership practices that affect

staff members as well as underlying school structures and operations (Mellard et al., 2012).

In findings from a national survey prepared for the Collaborative for Academic, Social

and Emotional Learning (CASEL), DePaoli et al. (2017) found that principals across the United

States understand how fundamental SEL is to the development of students and their success in

and out of school. However, researchers also found that principals needed more guidance,

training, and support to make effective school-wide SEL implementation a reality. A

representative survey was administered to 884 public school principals, 16 superintendents, and

10 district-research and evaluation specialists, representing diverse school districts with varying

levels of experience implementing SEL programming. The survey consisted of four key areas:

(1) attitudes regarding SEL; (2) SEL implementation; (3) the path to increased SEL; and (4)

assessing SEL. Their findings were combined with SEL research from the past two decades.

DePaoli et al. (2017) found that while support for SEL implementation was high, it varied widely

across schools. On average, only 1 in 3 principals implemented SEL school-wide, and only 1 in 4

schools were meeting benchmarks for high quality implementation. Overall, the researchers conclude that when principals and teachers attempting to implement SEL are well supported by their district leadership, they have better outcomes. Narrowing the results of the survey to the role of district- and school-based leadership in successful SEL implementation, the study highlights significant findings among those four areas. Because this study centers on leadership practices associated with a district-wide focus on SEL, and not the impact of SEL programming on teaching and learning at the classroom level, I draw attention to two of the four areas:

1. ***Attitudes about SEL.*** District- and school-based leaders reported a high level of commitment to developing students' SEL competencies, believing that it will not only promote positive school climate, but will also benefit all students from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

2. ***SEL Implementation.*** District-based leadership plays a significant role in driving SEL implementation. When district leaders are invested in SEL, implementation is more extensive. Seventy-two percent of principals surveyed reported that their district places a great deal of emphasis on developing students' SEL skills, while 40% of principals reported that their district leadership requires all schools to have a clear plan for SEL implementation. Overall, district- and school-based leaders agree that SEL implementation has a long way to go.

Finally, CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative (2011) states that SEL should be at the center of every school district's mission to educate children. Additionally, leaders must be given opportunities to build their own SEL competencies and skills in order to model these skills for teachers and students through their leadership practices:

> Our professional responsibility is to move away from sweeping and lofty expectations
> like 'teaching respect' [and move] towards building teachers' [social and emotional

learning] competency so they can develop common, explicit SEL language and practices in their classrooms…we must look at the competency of those who are the delivery vehicle for the SEL program itself. (Philibert, 2016, p. 137)

This research suggests that school leaders should model SEL competencies through their leadership practices.

Modeling for Social Emotional Learning

Bryck and Schneider (2003) posit that school leaders must be committed to developing the social-emotional skills of staff members and to improve the relationships between and among the adults and students in the school if successful SEL implementation is to occur in schools. Elias et al. (2006) extend that claim, stating that transformational leadership is necessary to integrate SEL into schools, specifically the ability to lead with vision and courage. Further, Elias et al. (2006) suggest that to lead with courage requires the leader to become aware of his/her own SEL competencies, as well as guide his/her in the examination and development of teacher's social emotional competencies. Transformational leaders understand that for students to reach social and emotional goals, the adults working within the district and its schools must demonstrate the social and emotional competence.

CASEL's *Guide to Schoolwide SEL* (2019) discusses two key aspects of the SEL competencies of the adults in the schools and districts who are responsible for implementing SEL initiatives. First, there must be meaningful opportunities for staff to reflect on and to develop their own SEL competencies multiple times throughout the year. Second, leadership must regularly model SEL competencies in their language and interactions with staff, students, families, and community partners.

Modeling the kinds of behavior leaders want to see in every interaction – listening carefully, respecting diversity, and solving problems compassionately - enhances staff beliefs

about their own capacities and their sense of self-efficacy (McColl-Kennedy & Anderson, 2002), leading to greater opportunities for the successful implementation of district SEL initiatives across the schools and within the classrooms (Carstarphen & Graff, 2018). However, there is little guidance on the role of a school leader's practices in the area of SEL (Kennedy, 2019), which is not surprising given that SEL leadership practices are rarely taught in leadership programs (Patti et al., 2015).

In a pilot study, Kearney et al. (2014) attempted to measure the impact of targeted interventions on the emotional intelligence of 31 aspiring principals enrolled in a leadership preparation program at a public university in Texas. The purpose of this pilot study was to determine whether emotionally intelligent leadership practices could be taught to students. The interventions were designed to increase emotionally intelligent leadership skills in six areas: social awareness, anxiety management, decision making, appropriate use of assertive behaviors, time management and commitment ethic. The researchers found that the interventions for social awareness and time management resulted in statistically significant gains for students who received the interventions. While small in scope, this study supports Goleman's (1998) claim that emotional competencies may be learned through awareness and practice.

It is difficult for school-based leaders to support the successful implementation of a district-wide focus on SEL in their schools if their leadership practices do not model SEL competencies. Research has shown that an adult's own SEL skills play an important role in their ability to model those skills (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). For a district-wide focus on SEL to be effective, school-based leaders need support in their ongoing work that provides opportunities for them to develop their own social emotional competence, so they are able to model those

skills for their teachers and students, ultimately fostering positive classroom environments

conducive to learning.

Methods

The following sections describe the data collection and analysis methods for the present

study. This study is part of a larger study examining the way leadership practices model SEL

competencies for adults or, promote the social and emotional learning for teachers and other

staff; and the way those leadership practices shape a district and its schools. Chapter 2 provides a

full discussion of the study design and the methods employed for the larger study.

Data Collection

Given the importance of language and communication to sensemaking, interviews and

text-based materials were the key data sources included in this study, specifically, school and

district documents and semi-structured interviews. Table 3.1 summarizes the number and length

of the reviewed documents and semi-structured interviews that informed this study.

Table 3.1

Data Collection for RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3

Method	Source	Number	Length
Document Review	Documents	35	2-100 pages
Semi-Structured Interview	District Leaders	5	45-90 minutes
Semi-Structured Interview	School Leaders	6	30-90 minutes

Document Review

During the fall of 2019, I gathered documents that would aid in understanding the context of the school district, as well as provide data to address my research questions. The documents reviewed for this study met one or more of the following criteria: (a) represented communications from district leaders to members of the school community; (b) clearly articulated goals for the district and/or schools; (c) addressed some aspect of the social and emotional learning focus at the district and/or school level (d) addressed district and/or school policies or practices related to social and emotional learning. I collected publicly available documents from the district and school websites related to district and school goal setting, district communications, and other documents that referenced SEL work across the district and in the schools from September 2017 through October 2019. A key factor in determining the date range for document collection and review was the hiring of a Director for School Counseling and Social and Emotional Learning in 2017. Monthly Superintendent Newsletters from September 2017 through October 2019, School Improvement Plans of six schools (2018-2019), FY20 Report to Town Meeting (April 2019), and four sections of the district website made up the 35 documents reviewed for this study.

Semi-structured Interviews

I utilized purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and selection of my interview subjects, specifically those district and school-based leaders responsible for overseeing and implementing the district-wide focus on SEL. Interviews with five district leaders and six school-based leaders were conducted at each participant's office or school, lasted from 30-90 minutes, were recorded with consent from each participant, and followed a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendices A and B). The semi-structured interviews provided flexibility in

gathering information in an exploratory manner, as well as a structure to guide the focus of the interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview protocol helped elicit district and school-based leader's accounts of the district-wide focus on SEL, as well as their accounts of events connected to the SEL focus.

Data Analysis

According to Yin (2014), "… analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed aspects of doing case studies" (p. 133). Data analysis began with, and continued through, the data gathering process in the fall of 2019. Relevant documents and interview transcripts were analyzed through an iterative coding process, specifically using a thematic analysis approach (Clarke & Braun, 2013) to analyze the documents and a content analysis approach (Krippendorff, 2004) to analyze the interview transcripts. The following sections detail each approach in turn.

Document Analysis

I utilized a thematic analysis approach as I examined the documents I collected. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within and across qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This systematic approach to analyzing the documents helped me identify themes, or patterns in the data, and use these themes to address, not answer, my research questions. Because I read the documents for themes connected to SEL rather than with my research questions in mind, the document analysis represents an inductive thematic analysis rather than a theoretical thematic analysis (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). I did not code every piece of text, which is generally true of inductive coding, but used open coding and developed and modified the codes throughout the coding process. As I read the documents, I coded for language that explicitly referenced SEL and iterations of such. This enabled me to highlight the

various ways the school district, as well as individual schools, classified work around SEL in such areas as district goals, school improvement plans, professional development, curriculum programs, and school and district events.

To aid in the development of themes, I grouped like documents (e.g. newsletters and district/school improvement plans) and tracked patterns of occurrences across time. For example, after reading a monthly Superintendent's newsletter, I captured descriptions of what was occurring in the district and its schools around SEL. This data was used to substantiate statements made by interview participants and to provide additional information that may not have been uncovered during the interview process. Additionally, corroborating my findings across data sets reduced potential bias by examining information collected through different methods. See Appendix E for a sample table of text, codes and themes supporting the document analysis.

Interview Analysis

Given the complexity of the work, I approached the analysis of my interview data systematically, utilizing a multi-phase analytic approach to organize and interpret the data through content analysis. Krippendorff (2004) defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p.18). The objective in qualitative content analysis is to systematically transform a large amount of text, in this case, the interview transcripts, into an organized, concise summary of key results (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). This is accomplished by analyzing the data from the interview transcripts to form categories and themes. Bengtsson (2016) distinguished four stages of content analysis: (1) decontextualizing, (2) re-contextualizing, (3) categorizing, and (4) compiling the data. While the process of content analysis is not linear, I will discuss each stage.

Decontextualizing and Re-contextualizing. Prior to the content analysis and coding, I wrote reflections after each interview as a means of recording my initial impressions about what I heard, which included a brief summary of the respondent's professional background. This practice of reflection writing is consistent with Stake's (1995) concept of "interpretation as method" (p. 40), wherein "there is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations" (p. 71).

Decontextualizing involves familiarizing oneself with the data as a whole in order to break it down into meaning units, defined as "…the smallest unit that contains some of the insights the researcher needs, and it is the constellation of sentences or paragraphs containing aspects related to each other" (Bengtsson, 2016, p.11). To do so, I read the interview transcripts in their entirety to gain a general understanding of what each respondent had to say. As I read the transcripts a second time, I highlighted sections of the text that seemed to be connected to the actions and activities in the district and its schools around SEL, creating meaning units. This process of decontextualizing the data enabled me to condense the larger meaning units into manageable text, or condensed meaning units, and develop initial codes. After an initial round of inductive coding, and as a means of re-contextualizing, I reviewed the codes, identified areas of text that had not been coded, and determined whether the text needed to be coded.

Categorization. Throughout the cycle of data analysis, I organized the transcripts and moved the data into meaning units, or excerpts from the transcripts (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). According to Tracy (2013), "The organizing process is an interpretative activity. When the data are organized a certain way, they implicitly encourage the researcher to notice some comparisons and overlook others" (p. 204). In order to notice as much as possible in the data, I aligned the interview questions to my research questions and re-read the transcripts accordingly.

Table 3.2 shows a sample of how interview questions from my interview protocol aligned with

my research questions, and thus how I organized the interview transcripts to extract meaning

units.

Table 3.2

Connecting Research Questions to Interview Questions

Research Questions (RQ)	Sample Interview Questions (IQ)
RQ1: How do district leaders support school-based leaders as they make sense of a district-wide focus on SEL?	IQ 6: How have SEL initiatives been implemented in your district (school) in the last 3 years? IQ 7: What opportunities were available for district and school personnel to come together to make sense of the district-wide SEL focus? **Probe:** What is your perception of how school-based leaders understand, and make sense of, the SEL initiative?
RQ 2: How does the district-wide focus on SEL shape school-based leadership practices?	IQ 8: What was your understanding of SEL prior to the rollout of the initiative by the district? **Probe:** What, if any, prior training or professional development have you participated in outside of the district? **Probe:** Please describe the focus of the training or professional development (type of professional development; SEL and leadership vs. SEL for students) IQ 10: How has a district-wide focus on SEL informed your leadership practices? **Probe:** Can you describe any changes to your leadership practices since the implementation of the SEL initiative(s) in your district/building?
RQ 3: What leadership practices, if any, model social and emotional learning competencies?	IQ 1: What is the role of leadership in your district/school? In other words, what do leaders do? IQ 2: In your district or school, who supports your work and what type of things do they do to show support (b) Whom do you support? What do you do to show the support?

Compiling the Data. The meaning units were shortened into condensed meaning units where appropriate. Condensing the meaning units ensured that sections of text were not too large or included too many different meanings (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). For example, as condensed meaning units were created, I developed descriptive labels, based on the sensemaking literature: language/talk/communication, social processes/interactions, processing information to take action, and actions taken. This enabled me to identify connections between condensed meaning units, leading to the formation of categories. These emerging categories described different aspects of the content, both similar and different, that belong together.

Finally, the categories were further developed into themes connected to RQ1 (district leaders' support for school-based leaders) and RQ2 (focus on SEL shaping school-based leadership practices). See Appendix F for a sample of the content analysis process outlined above.

I used the CASEL framework (see Figure 2.1) to guide my analysis for RQ3 (leadership practices that model SEL competencies). The five CASEL competencies (see Table 1.2) served as the lens for identifying school-based leadership practices, articulated in the condensed meaning units, that modeled the SEL competencies. The CASEL competencies guided my understanding of the data, serving as my *a priori* codes: self-awareness (SA), self-management (SM), social awareness (SOA), relationship skills (RS), and responsible decision-making (RDM). See Appendix G for a sample of how I coded the condensed meaning units (leadership practices) to the CASEL competencies.

Findings

Aligned with my research questions, the first section discusses the structures utilized by district leaders to support school-based leaders as they made sense of a district-wide focus on

SEL. Next, I explain the ways a district-wide focus on SEL shaped the practices of school-based

leaders. Further, I explore the social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies modeled

through school-based leadership practices.

Sensemaking

Research question one sought to identify ways district leaders supported school-based

leaders as they made sense of a district-wide focus on social emotional learning (SEL). A critical

first step in supporting the school-based leader's ability to make sense of the district-wide focus

on SEL was by clearly articulating the need for such a focus. The leaders did articulate the need

for such a focus by communicating a clear mission and common goals. To further support

school-based leaders' ability to make sense of a district-wide focus on SEL, district leaders

provided structures that fostered collaboration. Finally, providing resources for professional

development and cultivating relational trust deepened sensemaking opportunities around the

district-wide focus on SEL for school-based leaders.

Clear Articulation of Mission and Goals

 The evidence showed that one way district leaders perceived they supported school-

based leaders in making sense of a district-wide focus on SEL, was by communicating a clear

mission and common goals around SEL. The school district's mission, established prior to the

current Superintendent's tenure over a decade ago, was clearly articulated and repeated

throughout the superintendent's monthly newsletters from 2017-2019:

> The mission of the [school district] is to educate students by promoting
> academic excellence, by empowering students to achieve their maximum potential,
> and by preparing students for responsible participation in an ever-changing world.
> The [school district is] committed to helping every student achieve
> emotional, social, vocational, and academic success.

Supporting the school district's mission were its overarching goals. District Goal One and

District Goal Two, listed on the school district's website, clearly articulated a focus on the social

and emotional well-being of students, while providing structures, such as Responsive Classroom

and Trauma Sensitive Schools, that enabled schools to support student's social and emotional

growth. Referring to how district leaders supported school-based leaders as they made sense of a

district-wide focus on SEL, one district leader discussed the connection between the district's

overarching goals and the goals found in school improvement plans:

> You have the broader district goals, they set the focus, the non-negotiables around social and emotional learning, and then that sets the background for developing school improvement plans. The school improvement plans need to address those district goals, specifically articulating how the individual school will address SEL.

> The district goals around SEL were evident in the objectives set forth in the school

improvement plans of the participating schools. As one school leader stated,

> I think we have real alignment between the district goals and the school improvement plans. [Director for School Counseling and SEL] helps us see the link between the district goals around SEL and how those goals fit with each of our individual schools.

Through both the interviews and document review, I found significant connections

between the overarching district goals, and the objectives and action steps articulated in the

school improvement plans around SEL. Appendix H provides an overview of the district goals

and their connection to the specific school improvement objectives and actions of the

participating school sites.

Common across the interviews with school-based leaders was the collaborative process

involved in establishing the district goals, and the impact collaboration had on their ability to

make sense of the district-wide focus on SEL. This clear articulation of the district mission and

goals was supported through structures fostering collaboration, professional development, and

relational trust.

Structures Fostered Collaboration

I found that a second way district leaders supported school-based leaders as they made sense of the district-wide focus on SEL was by maintaining structures that fostered collaboration. The Superintendent's Administrative Team (SAT) meetings and monthly Principal meetings were two structures that fostered professional collaboration and emerged as powerful factors supporting sensemaking. Consistently, school-based leaders spoke of their ability to learn from each other's conversations, leading them to interpret the district-wide focus on SEL in a consistent and collective manner.

Superintendent's Administrative Team. Interviewees revealed the process of developing the overarching district goals by the Superintendent's Administrative Team (SAT) as a collaborative structure that enabled them to make sense of the district-wide focus on SEL. The SAT consisted of the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum Directors, and principals. As discussed previously, the district goals, while broad, articulated a focus on social and emotional well-being for students as well as a structure to provide SEL support for both teachers and students. When asked how district goals are determined at the district level prior to school level implementation, both district and school-based leaders discussed the work of the SAT. One school-based leader replied:

> We work with those goals as an Administrative team. The goals don't go out to the School Committee until we have had a chance to look at them. They are usually created at a higher level, but we vet them and talk about what it will look, feel, and sound like in our buildings. Then we write our school improvement plans based on them. Our school improvement plans specify how we are addressing SEL in our individual schools for both teachers and students.

Another school-based leader elaborated further, "When we're creating things like district goals, we have a voice in what those goals will be… we're creating things that make sense to us and have meaning to us so that we can really dig into them over time." Supporting that sentiment, a

district leader remarked, "The Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and SEL Director talk

about the goals; curriculum and building leaders talk about how it trickles down and what it

looks like at the various levels and in the classrooms." Supporting that sentiment, another district

leader stated,

> I help principals and teachers see the link between district goals and the work in their schools around SEL. For example, we ensure that when writing individual and team goals at the classroom level, teachers are able to clearly articulate how the work they are doing in their content areas supports the social and emotional learning needs of their students.

> When asked how they show support for collaboration, several district leaders referenced

providing and protecting the structures and schedules that allow for ongoing, consistent

collaboration among leaders, specifically the monthly principals meeting.

Monthly Principal Meetings. The monthly principal meetings are a second structure that

fostered collaboration and supported school-based leaders as they made sense of a district-wide

focus on SEL. District and school-based respondents described the meeting process, noting

several features that helped make this a collaborative space, such as scheduling the meeting after

school to make it more accessible for everyone to attend and using an open agenda to which

everyone could contribute. Respondents shared the following:

> I have a great relationship with the elementary school principals… My goal is to get on their agenda for their principal meeting so I can talk about what I am seeing in terms of the social and emotional needs of students when the kids come here. (School-based leader)

> For my meeting with my administrative team, I invite agenda items because it is our meeting, not my meeting. Obviously, I put things on the agenda, but there's an invitation: What do you need? What would you like some feedback on, or what do you need to present to everybody? This not only helps us discuss what is happening in the area of SEL in our schools, but it enables us to learn from one another. (District leader)

One school-based leader summed up the importance of maintaining structures that foster

collaboration, stating, "You can't do this alone. You need each other's support as you go through

this… there's some great ideas [around SEL] out there that might work really well. There's a lot

of exchange that way." Extending the benefits of collaboration are the many opportunities for

professional development offered across the district and its schools.

Professional Development

The evidence showed a third way district leaders supported school-based leaders as they

made sense of a district-wide focus on SEL was through professional development opportunities.

Every district leader referred to ongoing discussions between district leaders and school-based

leaders around the idea of supporting SEL across schools and within classrooms. While much of

those discussions focused on how to support teachers in the implementation of such SEL

programs as Responsive Classroom or Trauma Sensitive Schools, the overarching theme that

arose from all school-based leaders was the support by district leaders for professional

development opportunities that supported school-based leaders around SEL. As one district

leader recalled when discussing the focus on Youth Mental Health First Aid certification and

training:

> If we are going to mandate that all of our teachers participate in this, we should probably
> understand what their experience is going to be. And so, the expectation was that we
> were all going to take it together. As a group of people, of administrators, we have
> participated in a lot of professional development together around social emotional health.

Across several newsletters, the superintendent referenced the many opportunities for professional

development offered by the district around social emotional learning. Discussing a three-day

immersive training session on Youth Mental Health First Aid, she wrote that leaders "… used

this new knowledge to create personal goals and ideas on how to transfer our learning to others

in the district." Additional references to professional development for SEL in the

Superintendent's newsletters, school improvement plans, and school committee minutes centered

around Trauma Sensitive Schools, funding for the Safe and Supportive Schools initiative, and

Mindfulness for Educators. Consistent across all interviews was the reference to these programs as examples of the professional development that the district provided to both leaders and teachers in support of the district-wide focus on SEL.

As those most directly impacted by professional development opportunities, school-based leaders emphasized the importance of those opportunities as they made sense of the district's focus on SEL. One school-based leader stated, "This is our entry point. When you support social emotional learning with professional development, and you set up a vision and a mission the way we did, it will work." Several other school-based leaders referenced district-wide professional development opportunities that support the goals around social emotional learning. For example, a principal stated, "If we have a goal that's about something within the social emotional realm, and our district is offering coursework on trauma sensitive schools, it is important that I make sure we are taking advantage of that."

Conversely, it is important to address the gap school-based leaders felt in their sensemaking of the district-wide focus on SEL. As discussed previously, when asked how district leaders supported school-based leaders as they made sense of a district-wide focus on SEL, school-based leaders referred to the structures the district provides that foster collaboration as well as the district support for professional development. However, every school-based leader referenced the fact that they do not have opportunities to attend professional development around SEL as a collaborative body. More than half of the school-based leaders made statements such as, "We have never been at the same professional development at the same time," "None of us really have been to the same professional development together." While school-based leaders acknowledged that the district provides structures that foster collaboration, actual collaboration

as a means to support their sensemaking of the district-wide focus on SEL was lacking. One

school-based leader stated,

> We are a group of school leaders who work together fairly well, and are supposed to be
> working towards the same goals, but have never actually been to the same professional
> development together, or had the opportunity to discuss our learning around SEL. We are
> all doing different things but working towards the same SEL focus. We should be
> collaborating in the work to move SEL forward.

While collaboration is a social process necessary for supporting school-based leaders as

they make sense of a district-wide focus on SEL, school-based leaders expressed that their level

of collaboration needed to go beyond the principals' meetings and towards a tighter connection

to professional development around SEL in the schools.

Aligned with the professional development opportunities offered within the district, both

district leaders and school-based leaders mentioned the value that is placed on bringing what is

learned outside the district and its schools into their current leadership positions, fostering a

sense of relational trust.

Relational Trust

Further evidence showed a fourth way district leaders supported school-based leaders in

making sense of the district-wide focus on SEL was through relational trust. While relational

trust is not concrete in comparison to structures that foster collaboration or professional

development, the existence of relational trust appeared to have the effect of fostering

collaboration and promoting willingness among school-based leaders to grow professionally.

The sense made of a district-wide focus on SEL depended, in part, on the existing

understandings of school-based leaders and the relationships they had with one another, which

built a trusting environment. Oftentimes, those existing understandings came from prior learning

and experiences that school-based leaders brought to their positions. It was evident through the

interviews that school-based leaders felt their district leaders trusted and respected their

professional knowledge and experiences around SEL, which fostered relational trust. As two

different school-based leaders expressed:

> I have always felt like administration above me trusts me to do my job so they can say, 'Look, this is the initiative; these are the goals. We trust you to be able to funnel this down to people at your various levels.' This has enabled me to use my prior knowledge and experience with SEL in my current job as principal.
> I feel like I took a lot of my learning around SEL from my previous education and work experience and brought it here, which feels good. It feels good to know that I came into an environment that values what I bring to the table and allows me to use that in leading my school.

A district leader supported the sense of relational trust expressed by school-based leaders stating:

> Each of our buildings has their own culture, their own personality, their own system and way of functioning, their own strengths and their own priorities. As district leaders, I believe we very much support and allow principals to continue to do the work necessary to move their schools forward in supporting social emotional learning.

Further supporting a sense of relational trust felt by school-based leaders, another district leader

stated:

> The kind of people you want in your schools are people who are thinking, are reflecting, are changing and growing every year. To deny them autonomy to implement a greater vision denies or prevents them from having the creativity you want to see.

While school-based leaders highlighted the relational trust that supports their work as

school-based leaders in general, more than three-quarters of the school-based leaders stated that

there had not been explicit conversations about leadership expectations for fostering SEL in the

schools. Despite there being a clear articulation of the mission and common goals across the

district and within schools, the mission and goals were student-centered, and did not provide

clear expectations around leadership practices for SEL. One school-based leader responded, "I

can't say that there's been some explicit expectations around what [SEL implementation] needs,

what pieces need to exist within the building." Additionally, a school-based leader stated:

> I really do believe with my heart that that's where we're leading from, but… I'd love it if our communications start to have more of that focus instead of always being driven towards high test scores and reading proficiency. We want those things, too, but [SEL] has to come first.

In summary, school-based leaders spoke of SEL in terms of district goals, school goals,

and programs geared towards supporting student's social emotional learning. Absent was a clear

articulation for how a district-wide focus on SEL should be present in the leadership practices of

school-based leaders. Findings show that school-based leaders acknowledged that SEL informs

how they lead, specifically what they think and do, and that the district-wide focus on SEL for

students helped them realize the importance of SEL for adults. However, this happened

organically, and was not a purposeful action taken by district-leaders. Despite there being a clear

articulation of the mission and common goals across the district and within schools, the mission

and goals were student-centered, and did not provide clear expectations around leadership

practices for SEL. In other words, the focus of Westlake Public Schools is on SEL program

implementation for students, as opposed to how such a focus should inform their leadership

practices.

SEL Shapes School-based Leadership Practices

My second research question sought to identify how a district-wide focus on SEL shaped

school-based leadership practices. While most respondents acknowledged that SEL serves as the

foundation from which they lead, all respondents specifically mentioned three SEL competencies

that informed their leadership practices: social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible

decision-making. Since my third research question sought to identify which leadership practices,

if any, modeled social emotional learning competencies, and the respondents identified specific

SEL competencies that inform their leadership practices, I have addressed those findings

simultaneously.

SEL is a Foundation for Leadership

School-based leaders' participation in the opportunities discussed in the findings for

research question 1 indeed informed their leadership practices, but the district was not explicit in

naming how a district-wide focus on SEL should inform school-based leadership practices.

Rather, a district-wide focus on SEL, coupled with the existing understandings of SEL from prior

learning and experiences that school-based leaders brought to their positions, had the greatest

impact on shaping leadership practices. The evidence showed that one way a district-wide focus

on SEL shaped school-based leadership practices was by acknowledging that SEL is

foundational to the way they lead. School-based leaders acknowledged that SEL informs how

they lead, specifically what they think and do, and that the district-wide focus on SEL for

students helped them realize the importance of SEL for adults.

When asked how a district-wide focus on SEL informed the participant's leadership

practices, more than three-quarters of the school-based leaders either directly mentioned CASEL,

or broadly stated that SEL forms the basis of all leadership decisions. Summing up the theme of

those school-based leaders, one respondent stated:

> If I can approach every layer of my job with that social emotional lens as a leader, the
> other stuff falls right into place. You can start talking more about academic rigor when
> your staff and students are social and emotionally cared for.

Another school-based leader summarized an overall sense of SEL in his leadership practices

when he added:

> I model… how I talk to adults… how I collaborate… that I am willing to make
> mistakes… creating the culture and the environment so that teachers feel valued and
> respected. In turn, that helps the teaching and learning in the school because I believe that
> if I don't set an environment in which the adults feel valued and respected, then I am

going to have a hard time implementing other teaching and learning initiatives. I need to create an emotionally safe environment for the students and the staff so that we can increase student achievement.

Social Awareness

The evidence showed that a second way a district-wide focus on SEL shaped the practices of school-based leaders was by consciously engaging in leadership practices that modeled the CASEL competency of social awareness. For the purposes of this study, the CASEL competency of social awareness encompassed skills such as respecting others, showing empathy, appreciating diversity, considering the perspectives of others, understanding social and ethical norms, and recognizing family, school, and community resources and supports. School-based leaders acknowledged that a district-wide focus on SEL has highlighted the need to show compassion and consider the perspectives of teachers when providing positive feedback.

A third of the school-based leaders specifically mentioned compassion and/or empathy as a leadership practice that has been shaped by a district-wide focus on SEL. For example, one respondent stated, "It is important for me to show compassion towards the teachers, to demonstrate that I understand and appreciate that they have a life outside of school." Another participant elaborated on being compassionate, stating:

> I want to support teachers as much as I can, whether that means if something was happening in their personal life and I was able to let them leave early, or extend a weekend because they needed to care for a family member… it's all those kind of little things to hopefully show that you are compassionate towards them.

Two-thirds of the school-based leaders interviewed recognized the need to consider the perspectives of their teachers when it comes to positive feedback as a leadership practice that has been shaped by a district-wide focus on SEL. One participant summarized the need to provide positive feedback and acknowledge the good work of one another stating,

> In education, a lot of times you're not getting that positive feedback and acknowledgement of something done well because a lot of times you are lonely in your classroom just there doing your own thing… it is important that our teachers know we are aware of all the amazing work they are doing for the students.

Another respondent gave a specific example of operationalizing positive feedback among his staff, and demonstrating how important it is to be socially aware of what the staff is experiencing, recalling "We ended on an activity where we went around and just acknowledged someone who either helped us or who we felt was just doing a great job. As we moved around the group, you could see people's shoulders relax."

Relationship Skills

Evidence highlighted that a third way a district-wide focus on SEL shaped the practices of school-based leaders was by consciously engaging in leadership practices that modeled the CASEL competency of relationship skills. For the purposes of this study, the CASEL competency of relationship skills is identified as working cooperatively with others, resolving conflict, communicating clearly, engaging socially with diverse individuals and groups, collaborating with team members, listening well, and seeking and offering help when needed. School-based leaders acknowledged that a district-wide focus on SEL has highlighted the need to build relationships and communicate clearly and frequently with all stakeholders.

When asked how a district-wide focus on SEL shapes his/her leadership practices, every respondent articulated the need to build relationships with fellow leaders, teachers, students, families, and the community as a whole. One respondent elaborated, stating, "If you have the mindset that you're a community and that there's a relationship with the people that you're doing the work with, everything builds from there."

Adding to the importance of building relationships, almost all respondents discussed the need to communicate clearly and frequently. Three school-based leaders discussed monthly

newsletters to families or weekly emails to both staff and families. An example of this leadership

practice was clearly articulated in one school improvement plan, "Principal will communicate

through a weekly… message to parents… will build an infrastructure for [weekly notes] to staff

including information needed to run a smooth week at school." Another school-based leader

discussed the need to remind herself of the importance of communication in building and

maintaining strong relationships:

> I have to remind myself multiple times a day to stop… say hello… how are you… and then make sure that I'm doing that relationship building and remembering that this is another person who has a whole story behind what they're bringing to the day and honor that. I think sometimes too it's just, somebody has a sick child, they need to leave and I need to work that out with them. I just need to care for people, and that needs to come first. And then the whole school culture and climate can be that of caring for one another.

Responsible Decision-making

A fourth way a district-wide focus on SEL shaped the practices of school-based leaders

was by consciously engaging in leadership practices that modeled the CASEL competency of

responsible decision-making. For the purposes of this study, the CASEL competency of

responsible decision-making is defined as making ethical choices, identifying and solving

problems, being reflective, analyzing situations accurately, and evaluating consequences in

consideration of the well-being of others. School-based leaders acknowledged that a district-wide

focus on SEL emphasized the importance of making decisions that are in the best interest of the

both students and the adults in schools.

Every participant referenced the importance of making decisions that are in the best

interest of the students and teachers in their buildings. For example, one school-based leader

stated, "I think that we all have an understanding that the teachers need the support in order to do

the best work for kids. So, it's in our best interest, for the children, to take care of the teachers."

Similarly, another school-based leader stated, "I think most school leaders really know and understand that every decision we make has to be about what's best for kids."

Summing up the importance of responsible decision-making as an SEL-informed leadership practice, one school-based leader stated,

> We are all aware of the trends as they come through, but we are recognizing that [SEL] is really important… we are looking at data around the student experience, for example, and recognizing that disciplinary practices were feeling exclusionary. We had to make decisions based on that data and what the research says is best for kids.

Overall, every school-based leader interviewed for this study believes that their top priority, grounded in SEL practices, is to create an emotionally safe environment for students and staff in order to increase student achievement. Across the interviews and document review, all participants in district and school-based leadership positions understand the importance of SEL and recognize the implications of SEL competencies in their leadership.

Discussion

This study contributes to prior research about the role of district leadership during the process of policy implementation. While there is a significant body of research on strategies leaders can use during the implementation process, as well as the content of those strategies that enable sensemaking, there is little information about what district and school leaders should do to ensure successful implementation of SEL initiatives (Brackett & Patti, 2016). Further, no research to date has focused on the manner in which district leaders support school-based leaders as they make sense of a district-wide focus on SEL, and how such a focus shapes school-based, leadership practices.

The purpose of this study was to examine, through the lens of sensemaking, how district leaders supported school-based leaders as they made sense of a district-wide focus on SEL, how a district-wide focus on SEL shaped school-based leadership practices, and which school-based

leadership practices, if any, modeled SEL competencies. Findings revealed district leaders utilized key aspects of the sensemaking framework through articulating a clear mission and goals, providing structures that fostered collaboration, and supporting professional development. However, while structures that foster collaboration and professional development exist and support sensemaking, the level of sensemaking by the school-based leaders could be deepened through greater opportunities to share their learning through collaboration. Further, school-based leaders discussed how a district-wide focus on SEL shaped their leadership practices.

I present the discussion of my findings through the sensemaking framework. The sensemaking framework can be broken down into four key areas: 1) language/ talk/ communication; 2) social processes; 3) processing learning in order to act; and 4) taking action (Weick, et al., 2005; Maitlis, 2005). Utilizing language, talk, and communication, as well as social processes, district leaders supported school-based leaders' sensemaking of the district-wide focus on SEL. In turn, school-based leaders were able to process their learning in order to act and take action, as demonstrated in their leadership practices. First, I will connect the actions taken by district leaders that supported school-based leaders as they made sense of a district-wide focus on SEL to the sensemaking framework in the areas of language, talk and communication and the social processes that supported sensemaking. Next, I will discuss how making sense of a district-wide focus on SEL shaped the practices of school-based leaders, and why it is important for school-based leaders to model SEL competencies in their leadership practices.

Sensemaking

According to Coburn (2005), educational researchers commonly use a sensemaking framework to construct an understanding of policy changes, curriculum reform, and the implementation of new initiatives. Thus, this framework was useful for understanding how a

district-wide focus on SEL may affect the leadership practices of school-based leaders, because the way in which school-based leaders interpret information specific to a focus on SEL can shape the way SEL is implemented in the schools (see Louis & Robinson, 2012).

Language, Talk, and Communication

A critical aspect of leadership work is supporting a group as they develop shared understandings of the organization and its goals, which helps frame a sense of purpose or vision for the organization (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). Taylor and Van Every (2008) further emphasize the need for district leaders to communicate a clear vision around common goals, as open, ongoing communication between district and school leadership is critical if change is going to occur. At the foundation of supporting the school-based leader's ability to make sense of a district-wide focus on SEL was a clear articulation of the district's mission and goals around SEL, found not only on the district's website, but repeated throughout the Superintendent's newsletters. School-based leaders crafted their school improvement plans to reflect the district-wide focus on SEL as it connected to the work in their schools. This will be discussed in greater detail later in this section, as it demonstrates how school-based leaders processed the district-wide focus on SEL in order to take action in their schools.

Social Processes

Maitlis (2005) describes organizational sensemaking as a "fundamentally social process" in which "organizational members interpret their environment in and through interactions with each other, constructing accounts that allow them to comprehend the world and act collectively" (p. 21). As a social process, communication among and interaction between district and school-based leaders plays a significant role in sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005; Taylor & Van Every, 2008; Weick et al., 2005). Communication among and interaction between district and school-based

leaders was evident in areas where district leaders provided structures that fostered collaboration. School-based leaders identified both the principal meetings and Superintendent's Administrative Team meetings, as well as professional development connected to SEL, as structures that fostered collaboration, and thus supported their ability to make sense of a district-wide focus on SEL.

While district leaders provided structures that fostered collaboration among school-based leaders, aiding in the school-based leaders' sensemaking of the district-wide focus on SEL, school-based leaders explained that their level of collaboration and interaction needed to go beyond these meetings and towards a tighter connection to their own professional development around SEL and leadership in the schools. Participating in meetings and professional development allows school-based leaders to arrive at a basic understanding and make meaning of a district-wide focus on SEL, but school-based leaders need to test and refine these understandings with one another through more purposeful interactions specific to how SEL informs their leadership practices (see Ancona, 2012).

Facing a shift in policies, practices or understandings, school-based leaders sought to clarify how a district-wide focus on SEL will impact their leadership practices by collaborating with and learning beside their peers during principal meetings and participation in professional development. The depth of this engagement determined whether they engaged in significant change, incremental change, or resistance (see Louis et al., 2009). The interactions school-based leaders had with one another determined how they understood and implemented a district-wide focus on SEL (see Weick et al., 2005), enabling them to learn from one another, and further shaping the success of the district-wide focus on SEL in their schools. The school-based leader's understanding of what is expected will become clearer as it is tested and modified through

meaningful interactions with their peers. Interactions that allow school-based leaders to see how

the professional development differs from their current practice, instead of seeing it as matching

their current practice, are essential to sensemaking. For changes in practice to occur, school-

based leaders need opportunities to engage with one another in ways that enable them to discuss

their current practices and how those practices may or may not align with a district-wide focus

on SEL. Sensemaking is collective and is most effective when school-based leaders can learn

deeply with one another and compare their views with those of other leaders (see Ancona, 2012),

allowing them to have a better grasp of what is occurring in their environments, thus facilitating

other leadership practices and activities.

Processing Learning in Order to Act

Sensemaking requires that leaders have the flexibility to go between the "what is" of

sensemaking and the "what can be" of envisioning (Ancona, 2012). For the purposes of this

study, the "what is" refers to the district-wide focus on SEL, and the "what can be" is how that

focus shapes school-based leadership practices. In other words, sensemaking requires that

school-based leaders be able to engage the staff in their buildings in figuring out how a district-

wide focus on SEL fits with the work in their schools.

School-based leaders crafted their school improvement plans to reflect the district-wide

focus on SEL as the focus connected to the work in their schools. This is noteworthy as

researchers have observed occasions where, when district leaders presented initiatives, they tend

to develop policies that compete with school goals (Spillane, 2000), or promote district goals

over school goals (Honig, 2003). This was not the case in this school district. The district goals

were clearly articulated and aligned in each school improvement plan. School-specific goals

were written in such a manner that reflected the goals of the district but allowed for flexibility in

how the goals would be met as a school. None of the study's participants referred to competing

priorities, or articulated that district needs consistently took priority over school-based needs.

Taking Action: SEL and Leadership Practices

While district leaders are traditionally the initiators of large-scale reform efforts (Johnson

& Chrispeels, 2010), including the establishment of SEL initiatives, school-based leaders bear

the responsibility of implementing the programs and practices associated with such district-wide

initiatives (Louis & Robinson, 2012). The process of understanding, or making sense of, a

district-wide focus on SEL in order to implement it, is likely to shape leadership practices, as the

leader connects prior learning to new learning. When district-leaders are successful in

influencing the sensemaking of school-based leaders, school-based leaders are motivated to

make changes in their own roles and practices (Gioia & Chittipeddi; Maitlis & Christianson,

2014). Research questions two and three sought to identify how a district-wide focus on SEL

shaped school-based leadership practices and which leadership practices, if any, modeled social

emotional learning competencies. It is difficult for leaders to support the successful

implementation of SEL initiatives if their leadership practices do not model those competencies.

It is important to note that this study did not seek to determine the social and emotional

competence of leaders, but instead the extent to which their leadership practices modeled

CASEL's social and emotional competencies.

CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative (2011) states that school-based leaders must

be given opportunities to build their own social and emotional learning skills in order to model

these skills for teachers through their leadership practices. Modeling the kinds of behavior

leaders want to see in every interaction enhances staff beliefs about their own capacities and their

sense of self-efficacy (McColl-Kennedy & Anderson, 2002), leading to greater opportunities for

the successful implementation of a district-wide focus on SEL. While most respondents broadly

referenced ways in which a district-wide focus on SEL informed their leadership practices, every

school-based leader identified practices associated with all five SEL competencies. However, I

found evidence that social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making are

the most common SEL competencies reflected in the practices of school-based leaders. This is

not to diminish the importance of the SEL competencies of self-awareness or self-management

in school-based leadership practices. Instead, this highlights those competencies that have the

greatest impact on leading others, more specifically those competencies that are intrapersonal as

opposed to interpersonal.

School-based leaders did not specifically reference CASEL's competencies when

describing their leadership practices. Instead, they discussed skills connected to those

competencies, such as empathy, positive feedback, trust, and communication. This could be

directly connected to a district-wide focus on SEL programming for students, as opposed to a

deliberate, broader focus on the CASEL competencies and an understanding of how those

competencies impact leadership practices.

Conclusion

District leaders provided structures that supported school-based leaders' sensemaking of

a district-wide focus on SEL by communicating a clear district vision for SEL, as discussed

above. Articulated goals were connected to the needs of the schools allowing individual schools

to customize their approach to SEL within the framework established by the district.

Organizational factors such as structures fostering collaboration and opportunities for

professional development can impact the success of district-wide focus on SEL (see Elias, Zins,

Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003). These are the types of structures district leaders should consider

developing further. Across the interviews with all six school-based leaders, evidence showed that SEL interactions in the district did not support meaningful collaboration around SEL and leadership practices among school-based leaders. While school-based leaders had their own network of support among one another around the day to day work or crisis support, they did not have a collaborative structure that supported proactive and reflective SEL leadership practices. Working together, district leaders could be instrumental in establishing regular and planned opportunities for school-based to collaborate about SEL and how a district-wide focus on SEL shapes their leadership practices in a manner that promotes professional growth and increases internal drive for change (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000). The district is poised to deepen their focus on SEL in a more deliberate manner, and district leaders will be instrumental in determining purposeful next steps that take into consideration how to support school-based leaders around greater development of leadership practices that model SEL competencies for teachers and students. Successful implementation relies on creating and supporting interactions that will support school-based leaders' sensemaking of a district-wide focus on SEL.

Limitations

The purpose of this study was to examine, through the lens of sensemaking, how district leaders supported school-based leaders as they made sense of a district-wide focus on SEL, how a district-wide focus on SEL shaped school-based leadership practices, and which leadership practices, if any, modeled SEL competencies. Because this is a qualitative case study of one, mid-sized school district in Massachusetts, the findings cannot be generalized. Additionally, high school leadership was purposefully excluded from the participant sample, specifically because most of the work around SEL in this district has been focused on preK-8. However, the sample

included principals from more than half of the elementary schools, both middle schools, and five district leaders.

The findings present an accurate representation of the views and opinions of district and school-based leaders who participated in the study during the fall of 2019, as well as the documents reviewed from September 2017-October 2019. Therefore, the findings can be used to inform both district and school-based leadership practices as they work collaboratively to make sense of a district-wide focus on SEL.

An additional limitation relates to the design of the study. Determining how district leaders supported school-based leaders as they made sense of a district-wide focus on SEL proved more difficult than anticipated. When asked what opportunities were available for district and school leaders to come together to make sense of the district-wide focus on SEL, school-based leaders focused on meetings and professional development centered around district SEL programs such as Youth Mental Health First Aid and Responsive Classroom. However, sensemaking is about the deeper understanding of an initiative, and how that initiative impacts leadership practices. It was difficult for participants to talk about sensemaking because we are not always aware of sensemaking as it occurs. Although I asked about each participant's prior understanding of SEL, it was difficult to gauge how much, if at all, the district-wide focus on SEL influenced school-based leadership practices.

One of the main purposes of this study was to examine how a district-wide focus on SEL shaped school-based leadership practices, and what practices, if any modeled CASEL's SEL competencies. In seeking to gather data for this area of my study, I specifically asked school-based leaders how a district-wide focus on SEL shaped their leadership practices. In retrospect, this did not provide much insight into how a district-wide focus on SEL shaped the leadership

practices, or the extent to which those school-based leadership practices modeled SEL competencies. In retrospect, using an inventory or questionnaire aligned to the CASEL competencies and skills that probed leaders to reflect on what they think and do could have provided deeper insight into how a district-wide focus on SEL shaped the practices of school-based leaders.

In addition, as an outsider to the district, I only gathered documents that were readily available on the district and school websites. The documents reviewed for the study were not created with the sole purpose of answering my research questions, therefore they were subject to my personal interpretation. Moreover, my prior experience and current employment as a school-based leader contributed to my interest in this study and may have influenced my interpretation of the data. However, I worked diligently to remain impartial and unbiased during the data collection and analysis phases of my research.

CHAPTER FOUR[3]

Summary of Research Questions and Methods

The purpose of this study was to identify leadership practices that modeled social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies for adults and/or promoted opportunities for the SEL of staff. Our intent was to determine how these practices shaped different aspects of a district and its schools. To do so, we examined how district leaders supported sensemaking among school-based leaders around SEL (Conners, 2020) as well as the influences that school-based leaders had on adult collaboration (Ito, 2020), mental health staff (Renda, 2020), collective efficacy (Rose, 2020), and teacher resilience and well-being (Tobin, 2020).

We developed two overarching research questions that guided our collective work. Research question one (RQ1) was "what leadership practices model SEL competencies and/or promote SEL opportunities for staff?" Research Question two (RQ2) was "how do these leadership practices shape a district and its schools?" Our methodology included a qualitative case study with a unit of analysis of a single school district in Massachusetts, fictitiously named Westlake Public Schools (WPS). Our study encompassed four elementary and two middle schools. Utilizing purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), we selected our interview participants from four categories: district leaders, school-based leaders, teachers, and mental health staff (MHS). For data collection, we employed semi-structured interviews, document reviews, online questionnaires, and onsite observations. To analyze the data, our team used coding software, Dedoose, and used the coded data to find patterns and themes (Creswell, 2014).

In our analytic lenses, all members of the team used the CASEL competencies which included self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships skills, and responsible

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[3]This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach to this project: Michele Conners, Mark Ito, Adam Renda, Geoff Rose, and Donna Tobin

decision-making and their associated skills (Appendix D) when determining the social and emotional competence of our identified leadership practices. Individually and collectively, we established that the competencies of social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making were the most widely recognized SEL competencies related to the identified leadership practices (i.e., what leaders think and do).

From our synthesis of our individual studies, we found three common themes in response to our RQ1: 1) Leaders allocated time and resources to meet the needs of individuals; 2) Leaders engaged in relationship building with staff and/or colleagues; and 3) Leaders created structures for shared responsibility amongst colleagues. We found these leadership practices shaped the district and its schools (RQ2) when leaders prioritized outside resources and time to support individual development; staff felt validated when their leaders supported their personal and professional wellbeing; and leaders created structures designed to access shared knowledge and decision-making. In the following sections, we present our synthesized findings, discuss these findings in relation to the literature, propose a new framework for socially and emotionally competent leadership, and discuss recommendations and implications for practice.

Synthesis of Findings

We begin the section by examining common leadership practices identified across our studies. To address RQ1, we determined if the practices modeled (i.e., demonstrated or displayed) the SEL competencies or promoted (i.e., actively encouraged) SEL opportunities. For RQ2, through districtwide examples and the existing literature, we also explored how these practices shaped the district and its schools. As a result, we make recommendations to the district on how to potentially approach these practices when implementing them in the future.

Leaders Allocated Time and Resources to Meet the Needs of Individuals

This leadership practice focused on professional development (PD) and scheduled time in relationship to how leaders allocated time and resources that affected the needs of staff. In relation to RQ1, leaders modeled and/or promoted the SEL competency of relationship skills in their practices when they worked cooperatively with others, engaged socially with diverse individuals, listened well, and communicated effectively in order to increase the professional knowledge of their staff. Additionally, when leaders allocated resources for scheduled time in their practices, they also modeled and/or promoted the competency of social awareness, because they recognized the importance of collaboration for staff and the resource of time needed for them to engage. In response to RQ2, this practice shaped the district and its schools by leaders prioritizing outside resources for learning as opposed to internal expertise; and providing time in the schedule as opposed to developing greater capacity for shared responsibility of the work.

Professional Development

Collectively, we found that leaders encouraged and supported staff to attend training, workshops and conferences in order to increase their professional knowledge. Leaders promoted opportunities for staff to seek PD in the areas related to their specific roles (e.g., instruction, mental health and/or leadership) and/or in support of higher-level district goals (e.g., SEL, cultural proficiency, and/or project based learning). District leaders also modeled and promoted this practice by encouraging participation for individual WPS staff to attend out-of-district PD opportunities. These actions shaped the district and its schools by leaders prioritizing external opportunities for increased professional knowledge.

We found WPS spent more than half a million dollars ($535,801) in FY19 on external PD (WPS Report to Town Meeting & Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Summary, p. 30). In relation to the

district's PD investments, one district leader referred to providing "buckshot PD opportunities to WPS staff," as a means for supporting their learning. A buckshot PD opportunity is one that is widely communicated and often a one-time experience outside of the school district. Another district leader reflected that "part of what I see as my job is scouring the internet and places to find PD opportunities so that teachers can sign up for them." These specific examples from district leaders showed practices that modeled an awareness to support individualized staff practices through encouragement and communication of PD offerings.

In some cases, staff independently initiated and sought support for PD opportunities, specifically when the expertise the individual needed resided outside of internal district resources. During the semi-structured interviews, staff members across the district often commented that their leaders provided substitute coverage and paid registration fees in order for staff to participate in their choice of adult learning outside of their schools. This practice shaped the work of the schools by staff feeling supported through the time and money provided to attend PD. Furthermore, while some staff referenced these training sessions during interviews, findings showed that staff did not identify PD as pivotal in shaping their practice. Additionally, limited evidence supported purposeful shared learning from these "external" opportunities.

Conversely, another district leader acknowledged that they "made significant investments in bringing in national trainers to come here and certify about 12 or 15 instructors." One leader highlighted that the district-supported PD promoted SEL opportunities such as Responsive Classroom, Trauma Sensitive Schools, and Social Thinking, through an iterative process designed to support internal implementation. Based on our gathered evidence, it was unclear if the district's priorities aligned with buckshot PD opportunities or those that provided iterative training. The inconsistent use of district resources to support staff learning and development

shaped the work of WPS staff.

Overall, this leadership practice shaped the district and its schools since leaders and staff relied on outside resources to support their professional development. Furthermore, leaders promoted opportunities for staff to find and access external PD offerings. However, intentionally using internal time and resources appeared less in the data as a way to gain professional knowledge, and sharing expertise among colleagues did not happen regularly enough for staff to feel it was a standard practice in which they benefited from during collaborative time.

Scheduled Time

Throughout our data collection processes, we found that leaders allocated time for leaders, teaching and learning directors, coaches, teachers, and mental health staff to meet. Through this practice, leaders modeled the competency of social awareness because they recognized the importance of collaboration for staff, and the resource of time needed in which to engage. As one staff member reported, "Even at the highest level, leaders realize how important collaboration is, so they carve out time for it." This practice of scheduling time shaped WPS leaders' responsibilities, as it was expected that they would perform this task.

At the school level, our analysis showed that leaders promoted opportunities for staff to formally meet with their leaders and/or colleagues. During the semi-structured interviews, staff members commented that they participated regularly in formal meetings with leaders and/or colleagues. At both the elementary and middle school levels, school and district leaders built four to five formal meetings (e.g., staff, department, community) into their weekly and monthly schedules. Planned district and school meetings occurred both during the school day and after school (including weekly early release days for all elementary staff on Tuesdays). Additionally, interviews indicated that MHS across all schools observed that school leaders provided

scheduled time to collaborate with others. Specifically, leaders modeled relationship skills when they created structures for MHS to participate in job-alike groups or tried to match them up with different related service providers. These examples showed how leaders shaped the interactions of staff by providing opportunities for them to meet.

In relation to the allocation of scheduled time, we heard inconsistent reflections from school leaders and staff. Some staff perceived that collaborative time was not useful and took away from other work that needed to happen. As seen through the questionnaire data, both leaders and staff positively perceived that staff are committed to collaborative time; however, more than half of both staff and leaders did not positively perceive that time was used effectively. Related to this data, we acknowledge that the positionality of each staff member may influence their perceptions about the usefulness of collaborative time. Moreover, leaders also placed an emphasis on supporting summertime curriculum work when they provided teachers or MHS daily stipends. Although one district leader mentioned that leaders encouraged staff to meet as groups during these summer opportunities, school-based staff did not discuss or reference these opportunities as shaping their growth. These reflections highlighted the lack of coherence from WPS staff about the perceived value of their time.

Additionally, district leaders modeled social awareness for school-based leaders by providing time for elementary principals to collaborate during meetings. Moreover, when asked how they show support for collaboration, several district leaders modeled relationship skills by protecting the structures and schedules that allowed for ongoing, consistent collaboration among leaders. Other leadership meetings included principal meetings; superintendent's administrative team meetings, and opportunities for school leaders to work with mental health staff to design interventions. Furthermore, every district leader referred to ongoing discussions between district-

and school-based leaders about the promotion of SEL opportunities across schools and within classrooms. The overarching theme was that district leaders modeled and empowered school-based leaders to engage in collaborative opportunities with their job-alike colleagues.

Leaders Engaged in Relationship-building with Staff and/or Colleagues

Leaders in WPS modeled and/or promoted practices that valued and fostered collaborative relationships with school-based staff and between staff and their colleagues. In response to RQ1, leaders modeled the competency of relationship skills because they communicated clearly when they publicly acknowledged the work of staff and/or showed their appreciation. Leaders also modeled relationship skills when they delivered and shared information during formal and/or informal interactions. Lastly, leaders positively promoted relationship skills when they collaborated with staff and effectively modeled this competency when they offered support. In relation to RQ2, this leadership practice positively shaped WPS when leaders engaged in actions that strengthened relationships through communication, collaboration, and support.

Cooperative Opportunities

Data analysis at the school- and district-level strongly supported the importance of relationships. As an illustration, one district leader commented, "everything that applies to education is all about building relationships so the best way to support the staff is to know them as human beings." Furthermore, district leaders specifically modeled positive relationship skills by understanding the importance of bonding as a community, and caring about departments as a community of people. In general, we learned that school-based and district-level leaders considered the importance of modeling and maintaining positive, healthy, and supportive relationships.

In order to strengthen relationships, district leaders highlighted that meetings are often opportunities for cooperation, collaboration and discussion, including many ice breakers. They also emphasized the importance of social gatherings and outings outside of school. As noted in one interview with an MHS, "my principal always tries to bring people together." These relationships, in turn, promoted opportunities with staff to engage in practices that developed positive relationships with their leaders. As a result, district and school leaders positively shaped WPS when they exhibited practices that valued WPS staff and their collaborative opportunities with each other.

Staff expressed coaching as a valued resource, specifically when leaders promoted opportunities for subject area coaches to collaborate with teachers in their schools in order to improve their teacher's instructional practices. By promoting opportunities to collaborate with coaches, leaders provided dialogue between staff and their coaches specific to their content curriculum in an effort to bring improvement and change to what happens in classrooms. In some instances, elementary school teachers scheduled time with coaches to be in their classrooms to observe, discuss and advise on the instruction being delivered. As an example, one staff member emphasized that their collaborative relationship with a coach shaped their practices by having a "really good feeling, and I feel like I still can go ask her for advice just because I have that connection with her." In summary, when leaders supported collaborative opportunities between staff and coaches, their practices promoted opportunities for encouraging relationship skills, specifically positive connections and cooperative mindsets.

Clear Communication

In order to promote clear communications, two different district leaders acknowledged open door policies by naming that "doors are always open here." Furthermore, another district

leader commented, "I listen to teachers and if I think if there's something that they think they need, whether it's just time to talk to me or whether it's time to work with their colleagues or whether it's more resources." Another district leader commented on the importance of having conversations with teachers, just listening to them and asking them questions of what they need. These examples modeled how leaders effectively listened and supported both staff's individual needs and professional skills.

In addition to supporting by listening, data also showed that leaders modeled the relationship skills competency when they communicated with staff through feedback and praise. Noticing strong practices of staff and appreciating them, led to positive attitudes about meeting with administrators, and the trust and support that ensued. Collectively, we learned that leaders often recognized the work of staff privately and publicly. Leaders provided recognition in a variety of ways, including: notes in mailboxes or on a staff member's desk, a quick email, a shout-out in a newsletter or publication, a social media (Twitter or Facebook) acknowledgement, or just a quick verbal thank you or high-five. More specifically, staff interviews confirmed the importance of how recognizing others' successes can support and maintain positive relationships. In general, most staff expressed positive experiences receiving feedback and praise from their leaders as it shaped their perceptions about their own practices.

By providing cooperative opportunities and clear communication, this leadership practice shaped adult relationships by setting the tone for ongoing engagement: therefore, it paved the way towards honest and authentic dialogue between staff and leaders as well as a greater commitment to the school and district work. Furthermore, conversations between leaders and staff were important in building and/or maintaining relationships and staff viewed feedback and praise as constructive and positive. In summary, this leadership practice shaped the district and

its schools since staff felt validated when their leaders took the time to listen to and talk with them about their personal and professional wellbeing.

Leaders Created Structures for Shared Responsibility Among Colleagues

Leaders in WPS employed practices that modeled SEL competencies and/or promoted SEL opportunities, such as accessing and sharing expertise, encouraging interaction between colleagues, and providing problem-solving opportunities that included consulting and working with others. More specifically, in response to RQ1, leaders promoted responsible decision-making by giving staff opportunities to be involved in decisions regarding their work. While not consistently seen across the schools, when leaders gave staff opportunities to analyze situations and to identify possible solutions, they promoted opportunities to be included in responsible decision-making on behalf of the greater organization. In response to RQ2, shared expertise shaped the district and its schools by implementing collaborative structures that allowed access to the sources of collective efficacy, namely vicarious experiences and social persuasion. Additionally, shared decision-making opportunities shaped WPS by providing structures for leaders and staff to process challenging situations through a sense-making lens.

Shared Decision-making

Leaders promoted learning opportunities related to responsible decision-making by forming teams to access expertise, analyze situations, solve problems accurately, and provide input into the school community's policies and procedures. Evidence supported that some school leaders included staff in decisions related to their work. When leaders involved staff in decisions, staff reported that they felt valued and trusted. During the interviews, staff provided numerous examples of times when leaders sought their input during meetings, through surveys, or during individual conversations. Specifically, MHS mentioned that principals included them in the

decision-making and communication processes to best support students and keep them safe.

At the district level, one leader highlighted the presence of monthly principal meetings which included shared facilitation roles and open agendas. Specifically, leaders were asked, "What do you need? What would you like some feedback on or what do you need to present to everybody [staff]?" This showed the intentionality of district leaders supporting the individual needs of school leaders as well as encouraging shared responsibility during collaborative opportunities. In addition to scheduled meetings, district and school leaders also referenced frequent opportunities to problem solve together. School leaders felt empowered to call or email various district leaders with a dilemma. In turn, district leaders felt responsible to partner with school leaders "to problem solve things that could really be very impactful to their school or their department." Through these examples, WPS leaders modeled relationship- oriented practices while they interacted with each other, as they assessed outcomes, dealt with challenging situations, and made collaborative decisions.

Conversely, some staff stated that leaders should be more inclusive in decision making and that when leaders asked for input, they should actually consider it. Additionally, although evidence supported that some schools had structures in place to facilitate shared responsibility for decisions, some staff expressed there were many committees where their input was not apparent in the results. Although the practice was modeled, not all staff felt that the decision-making processes were inclusive.

Shared Expertise

Leaders promoted learning opportunities related to relationship skills by allowing staff to observe and learn from each other in order to build collaborative teams and support colleagues when needed. Findings demonstrated that collaborating with colleagues was the primary driver

for staff changing practice. Moreover, staff expressed that they learn from their colleagues and that informal collegial discussions support their work. By recognizing the value of sharing expertise, leaders modeled the competency of responsible decision-making because they assessed what could happen when colleagues learn from each other. Additionally, this practice promoted opportunities for others to take responsibility for the learning and professional exchange of knowledge with colleagues.

Across all six schools, the leadership practice of staff sharing expertise through collegial visits and observations emerged as a common theme. Leaders referenced various structures for sharing learning such as creating a "What do you want to see project?" posting staff schedules online to allow for self-identified pedagogical strengths and times when others can observe, publicly posting a board with staff strengths, and utilizing different frameworks for learning walks. These structures provided opportunities for staff to share their practices in their teaching environment in an effort to display their interactive work in classrooms.

Despite the fact that all leaders identified these different structures for sharing expertise, few school-based staff mentioned these specific practices during interviews. Furthermore, all of the meeting observations provided time for teachers to interact with each other in some capacity, yet, only three of the six meetings followed a protocol for sharing expertise. The questionnaire revealed that while half of staff positively perceived that their colleagues shared their expertise during collaborative time, only some leaders positively perceived that this was actually happening. Collectively, this data showed that inconsistencies emerged between the perceptions of leaders and staff about the value of formal collaborative structures.

Staff reported that collaborating with colleagues improved their instruction and supported their professional growth. One staff member said, "To be able to collaborate with our team helps

my instruction improve. When we were looking at student work, I was able to check out what

other classes are doing, and it helps me to learn and grow." In support, leaders provided

opportunities for staff collaboration, and when staff engaged with people from different content

areas it broadened staff's perspectives. One staff member said, "The best part of collaboration is

getting different points of view and working with people with different skill sets." Data also

showed that some principals took the time to access the expertise of MHS specifically, by

fostering opportunities for collective problem solving and modeling SEL lessons in classrooms.

Our synthesized findings supported the presence of leadership practices in WPS that

modeled and promoted the competencies of social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible

decision-making. These practices shaped the district and its schools when leaders prioritized

outside resources for learning as opposed to internal expertise, and leaders provided time in the

schedule as opposed to developing greater capacity for shared responsibility of the work.

Additionally, staff felt validated when their leaders communicated with them about their

personal and professional wellbeing. Lastly, leaders shaped WPS when they created structures

designed for shared decision-making and knowledge. We further extended these findings to

establish a framework that explores the importance of these practices and why they matter when

thinking about socially and emotionally competent leadership.

Discussion and Recommendations

In WPS, our team found three leadership practices that modeled SEL

competencies and/or promoted SEL opportunities: 1) leaders allocated time and resources to

meet the needs of individuals; 2) leaders engaged in relationship building with staff and/or

colleagues; and 3) leaders created structures for shared responsibility among colleagues. Based

on our findings, we connected these leadership practices to the literature and broadened them

further. The result is three leadership practices that support the development of socially and

emotionally competent leadership (SECL) in schools and districts. We encourage district and

school leaders to implement these practices as outlined in Figure 4.1. In this visual, we display

the SEL competencies, leadership practices, and how these practices shape a district and its

schools, more specifically, by developing individual capabilities, strengthening coherence of

vision and action, and establishing the structures that promote collective leadership capacity.

It is important to note that the identified leadership practices in the visual represent those

found within the scope of our study. Specifically, we focused on the identification of leadership

practices that modeled and/or promoted SEL competencies (i.e. social awareness, relationship

skills, and responsible decision-making) in the context of adult interactions as opposed to SEL

competencies (i.e. self-awareness and self-management) that focus more on attributes specific to

an individual. Although self-awareness and self-management are important competencies to

develop in SECL, in our study, we did not look for practices that exhibited these competencies.

As a result, our visual below highlights the leadership practices and competencies we encourage

leaders to develop and support when considering adult dynamics, and a means to SECL.

Socially and Emotionally Competent Leadership

The visual we created establishes three practices that can guide leaders in both districts

and schools. The center of our visual, "Socially and Emotionally Competent Leadership,"

reflects an intentional integration of the SEL competencies with what leaders think and do.

Around the center, we build on and broaden the three identified leadership practices.

Specifically, we discuss how each practice can shape the development of individual capabilities,

the strengthening of coherence of vision and action, and the establishment of collective

leadership capacity in a district and its schools. Finally, the "outer ring" of our SECL visual

reflects the SEL competencies that our study highlights, and that we argue are integral to the

work of leaders, districts, and schools. Collectively, the visual below answers our team's

research questions: 1) What leadership practices modeled SEL competencies and/or promote

SEL opportunities for staff? and 2) How did these leadership practices shape a district and its

schools?
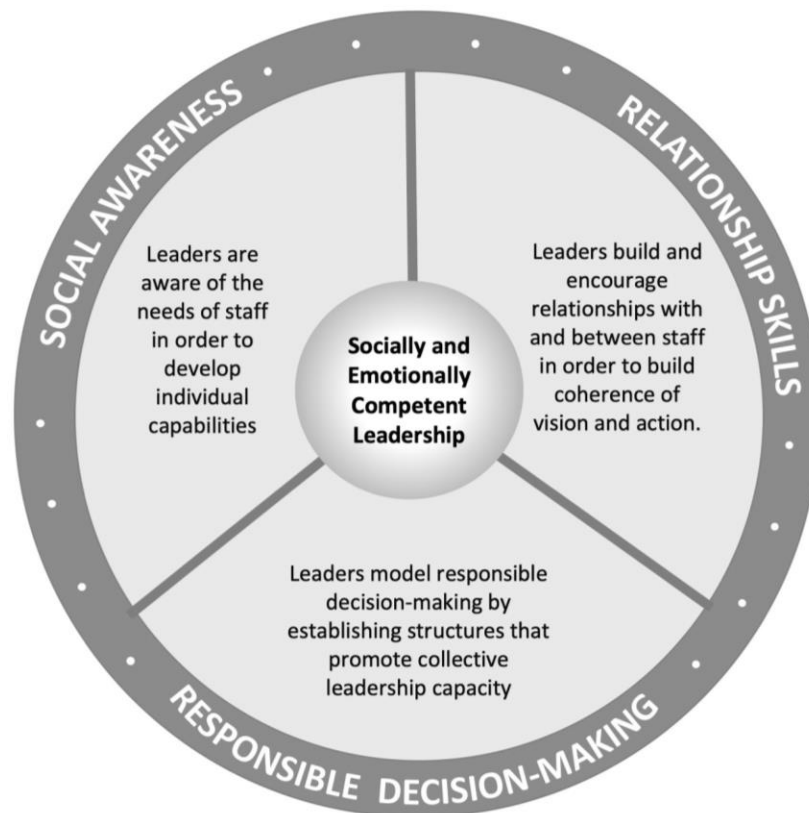
Figure 4.1. Recommended Practices that Support Socially and Emotionally Competent

Leadership

        The three practices found in WPS enabled our team to collectively develop this visual

that constructed meaning and reasoning as to why these leadership practices that modeled

competencies and/or promoted SEL opportunities mattered. By implementing these practices, we

argue that leaders can increase adult capabilities and their organization's capacity. As defined by

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), capabilities are more than just having "adequate ability," but rather the possession of "attributes required for performance or accomplishment" (p. 55). Additionally, Mullen and Jones (2008) refer to capacity in their work as "enabling the growth of teachers as leaders who are responsible for their actions" (p. 329). Based on our findings and the literature, we assert in our recommended practices that both adult capabilities and capacity improve as a result of SECL, which further extends the research of Cohen and colleagues (2007) who laid the groundwork for differentiating between capabilities and capacity-building.

The first leadership practice that we aimed to broaden, "leaders allocated time and resources to meet the needs of individuals," was significant because leaders showed an awareness of the needs of staff in order to support the development of an individual's capabilities. This practice aligned with Fullan and Quinn (2016) who discussed how surface learning "occurs when the experience is very individualized" and may "result from one-shot workshops and random accessing of online resources without a linkage to broader goals or applications" (p. 61). Capabilities of staff in an organization are built by offering individualized support to followers (Leithwood, 1994) and leaders are expected to assess followers' motives, satisfying their needs, and treat them as full human-beings (Northouse, 2016).

The significance of this practice of allocating scheduled time and resources is that the formal leaders at WPS provided time and budget to what staff felt were important to their work or dictated as iterative training that supported the district's vision and goals. However, we learned that individualized PD was primarily happening through buck-shot opportunities outside of the district, without coherence or alignment to collective goals. We argue that leaders should recognize that providing opportunities for staff to seek expertise outside of the district may not have been as cost-effective or as valuable as creating opportunities for staff to leverage expertise

from within the organization itself (Leithwood et al., 2019). Seeking outside PD opportunities did not necessarily yield more efficacious results.

From our findings, we broaden this original practice to one that develops SECL by arguing that leaders should be aware of the needs of staff in order to develop individual capabilities. Specifically, we recommend that WPS implement PD into their scheduled meetings and utilize the expertise found internally to grow staff capabilities. Forman et al. (2015) supported this recommendation by asserting that "professional development events are replaced by a culture of professional learning that happens in real time throughout the school year" (p. 218). This recommendation reflects an understanding that adult learning should be embedded within scheduled time and often take place in collaborative peer structures such as networks (Leithwood et al., 2010).

The second leadership practice that emerged from our findings, "formal leaders engaged in relationship building with staff and/or colleagues," was significant because leaders demonstrated that engaging in and modeling healthy relationships with staff and colleagues promoted the implementation of SEL competencies that built individual capabilities. It built these individual capabilities by considering the individual's needs and what supported them emotionally and stimulated them intellectually (Leithwood, 1994). In order for this practice to happen, leaders implemented practices that encouraged collaborative relationships between leaders and staff. The SECL practice that we established from this original practice is that leaders built and encouraged relationships with and between staff in order to build coherence of vision and action. We acknowledge that the organization benefits when leaders model, through their practices, important organizational values and their vision (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). Additionally, this practice aligns with the research of Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) who

maintained the importance of relationships for strengthening individual and collective commitment to the organization. Specifically, we recommend that WPS strengthen adult relationships by clarifying roles and responsibilities of administrators, coaches, and staff that align to the vision of leaders with the actions of staff. For example, explicitly naming the differences and/or similarities of the roles and responsibilities of coaches, administrators, MHS, and teachers related to the planning, facilitation, and outcomes of weekly team meetings within the schools. The research focused on role clarity and intentional alignment of collaborative work reflects the research of Donohoo (2018) who asserted that common understanding of responsibilities is essential to group effectiveness.

The third leadership practice that we looked to broaden, "leaders created structures for shared responsibility amongst colleagues," was significant because leaders, at times, supported a distributed model of shared decision-making that led to capacity building in their organizations. Data inconsistently supported that WPS staff felt empowered to contribute in shared decision-making structures and shared expertise opportunities. In order for this practice to happen more frequently, leaders should work internally and with intentionality to create opportunities for staff leadership to develop (Patti et. al., 2015). Specifically, by identifying where social capital exists and utilizing it to share expertise, schools and districts can most effectively influence practices and beliefs between colleagues (Minckler, 2014; Guskey, 1996). By implementing this approach, the organization can benefit by developing structures that foster participation in school decisions and improvement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999).

The leadership practice that develops SECL is that leaders model and promote responsible decision-making in order to build collective leadership capacity. Specifically, we recommend that WPS formally identify internal expertise and provide these informal staff

leaders with opportunities to model and promote their practices through adult learning structures (see Minckler, 2014; Leana, 2011). Within this final recommendation, we argue that leaders should support adult learning structures that share expertise, in the context of staff making responsible decisions for the good of the organization. We argue that this recommendation leads to collective leadership capacity where formal leaders do not need to facilitate all collaborative interactions and manage individual actions (see Spillane, 2004). We assert that the more that expertise is identified and collectively shared, the greater the capacity of the organization, and the stronger likelihood that the organization will reflect a consideration of the greater good (see Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

Limitations

This study identified leadership practices that modeled SEL competencies, and/or promoted SEL opportunities for district and school-based staff, while investigating how those leadership practices shaped a district and its schools. We acknowledge the following areas with limitations: 1) generalizability of findings; 2) time period of research; and 3) data collection and analysis.

A limitation of our study was the generalizability of the findings due to the small scope of the study. Because our research focused on a single unit of analysis, one school district in Massachusetts, our findings are not generalizable to other school districts in Massachusetts, or in the United States. While generalizability was a limitation within our study, the purpose of our study was not to seek ultimate truths, but to understand the relevance of our findings both as educational leaders and contributors to existing research (Mills & Gay, 2019). Despite a focus on one district, our process of selection ensured that the district we studied provided meaningful insights about a district-wide focus on SEL, and assisted us in identifying themes that we believe

are relevant to other districts in the process of implementing this type of reform, because

qualitative research builds theory.

The specific time period during which the data was collected and analyzed was driven by

the research team's limited timeframe, and thus we only captured a moment in time. As a result,

we were not able to analyze how each of our individual research themes and the leadership

practices evolved over time. The district hired a Director of SEL two years prior to our study,

which likely played a key role in our findings. Entering a district in the initial stages of a district-

wide focus on SEL would likely result in different outcomes than entering a district deeply

engaged in SEL. However, our findings are relevant and meaningful as they could assist other

districts in developing leadership practices that model or promote SEL competencies.

Importantly, we did not gather data from all members of the case study district, but rather

from a purposeful sample of district and school leaders. District, schools, and leaders were

purposefully selected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), however, individual staff participants

volunteered to contribute to this study. Self-selection into the study opened up the possibility of

participant bias in terms of what they wanted to promote or conceal as strengths or challenges

both within the district and as individuals. To mitigate this bias, we asked probing questions to

maximize the interactions between the participant and interviewer to increase rapport and reduce

the risk of socially desirable answers (Patton, 1990). In addition, we used multiple sources of

data to allow for methods triangulation in this study.

We aimed to access a range of perspectives by collecting data from documents,

questionnaires, observations, and interviews to triangulate the outcomes of the interview

analyses. It was important that we had multiple data sources because, "every type of data has

strengths and limitations, using a combination of techniques helps compensate for the

weaknesses found in one approach (Salkind, 2010).

We analyzed documents that were readily and publicly available to district and school

staff, parents or guardians, and the community. We interviewed district administrators,

principals, teachers and mental health staff who volunteered to participate. Their perspectives

were not necessarily representative of the perspectives of all certified professional staff in the

district and its schools. In addition, schools are dynamic environments in which the teachers and

administrators can change from one year to the next.

Finally, this qualitative case study has the potential for validity errors. According to

Creswell (2014), validity signals that the researcher checks for accuracy of the findings by

employing certain procedures. To improve validity, we posed "how" research questions that

influenced the use of strategies to address external validity (Yin, 2014). We triangulated our data

sources, data types, and methods, while reflecting upon the data collection and interpretation

process in an effort to minimize methodological threats to interpretation of the data (Yin, 2014).

Conclusion

Our collective findings supported the identification of leadership practices in WPS that

modeled and promoted the SEL competencies of social awareness, relationship skills, and

responsible decision-making. These leadership practices shaped the district and its schools when

leaders encouraged collaborative relationships and supported the development of individual

capabilities, needs, and professional skills. Furthermore, our collective research led to the

identification of new leadership practices that supports the development of SECL.

We argue that implementing leadership practices with the intention of developing

SECL has the potential to positively shape a district-wide focus on SEL, the sources of collective

efficacy, adult collaboration, staff resilience and wellbeing, and the work of MHS. As a result of

our research, leaders should focus their efforts on cultivating the capabilities of the adults

through structures that promote collaborative and collective expertise. Additionally, we

acknowledge that relationships and resources have the potential to positively shape the work of

educators and the tasks that we cannot accomplish individually. In conclusion, by developing

SECL practices in districts and schools, adults will grow their professional knowledge, vision

and actions will align more coherently, and shared responsibility will build organizational

capacity. Ultimately, district and school-based leaders and staff will benefit the students they

teach and support.

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Appendix A

DISTRICT LEADER INTERVIEWS
Social and Emotional Leadership Practices that Shape Districts and Schools
Interview Protocol and Notetaking Form

Researcher (to be read to participants): Hi, my name is (insert) and we are here today as part of our dissertation as doctoral candidates at Boston College. Our overarching research questions are, "*How do leadership practices model SEL competencies for adults, or promote the social and emotional learning of teachers and other staff?" and "How do these leadership practices shape a district and its schools?"* We will be asking questions related to general leadership practices, collective efficacy, adult collaboration, teacher resilience and well-being, and the work of mental health staff.

ALL INFORMATION PROVIDED WILL BE TREATED AS CONFIDENTIAL. The information from responses to this semi-structured interview will be compiled by the dissertation team for their analyses. Any data, including race/ethnicity and gender, that is not currently available to the public will only be used in aggregated form that cannot be used to discern the identity of any participant in any report or presentation or in the public use file that will be made available to the public at the conclusion of this study.

Before starting we would like to ***get your consent*** to participate in this study and permission to record this session. *(Get signature on consent form.)* Thank you. *(Once recording starts.)* The recording has started. Thank you for allowing us to record this session. Before we start, do you have any questions?

[Interviewer: Prior to starting the script, ensure that all questions re: consent form & study have been thoroughly addressed]

Thank you for sharing your time so we can learn more about your experiences in the Westlake Public Schools. As a quick reminder, we've allocated 45 minutes for this conversation and a questionnaire that we will ask you to complete at the end of the interview. Please let us know if you have any questions during our conversation. We just want to remind you that there are no right or wrong answers, we only wish to understand your unique insight. All of your information and responses will be confidential and used for research purposes. No individual information or identifying information will be shared. At any point in our interview, you can end our conversation or take a break for any reason. If for any reason, the interview questions do not apply to you, or you wish to skip any question, you may do so.

Your input is important to us and we want you to feel comfortable during this interview so please ask any clarifying questions you may have or let us know if you don't understand a question.

QUESTIONS (Look for leadership practices – what leaders *think and do*)

1. What is the role of leadership in your district/school? In other words, what do leaders *do*?

2. a) In your district/school, who supports your work and *what type of things do they do* to show support?
   b) Whom do you support? What do *you do* to show support?

3. a) How are collective and/or individual goals established in your district/school?
   b) What do you *do* to support this process?

4. How do you *show* support for collaboration in your district/school?

5. What do you *do* to *actively encourage* your staff's professional growth and development?

6. How have SEL initiatives been implemented in your district/school in the last 3 years?
   Probe: What drove the district to implement a district-wide SEL initiative(s)?
   Probe: In comparison to other district-wide (school-wide) initiatives, how would you prioritize the SEL initiative(s)?
   Probe: Is SEL part of the district's strategic plan (school's strategic/improvement plan)?

7. What opportunities were available for district and school personnel to come together to make sense of the implementation process and expectations?
   Probe: Assuming there were both formal communications (memos, emails, meetings) and informal communications, what were the most effective platforms to assist school leaders in making sense of the change process?
   Probe: What is your perception of how school-based leaders understand, and make sense of, the SEL initiative?

8. What was your understanding of SEL prior to the rollout of the initiative by the district?
   Probe: What, if any, prior training or professional development have you participated in outside of the district?
   Probe: Please describe the focus of the training or professional development (type of professional development; SEL and leadership vs. SEL for students)

9. How was the implementation plan communicated to school-based leaders?
   Probe: What rationale/vision/goals for the SEL initiative were communicated to you?
   Probe: What strategies were used during implementation to help school-based leaders understand the purpose of the initiative?
   Probe: What strategies were used during implementation to assist school-based leaders with making sense of the initiative?
   Probe: How would you measure "full implementation" of the SEL initiative in your school?
   Probe: How many schools would you characterize as having fully implemented the SEL initiative?

10. How has the district-wide SEL initiative informed your leadership practices?
    Probe: Can you describe any changes to your leadership practices since the implementation of the SEL initiative(s) in your district/building?
    Probe: How do you support the SEL initiative in your role as a district leader/school-based leader?
    Probe: What leadership practices have you found most effective during and after implementation of the SEL initiative(s)?

Appendix B

SCHOOL-BASED LEADER INTERVIEWS
Social and Emotional Leadership Practices that Shape Districts and Schools
Interview Protocol

Researcher (to be read to participants): Hi, my name is (insert) and we are here today as part of our dissertation as doctoral candidates at Boston College. Our overarching research questions are, "*How do leadership practices model SEL competencies for adults, or promote the social and emotional learning of teachers and other staff?" and "How do these leadership practices shape a district and its schools?"* We will be asking questions related to general leadership practices, collective efficacy, adult collaboration, teacher resilience and well-being, and the work of mental health staff.

ALL INFORMATION PROVIDED WILL BE TREATED AS CONFIDENTIAL. The information from responses to this semi-structured interview will be compiled by the dissertation team for their analyses. Any data, including race/ethnicity and gender, that is not currently available to the public will only be used in aggregated form that cannot be used to discern the identity of any participant in any report or presentation or in the public use file that will be made available to the public at the conclusion of this study.

Before starting we would like to ***get your consent*** to participate in this study and permission to record this session. *(Get signature on consent form.)* Thank you. *(Once recording starts.)* The recording has started. Thank you for allowing us to record this session. Before we start, do you have any questions?

[Interviewer: Prior to starting the script, ensure that all questions re: consent form & study have been thoroughly addressed]

Thank you for sharing your time so we can learn more about your experiences in the Westlake Public Schools. As a quick reminder, we've allocated 45 minutes for this conversation and a questionnaire that we will ask you to complete at the end of the interview. Please let us know if you have any questions during our conversation. We just want to remind you that there are no right or wrong answers, we only wish to understand your unique insight. All of your information and responses will be confidential and used for research purposes. No individual information or identifying information will be shared. At any point in our interview, you can end our conversation or take a break for any reason. If for any reason, the interview questions do not apply to you, or you wish to skip any question, you may do so.

Your input is important to us and we want you to feel comfortable during this interview so please ask any clarifying questions you may have or let us know if you don't understand a question.

QUESTIONS (Look for leadership practices – what leaders *think and do*)

1. What is the role of leadership in your school? In other words, what do leaders *do*?

2. a) In your district/school, who supports your work and *what type of things do they do* to show support?
    b) Whom do you support? What do *you do* to show support?

3. a) How are collective and/or individual goals established in your district/school?
    b) What do you *do* to support this process?

4. How do you *show* support for collaboration in your district/school?

5. What do you *do* to *actively encourage* your staff's professional growth and development?

6. Describe what you *do* in meetings.
(Exposes what the interviewee thinks a leader does in the context of collaboration.)

7.   What do you see as the benefits of collaboration in your district/school?
(Exposes the interviewee's perceptions of collaborative time)

8. What do you do that contributes to your staff's feelings of success?

9. What opportunities do you provide for your staff to learn from their colleagues?

10. What and/or who drives you to change your practice?
(Probe: Can ask specifically about adults.)

11. Are there things that you do that promote social and emotional learning opportunities for staff? If so, what are they?

12. What types of things seem to cause the most stress for teachers and what do you do, if anything, to support teachers when they are feeling stressed?

13. Do you engage teachers in decision making that is related to the work that they do in this school? If so, how?

14. How is feedback delivered and how open are teachers to receiving feedback?

15. What are the primary responsibilities of mental health staff? How is this determined? By whom? When? How would you change this?

16. How do you manage the mental health staff's work and/or interactions with students and how does the work impact students?

Appendix C

SCHOOL-BASED STAFF INTERVIEWS
Social and Emotional Leadership Practices that Shape Districts and Schools
Interview Protocol

Researcher (to be read to participants): Hi, my name is (insert) and we are here today as part of our dissertation as doctoral candidates at Boston College. Our overarching research questions are, "*How do leadership practices model SEL competencies for adults, or promote the social and emotional learning of teachers and other staff?" and "How do these leadership practices shape a district and its schools?"* We will be asking questions related to general leadership practices, collective efficacy, adult collaboration, teacher resilience and well-being, and the work of mental health staff.

ALL INFORMATION PROVIDED WILL BE TREATED AS CONFIDENTIAL. The information from responses to this semi-structured interview will be compiled by the dissertation team for their analyses. Any data, including race/ethnicity and gender, that is not currently available to the public will only be used in aggregated form that cannot be used to discern the identity of any participant in any report or presentation or in the public use file that will be made available to the public at the conclusion of this study.

Before starting we would like to ***get your consent*** to participate in this study and permission to record this session. *(Get signature on consent form.)* Thank you. *(Once recording starts.)* The recording has started. Thank you for allowing us to record this session. Before we start, do you have any questions?

[Interviewer: Prior to starting the script, ensure that all questions re: consent form & study have been thoroughly addressed]

Thank you for sharing your time so we can learn more about your experiences in the Westlake Public Schools. As a quick reminder, we've allocated 45 minutes for this conversation and a questionnaire that we will ask you to complete at the end of the interview. Please let us know if you have any questions during our conversation. We just want to remind you that there are no right or wrong answers, we only wish to understand your unique insight. All of your information and responses will be confidential and used for research purposes. No individual information or identifying information will be shared. At any point in our interview, you can end our conversation or take a break for any reason. If for any reason, the interview questions do not apply to you, or you wish to skip any question, you may do so.

Your input is important to us and we want you to feel comfortable during this interview so please ask any clarifying questions you may have or let us know if you don't understand a question.

QUESTIONS (Look for leadership practices – what leaders *think and do*)

1. What is the role of leadership in your school? In other words, what do leaders *do*?

2. a) In your district/school, who supports your work and *what type of things do they do* to show support?
    b) Whom do you support? What do *you do* to show support?

3. a) How are collective and/or individual goals established in your district/school?
    b) What do leaders *do* to support this process?

4. How do leaders *show* support for collaboration in your district/school?

5. What do leaders *do* to *actively encourage* your professional growth and development?

6. Describe what leaders (i.e., teachers or administrators) *do* in meetings.
(Exposes what the interviewee thinks a leader does in the context of collaboration)

7. What do you see as the benefits of your collaboration?
(Exposes the interviewee's perceptions of his/her collaborative time.)

8. What do leaders do that contribute to your feelings of success?

9. What opportunities do leaders provide to learn from colleagues?

10. What and/or who drives you to change your practice?
(*Probe: can ask specifically about adults.)*

11. Are there things that your leader does that promote social and emotional learning opportunities for staff? If so, what are they?

12. What causes you the most stress, and what if anything, does your leader do to support you in managing this stress?

13. Does your leader engage you in decision making that is related to the work that you do in this school? If so, how?

14. How do you receive feedback from your school leader and how do you usually feel after receiving feedback?

15. What are the primary responsibilities of mental health staff? How is this determined? By whom? When? How would you change this?

16. How does the principal manage the mental health staff's work and/or interactions with students and how does the work impact students?

Appendix D

BC DIP SEL Coding Manual
Codes that focus on leadership practices and support, interview questions, social and emotional learning competencies and skills, adult collaboration, collective efficacy, and resilience and well-being

While entering into the initial coding process, we began our coding manual to define the SEL skills related to each SEL competency and came to an "aha realization" that CASEL may have purposefully selected different verbs when outlining each of the skills. No verb is repeated. We expect to use these verbs to support our findings and discussions when thinking about our research questions related to LEADERSHIP PRACTICES - what leaders think and do! Out of the 29 SEL skills identified, ***23 skills are action oriented*** and ***6 skills are descriptive.***

General Codes

Parent code	Child code	Definition
Leadership Practices	THINK	To have as an intention or opinion
	DO	To perform or execute
Leaders Support *(reoccurring themes)*	LISTENING	To hear something with thoughtful intention
	TIME	A measurable period when an activity or thought exists; *Schedules
	TRUST	Assured reliance on someone to be honest, truthful, good
NON-SEL		A leadership practice that does not model one of the CASEL competencies

Interview Question Codes

Parent code	Child code	Interview question number	
Interview Questions	School-based leaders	SBL #1 SBL #2 SBL #3 SBL #4 SBL #5 SBL #6 SBL #7 SBL #8	SBL #9 SBL #10 SBL #11 SBL #12 SBL #13 SBL #14 SBL #15 SBL #16
	School-based staff	SBS #1 SBS #2 SBS #3 SBS #4 SBS #5 SBS #6 SBS #7 SBS #8	SBS #9 SBS #10 SBS #11 SBS #12 SBS #13 SBS #14 SBS #15 SBS #16

*Note: The coding of transcripts needs to identify leadership practices that **model (i.e., display and/or demonstrate)** or **promote (i.e., actively encourage)** SEL competencies.*

CASEL Competencies (5) and Skills (29)

Parent code	Child code
Self-awareness	Accurate self-perception
	Sense of self-confidence
	Self-efficacy
	Recognizes strengths
	Identifies own emotions and impact on others

Parent code	Child code
Self-management	**Controls** impulses
	Manages stress
	Self-motivated
	Self-discipline
	Sets goals
	Exhibits organizational skills

Parent code	Child code	Definition
SOCIAL AWARENESS	**RESPECTS OTHERS**	● Shows respect to others and consideration for them *praise or affirmation
	SHOWS EMPATHY	● Demonstrates perspective taking an/or affective understanding
	APPRECIATES DIVERSITY	● Recognizes the importance of and understands inclusivity as it relates to race and other marginalized groups
	ABLE TO CONSIDER OTHERS' PERSPECTIVES	● Works to understand what others are experiencing and thinking
	UNDERSTANDS SOCIAL AND ETHICAL NORMS	● Perceives the importance of and has an awareness of how to act and interact with and around others for the common good
	RECOGNIZES FAMILY, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS	● Identifies and acknowledges available resources
RELATIONSHIP SKILLS	**WORKS COOPERATIVELY WITH OTHERS**	● Interacts collegially with colleagues
	RESOLVES CONFLICTS	● Works with others to improve challenging situations
	COMMUNICATES CLEARLY	● Deliver, share or exchange information, news, or ideas in understandable ways
	ENGAGES SOCIALLY WITH DIVERSE INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS	● Interacts w/ individuals of different races and/or other marginalized groups
	COLLABORATES WITH TEAM MEMBERS	● Meets and works jointly with colleagues and supervisors
	LISTENS WELL	● Gives one's attention to someone
	SEEKS AND OFFERS HELP WHEN NEEDED	● Receives and gives support when needed
RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING	**MAKES ETHICAL CHOICES**	● Acts with and makes decisions with moral principles
	IDENTIFIES AND SOLVES PROBLEMS	● Finds and deals with challenging situations and figures out ways to improve them. *technical problems, for example
	REFLECTIVE	● Makes thoughtful decisions
	ANALYZES SITUATIONS ACCURATELY	● Examines methodically and in detail within a specific context for the purpose of interpretation; *adaptive problems, for example
	EVALUATES CONSEQUENCES IN CONSIDERATION OF THE WELL-BEING OF OTHERS	● Assesses what could happen and how it could impact others for positive outcomes; *people-oriented, relationship-oriented

DIP Focus Areas

Parent code	Parent code	Parent code
Sensemaking	Teacher resilience and well being	Mental health staff

Parent code	Child code	Definition
COLLECTIVE EFFICACY	**MASTERY EXPERIENCES**	• When you feel that something you did works
	VICARIOUS EXPERIENCES	• Seeing/hearing someone else have a successful experience • Sharing a successful idea
	SOCIAL PERSUASION	• Receiving feedback from someone else that causes you to reflect or change practice
	AFFECTIVE STATES	• Actions that make you feel a certain way
ADULT COLLABORATION	**POSITIVE ATTITUDES**	• Supportive, trusting • Committed, motivated • Understanding of collaborative roles • Accountability to team • Shared philosophy/goals
	TEAM PROCESS	• Communications b/w colleagues • Clear, formal processes • Collective effort over individual wants
	PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	• Clarity of focus (standards, expectations, values) • Teacher voices in planning • Connections b/w activities and classrooms • Teachers and administrators share expertise • Ongoing activities, flexibly scheduled • Community building climate
	LEADERSHIP	• Shared leadership • Supportive climate • Volunteer for leadership roles • Effort is recognized • Participants hold themselves to high expectations
	RESOURCES	• Targets needs • Ongoing assessment • Participant initiated
	BENEFITS	• Evident • Lived and prominent • Public recognition
RESILIENCE AND WELL-BEING	**COLLABORATION**	Two or more staff members and/or leaders and staff members coming together to: • support each other or seek support from each other • problem solve • produce or create something (i.e. policies, curriculum

		• share work, ideas, successes and frustrations
	RECOGNITION AND FEEDBACK	• Acknowledge the contributions and efforts of staff • Share staff contributions with others • Celebrated successes • Notice tings that made a difference for colleagues and/or students • Provide positive feedback during evaluation process • Offer constructive feedback to support growth in a thoughtful way
	INCLUSIVE DECISION MAKING	• Seek staff input • Listen to suggestions and ideas • Include all stakeholders in conversations related to decisions • Engage in constructive discourse to make better decisions • Use provided suggestions • Make decision making process transparent
	WORK/LIFE BALANCE AND SELF-CARE	• Allow staff to attend important family events • Encourage care of children and family members • Recognize family needs during crisis or trauma • Model work/life balance • Provide opportunities to engage in self-care at work • Offer workshops and training related to stress reduction and well-being • Promote growth mindset

Boston College PSAP

Social and Emotional Leadership Practices that Shape Districts and Schools

- Michele Conners
- Mark Ito
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- Geoff Rose
- Donna Tobin
- October 6, 2019

Defining Social and Emotional Learning

Dusenbury, Calin, Domitrovich, and Weissberg (2015) define Social and Emotional Learning as:

The process through which children and adults acquire 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. Social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student and citizen (p. 2).

SEL competencies	Definition of competency	Examples of skills with the competency
Self-awareness	Recognizing one's emotions, thoughts and values and how they influence behaviors, and identifying and cultivating one's strengths and limitations, and positive qualities	Accurate self-perception, sense of self-confidence, self-efficacy, recognizes strengths, identifies own emotions and impact on others
Self-management	Monitoring and regulating one's emotions, thoughts and behaviors in different situations and establishing and working toward achieving positive goals	Controls impulses, manages stress, self-motivated, self-discipline, sets goals, exhibits organizational skills
Social awareness	Understanding the thoughts and feelings of others and appreciating the value of human differences, understanding social and ethical norms for behavior and recognizing family, school, and community resources and supports.	Respects others, shows empathy, appreciates diversity, considers others' perspectives, understands social and ethical norms, recognizes family, school and community resources and supports
Relationship skills	Establishing and maintaining healthy, rewarding relationships with diverse individual and groups based on cooperation, listening, support, effective (clear) communication, conflict resolution, and an ability to resist inappropriate social pressure	Works cooperatively with others, resolves conflicts, communicates (clearly) effectively, engages socially with diverse individuals and groups, collaborates with team members, listens well, seeks and offers help when needed
Responsible decision-making	Making constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. Evaluating consequences of various actions in consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.	Makes ethical choices, identifies and solves problems, reflective, analyzes situations accurately, evaluates consequences in consideration of the well-being of others

Table 1. Social and emotional learning: competencies, definitions and associated skills. Adapted from "What does evidence based instruction in social and emotional learning actually look like in practice?: A brief on findings from CASEL's program reviews" by Dusenbury, L., Calin, S., Domitrovich, C.., & Weissberg, R. P., 2015, *A Publication of the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning,* Chicago: CASEL; and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2017, retrieved from https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Competencies.pdf

Appendix E

Thematic Analysis Sample – Document review

Text from document	Condensed meaning unit	Code	Theme
District Goal 1: "…will ensure that every graduate…integrate social, emotional, and wellness support	district goal referencing social and emotional wellbeing	language / talk/ communication	clear articulation
District Goal 2: "…will…build capacity of a …staff to be excellent teachers and administrators by providing high quality professional development…"	district goal to provide professional development	language / talk/ communication	clear articulation
FY20 Superintendent's Budget Message – "The School Department is focused on building safe and supportive schools for all students. Teachers support students growing social-emotional skills…" (TOC 4; 14)	district focus on safe and supportive schools; teachers supporting students' social emotional skills	language / talk/ communication	clear articulation
"The District continues to make professional development widely available to staff." (TOC 4; p. 16)	district provides professional development	processing in order to act	PD
"…students and staff coming together to support each other and to create safe spaces where young people can grow emotionally as well as academically."	staff come together to support each other	social process/interaction	collaboration
"…committed to helping every student achieve academic, emotional, social and vocational success…"	provide opportunity to achieve academic, emotional, social, and vocational success	language / talk/ communication	clear articulation
"…ensure every child has the opportunity to achieve academic, emotional, social and vocational success…"	provide opportunity to achieve academic, emotional, social, and vocational success	language / talk/ communication	clear articulation
"…focusing on social emotional learning and trauma sensitive practices to support the personal safety and emotional health of our students for several years."	district focus on social emotional learning	language / talk/ communication	clear articulation
"…our efforts to provide all the elements needed to give every child the opportunity to achieve academic, emotional, social and vocational success…"	provide opportunity to achieve academic, emotional, social, and vocational success	language / talk/ communication	clear articulation
"We are on our way to providing the additional information our teachers and staff need in order to proactively support students."	providing information for staff on how to support students	language / talk/ communication	clear articulation

Appendix F

Content Analysis Process – Interview transcripts

Meaning unit	Condensed meaning unit	Code	Category	Theme
build relationships first	build relationships	actions taken	relationship skills	RQ 1
we're all like this committed RC, and as I mentioned a couple of years ago I asked her to please consider, you know, declaring yet unambiguously that this is what we're up to, and that she didn't do it and she's sniffing around this.	We are committed to Responsive Classroom, but the district hasn't committed to it	language/ talk/ communication	program	RQ 2
I have a history with it and this was my first year and so, you know, so I have been a committed supporter of Responsive Classroom practices	previous history with Responsive classroom	processing in order to act	trust	RQ 1
Significant time is being spent on the ways we will create an environment that supports the social and emotional health of the sixth grade students.	time spent on creating an environment that supports the SEL of students	actions taken	responsible decision making	RQ 1
a group of people that were also doing safe and supportive schools.	Safe and Supportive schools	actions taken	program	RQ 2
And I felt if they entrusted me with their, their personal lives, they were developing some sort of trust with me.	fostering/building trust	actions taken	trust	RQ 1
[the district] has been offering graduate level courses from the Lesley Institute for Trauma Sensitivity to teachers, teaching assistants, administrators, related service providers, and support staff as elementary principles have never been to a PD together.	PD in Trauma Sensitivity	actions taken	PD	RQ 1
None of really have been to the same PD together. And we've got curriculum leaders and even like our title one grant person. Like, they go to PD all the time.	elementary principals have not attended PD together as a cohort of leaders	processing in order to act	collaboration	RQ 1

Appendix G

Content Analysis Process: CASEL Competencies

Meaning Unit	Condensed Meaning Unit	CASEL
"Significant time is being spent on the ways we will create an environment that supports the social and emotional health of the students."	time spent on creating an environment that supports the SEL of students	RDM
communication piece because I just keep coming back to it over and over again it's like you could do all this work and it could be wonderful but if it's staying like within just the people within the group, right, then. What good is it?	communication; learning needs to move beyond just the people in the group; share the learning	RS
[school-based leader] has hosted multiple PTO meetings and Principal Coffees where families, parents, and educators have the opportunity to share both their wisdom and experience from raising young children, to questions about parenting during a complex time of social change.	principal meets regularly with families	SA
for leaders to mirror the kind of work that we want teachers to do with children, it's really tough because I end up having to coach and give feedback that's going to be really challenging, and maybe even upsetting to these grownups, about how they're talking to kids.	leaders need to mirror what we want teachers to be doing with children	SA
I think it's just to have keep that perspective of how I'm feeling is probably how the teachers are feeling.	recognizing that the way I am feeling, the teachers are likely feeling as well	SM
I think that we all have an understanding that the teachers need the support in order to do that best work for kids so it's in our best interest for the children, to take care of the teachers	we understand that teachers need support to do the work that is best for kids	RDM
I want to have more of a we than an I approach and I don't want to be seen as dictating, top down because I feel like that you can make decisions quicker, but it won't stay.	Decisions are made collectively, not top down	RDM

Appendix H

District Goals and School Improvement Objectives

District Goal One: Student Achievement

The [school district] will ensure that every graduate is prepared to enter and complete a post-secondary degree program, pursue a career, and be an active citizen in an ever-changing world by offering a rigorous, comprehensive, standards-based and data-driven K-12 system of curriculum, instruction, and assessment **that integrates social, emotional and wellness support.**

School Improvement Objective One: Students will develop their social and emotional skills through age-appropriate SEL instruction…

- Responsive Classroom; complete training/implement - Responsive Advisory; Creation of Social Emotional Wellness Team; Build a schedule that supports…social emotional achievement; Define the members and the purpose of a social emotional wellness team
- Students will acquire knowledge, attitudes, skills necessary to recognize and manage their emotions, …through evidence-based social and emotional learning." Will receive direct instruction in mindfulness, social emotional competencies (Open Circle, Steps to Respect, Second Steps, Responsive Classroom)
- Collaborate amongst all stakeholders in order to support student learning in…social emotional support; Continue to prioritize social emotional health and well being amongst staff and students; Continue to implement SEL practices into each content area throughout the academic day (Responsive Classroom, Tools of the Mind, Growth Mindset) and share tools/strategies/ language with families; 2-3 faculty meetings to be run by teacher leaders on SEL from educator PD
- Learning walks, feedback on Responsive Classroom practices; External audit of Responsive Classroom practice
- Increase number of staff trained in Responsive Classroom; Continuation of "Mindfulness Moments"; Restructure schedule to ensure period 1 is dedicated to Morning Meeting and SEL instruction only; Each classroom will have a dedicated "Calming Corner."; Formation of a school SEL team
- Safe and Supportive School team will continue to implement effective response to behavior.

District Goal Two: Staff Excellence and Professional Development

The [school district] will recruit, hire, retain, and build the capacity of a diverse staff to be excellent teachers and administrators by **providing high quality professional** development aligned to needs, instructional support, coaching, and an evaluation framework that fosters continuous improvement.

School Improvement Objective Two: Professional learning for educators will reinforce…social emotional competencies and pedagogy…

- Staff will become well versed in social emotional needs of students; Staff will attend RC training
- Teachers and staff will participate in 10 hours of PD and work with SEL Director

- Continue to develop expertise in Responsive Classroom, Growth Mindset, and Tools of the Mind during PD for faculty and staff
- Continue development of a safe and supportive school, principal and faculty member to collaborate with district team during monthly meetings
- Responsive Classroom training for new staff and those not yet trained; Responsive Classroom book groups; Support staff members participation in district offered Trauma Informed Practices, course 4