

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS IN A  
SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

by

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SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

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## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

### **Abstract**

Research demonstrates students experience higher levels of engagement and less behavioral disruptions resulting in higher academic achievement when teachers incorporate social-emotional learning competencies into their classrooms (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012; Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2016; Yoder, 2014). As such, the Manalapan-Englishtown Regional School District has employed norms and values related to the incorporation of social-emotional learning competencies. This dissertation sought to describe elementary and middle school teachers' self-reported beliefs and practices about social emotional learning in this suburban school district using quantitative research methods. This study used a self-report questionnaire to collect baseline data. Aligned with the norm for descriptive studies, central tendency statistics and standard deviation statistics were calculated for each research question. Additionally, a logistic regression and a chi square analysis were completed to determine a relationship between respondents' beliefs and practices. This quantitative descriptive study also sought to examine if teachers' self-reported beliefs and practices varied based on grade level, content area, level of education, or years of professional experience. This further analysis allowed for personalized professional development sessions based on patterns identified by background data. This analysis will inform the development of a professional development program targeting the integration of social-emotional learning competencies.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

### **Dedication**

To my amazing husband, thank you for standing by my side while I spent hours reading and writing!

To my dedicated colleagues, thank you for being a constant source of inspiration throughout this journey! I am fortunate to be part of such a motivated and passionate group of administrators.

To all the MERS educators who took time to participate in my study, thank you for dedicating your valuable time to contribute to my research. Your commitment to our district is unmatched and deserves to be recognized in this study!

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Since 2001, No Child Left Behind has led to the expectation of improved academic achievement for all students and has imposed consequences for districts that fail to meet these expectations (Klem & Connell, 2004). For many public schools across the country, this increased focus on student achievement has been at the expense of teacher-student relationships and the social-emotional needs of students (Osterman, 2000). However, Osterman (2000) concluded that one of the best predictors of student's efforts and engagement is the interpersonal relationship between teacher and student. Additional research has shown that students experience higher levels of engagement and less behavioral disruptions resulting in higher academic achievement when teachers incorporate the development of students' social-emotional learning competencies into their classrooms (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012; Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2016; Yoder, 2014).

Social-emotional competencies include the development of the skills, behaviors, and attitudes needed by students to effectively manage their cognitive and social behavior (Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2014). Specifically, social-emotional learning competencies include: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills (Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2017). The development of these skills, behaviors, and attitudes help foster academic achievement in students (Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2014). This study focused on teachers' competency for developing students' social emotional learning and the organizational norms that foster these beliefs and practices. Specifically, this study examined the beliefs and practices of teachers used to promote positive teacher-student relationships that in turn foster students' social-emotional learning. Teacher beliefs and practices included: teacher caring and support, the use of respectful language, the

implementation of learner centered practices, possessing high expectations for students, teacher's knowledge of students, and the capacity to promote a sense of belonging among students.

Research has shown the importance of educating the "whole child" and the influence of including social-emotional learning competencies into classrooms to increase student's academic success (Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2014).

Academic benefits associated with the integration of social-emotional learning competencies are increased when partnered with positive teacher- student relationships (Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2014). In addition to the use of respectful language and high academic expectations, a warm and supportive teacher relationship is crucial to developing students' social-emotional learning competencies (Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2014). Teacher-student relationships are experiences that result through the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional interactions between a teacher and their students (Pianta, Hamre & Allen, 1999). These relationships, which are one specific social-emotional learning competency, have led to increased academic achievement as students experience increased levels of motivation, higher levels of engagement, and less behavior disruptions (Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2014). Multiple studies have cited associations between high quality teacher-student interactions and children's academic achievement in both elementary schools (Maldonado-Carreno & Votruba-Drzal, 2011; McCormick, O'Connor, Cappella, & McClowry, 2013) and secondary schools (Allen et al., 2013; Ellerbrock et al., 2015; Eryilmaz, 2014; Hofferber, Eckes, & Wilde, 2014; Juvonen, 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004). As a result, a school district must closely examine classroom environments to increase academic achievement amongst students.

In alignment with the research on the importance of integrating social-emotional learning competencies, specifically fostering positive teacher-student relationships, the Manalapan-Englishtown Regional School District adopted the Model Schools principles. In 2015, after attending the Model Schools Conference, the district embarked on an ongoing initiative to embed the Model Schools principles across the district. One such principle is the implementation of the Rigor/Relevance Framework, a model for planning and executing lessons that are not only rigorous but are relevant for the students (Daggett, 2014). Second, the district focused on transforming the district's culture. District norms were reestablished and administrators began to encourage collaboration, community, and teamwork (Daggett, 2014). Lastly, the district focused on relationships (Daggett, 2014). District administration mended relationships between union leadership and school administrators. More importantly, the district established expectations regarding teacher-student relationships. Staff handbooks were revised to include: greeting students at the door, smiling and greeting students in the hallway, and getting to know about students' interests and learning styles. These new norms and values have been embedded across all eight buildings. As such, this study examined how well the district's teachers are implementing these new norms and values.

### **Problem Statement of the study and Research questions**

As a former Central Office administrator, I supervised the classroom practices of teachers employed by the Manalapan-Englishtown Regional School District. Through my role as Supervisor of Instruction, I have observed over 1,500 classrooms spanning grades Kindergarten through Eighth grade. Using the Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2013), I have observed classroom interactions that appear beneficial to student's academic success and others that seem prohibitive to academic achievement. Upon formally visiting three to four classrooms per day

and countless informal observations, teacher-student relationships and students' social-emotional learning needs have become a specific area of interest.

Over the course of a day, I was often fortunate to observe the same student across four core content areas with four different instructors. I was able to observe how individual students behaved in a variety of settings, academically and behaviorally. For some students, this behavior did not vary between environments. However, other observations demonstrated stark contrasts in the student's actions, seemingly dependent on the teacher. One specific example still resonates with me today. One day, while serving as a building's substitute administrator, I noticed a familiar face from my days as an elementary school teacher in the district. This student had transitioned from a happy, well-adjusted elementary school student to a disaffected foster child now in seventh grade. I learned he was recently sent to a foster home after his aunt relinquished custody. He was visibly disconnected from his peers and many of his teachers. School administrators attempted to establish peer relationships for him through extra curricular activities. We noticed he thrived in computer class and social studies, two environments in which the teachers established a positive relationship. Both teachers called him by name, asked him questions about his day, and made an effort to connect to him on a personal level.

On the contrary, his science teacher was uninterested in trying to forge a relationship. One day while serving as the building's substitute administrator, this child was dismissed from class early and told to wait in the office until the conclusion of the class period. When I asked why, the teacher responded, "If he is not willing to do work, then I am not willing to teach him." The student was disengaged and this teacher did not feel obligated to engage the student in the day's lesson. After class, I sat with the teacher and told her candidly about his past. We discussed how he must feel knowing his aunt chose for him to live in a foster home. I also

shared how I remember him from elementary school. Her perspective changed and she suddenly saw the need to develop a relationship with this child. She started to engage with this child more personally. She called him by name. She made eye contact. She let him help her with her computer since that was an area of interest for him. I still wonder why it took our conversation for her to invest in fostering a positive teacher-student relationship with this student.

Subsequently, I have become interested in the influence of teachers' beliefs and practices on students' social emotional learning.

This study focused on the teachers' beliefs and practices associated with developing students' social-emotional learning competencies. Furthermore, it examined the level of integration of the district's organizational norms and values regarding the Model Schools principles. In this study, I conducted a survey of elementary and middle school teachers' beliefs about social-emotional learning and their self-reported practices related to fostering students' social-emotional learning in a suburban school district in New Jersey. Lastly, this quantitative descriptive study examined if teachers' self-reported beliefs and practices varied based on grade level, content area, level of education, or years of professional experience. The sub-questions posed provided a more detailed analysis of teacher's self-reported beliefs and practices regarding social-emotional learning.

Additional research questions further examined teacher's beliefs regarding the implementation of the district's organizational norms and their use of professional development practices to further these norms. This further analysis will allow for the development of personalized professional development sessions based on patterns identified by gender, content, teacher's qualifications, or years of professional development.

### **Research questions**

1. What are Manalapan-Englishtown Regional School's teacher's self-reported beliefs of social-emotional learning?
  - a. Do teacher's self-reported beliefs vary by grade?
  - b. Do teacher's self-reported beliefs vary by content area?
  - c. Do teacher's self-reported beliefs vary by teacher's qualifications?
  - d. Do teacher's self-reported beliefs vary by teacher's years of professional experience?
2. How do organizational practices affect teachers reported implementation of social-emotional learning in the classroom?
3. What are respondent's beliefs regarding professional development on social-emotional learning?
4. What self-reported practices are used by Manalapan-Englishtown Regional School's teachers to foster students' social emotional learning?
  - a. Do teacher's self-reported practices vary by grade?
  - b. Do teacher's self-reported practices vary by content area?
  - c. Do teacher's self-reported practices vary by teacher's qualifications?
  - d. Do teacher's self-reported practices vary by teacher's years of professional experience?

The data collected will be utilized to develop a targeted intervention for teachers, a professional development program on fostering positive teacher-student relationships to build to students' social emotional learning competencies. Research has determined teacher-student interactions can be improved through meaningful professional development (Allen et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2014; Mikami et al., 2011). Specifically, the use My Teaching Partner Secondary

Program (MTP-S), an empirically validated web-based professional development program that targets teacher- student interactions (Allen et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2014; Mikami et al., 2011) was deemed a “cost-effective” intervention for targeting teacher-student relationships. As such, an intervention will be administered at the district’s Back to School Professional Development Institute. The professional development session will focus on the three of the four tiers of quality youth development: interaction, a supportive environment, and a safe environment (Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2017). Teachers will be educated on creating a healthy environment in which students feel safe emotionally (Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2017). Furthermore, tools for building belonging and collaboration will enhance teacher-student interactions. Lastly, the importance of a warm welcome, active engagement, and encouragement will be emphasized as tools for creating a supportive environment.

### **Overview of methodology**

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design. A quantitative descriptive research design collects and analyzes quantitative data to develop a “generalizable, statistical representation of a sample’s behavior ...” (Gall et al., 2015; 74). Quantitative data was collected using an electronic survey to examine teachers’ self-reported beliefs and practices related to social-emotional learning. Survey data provided me with a “numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population” (Creswell, 2014, p. 13). The results will be used to construct an intervention program on social-emotional learning for teachers in this suburban school district.

This study aimed to establish a baseline of the school district’s staff’s self-reported beliefs related to social-emotional learning and their self- reported practices used to foster positive teacher-student relationships and students’ social emotional learning. As such, teachers

were asked to complete an electronic questionnaire. The questionnaire was based on items from the Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale (Brackett et al, 2012) and Part A of the Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies: A Tool for Teachers (Yoder, 2014). Background data was also collected to address these teacher variables (see Table 3).

### **Definition of key terms**

*Social-emotional learning competencies* include the development of the skills, behaviors, and attitudes needed by students to effectively manage their cognitive and social behavior (Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2014).

*Teacher-student relationships* are experiences that result through the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional interactions between a teacher and their students (Pianta, Hamre & Allen, 1999).

*Interaction* is defined as the creation of shared perceptions and experiences, which include a sense of safety, respect, and trust, as well as narratives, rituals, and cultural norms (Yoder, 2017). These interactions can intentionally build social and emotional competencies as defined locally through direct instruction, modeling, and reinforcement (Yoder, 2017).

*Teacher caring and support* refers to demonstrating to each student that they are appreciated as individuals (Yoder, 2014; Yoder, 2017). Behaviors include making appropriate eye contact and greeting each student by name (Yoder, 2014; Yoder, 2017). This also includes addressing the academic and nonacademic concerns of each student (Yoder, 2014; Yoder, 2017).

*Respectful language* refers to how teachers speak to their students (Yoder, 2014; Yoder, 2017). This includes the use of encouraging and positive words when students display good work habits, high levels of effort, and good social skills (Yoder, 2014; Yoder, 2017).



*Learner centered practices* refers to the inclusion of student choice in classroom activities (Yoder, 2014). These activities promote meaningful discussion and collaboration (Yoder, 2014; Yoder, 2017).

*High expectations* include communicating behavioral and academic expectations in a manner that addresses students' individual needs and strengths (Yoder, 2014). An example includes giving students more challenging problems when they have mastered easier material (Yoder, 2017).

*Teacher knowledge of her students* includes using the interests and experiences of the students when teaching and following up with students after they share a problem or concern (Yoder, 2017).

*Capacity to promote a sense of belonging* includes creating structures in the classroom that allow students to feel like an important part of the community. This may include class sharing sessions or morning meetings (Yoder, 2014; Yoder, 2017).

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Research has shown the importance of educating the “whole child” and the impact of social-emotional learning competencies on increasing student’s academic success (Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2014). Research has also demonstrated academic gains for students in which social-emotional learning competencies were integrated into their classrooms daily (Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2014). Previously conducted empirical studies were reviewed and analyzed to provide background on the influence of teacher’s beliefs and practices on fostering students’ social-emotional learning competencies and their subsequent impact on students’ academic achievement. As such, teacher-student interactions were examined as specific teachers’ attitudes and practices were identified as critical in fostering the development of students’ social-emotional learning. These practices include: teacher caring and support, the use of respectful language, the implementation of learner centered practices, possessing high expectations, a teacher’s knowledge of her students, and a teacher’s capacity to promote a sense of belonging. Additionally, research exploring the use of intervention programs to modify ineffective classroom environments was also reviewed to inform the potential impact of creating a professional development program for teachers employed by the Manalapan-Englishtown Regional Schools. These studies will guide the methods used to conduct a quantitative descriptive study within the Manalapan-Englishtown Regional School District.

The search for relevant and scholarly research began with the quest of locating articles that were related to social-emotional learning and teacher/student relationships in the elementary school setting and the middle school setting. Using Rutgers partnership with the SAGE database, and full-text and peer-reviewed search filters, I plugged in the phrases, “teacher-

student relationships,” “academic achievement,” and “middle school.” However, only 44 articles were returned with this search. I expanded the search using the same filters but switched the search terms to “school climate” and middle school” or “adolescents.” This revised search resulted in 18,123 articles. I narrowed the results by adding “academic achievement” and/or “intellectual engagement” and/or “social emotional learning competences” which returned 1,713 articles. To ensure I had enough of a comprehensive research base, a secondary search replaced “middle school” with “elementary school” to obtain articles with the elementary school research setting. Subsequently, articles were categorized into three categories: elementary school, middle school, and high school or above. All articles placed in the third category were eliminated, since the Manalapan-Englishtown Regional School District only serves students in Kindergarten through eighth grade. Titles were then examined to ensure relevancy to the research questions; studies deemed irrelevant were eliminated from the collection of articles. Upon reviewing the articles collected, I noticed a common set of researchers: Richard Pianta, Joseph Allen, Marc Brackett, and Anne Gregory. I conducted a final search using each of the author’s names individually. These articles were later reviewed and organized by theme.

### **Teacher-Student Interactions: Elementary School**

Empirical studies in elementary school settings demonstrated a correlation between positive teacher-student interactions and students’ academic achievement. “The interactions and experiences that students have in school have enduring impact on their academic success and psychosocial adjustment...” (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997, p. 326). Quantitative studies on classroom climate in the elementary school setting further this claim citing that healthy teacher-student relationships lead to higher academic achievement (Downer, Stuhlman, Schweig, Martinez, & Ruzek, 2015; McCormick, 2013). Defining academic achievement as higher

average scores in literacy and math on The Woodcock-Johnson III (Maldonado-Carreno & Votruba-Drzal, 2011; Spilt et al., 2012), researchers used a variety of data collection measures related to family involvement, student behavior, cognitive ability, and teacher-student relationship quality to study the influence of positive teacher-student interactions on academic achievement. These data collection tools confirmed positive relationships have an impact on student behavior and students' motivation levels (Downer et al., 2015; Haynes et al., 1997; Maldonado-Carreno & Votruba-Drzal, 2011).

However, interpretations of classroom environment may vary among students, since student perspectives are subjective. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the relationship between student perceptions of teacher-student interactions and academic achievement.

“Teachers shape classroom experiences and provide opportunities for personal care, instruction, and encouragement” (Buehler, Fletcher, Johnston, & Weymouth, 2015, p. 75). These experiences are pivotal to increasing “students’ feeling of efficacy and agency” (Buehler et al., 2015, p. 75). Empirical studies have found that student’s perceptions of the learning environment were a contributing factor to academic success in elementary school settings (Buehler et al., 2015; Klem & Connell, 2004; Mainhard, 2015; Smart, 2014; Tosolt, 2010).

Mainhard (2015) determined that student’s perception of teacher support led to the adoption of a mastery approach by students. However, when students perceived teachers as having low agency, students developed avoidance goals (Mainhard, 2015). These findings corroborated earlier research by Klem and Connell. Klem and Connell’s (2004) survey data collected from six elementary schools found that students who perceive teachers as caring are more likely to be engaged in school, when the teacher also establishes high expectations for their students. Using the School Success Profile (SSP) to examine 390 students’ perceptions related

to satisfaction, engagement, and avoiding trouble, Buehler et al. (2015) determined that youth were more engaged when they perceived their classrooms to be positive learning environment. This finding is significant since disengagement has been linked to adverse academic performance in middle school students (Buehler et al., 2015; Klem & Connell, 2004). Overall, empirical studies confirm the influence of a teacher's attitude and practices on academic achievement.

### **Teacher-Student Interactions: Secondary Schools**

Several studies conducted in secondary school settings indicated a relationship between positive teacher-student interactions and academic achievement. As such, investigations demonstrated the need for supportive teacher-student relationships and positive classroom environments in middle schools (Allen, Pianta, Gregory, Mikami, & Lun, 2011; Allen et al., 2013; Ellerbrock et al., 2015; Eryilmaz, 2014; Juvonen, 2007). By building supportive teacher-student relationships, teachers foster classroom communities that breed care and advance academic achievement (Ellerbrock et al., 2015; Eryilmaz, 2014). Using the Positive and Negative Affects Scale, PANAS, the Big Five Inventory, and academic achievement scores, Eryilmaz (2014) employed a mixed methods study that identified "seven affective strategies" resultant in positive emotions among the students: "showing intimacy, implementing effective instructional methods, provided students with flow experience, showing positive personality traits, exhibiting happiness-oriented behavior, guiding students, and supporting perceived control of students" (Eryilmaz, 2014, p. 2056). With these seven affective strategies, students adapted to the middle school environment and adapted to their academic learning goals, experiencing increased academic success (Eryilmaz, 2014). Furthermore, these affective strategies fostered the development of students' social-emotional learning competencies, and subsequently, impacted academic success in middle school settings (Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland et al.,

2016; Yoder, 2014). However, empirical studies in the middle school setting are inconclusive in determining the influence of a caring classroom environment on students' academic success. Contradictory to the aforementioned research, Mahmood and Iqbal (2015) found a "negative significant correlation" between a student's psychological adjustment and academic achievement (p. 41). One potential explanation for the contradictory results is that the sample only included students from the upper or middle social class. Typically, students from upper or middle class homes experience higher academic achievement than students from lower socioeconomic status. An additional explanation is the gender differences found in Mahmood and Iqbal's (2015) study. Mahmood and Iqbal (2015) concluded that male students with psychological issues were less likely to do well in school, whereas, the female students did not experience negative academic effects based on their level of psychological adjustment. A third explanation is the data collection methodology. Although the Reynolds Adolescent Adjustment Screening Inventory, RAASI, is a reliable tool, students self reported the data which may have influenced the accuracy of the results (Mahmood & Iqbal, 2015). Further investigation is essential to determine the influence of teachers' beliefs and practices on student's social emotional development and academic achievement.

### **Student Motivation and the Lack of Misbehavior**

Positive teacher-student interactions were also linked to a reduction in student misbehavior and increased levels of motivation (Downer et al. 2015; Maldonado-Carreno & Votruba-Drzal, 2011; Wentzel, 2002). Using the CLASS-SR student reporting survey, Downer et al. (2015) examined classroom interactions through the lens of emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support in elementary English language arts classrooms. Downer et al. (2015) found supportive teacher-student relationships influenced levels of student

motivation and lack of misbehavior contributing to increased academic success for 594 students. These findings were consistent among classroom reports and individual student reports measuring levels of Emotional Support in middle school classrooms (Downer et al., 2015). Using the School Motivation Scale and Connell's Multidimensional Measure of Children's Perceptions of Control self-reporting scales, in conjunction with peer nominations, student's grades, teacher ratings, the Short Form of the Classroom Environment Scale and Weinstein and Marshall's Teacher Treatment Inventory, TTI across 25 schools and 452 students Wentzel (2002) determined that teachers have a direct influence on student motivation in middle school. Student perceptions of classroom climate were also examined at the middle school level.

Smart (2014) explored the perceptions of 223 students using a mixed-methods study in sixth grade science classrooms. Using the QTI, with the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey, PALS, and a task value scale, students were selected to proceed to a second phase of the study, in which a qualitative semi-structured interview protocol was used to determine the relationship between student interactions and their levels of motivation (Smart, 2014). Students' perceptions of friendliness and helpfulness, coupled with high levels of teacher's understanding, led to higher levels of motivation in the students (Smart, 2014). Mainhard (2015) confirmed Smart's findings across all content areas. Mainhard (2015) found student's perceptions of their teachers are related to their tendency to adopt mastery approach goals or avoidance goals by administering the Elliot and McGregor's Achievement Goals Questionnaire, AGQ, as a student self-assessment measure, in conjunction with the Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction, QTI, to 2,892 students. Student motivation and student interaction with teachers has been identified as a significant mediator to academic success in middle school settings (Allen, Pianta, Gregory, Mikami, & Lun,

2011). Student perception of positive teacher-student interactions influenced academic achievement.

Kiefer, Ellerbrock, and Alley (2014) examined the effects of teacher-student relationships on motivation as perceived by classroom teachers. Utilizing qualitative data collection methods, in a diverse, urban school, Kiefer et al. (2014) examined specific teacher practices that support student's academic motivation, resulting in higher levels of academic success. Through purposeful sampling, Kiefer et al. (2014) studied 24 total individuals: 18 students, five teachers, and one school administrator. The teachers were selected to represent multiple content areas, and the administrator was "recruited because of her daily job responsibilities focused on students' instructional needs, including student motivation" (Kiefer et al., 2014, p. 5). After selecting a representative sample, researchers completed interviews with each individual using a semi-structured interview protocol (Kiefer et al., 2014). Subsequently, researchers coded data using Atlas.ti to identify domains that showed a relationship (Kiefer et al., 2014). Upon coding the data, researchers acquired knowledge regarding ways in which teachers support student learning. Kiefer et al. (2014) determined that "teacher-student relationships that served as a way for teachers to be responsive to students' needs for a close relationship with non-familial adults" led to increased levels of academic motivation in middle school settings (Kiefer et al., 2014, p. 6).

### **Teacher Caring and Support and the Use of Respectful language**

Consistent with findings supporting the need for positive teacher-student relationships, researchers also sought to determine specific characteristics of a positive relationship. Garza et al. (2014) investigated teachers' self-reported beliefs regarding the academic success of their students and their self-reported practices for creating a caring classroom environment. Using a



sample of four teachers whom were identified by their school leaders as being caring and compassionate, Garza, Alejandro, Blythe, and Fite (2014) completed teacher interviews and classroom observations. Additionally, teachers were asked to submit a reflective narrative detailing one incident that described a caring interaction (Garza et al., 2014). Subsequently, researchers coded data from all three measures to identify behaviors or language consistently categorized as caring (Garza et al., 2014). Specifically, teachers reported learning student's names, listening to students, and learning about the student's outside interests led to higher levels of motivation (Garza et al., 2014; Kiefer et al., 2014). This corroborated Juvonen's (2007) finding that students will be engaged and more willing to exert effort in classrooms with caring teachers. Caring teachers are described as those who demonstrate "respect, fairness, expectations, and commitment" to their students (Juvonen, 2007, p. 200).

Using the Classroom Learning Assessment Scoring System- Secondary, or CLASS-S, Allen et al. (2013) explored emotional supports, classroom organization, and instructional supports by coding video- taped lessons from 37 secondary school classrooms. Allen et al. (2013) found emotional support predicted students' future achievement as it led to increased levels of motivation. Researchers claimed that although each of the three domains in CLASS-S were all predictors of student achievement, the following dimensions: positive climate, teacher sensitivity, regard for adolescent perspective, instructional learning formats, and analysis and problem solving showed a significantly more positive relationship to higher student achievement (Allen et al., 2013). A positive climate and teacher sensitivity, two social emotional learning competencies, showed a significant relationship to academic achievement (Allen et al., 2013). As a result, Allen et al. (2013) endorsed a "connection between specific observed teacher-student interactions and student achievement in secondary school classrooms" (p. 91).

Examining the extended attachment perspective and the self-system motivational theory, Spilt et al. (2012) investigated the same topic completing a multi-level analysis of the Woodcock-Johnson III with a child version of the Network of Relationships Inventory, NRI; the Universal Nonverbal Intelligence Test, UNIT; and a teacher completed Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Spilt et al. (2012) examined the trajectories of change in teacher-student relationships, across 657 at-risk students in first through fifth grade, and their impact on student achievement. These trajectories aligned with previous findings indicating high warmth between teachers and students led to increased academic growth, whereas conflict between teachers and students led to a lack of growth (Downer et al., 2015; Smart, 2014; Spilt et al., 2012). Specifically, Mainhard (2015) determined that teacher support, or behaviors characterized as warm, led to the adoption of a mastery approach by students, especially in environments where teachers held high expectations for their students. However, Spilt et al. (2012) identified gender and racial implications within their findings. Levels of classroom conflict had a stronger impact on the academic achievement of females, whereas the level of warmth had a more significant impact on achievement of males. Classrooms characterized as “low warmth were associated with lower academic gains” for male students (Spilt et al., 2012, p. 1189).

However, McCormick et al. (2013) revealed contradictory findings. Using a sample of 324 students extracted from a “longitudinal efficacy trial of INSIGHTS,” McCormick et al. (2013) estimated the causal effects of a high quality teacher-student relationship on reading and math achievement (p. 613). Data were collected using the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale, STRS, Family Involvement Questionnaire, Sutter-Eyberg Student Behavior Inventory, subscales from the Leiter International Performance Scale and the Academic Competency Evaluation Scale to account for moderating variables and the Woodcock Johnson III to measure student’s

academic achievement. After analyzing the data, McCormick et al. (2013) endorsed a positive relationship between high quality teacher-student relationships in kindergarten on math achievement at the beginning of first grade. However, no effects were found in reading outcomes (McCormick et al., 2013).

The need to foster positive relationships between teachers and students was verified for vulnerable student populations, including: African American students, economically disadvantaged students, or children with low IQs and initial behavior problems, and academically at-risk students (Spilt et al., 2012). Studies concluded high quality teacher-student relationships could lead to increased academic persistence among lower-income, at-risk students (McCormick, 2013; Spilt et al., 2012). This finding extended the need for teachers to cultivate academic resilience within their classroom. Although some studies cite a stronger correlation of interpersonal relationships to academic achievement in African American students, a majority of studies show a causal relationship between teacher-student relationships and academic achievement for students of all ethnicities (Haynes et al., 1997). Spilt et al. (2012) cautions readers to consider mediating factors when analyzing the racial implications to their findings; the impact of conflict on academic achievement in African-American males may be the result of negative parental dispositions to school or antisocial cultural orientations (Spilt et al., 2012).

### **Learner-Centered Practices**

Using a pre-test/post-test model with 75 students, science classrooms described as autonomy supportive versus controlling by the teacher were found to have a significant influence on student's cognitive levels (Hofferber et al., 2014). Students achieved higher levels of academic success in classroom environments permitting student choice and student voice (Hofferber et al., 2014). While controlling teachers' behavior had no negative effect on rote

learning, the acquisition and application of concept knowledge was significantly weaker in restrictive classroom environments (Hofferber et al., 2014). Meece (2003) cited the same finding using survey data collected from 2,200 teachers and students across the United States. Data collected indicated that dimensions of learner-centered practices, such as respecting students, honoring their voices, and adapting to student's development differences, all positively related to students' mastery goal ratings (Meece, 2003). Furthermore, students experienced increased levels of academic achievement when their teachers demonstrated interest in their lives outside of school and modeled appropriate classroom behaviors (Pierce, 2001). These findings provide further justification for examining classroom environments, in addition to teacher's instructional practices.

### **High Expectations**

In addition to teachers being perceived as warm and caring, supportive teachers who were perceived as having high expectations had students whom experienced increased academic success (Hofferber et al., 2014; Meece, 2003; Wentzel, 2002). Students demonstrated an increased interest in the class, higher levels of motivation, and increased academic resilience; three social-emotional learning competencies (Hofferber et al., 2014; Wentzel, 2002). Meece (2003) cited the same finding upon surveying 2,200 teachers and students across the United States. Moreover, Mainhard (2015) determined that high teacher expectations led to the adoption of mastery goals by students, hereby, increasing academic achievement.

Additionally, high teacher expectations led to higher levels of motivation, thus increased academic success (Garza et al., 2014; Klem and Connell, 2004; Kiefer et al., 2014). Teachers noted the importance of communicating high expectations to their students and recognizing the efforts of their students verbally (Garza et al., 2014; Kiefer et al., 2014). As such, researchers

concluded that high-quality teacher-student relationships, specifically those that met students' needs, maximized student motivation and influenced their overall academic performance (Garza et al., 2014; Klem and Connell, 2004; Kiefer et al., 2014). High teacher expectations foster the development of students' social-emotional learning competencies.

### **Capacity to Promote a Sense of Belonging**

Using a case study method, Pierce (2001) completed daily behavioral observations of one teacher and 21 students in a middle school history classroom. During these observations, Pierce (2001) noted a classroom environment in which the "threat of failure was diminished" by a supportive and enthusiastic teacher led to increased academic achievement by students (p. 39). Allen et al. (2013) corroborated this claim independent of demographic data and 643 student's previous test scores. Similarly, teachers whom fostered a sense of belonging in their classrooms were reported as caring individuals (Garza et al., 2014). Teachers self-reported fostering a sense of belonging led to increased levels of intellectual engagement and motivation in their students (Garza et al., 2014).

Ellerbrock et al. (2015) indicated that the establishment of caring relationships with students led to classroom communities that promote academic success. Juvonen (2007) urged schools to revise their organizational practices to stabilize classroom environments and minimize transitions for adolescent students. As a result, students would have more of an opportunity to connect with their teachers (Juvonen, 2007). Eryilmaz furthered this sentiment by encouraging teachers to consider and implement strategies, such as the practices related to the social-emotional learning, that lead to a positive classroom environment (Eryilmaz, 2014).

### **Teacher-Student Interactions: A Cultural Perspective**

Tosolt (2010) examined the relationship between teacher-student relationships and academic achievement from a cultural perspective. After surveying fifty private school students, Tosolt (2010) determined race and gender implications between teacher-student interactions and academic achievement. In terms of gender, Tosolt (2010) found that both boys and girls valued interpersonal, caring teacher-student relationships. However, the similarities were not the same when comparing racial subgroups. While Caucasian students valued interpersonal, caring relationships, African-American students valued high expectations and teacher feedback (Tosolt, 2010). Contrary to Tosolt's earlier findings, Buehler et al., (2015) found teacher support and caring teacher-student relationships were more relevant for boy's levels of engagement than girls. These findings are significant due to the importance of a positive middle school experience for the healthy social-emotional development of an adolescent.

### **Interventions to Improve Teacher-Student Interactions**

Several studies examined interventions to improve teacher-student relationships in public school classrooms. Districts must be aware that changing the learning environment is not easy, and one isolated intervention does not result in significant change; change must be system-wide (Brookfield, 1986; Hall & Hord, 2006). However, standardized programs for increasing the quality of teacher-student interactions have been evaluated for effectiveness. Multiple empirical studies confirmed the effectiveness of intervention programs focused on increasing teacher's positive interactions with students (Allen et al., 2011; Gregory, Allen, Mikami, Hafen, & Pianta, 2014; Mikami, Gregory, Allen, Pianta, & Lun, 2011).

Three quantitative studies have tested the effects of the My Teaching Partner Secondary Program (MTP-S), an empirically validated web-based professional development program that targets teacher- student interactions (Allen et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2014; Mikami et al.,

2011). Specially, MTP-S focuses on improving the socio-emotional relationships between teachers and their students. The MTP-S uses the domains from the Classroom Assessment Scoring System Secondary, CLASS-S, to “provide clear behavioral anchors for describing, assessing, and intervention to change critical aspects of classroom interactions” (Allen et al., 2011, p. 1034-1035). CLASS-S is deemed to be a reliable and valid instrument for measuring secondary students’ academic achievement and motivation levels (Mikami et al., 2011). Each quantitative study set out to determine the effectiveness of the MTP-S intervention programs using a randomized control trial; a randomly selected portion of the sample was deemed the control group while the remaining participants were part of the intervention group, and received the standard MTP-S intervention. Teachers assigned to the intervention group videotaped a lesson of their choice and submitted it for review (Allen et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2014; Mikami et al., 2011). Upon submission, teachers watched the video and reflected on their performance, specifically their own behavior and the reaction of their students (Allen et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2014; Mikami et al., 2011). After submitting a personal reflection, teachers participated in a phone conference with a consultant to discuss strategies that could be used to “sensitively engage and cognitively challenge students with diverse learning needs” (Mikami et al., 2011, p. 373). This process was repeated at regular intervals throughout the year (Allen et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2014; Mikami et al., 2011). In addition to the specific feedback gained from their individual conferences, teachers accessed a video library of lesson exemplars deemed characteristic of high quality teaching (Allen et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2014; Mikami et al., 2011). After implementing the intervention program with fidelity, each researcher deemed the program successful with a range of findings to support their endorsement of the program.

Mikami et al. (2011) deemed MTP-S successful in increasing positive peer relationships within the classroom. Mikami et al.'s (2011) findings emphasized the impact a teacher's behavior may have on the classroom environment and/or a student's relationship with their peers. Allen et al. (2011) further endorsed the use of the MTP-S intervention program citing increased achievement for students with teachers enrolled in the intervention group. These results did not differ among content areas meaning the findings are not subject specific (Allen et al., 2011). Furthermore, teachers use of the newly acquired strategies in the subsequent academic year led to gains in participant's student achievement for the following school year (Allen et al., 2011). Gregory et al. (2014) also confirmed the impact of the MTP-S professional development program citing increased student engagement for students assigned to teachers in the intervention group. Overall, MTP-S is a "cost-effective" intervention for targeting teacher-student relationships, as well as the lack of motivation often present in secondary school students (Allen et al., 2011).

### **Extended Attachment Perspective**

Previously conducted empirical studies in both elementary and secondary school settings have formed a research base corroborating the effects of teacher's interactions on a students' academic achievement (Brackett et al., 2012; Yoder, 2014). These interactions, in conjunction with the development of students' social-emotional learning competencies, have been connected to higher levels of student motivation, higher levels of student engagement, and decreases in student misbehavior (Brackett et al., 2012; Yoder, 2014). Development psychologists have explained this connection through the extended attachment perspective (Maldonado-Carreno et al., 2011). This perspective can be utilized to explicate the connection between fostering positive teacher-student relationships to develop students' social-emotional learning



competencies. The extended attachment perspective, stemming from developmental psychology, discusses the impact of the social-emotional learning environment (Maldonado-Carreno et al., 2011).

Under this perspective, development psychologists refer to teachers as “alternate caregivers” emphasizing the importance of the relationship between a teacher and their students (Maldonado-Carreno et al., 2011). The extended attachment perspective postulates that negative relationships with teachers may inhibit a student’s ability to devote the needed energy in a school environment. Instead, these negative relationships evoke feelings of insecurity and distress among the students (Spilt et al., 2012). When a teacher-student relationship evokes negative feelings towards school, the student’s ability to stay focused is compromised, subsequently impacting their academic achievement negatively (Spilt et al., 2012). This theoretical lens was utilized to frame multiple elementary school studies as students’ daily interactions with instructors have been shown to directly affect student behavior, their willingness to take risks, and student’s levels of motivation, subsequently impacting their academic achievement (Downer et al., 2015; Maldonado-Carreno et al., 2011).

This perspective was also investigated from a long-term trajectory. Spilt et al. (2012) examined trajectories of change in teacher-student relationships and their impact on student achievement. These trajectories aligned with previous research studies indicating high warmth between teachers and students led to increased academic growth (Spilt et al., 2012). The study corroborated the idea that increases in conflict between teachers and students contributed to a lack of academic growth. Under the extended attachment perspective, Split et al. (2012) verified the need to foster positive relationships between “alternate caregivers” and students in order for students to reach their full academic potential.

The extended attachment perspective claims that teacher-student relationships impact a students' academic success. Academic outcomes may be shaped by a lack of student motivation, students' lack of engagement, or an overall feeling on conflict in the classroom. As such, the extended attachment perspective suggests that teacher's self-reported practices and teacher's self-reported beliefs may impact student's social and emotional skills, or social-emotional learning competencies. These self-reported practices and self-reported beliefs can be utilized to develop a professional development program that focuses on creating and maintaining a caring classroom environment.

### **Limitations of Studies**

The two main limitations of the studies reviewed here include representativeness of the sample and the short duration used for data collection. "Although studies of student achievement have been important in laying the foundation for inquiry into classroom effects, they have not yet succeeded in identifying specific processes that may lead to student learning and positive social adjustment across an array of content areas" (Allen et al., 2013, p. 91). The positive relationship between teacher-student interactions and academic achievement may truly be a result of the integration of a number of classroom and instructional variables. To generalize the synthesized findings, additional studies addressing the limitations are essential.

Six of the synthesized studies contained flaws regarding their sample. To generalize the findings, samples should be representative of the population (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2015). The small sample sizes utilized by Garza et al. (2014) and Kiefer et al. (2014) may not be representative of the population. Furthermore, the use of a small sample size increased the risk of collecting erroneous data (Gall et al., 2015). The sampling procedures utilized by Garza et al. (2014) also raised concerns. In their study, teachers were selected based on the administrator's

perception of the teacher's demeanor (Garza et al., 2014). This perception may have led to researcher bias as the research entered the data collection process with a preconceived notion about the sample. Furthermore, multiple studies permitted teachers to select the course section, the lesson scrutinized for the study, or the student participants, which could lead to skewed results (Allen et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2014; McCormick et al., 2013; Mikami et al., 2011). Supplemental studies that isolate confounding variables and eliminate the aforementioned issues regarding bias are needed in this area (Spilt et al., 2012).

Moreover, the studies had limitations regarding the data collection methodology. Kiefer et al. (2014) conducted interviews over a short period of time. This did not permit researchers to collect longitudinal data regarding the change in perceptions. Garza et al. (2014) and Kiefer et al. (2014) failed to account for confounding variables that may impact student's academic performance or student motivation levels. The inability to account for confounding variables leads to questions regarding the validity of the study since readers cannot be certain the results were not influenced by these variables (Gall et al., 2015; Lauer, 2004). Kiefer et al. (2014) recognized this limitation and stated, "studies using correlational, self-report, and observational measures... may not fully capture the complexities of a school setting" (p. 4). Klem and Connell (2004) raised a similar implication; elementary students have one teacher, which explains the negative impact of low teacher support; however, middle school students typically have multiple teachers throughout the day. While it could be directly related to the increases in antisocial behavior, and declines in self-esteem, school engagement, and grades during the early adolescent years (Blackwell et al., 2007), the exact reasons for these findings are unclear to the reader. Additional research is essential to determining the impact of mediating factors, and the role of

social-emotional learning in the middle school environment. The aforementioned limitations impact the reliability and validity of the data leading to the inability to generalize the findings.

### **Teacher-Student Interactions: Implications for Practice**

Despite the aforementioned limitations, findings support a connection between teacher-student interactions and academic achievement. Although a multitude of factors impact student achievement, administrators must pay careful attention to the quality of the teacher-student interactions across all grade levels (Allen et al., 2013). Administrators must also be aware of student perceptions regarding teacher caring and support and the students' perceptions of teachers' expectations. Student perceptions can lead to obtainment or lack of obtainment of academic goals; dependent on the type of goal and the level of teacher expectations (Buehler et al., 2015; Klem & Connell, 2004; Mainhard, 2015; Smart, 2014; Tosolt, 2010).

Empirical studies have explicated that teacher-student relationships can be mediated through the use of a targeted professional development program (Allen et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2014; Mikami et al., 2011). As such, the Manalapan-Englishtown Regional School's Professional Development programs should be inclusive of social-emotional learning competencies. A September workshop should be developed that includes programs focusing on establishing a positive climate, teacher sensitivity to student needs, the importance of providing autonomy in the learning environment, and how to foster meaningful and respectful peer interactions. Teacher's self-reported beliefs and self-reported practices can be utilized to develop a relevant and meaningful teacher workshop.

### **Significance for current study**

The Manalapan-Englishtown Regional School district is a successful organization comprised of eight buildings. These buildings house 900 staff members and 27 administrators

that bring their own norms, values, and beliefs to their roles. According to Hatch (2013), “a theory is a set of concepts whose proposed relationships offer explanation, understanding, or appreciation of a phenomenon of interest” (p. 5). While examining and analyzing the daily practices of the Manalapan-Englishtown Regional School District, one can identify concepts related to organizational theory framed around both a modernist perspective and a normative perspective. A modern perspective situates district phenomenon around a quantitative approach (Hatch, 2013). Our organization invests time analyzing quantitative data to evaluate the implementation of instructional practices and curricular programs. This approach, led by Superintendent Dr. Marciante, is a result of his background in Clinical Psychology. As Superintendent, he relies on data to make decisions regularly, just as he would as a Clinical Psychologist. Congruent with his previous experiences, he requests data to support each claim, a practice characteristic of objective ontology, to ensure decisions remain uninfluenced by personal bias. However, in schools, not everything can be developed, tested, and analyzed using data. In these situations, Dr. Marciante exercises a normative perspective, looking towards the practical application or development of “an ideal, standard or model of how things should be” (Hatch, 2013, p. 8). In this sense, while Dr. Marciante often affords the building principals the latitude in making decisions for their school; certain standards or models must be employed in the decision making process. These models ensure that the strong reputation for excellence is being maintained throughout the district.

## **Theoretical framework**

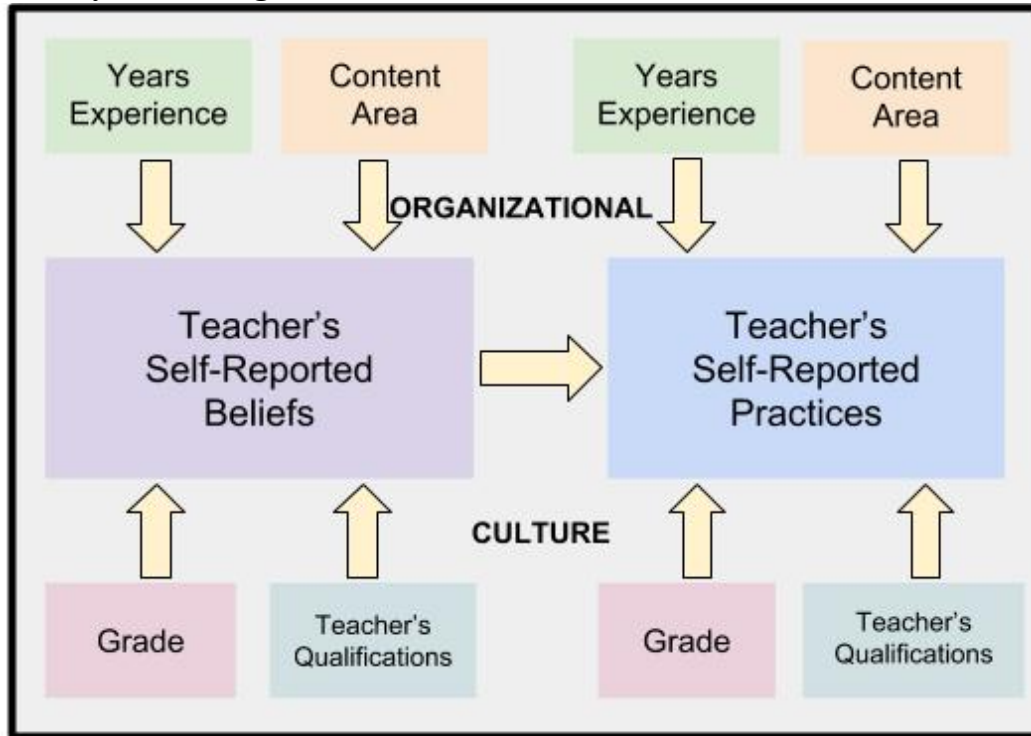
When examining the practices of any large organization, one can identify dominant cultures and subcultures. While Hatch (2013) defines organizational culture “as the way of life within an organization” (p. 158); Schein (2010) informally defines culture as “both a here and now phenomenon and coercive background structure that influences us in multiple ways” (p. 3). Regardless of which definition is employed, culture is created and implanted in an organization through its leadership team (Schein, 2010). For the Manalapan-Englishtown Regional Schools, our culture, or ideology, perpetuates success for all students. This is demonstrated when witnessing interactions among staff (Schein, 2010), specifically between teachers and administrators, at each professional development workshop, and at every Superintendent Cabinet meeting. However, administrators must determine if this same culture is evident during every interaction between teacher and student. Collectively, the norms, values, and beliefs must be evaluated through all social interactions within the buildings. During informal and formal interactions with students, positive teacher-student relationships that foster students’ social emotional skills must be prevalent through the organization. These interactions promote academic success, hereby, fostering our district goals.

Empirical studies have demonstrated a connection between the integration of social-emotional learning competencies, including fostering positive teacher-student relationships, and increased academic achievement (Brackett et al., 2012; Yoder, 2014). As such, the district must enact a series of actions that articulate our core values. Values are the articulated principles and goals trying to be achieved and maintained by the group (Hatch, 2013; Schein, 2010). Our goal is to remediate the achievement gap and promote the academic success for all students. This

goal can be enhanced by ensuring teachers include social-emotional learning competencies into their daily practices.

In the Manalapan- Englishtown Regional Schools, leadership must continually reflect on areas in need of cultural change. As such, the district can utilize the data from this study to further improve its organizational culture. The data collected will provide district officials with local, ecological data to inform future improvement (Hopson and Lawson, 2011). The Social Development Model promotes the collection of local, ecological data to inform local practice (Hopson and Lawson, 2011). The Social Development Model suggests that clear norms regarding social interactions inhibit negative behaviors by students (Hopson and Lawson, 2011). However, organizations must investigate the environment in which students interact with their peers and their teachers. Upon analyzing the data, school officials may implement a series of interventions including helping students develop the skills needed to foster positive interpersonal relationships (Hopson and Lawson, 2011). Upon learning the skills, students and staff will need reinforcement to continuously apply these newly learned skills (Hopson and Lawson, 2011). Capitalizing on already implemented initiatives, the district can utilize a professional development model to teach staff on how to foster and reinforce these social interactions. Working collaboratively, “we know each other well enough, both in a positive and negative light, that we can work well together and accomplish our external goals” (Schein, 2010, p. 217). Through the strong relationship among stakeholders, effective change can further the success of the Manalapan-Englishtown Regional Schools.

**Figure 1: Theory- Based Logic Model**





### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

#### **Research design**

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design. A quantitative descriptive research design collects and analyzes quantitative data to develop a “generalizable, statistical representation of a sample’s behavior ...” (Gall et al., 2015; 74). Quantitative data was collected using an electronic survey to examine teachers’ self-reported beliefs and practices related to social-emotional learning. Survey data provided me with a “ numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population” (Creswell, 2014, p. 13). The results will be used to construct an intervention program on social-emotional learning for teachers in the Manalapan-Englishtown Regional School District. This intervention will be implemented during teacher orientation in September. This professional development session will focus on the three of the four tiers of quality youth development: interaction, a supportive environment, and a safe environment (Yoder, 2017). As such, this training will focus on remediating classroom environments to foster positive teacher-student relationships. Consequently, these positive relationships will impact students’ social emotional learning, and subsequently, academic achievement.

#### **Research site**

The Manalapan-Englishtown Regional School District has a rich history of serving all kindergarten through eighth grade students residing in Manalapan or Englishtown. This strong tradition of providing an excellent education for all students has earned the Manalapan-Englishtown Regional School District a positive reputation amongst parents and community members. Since being incorporated in 1963, two schools have won “Star School” designations, and the district has been recognized for its “Best Practices” in inclusive education. Over 5,000

students are educated and nurtured across eight school buildings (*New Jersey School Performance Report*, 2015, para.1). In 2009, the district underwent a major restructuring creating a neighborhood school model for students in grades Kindergarten through five.

Students in the Manalapan-Englishtown Regional School embark on their educational journey at the John I. Dawes Early Learning Center. Opened in 2007, it is the newest facility and houses the district's preschool and kindergarten programs. Serving 400 hundred students, 78% are White, 10% are Asian, 8.3% are Hispanic, and 1.1% are African American; 7.8% of the preschool and kindergarten population are considered economically disadvantaged (*New Jersey School Performance Report*, 2015). Preschool students, which account for 20% of the total school population, participate in either a full day program or half day program dependent on individual student needs (*New Jersey School Performance Report*, 2015). After completing one year of kindergarten at the John I. Dawes Early Learning Center, students transition to their neighborhood school for grades one through five.

Of the district's eight school buildings, five of the buildings house grades one through five. Each building is responsible for providing approximately 500 students with an outstanding educational program that will cultivate a love of life-long learning. Wemrock Brook, our newest grade one through five building, exceeds the district average, and houses approximately 700 students. This disparity in population is solely due to the size of the facility. Three of the five elementary buildings have a similar student population. At Clark Mills School, approximately 85% of the students are White, 5% are Hispanic, 5% are Asian and 2% are Black (*New Jersey School Performance Report*, 2015). At Lafayette Mills School, approximately 78% of the students are White, 9% are Hispanic, 10% are Asian and 1.5% is Black (*New Jersey School Performance Report*, 2015). At Wemrock Brook School, approximately 73% of the students are

White, 5% are Hispanic, 17% are Asian and 1% is Black (*New Jersey School Performance Report*, 2015). At Milford Brook School, approximately 77% of the students are White, 9% are Hispanic, 10% are Asian and 1% is Black (*New Jersey School Performance Report*, 2015). At Taylor Mills School, approximately 81% of the students are White, 9% are Hispanic, 5% are Asian and 3% are Black (*New Jersey School Performance Report*, 2015). The remaining students are multi-racial. Despite the differences in enrollment by ethnic and racial subgroup, the buildings have similar trends regarding program participation; 12% of the student population is classified as economically disadvantaged, and 13% of the student population receives Special Education services (*New Jersey School Performance Report*, 2015). Despite a similar ethnic/racial subgroup population, the current enrollment by program participation varies significantly at Taylor Mills School from the other neighborhood schools. At Taylor Mills School, 16% of the student population is considered Economically Disadvantaged, and 17% of the student population is enrolled in a Special Education program. Student demographic data was also displayed below Table 1. After completing a comprehensive educational program in their “home school,” all students proceed to Pine Brook School.

Using a neighborhood school structure, students transition from their first through fifth grade school into our “Sixth Grade Center,” Pine Brook School. Pine Brook School serves as a transitioning ground for students, exposing them to lockers and a departmentalized schedule for the first time in their educational careers. Students enter the building in September from the five sending schools in the district. Of the 600 students served at Pine Brook School, 82% are White, 6% are Hispanic, 7% are Asian and 2% are Black (*New Jersey School Performance Report*, 2015). The remaining students are multi-racial. Additionally, 12% of the student population is classified as economically disadvantaged, and 13% of the student population receives Special

Education services (*New Jersey School Performance Report, 2015*). After one year at Pine Brook School, students complete another transition to our middle school.

After one year at Pine Brook School, students are promoted to the Manalapan-Englishtown Middle School for their seventh and eighth grade year. Manalapan-Englishtown Middle School is the only formal middle school in the district. Students enter the building in September after one year at Pine Brook School and stay for both their seventh and eighth grade years. Of the 1,200 students served at the middle school, 80% are White, 6% are Hispanic, 9% are Asian and 2% are Black (*New Jersey School Performance Report, 2015*). The remaining students are multi-racial. 15% of the student population is classified as economically disadvantaged (*New Jersey School Performance Report, 2015*). Additionally, 11% of the student population receives Special Education services (*New Jersey School Performance Report, 2015*). Table 1 displays the student demographic data for this suburban school district.

*Table 1: Student Population by School*

School	White	Hispanic	Asian	Black	Economically Disadvantaged	Special Education
Early Learning Center	78%	10%	8.3%	1.1%	7.8%	20%
Clark Mills	85%	5%	5%	2%	12%	13%
Lafayette Mills	78%	9%	10%	1.5%	12%	13%
Milford Brook	77%	9%	10%	1%	12%	13%
Taylor Mills	81%	9%	5%	3%	16%	17%
Wemrock Brook	73%	5%	17%	1%	12%	13%
Pine Brook	82%	6%	7%	2%	12%	13%
Manalapan-Englishtown Middle School	80%	6%	9%	2%	15%	11%

### **Research sample**

Each building in the district employs an average of 50 teachers with the exception of the Manalapan-Englishtown Middle School, which employs approximately 100 teachers to serve their larger population. Our teaching population is 80% female, and 20% male. Teachers in the Kindergarten through Fifth grades teach all content areas; where as the teachers in both Pine Brook and the Manalapan-Englishtown Middle School are content area specialists. While 19% of our staff has been in the field of teaching for five years or less, more than 55% of our staff has over ten years of experience. Demographic data for each building's teaching staff is provided below in Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic Data District Certified Teaching Staff

	Gender		Content Area						Years Experience			
	Male	Female	Math	Language Arts	Science	Social studies	Cycle	Special Education	1- 5	5- 10	10- 20	20 or more
ELC	0	37	22	22	22	22	4	11	16	16	4	1
Clark Mills	2	42	31	31	31	31	5	8	5	19	16	4
Lafayette Mills	5	41	31	31	31	31	7	8	4	11	24	7
Milford Brook	1	47	34	34	34	34	7	7	12	5	17	14
Taylor Mills	1	53	34	34	34	34	5	15	15	21	16	2
Wemrock Brook	4	44	35	35	35	35	6	7	7	5	27	9
Pine Brook	6	41	7	8	6	6	8	10	13	4	19	9
MEMS*	21	79	17	17	9	8	23	25	12	10	34	36

\*MEMS is the district’s abbreviation for Manalapan-Englishtown Middle School.

My study utilized a census of all teachers from each school setting in the Manalapan-Englishtown Regional School District. Gall et al. (2015) describes a target population as the “entire group of individuals having the characteristics that interest the researchers (p. 113). Since all 424 teachers were included in the study no sampling procedures were necessary. All teachers are easily accessible due to their employment status in the district so they are also the

accessible population, meaning they can “feasibly be included in the research sample” (Gall et al., 2015, p. 113).

**Data collection procedures**

This quantitative descriptive research study established a baseline of our current school staff’s self-reported beliefs related to social-emotional learning and their self-reported practices used to foster positive teacher-student relationships. Additional data collected measured teacher’s beliefs regarding organizational culture and professional development about social-emotional learning. This data allowed administration to measure how well teachers are implementing the district’s organizational norms. Data for the study was collected using an electronic survey after receiving assent from study participants. Questionnaire items included background characteristics, the Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale (Brackett et al, 2012) and Part A of the Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies: A Tool for Teachers scale (Yoder, 2014). The Teacher SEL Beliefs scale measured teacher’s self reported beliefs and Part A of the Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies: A Tool for Teachers scale measured teacher’s self-reported practices. Variables are listed in Table 3.

*Table 3: Independent and Dependent Variables*

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>Dependent Variables</b>
Teacher’s grade level	Teacher’s current beliefs
Teacher’s qualifications	Teacher’s current practices
Teacher’s content area	Time
Teacher’s years of experience	
Training	

Teachers were asked to complete the questionnaire anonymously. This anonymity may have contributed to an increased response rate due to my administrative position within the district. The questionnaire was designed and administered using a Google Form to ease the data collection process. The use of an electronic measure was the fastest and most efficient method of collecting data (Walonick, 2004). To determine teacher’s beliefs on social-emotional

learning, an electronic version of Brackett et al.'s (2012) Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale was transcribed to a Google Form. The Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale was developed based on key theoretical frameworks related to social-emotional learning and the findings from previous studies on teacher's beliefs related to social-emotional learning (Brackett et al., 2012). This Likert-type scale was based on key theoretical frameworks and previous findings on teacher's beliefs related to social-emotional learning (Brackett et al., 2012). A Likert-type scale gives respondents five response options to indicate their attitude, perceptions, feelings, or beliefs on a topic (Gall et al., 2015). After piloting a 32-item scale, the creators eliminated questions, resulting in a final scale of twelve questions. The definition of social-emotional learning is included on the scale to ensure all respondents possess a common definition of social-emotional learning, a key variable. Although this scale was developed by experts on social-emotional learning, information was unavailable regarding the validity and reliability of the measure. Validity and reliability is essential to determining whether the measure accurately addresses the variables, or constructs (Gall et al., 2015). As such, the modified measure was piloted using a small group of district teachers (Lauer, 2004). The pilot determined respondents were able to understand the questions and complete the form with ease.

Background data was also requested from respondents as part of the data collection process. This background data was used to answer the sub-questions of research question one: do teacher's self-reported beliefs vary by grade, content area, teacher's qualifications, or years of professional experience, defined as the total number of years the individual has been employed as a teacher. These questions were added to the beginning of the Google Form. Questions were marked as required to ensure this information was collected from each participant. The



background data and teacher's self reported beliefs were collected by all participants simultaneously as all questions are on one measure.

Part A of the Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies: A Tool for Teachers was used to determine the self-reported practices used to foster students' social emotional learning competencies. This tool was developed by the staff at the American Institute for Research, AIR, after completing an extensive literature review and interviews with experts on social-emotional learning, and was later reviewed by state department of education staff whose focus is on social-emotional learning. This tool asks teachers to identify elements of their work that lead to development of positive teacher-student relationships and social-emotional competencies (Yoder, 2014). To complete the survey, teachers utilized a five-point Likert scale to indicate how often and how well they implement each behavior related to a social emotional learning competency. The practices focus on the social interactions and instructional interactions that occur within the classroom.

To encourage participation in the study, a pre-notification email was sent to each participant. This email explained the purpose of the study and how the results from the study would be utilized (Walonick, 2004). This may have helped to increase the number of participants who assent to participating in the study. Since a high response rate is vital to the validity of the study, the pre-notification email will be used to increase the response rate (Herek, n.d.; Walonick, 2004). According to Walonick (2004), sending a reminder email may significantly increase participant response rates. As such, teachers were sent two reminder emails restating the purpose of the research and the link to the Google Form (Walonick, 2004). This reminder may have contributed to the reliability of the study by increasing the response rate. Upon completing the data collection process, the sample was evaluated based on

nonparticipation and response rates (Herek, n.d.). “The response rate describes the extent to which the final data set includes all sample members” (Herek, n.d., p.4). The response rate also contributes to the reliability and generalizability of the data.

### **Data analysis**

The purpose of a descriptive study is to describe what is currently happening in schools (Gall et al., 2015). In this study, I sought to determine teacher’s self-reported beliefs and self-reported practices regarding social-emotional learning by administering an electronic questionnaire. Additionally, I sought data regarding implementation of the organizational norms and the use of professional development to address these norms and values. Specifically, the data collected will inform administration on how well teachers are implementing the district’s organizational norms. Multiple data analysis strategies were utilized to address the research questions and sub-questions. The use of an online questionnaire via Google Form simplified the data collection and management process significantly. The data was automatically coded upon the download of responses via Google Form. Subsequently, the data analysis process commenced using Excel and Stata. Aligned with the norm for descriptive studies, central tendency statistics and standard deviation statistics were calculated for each research question (Gall et al., 2015). Additionally, a chi-square analysis was completed to determine the relationship between teacher’s self-reported beliefs and their self-reported practices. This analysis will inform the development of a professional development program targeting the development of students’ social-emotional learning competencies in classrooms across the district.

Descriptive statistics provided “numerical summaries of the sample’s distribution of scores on a scale” (Gall et al., 2015, p. 149). First, I examined the frequency of each response

for commonalities and conflicting data. To represent the data, tables were created displaying the response rate in percentages. The tables feature each question as they appear on the measure. Background questions, such as years of experience and job classification, allowed the research to be analyzed using the independent variables: teacher's grade level, qualifications, content area, and years of experience. Several questions related to the desire to attend training or the teacher's previous training experiences addressed the final independent variable, training. Lastly, questions regarding teacher's current beliefs and teacher's current practices addressed two of the dependent variables. Questions centered on the specific beliefs and practices identified in previously conducted empirical studies: teacher caring and support, respectful language, learner centered practices, high expectations, teacher knowledge of her students, and capacity to promote a sense of belonging.

Using a Likert scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree, teachers responded to 13 questions soliciting their beliefs on social emotional learning. Questions also addressed participants beliefs regarding organizational culture. Sample questions included: My school expects teachers to address children's social and emotional needs; The culture in my school supports the development of children's social and emotional needs; My principal creates an environment that promotes social and emotional learning for our students; I am comfortable providing instruction on social and emotional skills to my students; and I want to improve my ability to teach social and emotional skills to students.

Teachers were also asked to self-report on practices utilized to foster students' social emotional learning. Using a Likert scale ranging from "I implement this practice extremely well" to "I do not implement this practice," teachers answered a series of 15 questions. Sample questions included: I promote positive behaviors by encouraging my students when they display

good work habits; I ask for student input when making decisions about how the classroom will operate in developmentally appropriate ways; I demonstrate to each student that I appreciate him or her as an individual; and I check in with my students about academic and nonacademic concerns they might have. This series of questions addressed the dependent variable, teacher's practices. Lastly, teachers were asked one specific question to address the final dependent construct, time. Teachers were asked to rate how strongly they agree or disagree with the statement: I feel my curriculum allows time for the integration of social emotional learning competencies. This question directly addressed my hypothesis that certain content areas do not believe they have time to incorporate social emotional learning competencies into the classrooms due to amount of content included in the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. Each question will help inform the development of the district's professional development session on the topic of social-emotional learning.

*Table 4: Questionnaire Items Aligned by Construct*

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Independent or Dependent</b>	<b>Questionnaire Item Number(s)</b>
Teacher's grade level	Independent	2
Teacher's qualifications	Independent	4
Teacher's content area	Independent	1, 15
Teacher's years of experience	Independent	3
Training	Independent	8, 9, 10, 19
Social-emotional learning competencies	Dependent	6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18
Teacher-student relationships	Dependent	28, 30, 32, 33
Interactions	Dependent	27, 28, 30, 32, 33
Teacher caring and support	Dependent	26, 30, 32, 33
Respectful language	Dependent	20, 21, 22, 28
Learner-centered practices	Dependent	21, 23, 24, 25, 27
High expectations	Dependent	21, 22
Teacher knowledge of students	Dependent	28, 29, 32
Capacity to promote a sense of belonging	Dependent	27, 31, 34
Time	Dependent	16

The second level of analysis determined the central tendency of the sample's scores on the measure. Central tendencies can be defined as the center of the distribution of scores (Gall et al., 2015; Moore, McCabe, & Craig, 2014). Using Excel, I calculated the central tendencies for

each question on the scale. The measures of central tendency, including the mean, or average, score as well as the median, or middle, and mode will be displayed in a table (Gall et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2014). While the mode is not often reported in educational studies, it will be included since this study's purpose was to establish a baseline of teacher's beliefs and practices related to social-emotional learning. These measures of central tendency identify patterns among the data and allowed me to determine similarities and differences within grades, content area, teacher's qualifications, and teacher's years of professional experience.

Next, I calculated a measure of variability, the standard deviation for each question. The standard deviation, or the square root of the variance, demonstrates how much deviation is represented in the scores (Gall et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2014). According to Gall et al. (2015), the standard deviation is the most commonly reported measure of variability, as it is a stable and useful measure. This information provided me with a comparison regarding the distribution of each score as related to its mean. Standard deviation was calculated using Excel and will guide the contents of the professional development intervention.

Lastly, I utilized inferential statistics to establish confidence intervals. Initially, a logistic regression was calculated using Stata to determine if the background characteristics collected from respondents influenced their beliefs or practices. The regression analysis allowed me to determine the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable (Gall et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2014). The formula,  $\text{Beliefs} = a + c_1 (\text{qualifications}) + c_2 (\text{content area}) + c_3 (\text{years experience}) + c_4 (\text{grade})$ , was employed to explore teacher's self-reported beliefs of social-emotional learning. Upon completing the logistic regression and determining no relationship between background characteristics and the self-reported data, a chi-square test was executed to determine if teacher's self-reported beliefs were related to their self-reported practices. The chi-

square test allowed me to determine if a relationship existed between two categorical variables (Gall et al., 2015). As such, this test was run comparing each item on the beliefs scale to each item on the practice measure using Stata.

### **Limitations of the study**

The intent of this study was to describe the self-reported beliefs and practices of the teachers in one suburban school district. The district employs over 430 certified staff members allowing a sample size of significance for a descriptive study. However, the use of one sample site prohibits the generalizability of the data to other sites (Gall et al., 2015). The lack of generalizability poses one limitation for this empirical study. Another limitation stems from my administrative role within the organization being used as the study site. While the data collection was executed in a means to protect respondent's identity, potential subjects may be resistant to respond to the Google form. This hesitation could negatively impact the response rate impacting the reliability of the results (Gall et al., 2015). Lastly, this study utilized self-report data to address each research question.

The sole use of self-reported data was a limitation for a number of reasons. First, the respondents may lack introspective ability (Hoskin, 2012). While the respondent may feel they are answering accurately, they may be unable to reflect and provide an accurate answer to the Likert scale (Hoskin, 2012). Second, participants may be limited regarding their background knowledge regarding social-emotional learning competencies (Hoskin, 2012). As such, each respondent brings his or her own understanding to each item on the scale. This understanding, partnered with the individuals' background knowledge, may influence how they respond to the survey (Hoskin, 2012). Furthermore, the use of an online self-report measure results in a lack of control of the sample (Hoskin, 2012). Due to the survey being completed online and

anonymously, there is no way to ensure a respondent did not complete the measure more than one time (Hoskin, 2012). Additionally, the sample could be skewed in the make up of respondents (Hoskin, 2012). Self-report data also subjects this study to social desirability bias.

Social desirability bias is one form of response bias. According to Charles and Dattalo (2018), social desirability bias is defined as the skewing of one's responses to present themselves in a more socially acceptable manner. This skewed data "confounds research results by creating false relationships or by obscuring relationships between variables" (Charles and Dattalo, 2018, p. 587). Teachers may have skewed their responses in an attempt to align their beliefs and practices with previously established organizational norms. These responses minimize embarrassment or fear of more significant consequences, such as job loss (Charles and Dattalo, 2018). While survey responses were collected anonymously, my administrative role in the district may have concerned some respondents. As such, this may have compounded the respondents' desire to inflate their responses. The presence of social desirability bias should be considered upon review of the findings.

Validity and reliability is a key aspect to any empirical study. To ensure a valid study, the revised Teacher SEL Scale was piloted with a small group of district teachers. This pilot ensured that research participants were able to answer each question on the measure accurately. I also completed a validity check by comparing the self-reported background data to the demographic data in our district databases to ensure the answers being reported were reliable.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

This chapter presents the findings from a quantitative descriptive study focused on teachers' self-reported beliefs and practices associated with developing students' social-emotional learning competencies. Teachers across the district possessed the shared importance of incorporating social-emotional learning competencies into their daily practice. These beliefs did not vary based on job classification or level of education. However, an analysis by content area demonstrated disparities among respondents, specifically among science teachers. While examining self-reported practices, teachers felt confident in their ability to integrate social emotional learning competencies into their daily practices. Once again, the responses did not vary based on job classification or level of education. However, variations did emerge among grade level and content area. Teachers in grades six through eight scored lower than the mean in specific practices. Furthermore, middle school teachers in each content area identified specific social-emotional learning practices in need of development. A detailed analysis of the results follow in each of the subheadings.

### **Respondents**

Background data was also requested from respondents as part of the data collection process. This background data was used to determine if an educator's background had an influence on their beliefs regarding social-emotional learning competencies. Participant's background information was extracted to determine who completed the survey. 178 district employees completed the Google Form, resulting in a 41.9% response rate. This high response rate added to the validity of the study results since the average response rate of organizational studies is 36.1% with a standard deviation of 13.3. Background characteristics of each respondent are included in Table 5. The majority of respondents were general education



teachers with Master's Degrees. However, when analyzing the respondents by percentage, 75% of the district's specialists responded to the survey. For the purpose of this study, specialists are defined as non-classroom teachers or as individuals who teach a Special subject or provide a related service. The least represented grade level within respondents were seventh and eighth grade teachers. Kindergarten teachers were the least represented group within the elementary level. On the contrary, over 70% of the fourth grade teachers responded to the survey. In terms of content area, specialists and Science teachers were the largest group of participants for grades sixth through eighth. Special education teachers at grades six through eight were the smallest group of participants at 25.7%. Overall, the respondents represent the varied roles assigned to district teaching staff.

*Table 5: Respondents Background Data*

	<b>Percentage Respondents</b>	<b>Count Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage Non-Respondents</b>	<b>Count Non-Respondents</b>
Job Classification				
<b>Regular Education</b>	28.1	105	71.4	268
<b>Special Education</b>	36.3	33	63.7	58
<b>Special Subject</b>	38.5	25	61.5	40
<b>Other</b>	75	15	25	5
Grade Level				
<b>Kindergarten</b>	37.8	14	62.2	23
<b>First</b>	40	10	60	15
<b>Second</b>	64	16	36	9
<b>Third</b>	60	15	40	10
<b>Fourth</b>	72.4	21	27.6	8
<b>Fifth</b>	62.5	15	37.5	9
<b>Sixth</b>	36.2	17	63.8	30
<b>Seventh</b>	30.7	16	69.2	36
<b>Eighth</b>	30	15	70	35
<b>Grades 1-5</b>	43.4	23	56.6	30
<b>Grades seven and eight</b>	76.2	16	23.8	5
Level of Education				
<b>Bachelor's Degree</b>	30.4	66	69.6	151
<b>Master's Degree</b>	48.5	110	51.5	117
<b>Doctorate</b>	100	1	0	0
Content Area				
<b>English language arts</b>	28	7	72	18
<b>Mathematics</b>	37.5	9	62.5	15
<b>Science</b>	73.3	11	26.7	4
<b>Social studies</b>	50	7	50	7
<b>Special Education</b>	25.7	9	74.3	26
<b>Other</b>	83.9	26	16.1	5

**Teacher's self- reported beliefs**

To determine teacher's beliefs on social-emotional learning, an electronic version of Brackett et al.'s (2012) Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale was completed by respondents. Overall, respondents held positive beliefs regarding the integration of social-emotional learning competencies. Over 75% of respondents feel comfortable teaching social skills and emotional skills to their students. However, only 68% of teachers feel comfortable providing instruction on social and emotional learning. Table 6 provides a summary of responses on the Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale. Only 28% of the respondents feel that their curriculum allows time to integrate social-emotional learning competencies. The central tendency data reflects similar trends regarding district teachers' beliefs regarding social-emotional learning competencies

*Table 6: Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale Responses by Percentage*

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither Agree or Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
My school expects teachers to address children's social and emotional needs.	45.5	41.6	5.6	1.1	6.2
The culture in my school supports the development of children's social and emotional needs.	33.9	50.8	9.6	2.3	3.4
All teachers should receive training on how to teach social and emotional skills to students.	50.3	37.1	7.4	1.1	4
I would like to attend a workshop to develop my own social and emotional skills.	16.9	40.1	31.6	8.5	2.8
I have previously attended a workshop on social emotional learning competencies.	7.5	23.6	19.5	33.9	15.5
Taking care of my students' social and emotional needs come naturally to me.	34.5	52.5	9.6	2.3	1.1
My principal creates an environment that promotes social and emotional learning for our students.	27.6	47.7	21.3	1.7	1.7
I am comfortable providing instruction on social and emotional skills to my students.	23	53.9	15.2	5.6	2.2
Informal lessons in social and emotional learning are part of my regular teaching practice.	29.7	49.7	12.6	6.9	1.1
I feel confident in my ability to provide instruction on social and emotional learning.	18.8	50	23.9	6.3	1.1
I feel my curriculum allows time for the integration of social emotional learning competencies.	5.7	22.3	24	35.4	12.6
My principal does not encourage the teaching of social and emotional skills to students.	1.1	2.2	15.7	48.9	32
I want to improve my ability to teach social and emotional skills to students.	13.5	64.6	16.9	3.4	1.7
I would like to attend a workshop to learn how to develop my students' social and emotional skills.	17	59.1	15.3	7.4	1.1

The mean, median, mode, and standard deviation were calculated for each question on the Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale. These measures of central tendency corroborated the findings based on percentages. The standard deviation across each question indicates most respondents share similar beliefs regarding social-emotional learning competencies. A median of 1.92 and a mode of 2 highlight the teachers' beliefs concerning the lack of time. In conjunction with the percentage data, respondents feel the lack of time is prohibiting them from including social-emotional learning competencies into daily lessons. As such, I conclude that the majority of respondents value the integration of social-emotional learning competencies.

*Table 7: Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale Central Tendencies*

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
My school expects teachers to address children's social and emotional needs.	4.19	4	5	1.04
The culture in my school supports the development of children's social and emotional needs.	4.09	4	4	0.91
All teachers should receive training on how to teach social and emotional skills to students.	4.27	5	5	0.95
I would like to attend a workshop to develop my own social and emotional skills.	3.60	4	4	0.96
I have previously attended a workshop on social emotional learning competencies.	2.74	3	2	1.20
Taking care of my students' social and emotional needs come naturally to me.	4.17	4	4	0.78
My principal creates an environment that promotes social and emotional learning for our students.	3.98	4	4	0.85
I am comfortable providing instruction on social and emotional skills to my students.	3.90	4	4	0.89
Informal lessons in social and emotional learning are part of my regular teaching practice.	4	4	4	0.90
I feel confident in my ability to provide instruction on social and emotional learning.	3.79	4	4	0.85
I feel my curriculum allows time for the integration of social emotional learning competencies.	2.73	3	2	1.12
My principal does not encourage the teaching of social and emotional skills to students.	1.92	2	2	0.82
I want to improve my ability to teach social and emotional skills to students.	3.85	4	4	0.75
I would like to attend a workshop to learn how to develop my students' social and emotional skills.	3.84	4	4	0.84

### Teachers' self-reported beliefs by grade level

In order to answer each of the sub-questions, responses were analyzed by job classification, level of education, grade level, and content area. The findings revealed no variation in responses based on an individual's job classification or level of education. However, variations emerged among grade level data and content area responses. Overall, kindergarten teachers' responses were higher than the mean on the majority of questions. The majority of elementary school teachers answered the Likert scale with answers closer to the mean. Teachers in grades six through eight expressed lower than average responses in specific items. These specific items are listed in Table 8. Additionally, teachers in grades ones, six, seven, and eight hold the belief that their curriculum does not allow time for the integration of social emotional learning competencies. Responses were further analyzed by content area for teachers in grades six through eight, the district's only departmentalized grade levels.

*Table 8: Grade Level Analysis of Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale*

<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Scale Item</b>	<b>Response Mean</b>	<b>Overall Item Mean</b>
Second	Taking care of my students' social and emotional needs come naturally to me.	3.87	4.17
Fifth	My school expects teachers to address children's social and emotional needs.	3.80	4.19
Sixth	All teachers should receive training on how to teach social and emotional skills to students.	3.90	4.27
Eighth	Taking care of my students' social and emotional needs come naturally to me.	3.80	4.17
	All teachers should receive training on how to teach social and emotional skills to students.	3.90	4.27
	I am comfortable providing instruction on social and emotional skills to my students.	3.46	3.90
	Informal lessons in social and emotional learning are part of my regular teaching practice.	3.50	4.0
	I feel confident in my ability to provide instruction on social and emotional learning.	3.20	3.79
Both Seventh and Eighth	My school expects teachers to address children's social and emotional needs.	3.67	4.19
	The culture in my school supports the development of children's social and emotional needs.	3.78	4.09

**Teachers' self-reported beliefs by content area**

Analysis by content area revealed a minimum of one belief per subject that was scored below the mean. Most notably were the responses associated with science teachers. These teachers noted that informal lessons in social and emotional learning were not part of their regular teaching practice, with a mean of 2.9 compared to an overall mean of 4.0. Additionally, their rating to the item: "I feel confident in my ability to provide instruction on social and emotional learning"; scored 2.8 compared to 3.79. These means both scored below the overall average. Special education teachers were the sole subgroup to report a higher than average response to "I have previously attended a workshop on social emotional learning competencies." A complete list of outliers can be found in Table 9. Also notable is the variance in content area mean related to the question: "I feel my curriculum allows time for the integration of social emotional learning competencies." While math and science teachers scores were 1.8 and 1.9 respectively; English language arts, Social studies, Special Education, and Other were rated 3.14, 2.5, 3.4 and 3.08.

*Table 9: Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale Analysis by Content Area*

<b>Content Area</b>	<b>Scale Item</b>	<b>Response Mean</b>	<b>Overall Item Mean</b>
English language arts	All teachers should receive training on how to teach social and emotional skills to students.	3.80	4.27
	I would like to attend a workshop to develop my own social and emotional skills.	3.14	3.60
Math	I am comfortable providing instruction on social and emotional skills to my students.	3.3	3.90
Social studies	All teachers should receive training on how to teach social and emotional skills to students.	3.70	4.27
	I would like to attend a workshop to develop my own social and emotional skills.	3.28	3.60
	My school expects teachers to address children's social and emotional needs.	3.8	4.19
Science	Informal lessons in social and emotional learning are part of my regular teaching practice.	2.90	4.0
	I feel confident in my ability to provide instruction on social and emotional learning.	2.80	3.79
Other	My school expects teachers to address children's social and emotional needs.	3.8	4.19

### **Social-emotional learning and organizational culture**

Questions regarding organizational culture, specifically school leadership, were embedded within the Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale. Over 80% of respondents felt their school expected them to address children's social and emotional needs. Additionally, 83% of respondents indicated that their school culture supported the development of children's social and emotional needs. 74% of respondents believe their principal creates an environment that promotes social and emotional learning for students. A minimum mean of 4, corresponding with agree on the Likert scale, indicate that most respondents believe that their school culture supports the integration of social-emotional learning competencies. Teachers strongly believe that their school expects teachers to address children's social and emotional needs. This is confirmed by the mean of 1.92 when asked "My principal does not encourage the teaching of social and emotional skills to students." However, teachers in grades seven and eight, the district's sole middle school, produced a mean of 3.78, slightly lower than the overall mean. This indicates



that the middle school teachers' beliefs vary slightly from the elementary school teachers. These results are included above in Table 6.

### **Social-emotional learning and professional development**

The purpose of this study is to plan and implement a professional development program on the integration of social-emotional learning competencies. As such, it was important to measure the teachers' current beliefs regarding professional development on this topic. While 87% of respondents felt all teachers should receive training on how to teach social and emotional skills to students, only 76% of the respondents would like to attend a workshop on this topic and only 30% of respondents previously attended a session. Furthermore, the mode of 5 indicates that most respondents believe that all teachers should receive training on how to teach social and emotional skills to students. Despite the strong belief that all teachers should receive training, the average of 3.60 indicates that not all teachers would like to attend a workshop on the same topic, nor have they previously attended a workshop as indicated by the mean of 2.74.

### **Teacher's self-reported practices**

Part A of the Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies: A Tool for Teachers was also used to determine the self-reported practices used to foster students' social emotional learning competencies. Generally, teachers felt confident in their self-reported practices as related to social-emotional learning competencies. More than 80% of respondents indicated that they promote positive behaviors by encouraging students when they display good social skills and good work habits. 90% of respondents indicated they regularly use praise and positive reinforcement to let their students know effort leads to positive results. Only 50% of the participants use student input to make classroom decisions or allow students to help plan classroom activities. Additionally, 10% of the respondents indicate that they do not create

structures in the classroom to help foster acceptance and inclusion. A complete summary of the results from the Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies: A Tool for Teachers is included in Table 10.

*Table 10: Part A of the Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies: A Tool for Teachers Response Summary by Percentage*

	<b>I implement this practice extremely well.</b>	<b>I implement this practice generally well.</b>	<b>I implement this practice reasonably well.</b>	<b>I struggle to implement this practice.</b>	<b>I do not implement this practice.</b>
I promote positive behaviors by encouraging my students when they display good social skills.	44.6	47.5	7.3	0	0.6
I promote positive behaviors by encouraging my students when they display good work habits.	54.5	39.3	5.6	0	0.6
I let my students know how their effort leads to positive results with specific affirmations.	40.4	50.6	7.3	1.1	0.6
I let my students help plan how they are going to learn in developmentally appropriate ways.	12.5	38.6	30.1	13.6	5.1
I ask for student input when making decisions about how the classroom will operate in developmentally appropriate ways.	11.4	43.8	26.7	10.8	7.4
I give students meaningful choices on what they can work on.	22.2	51.7	20.5	4	1.7
I make sure students make the connection between their choices and potential consequences.	29.2	53.9	15.2	1.1	0.6
I arrange experiences that allow my students to become responsible in developmentally appropriate ways.	32.2	46.9	14.1	4.5	2.3
I demonstrate to each student that I appreciate him or her as an individual.	71.8	23.2	4.5	0.6	0
I use the interests and experiences of my students when teaching.	41.8	45.8	10.7	1.1	0.6
I let my students know that it is okay to get answers wrong or think outside of the box (e.g., modeling, praising attempts with “good thinking”).	67.8	30.5	1.7	0	0
I check in with my students about academic and nonacademic concerns they might have.	39.9	45.5	12.9	1.7	0
I follow up with my students when they have a problem or concern.	51.7	42.7	5.6	0	0
I create structures in the classroom where my students feel included and appreciated.	40.1	39	10.2	7.3	3.4

Central tendency data was also analyzed based on the responses to Part A of the Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies: A Tool for Teachers. Table 11 provides the measures of central tendency for each item on the aforementioned scale. A mean higher than 4 indicates that most respondents provide encouragement when promote positive behaviors both socially and academically. However, a mean of 3.4 indicates a wide range of responses to two questions regarding decision making and student input; I let my students help plan how they are going to learn in developmentally appropriate ways and I ask for student input when making decisions about how the classroom will operate in developmentally appropriate ways. While the mode and median of 4 indicate more respondents selected “ I implement this practice generally well,” the standard deviation of 1.04 and 1.07, respectively, indicates a wider range in responses to these two questions. A mode and median of 5 indicate teachers feel most comfortable demonstrating appreciation for each individual student, displaying to students that they care about how and what they learn, praising students’ attempts, and following up with students regarding specific problems or concerns.

*Table 11: Part A of the Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies: A Tool for Teachers Central Tendencies*

<b>Scale Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
I promote positive behaviors by encouraging my students when they display good social skills.	4.36	4	4	0.67
I promote positive behaviors by encouraging my students when they display good work habits.	4.47	5	5	0.66
I let my students know how their effort leads to positive results with specific affirmations.	4.29	4	4	0.70
I let my students help plan how they are going to learn in developmentally appropriate ways.	3.40	4	4	1.04
I ask for student input when making decisions about how the classroom will operate in developmentally appropriate ways.	3.41	4	4	1.07
I give students meaningful choices on what they can work on.	3.88	4	4	0.85
I make sure students make the connection between their choices and potential consequences.	4.10	4	4	0.73
I arrange experiences that allow my students to become responsible in developmentally appropriate ways.	4.02	4	4	0.92
I demonstrate to each student that I appreciate him or her as an individual.	4.66	5	5	0.59
I use the interests and experiences of my students when teaching.	4.27	4	4	0.74
I display to my students that I care about how and what they learn.	4.61	5	5	0.55
I let my students know that it is okay to get answers wrong or think outside of the box.	4.66	5	5	0.51
I check in with my students about academic and nonacademic concerns they might have.	4.24	4	4	0.74
I follow up with my students when they have a problem or concern.	4.46	5	5	0.60
I create structures in the classroom where my students feel included and appreciated.	4.05	4	5	1.05

**Teachers' self-reported practices by grade level**

Responses were analyzed by job classification, level of education, grade level, and content area to answer each subquestion. The findings revealed no variation in responses based on an individual's job classification or level of education. However, variations emerged among grade level data and content area responses. Similar to the beliefs data, kindergarten teachers' responses were higher than the mean on the majority of questions. The majority of elementary school teachers answered the Likert scale with answers closer to the mean with the exception of one item: "I arrange experiences that allow my students to become responsible (e.g., classroom aids or jobs, peer tutoring, specific roles in group work) in developmentally appropriate ways." Once again, teachers in grades six through eight expressed lower than average responses in specific items. These specific items are listed in Table 12. Responses were further analyzed by content area for teachers in grades six through eight, the district's only departmentalized grade levels.

*Table 12: Grade Level Analysis of Part A of the Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies: A Tool for Teachers*

Grade Level	Scale Item	Response Mean	Overall Item Mean
Sixth	I let my students help plan how they are going to learn in developmentally appropriate ways.	2.94	3.40
	I make sure students make the connection between their choices and potential consequences.	3.65	4.10
	I create structures in the classroom where my students feel included and appreciated (e.g., morning meetings, small moments, whole-class share outs).	3.35	4.05
Eighth	I arrange experiences that allow my students to become responsible (e.g., classroom aids or jobs, peer tutoring, specific roles in group work) in developmentally appropriate ways.	3.46	4.02
	I create structures in the classroom where my students feel included and appreciated (e.g., morning meetings, small moments, whole-class share outs).	3.86	4.05
Both Grades Seventh and Eighth	I ask for student input when making decisions about how the classroom will operate in developmentally appropriate ways.	2.86	3.41
	I arrange experiences that allow my students to become responsible (e.g., classroom aids or jobs, peer tutoring, specific roles in group work) in developmentally appropriate ways.	3.53	4.02
	I create structures in the classroom where my students feel included and appreciated (e.g., morning meetings, small moments, whole-class share outs).	3.53	4.03

### **Teachers' self-reported practices by content area**

A few patterns emerged between teacher's self-reported practices and content area. Math teachers had a mean of 2.5 on "I let my students plan how they are going to learn in developmentally appropriate ways" versus an overall mean of 3.40. Additionally, a mean of 2.5 was discovered on "I ask for student input when making decisions about how the classroom will operate in developmentally appropriate ways" in comparison with an overall mean of 3.41. Lastly, both english language arts and math teachers indicated a failure to use the interests and experiences of students when planning future lessons.

### **Relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices**

Initially, a logistic regression was calculated using Stata to determine if the background characteristics collected from respondents influenced their beliefs or practices. The logistic regression revealed no relationship between the respondent's background characteristics and their answers to the Likert scale. The chi square tests indicated that teacher's beliefs are related to the practices they employ in their classrooms. Each belief statement was tested against each of the practice statements to determine if the responses could be related to chance. Teachers indicated an influence on their practices based on school culture. Specifically, when administration expected teachers to address students' social and emotional needs, teachers embedded these competencies into their daily practices. Furthermore, teachers whom felt more confident or comfortable addressing students' social-emotional learning needs indicated the integration of social-emotional learning competencies at a higher level. However, results showed less of a relationship when discussing future training opportunities. Although teachers felt strongly about the importance of including social-emotional learning competencies into their classroom practice, they were less willing to attend a workshop on the same topic. Overall, the chi square tests indicate a teacher's self-reported beliefs impact their self-reported practices. These results are summarized in Tables 13, 14 and 15.

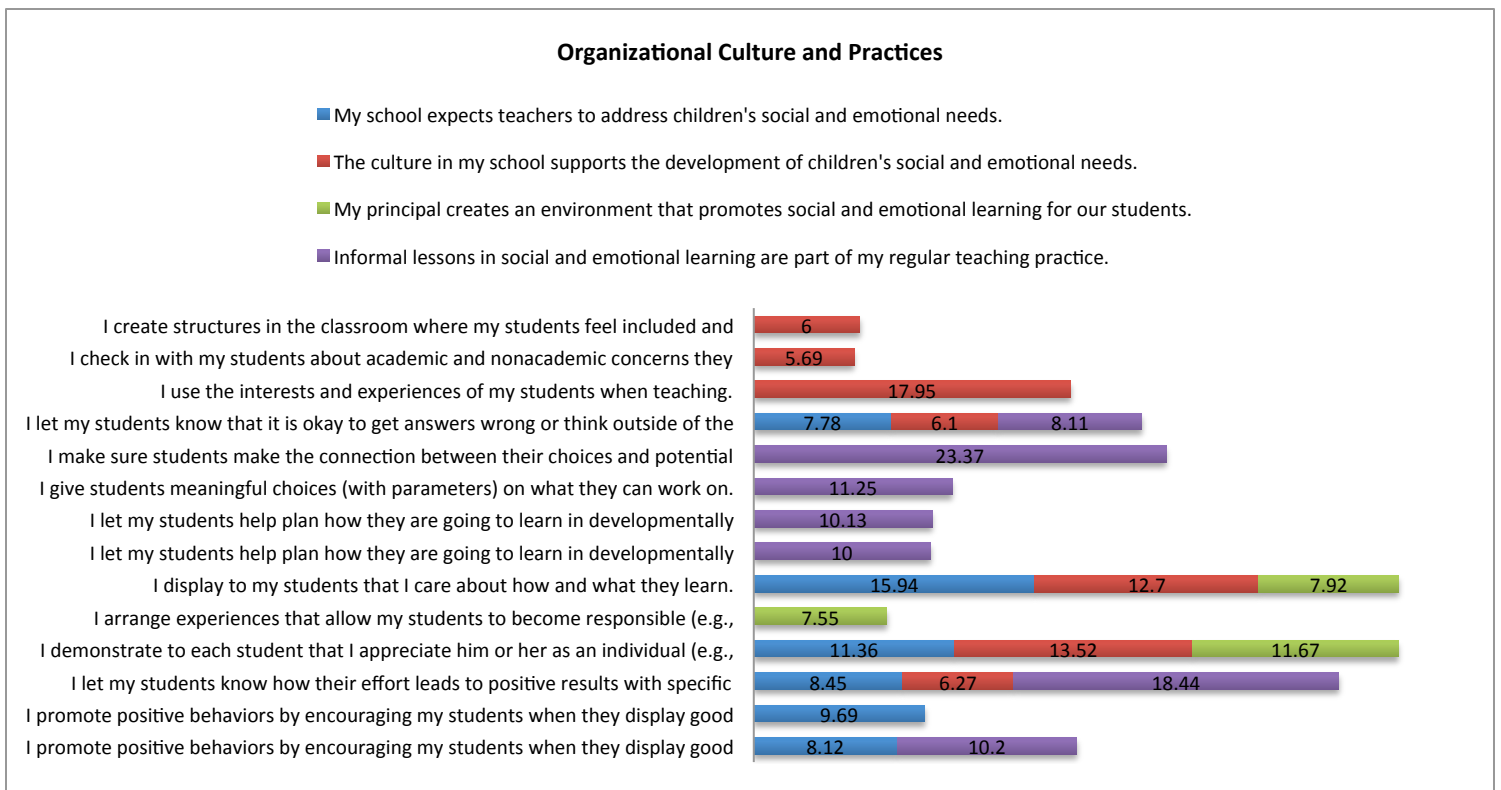
### **Teacher's self-reported practices and school culture**

The strongest relationship between variables occurred between organizational culture and teacher practice. As previously mentioned, the norms and values held by school administrators influence the practices employed by teachers in their building. Despite multiple school sites, the norms and values articulated by district level administrators have led to consistent efforts across all eight buildings. Figure 2 displays the relationships between teacher practices and organizational culture. Seven practice statements were connected with "The culture in my



school supports the development of children’s social and emotional needs.” A strong relationship exists between: “Informal lessons in social and emotional learning are part of my regular teaching practice” and “I let my students know how their effort leads to positive results with specific affirmations” and “I make sure students make the connection between their choices and potential consequences.” School administrators must continue to set their expectations regarding the integration of social-emotional learning competencies.

Figure 2: Organizational Culture and Teacher Practice



*Table 13: Chi Square Test: Social Emotional Learning Competencies: School Culture*

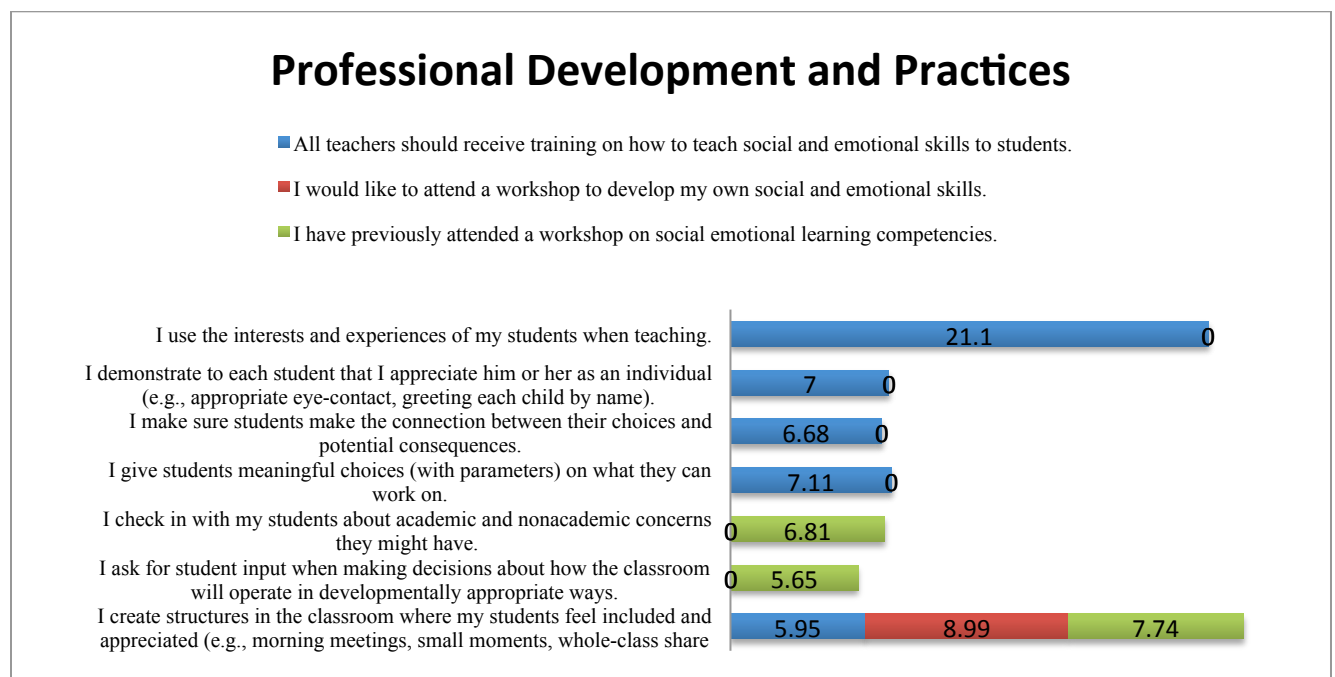
<b>Social-Emotional Belief</b>	<b>Social-Emotional Practice</b>	<b>Pearson Chi</b>
My school expects teachers to address children's social and emotional needs.	I promote positive behaviors by encouraging my students when they display good social skills (e.g., acknowledge positive actions or steps to improve).	8.12
	I promote positive behaviors by encouraging my students when they display good work habits (e.g., acknowledge positive actions or steps to improve).	9.69
	I let my students know how their effort leads to positive results with specific affirmations.	8.45
	I demonstrate to each student that I appreciate him or her as an individual (e.g., appropriate eye-contact, greeting each child by name).	11.36
	I display to my students that I care about how and what they learn.	15.94
My principal creates an environment that promotes social and emotional learning for our students.	I let my students know that it is okay to get answers wrong or think outside of the box (e.g., modeling, praising attempts with "good thinking").	7.78
	I arrange experiences that allow my students to become responsible (e.g., classroom aids or jobs, peer tutoring, specific roles in group work) in developmentally appropriate ways.	7.55
	I demonstrate to each student that I appreciate him or her as an individual (e.g., appropriate eye-contact, greeting each child by name).	11.67
The culture in my school supports the development of children's social and emotional needs.	I let my students know how their effort leads to positive results with specific affirmations.	6.27
	I demonstrate to each student that I appreciate him or her as an individual (e.g., appropriate eye-contact, greeting each child by name).	13.52
	I use the interests and experiences of my students when teaching.	17.95
	I display to my students that I care about how and what they learn.	12.70
	I let my students know that it is okay to get answers wrong or think outside of the box (e.g., modeling, praising attempts with "good thinking").	6.1
	I create structures in the classroom where my students feel included and appreciated (e.g., morning meetings, small moments, whole-class share outs).	6.0

### **Teachers' self- reported practices and professional development**

While the majority of respondents believe all teachers should receive training on how to

teach social and emotional skills to their students, only 76% of the respondents would like to attend a workshop on this topic. Additionally, only 30% of respondents previously attended a session on social-emotional learning. This finding is crucial to the planning of future professional development on this topic. Although teachers lack formal training, teachers are implementing the following practices consistently: “I create structures in the classroom where my students feel included and appreciated (e.g., morning meetings, small moments, whole-class share outs),” “I give students meaningful choices (with parameters) on what they can work on,” “I make sure students make the connection between their choices and potential consequences,” “I demonstrate to each student that I appreciate him or her as an individual (e.g., appropriate eye-contact, greeting each child by name),” and “I use the interests and experiences of my students when teaching.” These findings are displayed in Figure 3. The implementation of these practices reflects the execution of the Model School principles by building administration. Future training opportunities can enhance the integration of these competencies.

Figure 3: Professional Development and Teacher Practice



*Table 14: Chi Square Test: Training*

<b>Social-Emotional Belief</b>	<b>Social-Emotional Practice</b>	<b>Pearson Chi</b>
All teachers should receive training on how to teach social and emotional skills to students.	I give students meaningful choices (with parameters) on what they can work on.	7.11
	I make sure students make the connection between their choices and potential consequences.	6.68
	I demonstrate to each student that I appreciate him or her as an individual (e.g., appropriate eye-contact, greeting each child by name).	7.0
	I use the interests and experiences of my students when teaching.	21.1
	I display to my students that I care about how and what they learn.	7.92
I would like to attend a workshop to develop my own social and emotional skills.	I create structures in the classroom where my students feel included and appreciated (e.g., morning meetings, small moments, whole-class share outs).	5.95
	I create structures in the classroom where my students feel included and appreciated (e.g., morning meetings, small moments, whole-class share outs).	8.99
I have previously attended a workshop on social emotional learning competencies.	I ask for student input when making decisions about how the classroom will operate in developmentally appropriate ways.	5.65
	I check in with my students about academic and nonacademic concerns they might have.	6.81
	I create structures in the classroom where my students feel included and appreciated (e.g., morning meetings, small moments, whole-class share outs).	7.74

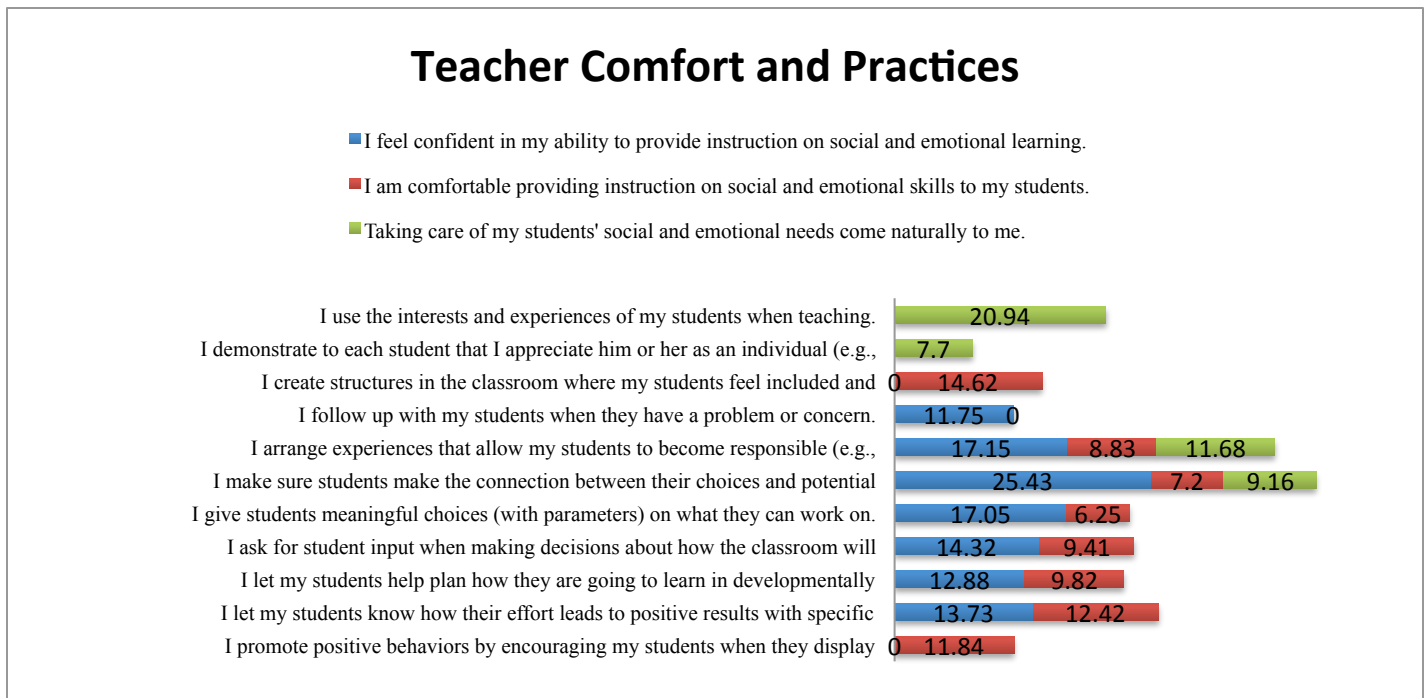
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### **Teachers' self-reported practices and level of comfort**

Teachers whom responded they are comfortable providing instruction on social and emotional skills to their students indicated they implement social-emotional learning competencies very well. Specifically, they believe they implement the following practices consistently: “I let my students help plan how they are going to learn in developmentally appropriate ways,” “I give students meaningful choices (with parameters) on what they can work on,” “I make sure students make the connection between their choices and potential

consequences,” “I arrange experiences that allow my students to become responsible (e.g., classroom aids or jobs, peer tutoring, specific roles in group work) in developmentally appropriate ways,” “I follow up with my students when they have a problem or concern,” “I create structures in the classroom where my students feel included and appreciated (e.g., morning meetings, small moments, whole-class share outs),” “I demonstrate to each student that I appreciate him or her as an individual (e.g., appropriate eye-contact, greeting each child by name),” and “I use the interests and experiences of my students when teaching.” A relationship was also shown between the aforementioned practices and the belief, “I feel confident in my ability to provide instruction on social and emotional learning.” One additional practice was linked to this belief statement; “I follow up with my students when they have a problem or a concern.” These relationships are illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Teacher Comfort and Teacher Practice



*Table 15: Chi Square Test: Social Emotional Learning Competencies- Teacher Comfort*

<b>Social-Emotional Belief</b>	<b>Social-Emotional Practice</b>	<b>Pearson Chi</b>
I am comfortable providing instruction on social and emotional skills to my students.	I promote positive behaviors by encouraging my students when they display good social skills (e.g., acknowledge positive actions or steps to improve).	11.84
	I let my students know how their effort leads to positive results with specific affirmations.	12.42
	I let my students help plan how they are going to learn in developmentally appropriate ways.	9.82
	I ask for student input when making decisions about how the classroom will operate in developmentally appropriate ways.	9.41
	I give students meaningful choices (with parameters) on what they can work on.	6.25
	I make sure students make the connection between their choices and potential consequences.	7.20
	I arrange experiences that allow my students to become responsible (e.g., classroom aids or jobs, peer tutoring, specific roles in group work) in developmentally appropriate ways.	8.83
	I create structures in the classroom where my students feel included and appreciated (e.g., morning meetings, small moments, whole-class share outs).	14.62
Informal lessons in social and emotional learning are part of my regular teaching practice.	I promote positive behaviors by encouraging my students when they display good social skills (e.g., acknowledge positive actions or steps to improve).	10.20
	I let my students know how their effort leads to positive results with specific affirmations.	18.44
	I let my students help plan how they are going to learn in developmentally appropriate ways.	10.0
	I ask for student input when making decisions about how the classroom will operate in developmentally appropriate ways.	10.13
	I give students meaningful choices (with parameters) on what they can work on.	11.25
	I make sure students make the connection between their choices and potential consequences.	23.37
	I let my students know that it is okay to get answers wrong or think outside of the box (e.g., modeling, praising attempts with “good thinking”).	8.11

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I feel confident in my ability to provide instruction on social and emotional learning.	I let my students know how their effort leads to positive results with specific affirmations.	13.73
	I let my students help plan how they are going to learn in developmentally appropriate ways.	12.88
	I ask for student input when making decisions about how the classroom will operate in developmentally appropriate ways.	14.32
	I give students meaningful choices (with parameters) on what they can work on.	17.05
	I make sure students make the connection between their choices and potential consequences.	25.43
	I arrange experiences that allow my students to become responsible (e.g., classroom aids or jobs, peer tutoring, specific roles in group work) in developmentally appropriate ways.	17.15
	I follow up with my students when they have a problem or concern.	11.75
Taking care of my students' social and emotional needs come naturally to me.	I make sure students make the connection between their choices and potential consequences.	9.16
	I arrange experiences that allow my students to become responsible (e.g., classroom aids or jobs, peer tutoring, specific roles in group work) in developmentally appropriate ways.	11.68
	I demonstrate to each student that I appreciate him or her as an individual (e.g., appropriate eye-contact, greeting each child by name).	7.70
	I use the interests and experiences of my students when teaching.	20.94
	I follow up with my students when they have a problem or concern.	6.83
	I create structures in the classroom where my students feel included and appreciated (e.g., morning meetings, small moments, whole-class share outs).	10.61

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## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

This quantitative descriptive study examined teachers' self-reported beliefs and practices regarding social-emotional learning, specifically the integration of social-emotional learning competencies into their classrooms. The data collected allows me to generalize the behavior and opinions of a census of the staff of Manalapan-Englishtown Regional Schools (Gall et al., 2015). Multiple empirical studies confirmed the effectiveness of intervention programs focused on increasing teacher's positive interactions with students (Allen et al., 2011; Gregory, Allen, Mikami, Hafen, & Pianta, 2014; Mikami, Gregory, Allen, Pianta, & Lun, 2011). As such, the results will be utilized to prepare professional development for district employees on social-emotional learning. However, one isolated intervention does not result in significant change as research has demonstrated the need for change to be system-wide and continuous (Brookfield, 1986; Hall & Hord, 2006). This section includes recommendations for a systematic intervention program for selected grade levels and content areas.

### **Teachers' self-reported beliefs**

Overall, respondents held positive beliefs regarding the integration of social-emotional learning competencies. Teachers' responses indicated their school culture supports the integration of such competencies as communicated by their building administrators. This aligns with the district's adoption of the Model School principles and previously conducted empirical studies on the same topic. Research has shown the importance of educating the "whole child" and the impact of including social-emotional learning competencies into classrooms to increase student's academic success (Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2014). Additionally, teachers being perceived as warm and caring, and those perceived as having high expectations had students whom experienced increased academic success (Hofferber et al., 2014;



Meece, 2003; Wentzel, 2002). Students demonstrated an increased interest in the class, higher levels of motivation, and increased academic resilience; three social-emotional learning competencies (Hofferber et al., 2014; Wentzel, 2002). These social-emotional learning competencies are key to increasing academic achievement in the Manalapan-Englishtown Regional Schools. The district's organizational norms, specifically the adoption of the Model Schools principles, and teachers' beliefs regarding social-emotional learning competencies align with practices validated by previously conducted empirical studies.

However, upon further analysis patterns emerged across grade levels and content areas. These patterns should be addressed during after school meetings, department meetings, and district-wide professional development sessions. These trainings should focus on specific practices related to social-emotional learning competencies as previously conducted empirical studies have shown the integration of social-emotional learning competencies improves academic achievement (Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2014).

### **Teachers' self-reported beliefs by grade level**

In order to answer each of the sub-questions, responses were analyzed by job classification, level of education, grade level, and content area. The findings revealed no variation in responses based on an individual's job classification or level of education consistent with previously conducted empirical studies. However, variations emerged among grade level data and content area responses. A quarter of respondents felt that their curriculum does not permit the inclusion of social-emotional learning competencies due to time constraints. Upon further analysis, this belief was stronger among grades one, six, seven, and eight; three grades housed in our middle schools. As such, training opportunities must focus on how to integrate social-emotional learning competencies into already existing curriculum. Specifically, trainings

may include topics such as: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills (Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2017), social-emotional learning competencies identified as fostering academic achievement in students. Overall, kindergarten teachers' responses were higher than the mean on the majority of questions. These teachers should be utilized as teacher leaders to model how to integrate the aforementioned skills into daily practice. This training should be focused on teachers in grades six through eight as the majority of elementary school teachers answered the Likert scale with answers closer to the mean. Teachers in grades six through eight expressed lower than average responses in specific items. These specific findings are listed in Table 8. Responses were further analyzed by content area for teachers in grades six through eight, the district's only departmentalized grade levels.

#### **Teacher's self-reported beliefs across content areas**

Furthermore, specific trends were identified when responses were analyzed by content area. These content area specific trends add to already existing research base that does not provide practitioners with content area specific findings. Specifically, grades six through eight science teachers need training on incorporating informal lessons in social and emotional learning. Additional training is essential on the foundations of social-emotional learning, as many science teachers did not feel confident in providing instruction on social and emotional learning. As mentioned previously, a quarter of respondents felt that their curriculum does not permit the inclusion of social-emotional learning competencies due to time constraints. This finding was more prevalent among math and science teachers in grades six through eight. However, previously conducted empirical studies demonstrated the need for supportive teacher-student relationships and positive classroom environments in middle schools (Allen et al., 2013; Ellerbrock et al., 2015; Juvonen, 2007). As such, department supervisors should include this

topic during their after school department meetings with a focus on specific practices related to social-emotional learning competencies. These trainings may include “seven affective strategies” identified by Eryilmaz (2014) that produced positive emotions among middle school students: “showing intimacy, implementing effective instructional methods, provided students with flow experience, showing positive personality traits, exhibiting happiness-oriented behavior, guiding students, and supporting perceived control of students” (Eryilmaz, 2014, p. 2056). The inclusion of these seven affective strategies fostered students’ adaption to the middle school environment and their academic learning goals resulting in increased academic success (Eryilmaz, 2014). As targeted professional development has demonstrated an increase academic performance among middle school students (Allen et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2014; Mikami et al., 2011), focused professional development on the seven empirically validated affective strategies can enhance student performance in grades six through eight.

### **Social-emotional learning and organizational culture**

Questions regarding organizational culture, specifically school leadership, were embedded within the Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale. Teachers strongly believe that their school expects teachers to address children’s social and emotional needs. This is confirmed by the mean of 1.92 when asked “My principal does not encourage the teaching of social and emotional skills to students.” However, teachers in grades seven and eight, the district’s sole middle school, produced a mean slightly lower than the overall mean. This indicates the need for specific training at the middle school. Further analysis should be conducted to determine if they are implementing the district norms of collaboration, community, and teamwork (Daggett, 2014). Furthermore, building-wide practices should be examined to determine if they align to practices that foster social-emotional learning competencies. Additional observation should be conducted

to address this finding.

### **Social-emotional learning and professional development**

Previously conducted studies confirmed the effectiveness of intervention programs focused increasing positive teacher-student relationships (Allen et al., 2011; Gregory, Allen, Mikami, Hafen, & Pianta, 2014; Mikami, Gregory, Allen, Pianta, & Lun, 2011). As such, respondents were asked to share their beliefs regarding training on social-emotional learning competencies. Respondents felt strongly that all teachers should receive training on how to teach social and emotional skills to students. However, when asked if they would like to attend a workshop only 76% of the respondents rated that item with an agree or strongly agree response. This finding can be resultant of teachers not wanting to attend an additional meeting or concerns that they may have an additional professional development session added to the organization's calendar, despite, finding the topic important. However, professional development must focus on the three of the four tiers of quality youth development: interaction, a supportive environment, and a safe environment (Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2017). Teachers must be educated on creating a healthy environment in which students feel safe emotionally (Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2017) in order to foster academic achievement in all students.

District administration must use previously established structures to embed this topic onto the agendas. For example, one social-emotional learning competency can be included on each faculty meeting agenda. Specific social-emotional learning competencies can be grouped and offered as one of the three sessions during district wide professional development days. Furthermore, partnered with already established district goal to foster teacher leaders, the district may choose to use the kindergarten staff to present on the topic as their responses were higher than the mean on the majority of questions. Despite teacher's resistance to increased training,

research has demonstrated the importance of including this topic on professional development agendas.

### **Teachers' self-reported practices**

Empirical research has shown that students experience higher levels of academic achievement when teachers integrate social-emotional learning competencies into their classrooms (Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2014). As a result, this study examined teachers' self-reported practices in addition to their self-reported beliefs. Generally, teachers felt confident in their self-reported practices as related to social-emotional learning competencies. This finding is significant as the development of these skills, behaviors, and attitudes help foster academic achievement in students (Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2014). Extant research has demonstrated an increase in student engagement, increased student effort, and a decrease in behavioral disruptions upon the inclusion on social-emotional learning competencies into daily practices (Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2014). Over 80% of respondents indicated that they implement praise and positive reinforcement extremely well. The implementation of praise and positive reinforcement can produce a warm environment between teachers and students and lead to increased academic growth (Downer et al., 2015; Smart, 2014; Spilt et al., 2012). Furthermore, teachers felt comfortable establishing relationships with their students. This finding is important as the extended attachment perspective refers to teachers as "alternate caregivers" emphasizing the importance of the relationship between a teacher and their students (Maldonado-Carreno et al., 2011). In the absence of a positive teacher-student relationship negative feelings towards school are developed, and the student's ability to stay focused is compromised, subsequently impacting their academic achievement negatively (Spilt et al., 2012). This data was reassuring, as the

district has employed a four-year initiative implementing the Model Schools principles focused on establishing strong relationships with students. Additionally, it aligns district practices to already established research base regarding the importance of teacher-student relationships.

On the contrary, only 50% of the participants use student input to make classroom decisions or allow students to help plan classroom activities. Additionally, 10% of the respondents indicated that they do not create structures in the classroom to help foster acceptance and inclusion. The low percentages indicate the need for district-wide professional development on these specific practices as the failure to incorporate these specific social-emotional learning practices can influence student's academic performance (Allen, Pianta, Gregory, Mikami, & Lun, 2011; Allen et al., 2013; Ellerbrock et al., 2015; Eryilmaz, 2014; Juvonen, 2007). District administrators can utilize previously established organizational structures to providing training based on these findings.

Department meetings, faculty meetings, and district wide professional development days must be used as a forum for providing a targeted intervention on these specific practices related to social-emotional learning competencies. Teacher responses regarding "I let my students help plan how they are going to learn in developmentally appropriate ways" and "I ask for student input when making decisions about how the classroom will operate in developmentally appropriate ways" indicated a wide range on how effectively these practices are integrated into classrooms. However, research has demonstrated that students' experiences have an influence on their academic success (Haynes et al., 1997). As a means of addressing this void in teacher practice, district administrators should be mindful of this data while conducting classroom observations. Individual discussions may be conducted with teachers regarding these specific practices during their post-observation conferences. These discussions would align to the

district's normative perspective for communicating a standard or model for classroom practices (Hatch, 2013).

### **Teachers' self-reported practices and grade level**

Responses were also analyzed by job classification, level of education, grade level, and content area despite the lack of pre-existing studies providing a like analysis. Similar to the beliefs data, kindergarten teachers' responses were higher than the mean on the majority of questions. Once again, the district should employ the use of kindergarten teachers to provide training to their colleagues on implementing practices related to student's social and emotional learning needs. This professional development should increase academic performance as students achieve higher levels of academic success in classroom environments permitting student choice and student voice (Hofferber et al., 2014; Pierce, 2001).

Specifically, elementary teachers need training on how to arrange experiences that foster responsibility. This topic could be addressed at faculty meetings or district wide professional development sessions. Middle school administration should utilize faculty meetings to address specific practices that were related as areas of need in their buildings. At the sixth grade center, professional development should be provided on the following practices: I let my students help plan how they are going to learn in developmentally appropriate ways, I make sure students make the connection between their choices and potential consequences, and I create structures in the classroom where my students feel included and appreciated (e.g., morning meetings, small moments, whole-class share outs). At the middle school, training should be provided on the following practices: I ask for student input when making decisions about how the classroom will operate in developmentally appropriate ways, I arrange experiences that allow my students to become responsible (e.g., classroom aids or jobs, peer tutoring, specific roles in group work) in

developmentally appropriate ways, and I create structures in the classroom where my students feel included and appreciated (e.g., morning meetings, small moments, whole-class share outs). The inclusion of these practices on a daily basis can result in higher academic achievement (Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2014).

### **Teachers' self-reported practices and content area**

To address the patterns that emerged between teacher's self-reported practices and content area, central office supervisors may use their department meetings to provide targeted interventions related to each social-emotional learning competency. Math teachers should be provided training on letting students plan how they are going to learn in developmentally appropriate ways and on how to incorporate student input when making decisions about how the classroom will operate. Lastly, both English language arts and math teachers should be provided training on how to incorporate students' interests and experiences when planning future lessons. These practices can enhance academic achievement across content areas, specifically those that are tied to graduation requirements (Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2014). Moreover, the math and science departments indicated that their curriculum does not provide time for the inclusion of social-emotional learning competencies. This belief should be integrated with the training on specific practices.

### **Relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices**

The logistic regression did not indicate a relationship between any of these background characteristics and teacher's self-reported beliefs regarding social-emotional learning. Therefore, it was determined the teacher's background did not influence their beliefs. Training should be related to their specific grade level or content area concern but should not be based on their level



of education or years of experience. As such, trainings should be conducted based on the data collected from the teacher completed Likert scales.

The chi-square tests indicated that teacher's beliefs are related to the practices they employ in their classrooms. Since teachers indicated school culture influences the practices utilized by teachers it is important that the organization continues to emphasize the importance of student-teacher relationships (Brackett et al., 2012; Bridgeland et al., 2016; Yoder, 2014). Furthermore, teachers who felt more confident or comfortable addressing students' social-emotional learning needs were more likely to ask for student input when planning lessons, provide meaningful choice during classroom activities, and fostered students' connections between their behavior and potential consequences. Administration must provide ongoing professional development to foster confidence regarding the practices related to social-emotional learning. Furthermore, the topic should be revisited during post-observation conferences to provide specific and meaningful feedback. As research demonstrates that changing the learning environment is not easy, and one isolated intervention does not result in significant change; change must be system-wide (Brookfield, 1986; Hall & Hord, 2006).

### **Implications for practice**

Studies included in the literature review share similar limitations to this descriptive study. The data collected has helped to identify district trends regarding organizational norms and values by content area and grade level but teaching is a complex process. Therefore, the data collected is limited as it does not identify specific processes that can also influence student learning (Allen et al., 2013). While targeted professional development can help to ensure social-emotional learning competencies are incorporated into daily practices, it will not account for confounding variables that may influence student performance (Spilt et al., 2012). Additionally,

middle school students typically have multiple teachers throughout the day. These changes in classroom environment can skew the positive results of implementing social-emotional learning competencies if the initiative is not monitored effectively.

This study was conducted solely from the teacher perspective. While teachers construct the classroom environment and related experiences (Buehler et al., 2015), students' perceptions of the classroom can vary dramatically. As such, administrators must be aware of student perceptions regarding teacher caring and support and the students' perceptions of the classroom environment. Empirical studies have found that student's perceptions of the environment were a contributing factor to academic success in elementary school settings as their perception can influence students' obtainment of their learning goals (Buehler et al., 2015; Klem & Connell, 2004; Mainhard, 2015; Smart, 2014; Tosolt, 2010). It is essential to investigate the relationship between student perceptions of teacher-student interactions and academic achievement.

### **Implications for research**

This quantitative descriptive study examining teachers' self-reported beliefs and practices revealed trends among content area and grade level cohorts. This finding will inform a targeted professional development for our district. However, the data was collected from one district despite the large sample size. As a result, the use of one sample site prohibits the generalizability of the data to other sites (Gall et al., 2015). These trends must also be looked at cautiously as this study solely utilized self-report data to address each research question.

The use of self-report data poses a limitation as respondents may lack introspective ability (Hoskin, 2012). Respondents are answering each question with their prior knowledge regarding social-emotional learning (Hoskin, 2012). This understanding, partnered with the individuals' background knowledge, may influence how their respond to the survey (Hoskin,

2012). Furthermore, the results may not be generalizable due to the presence of social desirability bias. This skewed data “confounds research results by creating false relationships or by obscuring relationships between variables” (Charles and Dattalo, 2018, p. 587). Teachers may have provided responses they believed aligned to our organizational norms. As such, the results must be evaluated in conjunction with the aforementioned limitations.

### **Conclusion**

Osterman (2000) concluded that one of the best predictors of student’s efforts and engagement is the interpersonal relationship between teacher and student. Additional research has shown that students experience higher levels of engagement and less behavioral disruptions resulting in higher academic achievement when teachers integrate social-emotional learning competencies into their classrooms (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012; Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2016; Yoder, 2014). As such, a study was conducted to examine teachers’ self-reported beliefs and practices in regards to social-emotional learning competencies. This study sought to determine how teachers’ self-reported beliefs and their self-reported practices aligned with previously established organizational norms.

A years ago, the Manalapan-Englishtown Regional Schools employed the Model School principles. One component of this initiative was to establish positive teacher-student relationships. As a result, the district instituted specific norms and values that focused on these relationships. By measuring teachers’ self-reported beliefs and self-reported practices, this data informed district administrators of the alignment between teachers’ self-reported beliefs and self-reported practices and our organizational norms. Teachers across the district have a positive regard for the importance of social-emotional learning, and strongly believe that their school culture supports the integration of social-emotional learning competencies. Despite these beliefs,

deficiencies regarding specific self-reported practices were revealed through the data analysis. The findings suggest the need for specific, targeted interventions based on content area or grade level. Based on these findings, the majority of these interventions should be conducted at the middle school. Kindergarten and elementary school teachers can be used as teacher leaders to foster the integration of social-emotional learning competencies. The use of established organizational structures, such as department meetings, professional development workshops, and post-observation conferences, serve to further the norms and values of the district. Furthermore, the use of district-wide peer observations and microteaching protocols will be utilized to ensure all teachers include social-emotional learning competencies in their daily practice. Through these targeted professional development programs, the district administrators can ensure all teachers are employing practices aligned to our organizational norms and values.

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### **Appendix A: Consent Form**

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Rebecca Seery, who is a student in the Educational Leadership Department at Rutgers University. This study will focus on teachers' competency for developing students' social emotional learning competencies. In this study, I plan to conduct a survey of elementary and middle school teachers' beliefs about social emotional learning and their self-reported practices related to the development of relationships with students in a suburban school district in New Jersey. Additionally, this quantitative descriptive study seeks to examine if teachers' self-reported beliefs and practices vary based on grade level, content area, level of education or years of professional experience. The sub-questions posed will provide a more detailed analysis of the teacher's self-reported beliefs and practices regarding social-emotional learning. This further analysis will allow for additional personalized professional development sessions if trends or patterns are identified by gender, content, teacher's qualifications, or years of professional development.

This research is anonymous. Anonymous means that I will record no information about you that could identify you. There will be no linkage between your identity and your response in the research. This means that I will not record your name, address, phone number, date of birth, etc. Your email address will NOT be collected upon submission of this Google Form. If you agree to take part in the study, you will be assigned a random code number that will be used on each test and the questionnaire. There will be no way to link your responses back to you. Therefore, data collection is anonymous.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this

study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept for three years.

There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study. In addition, you may receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact myself at

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You can also contact my faculty advisor Dr. Tanja Sargent at

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If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact an IRB Administrator at the Rutgers University, Arts and Sciences IRB: Institutional Review Board

Rutgers University,

the State University of New Jersey Liberty Plaza

Suite 3200 335 George Street, 3rd Floor

New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Phone: 732-235-2866

Email: [humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu](mailto:humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu)

Please retain a copy of this form for your records. By participating in the above stated procedures, then you agree to participation in this study.

If you are 18 years of age or older, understand the statements above, and will consent to participate in the study, click on the "I Agree" button to begin the survey/experiment. If not, please click on the "I Do Not Agree" button and submit the form.

I Agree

I Do Not Agree

**Appendix B: Data Collection Form**

## SOCIALEMOTIONAL LEARNING AND TEACHERSTUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

## IN A SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT:

Please read the following definitions: Social-emotional learning competencies include the development of the skills, behaviors, and attitudes needed by students to effectively manage their cognitive and social behavior (Brackett et al., 2012; Yoder, 2014). Social and Emotional Learning refers to the development of skills related to recognizing and managing emotions, developing care and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively.

Teacher-student relationships are experiences that result through the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional interactions between a teacher and their students (Pianta, Hamre & Allen, 1999).

With these definitions in mind, please read the following statements and think about how true each is for YOU.

Rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

1. What is your job classification?

Mark only one oval.

Regular education teacher

Special education teacher

Special subject teacher

Other

2. What grade do you currently teach?

Mark only one oval.

Kindergarten

First

Second

Third

Fourth

Fifth

Sixth

Seventh

Eighth

I teach Grades 1-5.

I teach both Grades 7 and 8.

3. How many years of professional experience do you have?

(Please indicate your answer in number of years).

4. Please indicate the highest level of degree you obtained:

Mark only one oval.

Bachelor's Degree

Masters Degree

Doctorate

5. Grades six through eight only, which content area do you teach?

Mark only one oval.

Mathematics

English

Language Arts

Science

Social studies

Special Education

Other

The following questions will use the following scale:

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

6. My school expects teachers to address children's social and emotional needs.

7. The culture in my school supports the development of children's social and emotional needs.

8. All teachers should receive training on how to teach social and emotional skills to students.

9. I would like to attend a workshop to develop my own social and emotional skills.

10. I have previously attended a workshop on social emotional learning competencies.

11. Taking care of my students' social and emotional needs come naturally to me.

12. My principal creates an environment that promotes social and emotional learning for our students.

13. I am comfortable providing instruction on social and emotional skills to my students.

14. Informal lessons in social and emotional learning are part of my regular teaching practice.



15. I feel confident in my ability to provide instruction on social and emotional learning.

16. I feel my curriculum allows time for the integration of social emotional learning competencies.

17. My principal does not encourage the teaching of social and emotional skills to students.

18. I want to improve my ability to teach social and emotional skills to students.

19. I would like to attend a workshop to learn how to develop my students' social and emotional skills.

The following questions use the following scale:

I implement this practice extremely well.

I generally implement this practice well.

I implement this practice reasonably well.

I struggle to implement this practice.

I do not implement this practice.

20. I promote positive behaviors by encouraging my students when they display good social skills (e.g., acknowledge positive actions or steps to improve).

21. I promote positive behaviors by encouraging my students when they display good work habits (e.g., acknowledge positive actions or steps to improve).

22. I let my students know how their effort leads to positive results with specific affirmations.

23. I let my students help plan how they are going to learn in developmentally appropriate ways.

24. I ask for student input when making decisions about how the classroom will operate in developmentally appropriate ways.
25. I give students meaningful choices (with parameters) on what they can work on.
26. I make sure students make the connection between their choices and potential consequences.
27. I arrange experiences that allow my students to become responsible (e.g., classroom aids or jobs, peer tutoring, specific roles in group work) in developmentally appropriate ways.
28. I demonstrate to each student that I appreciate him or her as an individual (e.g., appropriate eye contact, greeting each child by name).
29. I use the interests and experiences of my students when teaching.
30. I display to my students that I care about how and what they learn.
31. I let my students know that it is okay to get answers wrong or think outside of the box (e.g., modeling, praising attempts with “good thinking”).
32. I check in with my students about academic and nonacademic concerns they might have.
33. I follow up with my students when they have a problem or concern.
34. I create structures in the classroom where my students feel included and appreciated (e.g., morning meetings, small moments, whole class share outs).