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Secondary Principals' Perspectives of Adaptive Leadership Behaviors and Social Emotional Learning Program Implementation

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
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Abstract

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Emotional Learning Program Implementation

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EdS, Walden University, 2017

MS, Walden University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

School leaders play an important role in implementing social emotional learning (SEL)

and equitable discipline practices. A Northeastern United States school district initiated

the use of SEL programs districtwide to reduce suspensions, and no follow-up has been

conducted to explore how school principals adapted implementation to correspond with

their leadership practices, nor how these individuals adapted their leadership practices to

implement the intervention. Grounded in the SEL and adaptive leadership models, a basic

qualitative study was conducted to explore this gap in practice concerning the adaptive

leadership behaviors of 10 secondary principals who implemented SEL programs at their

schools, including the five SEL competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, self-

management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Transcripts of

individual semistructured interviews conducted via Zoom were explored using inductive

analysis through a priori and open coding. Findings revealed that principals adapted the

SEL intervention through the application of school improvement strategies and by

building a strong school culture. Specifically, principals provided SEL training and

adapted implementation based on school data and feedback. Principals modified their

leadership behaviors by responding to student needs and establishing a school identity.

They listened to students, created advisory classes, and made curriculum changes.

Positive social change may occur through expanded understanding of school leaders'

strategies that support effective SEL program implementation and may assist others

seeking to implement SEL programs.

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Dedication

My doctoral dissertation is dedicated to my Heavenly Father, who has blessed me beyond measure, my husband, Deron, my biggest cheerleader, and my daughters, Sierra, and Sequoia, who bring me joy every day!

Acknowledgments

Thank you, God, for allowing me to experience this moment! I am eternally grateful. Thank you to the best family in the world (Ma, Daddy, Bernie, Sabina Ann, Tony, Mike, Valerie, Jeff, Maryann, Bari); my mother-in-love, Teresa Snyder, my nieces and nephews and my new grandbaby, Nala. You all are my tribe and you got me through the ups and downs of this journey! Special thanks to my fellow doctoral student-friends (Darla, Davitta, and Tonia) because you listened, encouraged, and prayed for me when I wanted to give up.

Thank you to my committee chair, Dr. Underwood, and my committee member, Dr. Crawford, for your expertise, patience, and support along the way. I know you went way above and beyond on my behalf.

Jesus looked at them and said,

> *"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

Matthew 19:26

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

School administrators' roles and responsibilities have expanded, and leaders are required to address more than academic instruction when considering students' needs. In a school district in the Northeastern United States that will serve as the research site, administrators have initiated social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum to increase school climate satisfaction, enhance student performance, and decrease suspensions. SEL relates to how children and adults effectively manage emotions, show empathy, cultivate healthy relationships, and make good decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020). SEL skills help both students and academic staff navigate daily tasks and life challenges. Improved school climate and academic performance are among the positive outcomes that SEL programs can produce (Mahoney et al., 2020).

SEL programs implemented in schools have been found to increase students' self-confidence, school engagement, test scores, grades, and appropriate behavior (Greenberg et al., 2017; Jones-Schenk, 2019). The programs are preventive and interventive systems designed to support academic skills by addressing students' social emotional and behavioral needs (Yeager, 2017). When students possess a sense of self, can manage stress, and are socially aware; they experience greater learning success (Sospeter et al., 2020). SEL programs are based on five competencies: self-awareness, self-management; social awareness, responsible decision making, and relationship skills. These competencies are most effective when developed in the classroom but extend schoolwide and into the home and community (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Mahoney et al., 2020).

In addition to supporting academic success, teaching the SEL competencies also promotes positive behavior and encourages the formation of better relationships between students and teachers and among peers (Durlak et al., 2022; Khazanchi et al., 2021). At the research site, district principals implemented SEL programs to decrease suspension rates, particularly for African American students who constitute 60% of the student population and comprise 90% of the suspensions. Overall, African American students are four times more likely than White students to be suspended in the district where the study was conducted.

African American students have been found to experience the highest suspension and expulsion rates in previous research conducted in the United States (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Huang & Cornell, 2017; Skiba et al., 2012; Welsh & Little, 2018). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2021), the most recent data available which is from the school years 2017-2018, indicate that African American students account for 38% of out-of-school suspensions but comprise 15% of the student population. Exclusionary discipline practices may have a negative influence on academic achievement for African American students (Huang & Cornell, 2017; Welsh & Little, 2018). Other potential negative results of suspension are that it increases an individual's likelihood for: (a) involvement with crime, (b) future suspensions, (c) dropping out of school, and (d) minimal future civic engagement (Hwang, 2018; Morris & Perry, 2016; Ritter & Anderson, 2018). Implementing SEL programs in schools may prevent such adverse outcomes (Panayiotou et al., 2020). To be most effective, SEL implementation

should occur schoolwide (Mahoney et al., 2020) and involvement of school leaders is critical to this process (Kennedy, 2019; Oberle et al., 2016).

Although guidance for implementing SEL was provided to school principals at the study site in response to the district mandate to ensure successful SEL programs in their assigned schools, no follow-up has been conducted to explore how school principals may have adapted implementation plans to correspond with their own leadership practices, and whether they adapted their leadership practices to implement the intervention in their building. In this basic qualitative study, I explored these possibilities through semistructured interviews with principals. How principals use adaptive leadership skills to successfully implement SEL programs could have positive social change implications for other districts attempting to implement SEL practices by providing strategies to augment the standard implementation guidance with a range of successful practices.

In the remainder of Chapter 1, I will address the background literature, provide evidence to support the problem statement, and explain the purpose of the study. The formulation of my RQs and the alignment of the problem to my conceptual framework will be discussed. I will also explain the nature of the study, list definitions of terms specific to this study, as well as describe the assumptions, scope, delimitations, and limitations of the study. Chapter 1 concludes with the significance of this research study through its potential contributions to knowledge and practice.

Background

As educator concerns about students' mental health and social development have increased, so has administrative interest in SEL programs in schools (Allbright & Marsh, 2022; Ross & Tolan, 2018). All 50 states have SEL standards at the pre-K level and 16 of these include early elementary; eight states have SEL standards that include middle and secondary students (Omasta et al., 2021; Ross & Tolan, 2018). Forty-nine states and the District of Columbia include SEL in their health and physical education standards (Eklund et al., 2018). Suggested SEL strategies include: (a) ensuring a comprehensive vision of student success, (b) providing professional development, (c) identifying evidence-based strategies, (d) using Title IV grants for implementation, and (e) making SEL-related data public, including student surveys, school quality reviews, and attendance data (Gayl, 2018).

SEL is an intervention that was constructed to support the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA, U.S. Department of Education, 2019), which was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, U.S. Department of Education, 1965) providing equal opportunities for all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Through provisions in ESSA, school leaders can design their own programs to fit their schools' needs including developing students' social emotional skills and reducing suspensions. Based on the law, school leaders are encouraged to address equity issues, including discipline disparities, especially for African American students who experience the highest suspension rates nationally (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). SEL has the potential to address discipline issues (Hulvershorn & Mulholland,

2018). Several school districts have used SEL programs to change their approach to

discipline and reduce suspension rates (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). School administrators

are responsible for addressing discipline (Welsh & Little, 2018); their involvement is also

critical for the effective implementation of SEL programs in schools (Kennedy, 2019;

Oberle et al., 2016). In the study district, principals, other school leaders, and staff

participated in district-led SEL training throughout the school year on professional

development days and during preservice week. The training provided strategies for

implementing the SEL competencies to support improvements in climate and culture and

academic achievement and to address equity issues. Principals were also expected to

embed SEL goals within school improvement plans.

 The gap in practice to be addressed in this study is that a SEL intervention was

implemented without a follow-up to determine how it was implemented. This study could

reveal how the implementation plan provided by the district was adapted to individual

leadership practices, and how the implementation affected leadership practices of those

implementing the program. This study could encourage positive social change for district

leaders and academic decision makers who could potentially use the findings to guide

SEL implementation training for prospective and current principals.

<div align="center">**Problem Statement**</div>

 The problem addressed by this study is that no follow-up had been conducted to

explore how school principals adapted implementation of a districtwide SEL intervention

to correspond with their leadership practices, nor how they adapted their leadership

practices to implement the intervention. School leaders have resources for leading

instructional programs, managing school finances, and fostering collaborative planning

cultures, yet few studies detail the specific leadership practices needed to support

effective SEL implementation (Bailey & Weiner, 2022; Kennedy, 2019). Although the

research is limited, studies indicate that school leaders are critical to successful SEL

application (Bailey & Weiner, 2022). Exploring secondary principals' perspectives on the

implementation of SEL may bolster existing research on leadership's role in such

programming.

Effective implementation is critical to the success of the SEL program, and the

way the program is implemented affects student outcomes. Monitoring, professional

development, and leadership are some of the factors that contribute to the quality and

fidelity of implementation of SEL (Durlak, 2017). Additionally, teachers believe the

support of school administrators improves implementation of SEL (Kendziora & Osher,

2016; Ransford et al., 2009). Exploring the leadership practices of secondary principals

who implemented SEL programs as part of a district-wide strategy to improve school

climate, increase student performance, and decrease disciplinary suspensions may

provide implementation guidance including a range of successful practices that could be

used in other schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how school principals

adapted implementation of a districtwide SEL intervention to correspond with their

leadership practices, and how they adapted their leadership practices to implement the

intervention. A naturalistic research paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used to

explore school principals' perspectives on adapting a SEL intervention to correspond with their leadership skills and how their leadership behaviors were adapted to accommodate implementation of SEL principles. School principals may use the findings to add to their existing knowledge of leadership behaviors to support schoolwide implementation of SEL. The phenomenon being studied was the leadership behaviors used throughout implementation of SEL to improve school climate, increase student performance, and decrease disciplinary suspensions.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following RQs:

RQ1: How do secondary school administrators in a Northeastern school district in the United States adapt implementation of a SEL intervention to correspond with their leadership practices?

RQ2: How do secondary school administrators in a Northeastern school district adapt their leadership behaviors to support SEL competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was drawn from two models, SEL and adaptive leadership. SEL relates to how people understand and manage their emotions so they can achieve success, demonstrate care for others, develop healthy relationships and make wise choices. The SEL model is grounded in five competencies: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making

(CASEL, n.d.-a). The competencies will be used to guide the formation of the interview questions regarding SEL implementation and principal leadership behavior adaptations.

Incorporating these five competencies of SEL in schools leads to improved school climate, increased academic achievement, and stronger student-teacher relationships (Greenberg et al., 2017; Yeager, 2017). Using the SEL model as a contextual lens for the study will allow me to understand how the SEL intervention and leadership practices may have been adapted to support implementation. I analyzed participants' responses to determine emerging themes related to implementing the SEL intervention and adapting leadership practices to support implementation.

Heifetz et al. (2009) defined *adaptive leadership* as "the work of mobilizing people to address difficult problems which involves addressing needed changes in values and beliefs of the individuals in the organization" (p. 14). Adaptive leaders also distinguish between adaptive and technical challenges to facilitate change and achieve goals within their organization (Watkins et al., 2017). Adaptive challenges require new learning by individuals within an organization, but technical challenges have clear, known solutions (Heifetz et al., 2009). Adaptive challenges refer to uncertain and turbulent situations with a multitude of solutions (Nelson & Squires, 2017). Heifetz's contextual lens is pertinent to the study because elements of adaptive leadership, such as managing change and shifting mindsets and beliefs, when applied to the five SEL competencies, may improve school culture and climate. Additionally, adaptive leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009; Nelson & Squires, 2017) and SEL (Schonert-Reichl, 2019) may be

critical factors relating to school change. These two models comprising the conceptual framework will be described in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The research design was a basic qualitative study in one urban school district. Qualitative researchers seek to interpret the world and to make meaning through people in their natural contexts (Creswell, 2013). A basic qualitative study was used to understand the perspectives of participants and the meaning they derive from a certain phenomenon. Data were gathered from interviews, observations, or document analysis (Merriam, 2002). In the current study I used a basic qualitative study to explore school principals' perspectives on adapting the SEL intervention to correspond with their leadership behaviors and how they adapted their leadership behaviors to develop SEL competencies.

The sample included 10 secondary (middle and high school) principals who have been implementing SEL in their schools, as indicated by school profiles publicly available online. Data were gathered through individual semistructured interviews with school principals via Zoom video conference interface. I protected the rights of participants through a signed informed consent, use of pseudonyms, confidentiality, and the omission of identifying data about participants or their school and district when describing the study. Data were analyzed with a priori and open coding using thematic analysis.

Definitions

Principal leadership practices: Behaviors that are critical to student success (Liebowitz & Porter, 2019) such as creating strong instructional programs, motivating staff, developing vision, fostering collaboration, and building positive culture (Day et al., 2016).

Secondary schools: Include middle schools, Grades 6-8, and high schools, Grades 9-12 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

Assumptions

I assumed that school principals responsible for SEL implementation knew the district's focus on SEL is grounded in its equity goals to improve school climate, enhance student performance, and decrease suspensions because training was provided by the district. I also assumed that principals had knowledge of their unique school context and would share their honest perspectives regarding how SEL implementation works at their schools. Principals should also have been familiar with SEL as they needed to discuss SEL as an aspect of their school improvement plan because it is a required element of the plan.

Scope and Delimitations

The focus of the study was on secondary school principals' perspectives on how they adapted the implementation of SEL to fit their leadership practices and how they adapted their leadership practices to correspond with SEL. The study district implemented SEL at all schools, yet no follow-up has been conducted to determine how principals adapted the program or adapted their leadership practices.

I chose adaptive leadership as part of my framework because I wanted to explore how school principals manage the change process, address mindsets, and create sustainable, schoolwide change. While elements of transformational leadership such as focusing on the needs of followers and inspirational motivation are embedded within adaptive leadership, I chose adaptive leadership as a framework because I am interested in how school principals support individuals in their schools with addressing difficult problems through changes in values and beliefs. I also did not select a program evaluation framework because that approach is designed to assess the merit or worth of a program (Patton, 2002). My focus was not on the quality of SEL programs but on the leadership practices of principals as they implemented SEL. The scope of this study was limited to 10 secondary school principals who have implemented SEL at their schools in one Northeastern urban school district.

Transferability may be possible because the study will explore the perspectives of secondary principals from different schools throughout the district. Transferability is enhanced when the study uses various participants and sites (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Another term for transferability is similarity, which relates to the likeness of two contexts. If both contexts are "congruent" then the "working hypotheses" can be applied to the other context (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 262).

Limitations

This study was limited to the experiences and perspectives of secondary public school principals and no other school administrators who were involved with implementation of SEL programs. This limitation may affect transferability of findings.

As an assistant principal in the district, part of my role is to support teachers with implementing SEL practices in their classrooms. I also receive SEL training with other school leaders in the district. This training, along with my previous experiences as an assistant principal at a different school that used SEL strategies to build relationships and address discipline, has made me a proponent of the intervention. I believe that SEL strategies support student academic success and improve school climate and culture.

To minimize bias, I was cognizant of my own opinions and thoughts about principals' implementation of SEL and its potential to address discipline inequities among students. During the interviews I did not share my opinions, verbally or through other cues, and I encouraged participants to speak freely. In addition, I maintained a reflexive journal during the data collection and analysis process to record my personal thoughts and opinions.

Significance

The findings from this basic qualitative study may contribute to a better understanding of leadership behaviors that can help school administrators implement SEL programs at their schools. School principals may also use SEL competencies to improve school climate and culture and reduce inequities in suspension rates. Results from this study may contribute to positive social change by providing guidance on leadership practices that support implementation of SEL. District leaders may use the findings from this study to train new and current school leaders to support implementation of SEL programs.

Summary

Understanding how secondary school principals adapt their leadership practices to accommodate SEL strategies may facilitate effective implementation. At the research site, a gap in practice exists in that an intervention was implemented without a follow-up to determine how it was implemented and how that implementation affected leadership practices. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how school principals adapted implementation of a districtwide SEL intervention to correspond with their leadership practices and how they adapted their leadership practices to implement the intervention. I explored adaptive leadership strategies relating to managing change and mindsets. The findings of this study may provide school leaders insight into practices that support the effective implementation of SEL programs.

In Chapter 2, the review of the literature, I describe my literature search strategy and the conceptual framework supporting the study. I explore the research relating to the origins of SEL, the positive effects of SEL programs, how leadership plays a role in effective SEL implementation, and how adaptive leadership principles may support implementation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem of practice that was addressed by this study is that no follow up was conducted to explore how school principals adapted implementation of a districtwide SEL intervention to correspond with their leadership practices nor how they adapted their leadership practices to implement the intervention. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how school principals adapted implementation of a districtwide SEL intervention to correspond with their leadership practices, and how they adapted their leadership practices to implement the intervention. Additional research is needed regarding the role of leadership in the implementation of SEL; teachers need the support of school leadership for effective SEL implementation (Kennedy, 2019).

This literature review is organized to address the origins of SEL programs, the benefits of implementing the five SEL competencies in schools, challenges relating to implementation and measuring SEL outcomes, and the role of leadership in implementing SEL programs. I will also examine how adaptive leadership has been applied in previous studies and explore how it may be used to support implementation of SEL. The conceptual framework consists of two models: SEL and adaptive leadership. The SEL model represents how leaders implement the five competencies of SEL in schools. When SEL competencies have been implemented in the classroom, school climate and academic achievement have improved along with student-teacher relationships (Greenberg et al., 2017; Yeager, 2017). The adaptive leadership model is centered on how organizational members learn different strategies to solve difficult problems. Adaptive leaders distinguish between technical challenges and adaptive challenges when

seeking to implement change and new programs in their organizations. Technical

challenges have clear, known solutions to address problems associated with change,

while adaptive challenges require members of an organization to learn new ways to solve

problems (Heifetz et al., 2009). The conceptional framework was constructed using these

two models because elements of adaptive leadership, such as managing change and

shifting mindsets/beliefs, when applied to the five SEL competencies of self-awareness,

social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and self-management, may

provide school leaders with strategies to support implementation of SEL in their schools.

Literature Search Strategy

Resources used within Walden University Library included ERIC, Education

Source, Sage Journals, ProQuest, Google Scholar, and education and psychology

journals. Key words guiding the literature search were *social emotional learning, social*

emotional learning implementation, measuring SEL outcomes, leadership for SEL,

leadership strategies and school climate, teacher buy-in, school leadership, school

leadership and change, educational leadership, principal leadership, adaptive

leadership, transformational leadership, social emotional learning leadership, and

school culture. I also included books relating to SEL, dissertations, teacher surveys

regarding SEL, and other publications from the last 5 years were also included in the

literature search process.

Studies on SEL programs were reviewed to clearly understand the existing

literature on school leaders' roles in implementation and current perspectives on

leadership behaviors for successful SEL implementation. The limited pool of research

literature relating to the role of leadership in SEL programs resulted in an expansion of key term searches. Articles regarding effective implementation of SEL were included to identify leadership behaviors that support implementation, including articles about change leadership in education. I also included research-based articles about school discipline and the role of leadership were included in the search. I found a limited pool of research studies addressing SEL in relation to equity in discipline were found, including the role of school leadership in these areas.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was built on the underpinnings of two models, SEL and adaptive leadership. *Social emotional learning* is how people understand and manage their emotions so they can meet goals, show empathy, sustain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, n.d.-e. *Adaptive leadership* is the practice of mobilizing people to tackle difficult problems by helping them confront their own values, mindsets and beliefs and ultimately thrive in an organization (Heifetz, 1994; Watkins et al., 2017). Adaptive leaders distinguish between adaptive and technical challenges to help members in their organizations respond to change (Heifetz, 1994). *Adaptive* challenges require new thinking and mindset shifts whereas *technical* challenges can be addressed using existing knowledge and resources (Heifetz et al., 2009)

Implementing SEL programs often involves developing new mindsets and beliefs in adults and children (Brackett et al., 2019). Adaptive leaders understand that change in an organization must be systematic but also recognize the importance of supporting

people through the change process (Heifetz, 1994). Using this conceptual framework, I will explore school leaders' perspectives on adapting the SEL program and their own leadership behaviors to support implementation.

Social Emotional Learning

Discipline and academic achievement improve with the use of SEL in schools. According to findings from SEL research, teaching students to manage their emotions can lead to positive school and life outcomes (Barnes & McCallops, 2019; Jones & Doolittle, 2017; Greenberg, 2023). As a result, interest in SEL has increased over the last two decades leading more school districts to adopt SEL programs (Eklund et al., 2018; Osher et al., 2016) although schools have always been involved in cultivating the social emotional and moral aspects of students (Elias et al., 2008; Zins et al., 2007). SEL in schools has its origins in the progressive era's mental health movement, ecological thinking, behavior theories, multiple intelligences, and emotional intelligence (Osher et al., 2016). SEL programs are school-based systems designed to support academic skills by addressing students' social emotional and behavioral needs (Yeager, 2017). CASEL, a national nonprofit organization formed in 1994, established five SEL competencies designed to help adults and children manage their emotions. CASEL's definition of SEL was recently expanded to include the term "transformative" to emphasize the importance of addressing issues of inequity and race in schools (CASEL, n.d.-d.)

SEL Competencies

The goal of SEL programs in schools is for students to develop the five competencies and attain better school and life outcomes. These five competencies,

described below, are developed in the classroom but extend schoolwide and into the home and community (Schonert-Reichl, 2019).

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is understanding oneself including feelings, values, and behaviors. It is knowing and understanding your feelings and recognizing how those feelings may influence behavior (Rockwood, 2021). Teachers may use questioning strategies to help students monitor their feelings. Teachers can also model their own thinking process in response to frustration (Elias et al., 1997). Additionally, using classroom time for students to reflect on their thoughts and choices can foster self-awareness (CASEL, 2003).

Self-Management

Self-management is the ability to control emotions in order to reach goals. This is the power to manage stress, persevere, and regulate impulses (Melnick et al., 2017). For example, teachers may provide assignments for students to complete classwork independently without teacher direction which gives students opportunities to make decisions about their learning and practice self-control (Elias et al., 1997).

Social Awareness

Social awareness is understanding how one's emotions and feelings affect others, as well as understanding others' perspectives. The teaching of social awareness can be embedded into content when students are asked to develop a line of reasoning or respond to other students' opinions. A classroom lesson may engage students in a discussion about emotions and how not everyone feels the same in every situation (CASEL, 2003).

Relationship Skills

Relationship skills involve managing and developing healthy interactions and associations with others. When students work in pairs or groups in the classroom, there is an opportunity to integrate these skills into the lesson. Students can practice how to actively listen and work respectfully with others (CASEL, 2003).

Responsible Decision-Making

Responsible decision-making is the ability to make appropriate choices personally and socially. This includes an awareness of consequences and a consideration for the well-being of others. Students may learn how to consider ethics and safety when making decisions and develop skills for making long-term healthy choices (CASEL, 2018).

Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership, the second theory used in the conceptual framework for this study, was developed by Heifetz (1994) as a theory of practice at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. *Adaptive leadership* is the "practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive" (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 14). Adaptive leadership is grounded in two critical concepts: technical and adaptive challenges (Heifetz et al., 2009). *Technical challenges* are identifiable, have clear solutions, and can be resolved with existing resources. *Adaptive challenges* are not easily identifiable and cannot be solved with the leader's authority or through existing organizational processes (Northouse, 2016). Adaptive challenges require new learning. Additionally, some challenges are both technical and adaptive in nature (Heifetz et al., 2009).

With adaptive leadership, change is possible in an organization because there is a willlingness to address values and beliefs in order to strive for change. I chose this model because the implementation of SEL programs requires schoolwide adaptive change including addressing beliefs and mindsets.

Principles of Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leaders operate with an understanding that leaders' choices relate to a given space and time (Glover et al., 2002). This view expanded to include transactional interactions between leaders and followers in which a leader increases influence over time and is based on the leader gaining influence by conforming to expectations of followers or by using persuasive techniques to garner the support of followers (Heifetz, 1994). The Heifetz adaptive leadership model is built on the six principles described below.

Thriving

New challenges require new techniques for organizations to succeed in difficult times. Leaders must decide what thriving means for their organization. Some may determine that thriving means high morale, while others might choose exceptional customer service or positive social impact (Heifetz et al., 2009). For example, a principal may believe that thriving means all students are equipped with the necessary skills to succeed after graduation, or that all teachers work collaboratively in professional learning communities to improve their practice.

Building on the Past

Leaders decide what aspects of an organization should stay and what needs to be eliminated. Adaptive leaders ground change in the organization's values and beliefs, drawing on previous wisdom and expertise (Heifetz et al., 2009). A principal may decide to preserve a long-standing arts program, bolster an acclaimed athletic program, or improve the institution's relationship with the surrounding community.

Experimentation

Adaptive leaders find time and resources so they can try different strategies within their organization to implement change (Heifetz et al., 2009). A principal who works to improve academic achievement, climate, and culture in schools might partner with an external organization that provides tutoring or extracurricular activities. The principal acting as an adaptive leader may change the school schedule to increase teacher planning time or seek funds to send staff to professional development conferences to learn new skills.

Diversity

Adaptive leaders listen and appreciate different views. They do not rely on only those who are in leadership positions (Heifetz et al., 2009). In schools, this means seeking out the opinions of various stakeholders who may have a different, and possibly more accurate, understanding of what is occurring within the building. Such stakeholders may include teachers, aides, front office workers, and custodial staff.

Loss and Disequilibrium

Adaptive challenges inevitably lead to loss of long-held beliefs and behaviors. Leaders must identify and help people manage these losses (Heifetz et al., 2009). In schools, such change may come in the form of a new curriculum or schoolwide instructional focus, or a different approach to discipline.

The adaptive process of change, including confronting values and beliefs, leads to disequilibrium for followers. Adaptive problems cause greater anxiety and discomfort (Heifetz et al., 2009). Because the change process can lead to feelings of instability among followers, adaptive leaders must be adept at regulating distress and the resulting disequilibrium. A *zone of disequilibrium* exists where adaptive and technical problems can be addressed. In this zone, adaptive leaders must manage and monitor the stress of others by providing direction, building supportive relationships, and creating a safe atmosphere where there is comfort in handling difficult problems (Northouse, 2016).

Time

Adaptive change does not happen quickly. Even when the process is difficult, adaptive leaders must be willing to persist and endure the pressure (Heifetz et al., 2009). In schools, this may mean managing expectations when new programming is introduced and not expecting change to occur right away.

Adaptive Leadership Behaviors

The adaptive leadership model includes six leadership behaviors that are critical to the implementation of adaptive work (Northouse, 2016).

Get on the Balcony

Adaptive leaders must assess how their organization responds to adaptive challenges. The leaders are to step back and take a broad look at how the organization operates in terms of values, power struggles, and other negative reactions to change. The leaders will gather an accurate view of how the organization responds to problems. During this process, the adaptive leader examines structures, culture, and systems. (Heifetz et al., 2009). This requires the leader to reflect on the organization as an outsider, constantly moving from participant to observer. The goal is to see different possibilities and distinguish between adaptive and technical challenges (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017).

Identify Adaptive Challenges

Leaders must distinguish between technical and adaptive challenges so they can respond appropriately. Adaptive challenges are complex and often rooted in beliefs, loyalties, and values. These challenges require people to change (Heifetz et al., 2009). However, technical challenges can be addressed with existing resources or known solutions. Within all organizations there is a tendency to rely on technical solutions (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). For example, if students are consistently late to school, a technical response might be altering the schedule or assigning detention to late students while not addressing the underlying reasons why they may be late.

Regulate Distress

Adaptive leaders support others through the change process. Leaders can accomplish this and create a safe atmosphere for people to confront problems by

providing guidance, regulating their own stress, staying consistent, being a role model, and remaining confident (Northouse, 2016). Ultimately, regulating distress requires operating with compassion, and recognizing that change involves pain as individuals are pushed beyond their comfort zone. The adaptive leader meets people where they are while still challenging them to change (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Maintain Disciplined Attention

Helping people face the hard work that accompanies sustainable change is necessary, particularly the work relating to changing values and beliefs. People often engage in work avoidance. The adaptive leader keeps everyone focused on what is most important in the organization and will address those important topics that others try to ignore (Northouse, 2016).

Give the Work Back to the People

Knowing when to allow others to take on responsibility, even when they feel uncertain, is critical. Adaptive work means the leader provides direction but pushes others to take ownership of the work. In schools, a principal may charge teachers with designing and delivering professional development to address a problem, or give the custodial staff opportunities to work directly with students to improve school cleanliness. Adaptive leaders must be willing to release the work and challenge people to problem solve.

Protect Leadership Voices from Below

Adaptive leaders have the courage to listen to those in the organization who consistently disagree with the larger group. The decision to listen to "low-status" or "out-

group" members can disrupt the balance of the organization because these individuals would often not follow social norms in the way they express themselves. However, adaptive leaders are not afraid to give them voice and allow them to participate in decision-making (Northouse, 2016).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

Research on Social Emotional Learning Programs

SEL is described as education's missing component because educators recognize they must go beyond teaching academics and engage with students' social and emotional development (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019). Such involvement is associated with better academic performance and improved behavior (Atwell & Bridgeland, 2019; Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017; Corcoran et al., 2018; Cramer & Castro-Olivo, 2016; Elias, 2019; Greenberg et al., 2017; Meyers et al., 2019; Moţăţăianu, 2019; Tan et al., 2018). When educators successfully implement SEL programs, students' self-confidence, school engagement, test scores, grades, and behavior improve (Atkins et al., 2023; Greenberg et al., 2017; Jones-Schenk, 2019). Additionally, the use of SEL programs may decrease aggressive behavior and emotional anxiety among students, increase prosocial behavior, and improve students' attitudes about themselves and others (Castillo-Gualda et al., 2018; Martínez, 2016).

SEL programs can be implemented to help students cope with risk factors like drug use, bullying, and anxiety as well as prepare them for the challenges associated with further education and life beyond school (Greenberg et al., 2017; McKown, 2017; Posamentier et al., 2023). Participants in SEL programs had better attendance and

behavior than students not participating in SEL programs, according to the results of 213

studies involving 270,034 students (Kendziora & Osher, 2016). Researchers also found

that a focus on preventive measures such as conflict resolution skills, modeling, and

group discussions led to fewer conduct issues, less verbal and physical aggression, and

improved behavior among students (Bosworth et al., 2018; Botvin et al., 2006).

Challenges with SEL Implementation and Measurement

Additional research is needed to address factors that may influence

implementation at the individual, school, and systems level (McCormick et al., 2015).

For example, curriculum, teacher skill, leadership support, funding and policy, and school

climate may all be influencing factors (Cahill et al., 2019; McCormick et al., 2015;

Thierry et al., 2020). When schools are restricted to using a particular SEL curriculum or

a less-structured model not linked to the research, student training in SEL skills is

diminished (Herrenkohl et al., 2019). In settings where positive norms have already been

established, SEL programs may prove to be more successful. (McCormick et al., 2015).

Another challenge with implementation is fidelity (Durlak, 2015; Jones & Bouffard,

2012). Some schools implement programs for a short period of time, eliminate parts, and

fail to integrate SEL beyond the classroom level (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). As a result,

SEL outcomes are difficult to measure; Kim et al., 2022; McCormick et al., 2015;

Wigelsworth et al., 2016).

According to Wigelsworth (2016), there are three factors to be addressed in

evaluating SEL programming success: effectiveness, involvement of program developers,

and cultural transferability. Effectiveness can be determined when SEL is assessed at all

stages from inception to application in a real-life school context, not a controlled environment where staff members are well trained and supervised (Wigelsworth et al., 2016). Additionally, when program developers are involved with the evaluation and able to ensure fidelity, there is a likelihood that positive outcomes will be higher. Such outcomes may be difficult to ensure in other settings in which developers are not involved. Lastly, cultural transferability can be problematic, leading to mixed results if major adaptations are made when SEL is implemented internationally (Wigelsworth et al., 2016). Researchers also question whether SEL programming meets the needs of all students. There is a need for SEL to address racial inequities and to ensure programming is inclusive of all cultures (McCall, 2023; Vera, 2023). Despite these challenges with implementation and measurement, researchers believe SEL improves academic and social emotional well-being (Herrenkohl et al., 2020; Ura et al., 2020).

Social and Emotional Learning in the Classroom

Emotional and behavioral health is important to academic success and can improve performance. SEL can be used to help students become more aware of their learning and to exert themselves in improving their work (Eklund et al., 2018; Hunter et al., 2022; Kendziora & Osher, 2016). A supportive classroom climate, SEL-integrated instruction, and the direct teaching of SEL skills are the components of effective implementation in the classroom (CASEL, n.d.-b). Teachers can use SEL programs to create classroom environments where students feel safe and supported. They can establish a sense of community, build positive relationships with students, and use

culturally responsive teaching strategies (Barnes & McCallops, 2019; Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2018) to reinforce SEL competencies (Barnes, 2019).

Through SEL classroom instruction, students learn skills that allow them to develop positive relationships with their peers and teachers (Jones & Doolittle, 2017; Michael et al., 2023; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2018). Through literature as well as informational and complex texts, students can examine social issues and understand the world (Fisher & Frey, 2020; Kim & Hong, 2019). In the science and mathematics classroom, students engage in inquiry work using SEL skills such as collaboration and decision making (Bahnson et al., 2020; Lee, 2022). Culturally relevant teaching practices, diverse viewpoints, and openness to allow students to contribute to their own learning are important components of SEL programs (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2018).

Additionally, teachers who are skilled in SEL and culturally relevant teaching are better prepared to teach diverse students (Barnes & McCallops, 2019; Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). Culturally relevant teaching strategies are used to embed student experiences with SEL competencies and to incorporate their perspectives and interests (Barnes & McCallops, 2019). When teachers create classrooms that are inviting and supportive, there is opportunity for deeper learning, better classroom management, and better relationships with students (Jones & Kahn, 2017; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017; Taylor & Lein, 2023). The goal of SEL programming is to maximize learning in school by supporting the social and emotional skills of students, while meeting academic standards in a safe, caring, and supportive environment (Martínez, 2016). Teachers are

responsible for creating these safe learning environments (Billy & Garríguez, 2021; Schonert-Reichl, 2019; Wentzel et al., 2016) and for motivating students (Wentzel et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2018).

Social and Emotional Learning and Teacher Buy-In

Teachers drive SEL program implementation, so their buy-in and belief in SEL is critical. According to a 2013 report prepared by Civic Enterprises (Bridgeland et al., 2013), a public policy group, teachers believed in the effectiveness of SEL. Of the more than 600 teachers surveyed, 95% believed SEL can be taught, and 97% said SEL is beneficial for all students. The survey also indicated that teachers believed in the positive effects of SEL on students regarding college and career readiness, attendance, graduation, behavior, and overall academics (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Another study of 82 school-based social and emotional interventions also demonstrated teacher support for the benefits of SEL (Taylor et al., 2017).

For classroom teachers to successfully implement SEL programs, they need the support of school leadership, including principals and other administrators. When teachers perceive there is support from school leaders as evidenced by consistent schoolwide SEL practices and resources, including additional planning time, they are more willing to support SEL implementation (Brackett et al., 2019; Hanson-Peterson et al., 2016; Martínez, 2016). Ongoing training, support, and professional development helps build teachers' confidence in their ability to teach SEL strategies (Benner et al., 2023; Huck et al., 2023; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017; Vera, 2023).

Applying Social and Emotional Learning Competencies to Discipline

Implementing SEL programs may help students and adults apply new skills and knowledge that could improve discipline disparities (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). When school leaders apply SEL strategies to address discipline problems, relationships between students and adults improve. For example, building healthy relationships, one of the five SEL competencies, may help address discipline challenges. Research indicates that cultivating positive relationships, conflict resolution, and other restorative practices support behavior management (Haymovitz et al., 2018; LaForett & De Marco, 2020; Mahoney et al., 2020). The use of restorative practices in schools is increasing and recent studies show it is most effective when implemented schoolwide and within the context of SEL programming (Garnett et al., 2022; Huguley et al., 2022).

Restorative practices are processes used to build relationships and community to prevent conflict and wrongdoing and to rebuild community when harm has occurred (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). The use of restorative practices supports self-management and self-awareness because these practices allow for healing, recovery, and prevention of conflict between students, as well as between adults and students. Students learn to control their emotions, understand other perspectives, set positive goals, and be responsible (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018; Hurd et al., 2021). School leaders can lead by modeling the language and practices of SEL (Patti et al., 2015). School leaders can also create schoolwide systems to help students and staff practice SEL competencies like *self-awareness* to examine and reflect on one's own beliefs and biases and *social awarenes*s to consider the perspectives of others. Administrators have the power to

establish a schoolwide vision for SEL by offering professional development and ensuring

coordinated classroom implementation and providing resources in support of SEL

(Greenberg et al., 2017; Humphries et al., 2018; Jones & Kahn, 2017; Kendziora &

Osher, 2016).

Leadership and Social Emotional Learning

Like many teachers, school leaders believe that SEL is effective, but desire more

training to support implementation. A national survey prepared for CASEL by Atwell

and Bridgeland (2019) determined that 83% of more than 710 principals supported

teaching SEL skills and believed in its effectiveness. The survey also indicated that

principals struggled with implementation and that high schools were less likely than

middle and elementary schools to have a plan for implementation (Atwell & Bridgeland,

2019). Jones and Cater (2020) concluded that principals believed in its importance but

lacked a clear understanding of how to implement and assess SEL. Bailey (2022) echoed

similar findings referencing principal lack of understanding about how to implement SEL

and the role of the competencies in their schools. However, support of school leadership

is crucial to effective implementation of SEL because leaders are expected to create

vision and cultivate change in schools (Allensworth & Hart, 2018; Mahfouz et al., 2019).

CASEL, in its theory of action model, indicates four key areas to promote effective

implementation of SEL: (a) build foundational support, (b) strengthen adult SEL

competencies, (c) promote SEL for students, and (d) practice continuous improvement

(CASEL, n.d.-c).

Leaders can build foundational support by establishing a schoolwide vision and taking a systems approach (Greenberg et al., 2017; Jones & Kahn, 2017; Kendziora & Osher, 2016). A systems approach to SEL means leaders are assessing school resources, providing training for all staff, and using evidence-based strategies in the classroom and throughout the school to support schoolwide implementation (Oberle et al., 2016). School leaders can also build foundational support by partnering with staff and the community around common language, strategies, and activities to support SEL (Oberle et al., 2016).

Establishing a vision includes inviting all stakeholders to contribute to the SEL process. Teachers, students, parents, and the community should be part of the SEL team that creates the vision for the school. This vision can be used to guide the school's SEL implementation (Meyers et al., 2019). Adult competencies can be developed through training and opportunities for staff to collaborate and build relationships with each other. A focus on adult social emotional competencies is a key indicator of systemic SEL implementation (Mahoney et al., 2020). Additionally, when adults develop their own SEL skills, they can build trusting relationships with students, which in turn support prosocial behavior and positive school climates. The systemic approach to SEL includes teachers applying SEL in classrooms and parents modeling SEL skills at home and in the community (Meyers et al., 2019).

Promoting SEL for students involves school leaders working to align existing school structures like behavior norms and classroom instruction with SEL programming (CASEL, 2008). For example, establishing schoolwide behavior expectations based on SEL principles, and drawing on academic content to teach students about managing

emotions are ways to infuse SEL into current school structures. Using restorative

discipline practices and providing ongoing training to help staff and students practice

SEL strategies are also techniques for systemic implementation (Oberle et al., 2016).

Selecting teaching practices that support SEL and helping teachers integrate these

practices into classrooms is another method for integrating SEL into school structures

(Chu & DeArmond, 2021).

Results of a study conducted by Chu and DeArmond (2021) further support the

importance of schoolwide implementation and the critical role of leadership. The

researchers determined that shared approaches such as using a common curriculum

helped staff and students practice SEL strategies daily. In addition, collecting data that

align with SEL skills provides guidance on needed improvements and adding SEL

positions to the leadership staff ensures authority and may increase resources to support

implementation. Ultimately, school leaders are responsible for creating the vision, setting

high expectations, and providing the resources to ensure that SEL is implemented

effectively (Mahoney et al., 2020; Patti et al., 2015). Although research addressing the

role of school leadership in SEL implementation is limited, school leaders are critical for

sustainability of SEL programs (Bailey & Weiner, 2022; Domitrovich et al., 2019;

Greenberg et al., 2003; Kennedy, 2019).

Research on Adaptive Leadership

Schools are complex environments and school leaders must be able to navigate

change and adapt as education has become increasingly complex as a result of advances

in science, technology, and most recently a global pandemic (Dunn, 2020). Adaptive

leadership has been studied for over 20 years, with initial research relating to its utility in the military and medical fields. In a study of 12 corporations, Kotter and Heskett (1992) determined that organizations that are flexible and adaptive ultimately experience success. Leaders of these organizations embrace change and believe in working together to achieve success. Such organizations place trust in people, view mistakes as opportunities to improve, and assume responsibility for the growth of followers (Kotter & Heskett, 1992). Yukl and Mahsud (2010) described flexible and adaptive leadership as essential because of global, technological, and cultural changes. Studies also addressed adaptive leadership in educational leadership and higher education. For example, within the literature on educational leadership, the importance of managing technical and adaptive challenges has emerged as a potential factor in improving student achievement and school climate (Jayan et al., 2016; Waters et al., 2003). The technical challenges involve problem solving while the adaptive challenges involve leaders building trust, taking risks, and addressing values and beliefs of members in the organization.

A 2020 study examined the use of adaptive leadership at the University of Nebraska (Sunderman et al., 2020). Campus leaders used adaptive leadership strategies to address a rise in freedom of speech incidents on campus. After identifying the adaptive challenge, leaders used forums and collaborative conversations to address the issues, ultimately developing a "commitment to free expression" and creating a position to address diversity and inclusion. All voices were included during the process and the work was given back to those involved to devise a solution (Heifetz et al., 2009).

In a study of five Australian school boards, researchers used adaptive leadership to examine how the boards responded to a change in governance. The principles of embracing diversity, designing the learning, and managing disequilibrium were found to be key components of the necessary adaptive work (Campbell-Evans et al., 2014). Additionally, two case studies illustrated the applicability of adaptive leadership in a higher education setting (Randall & Coakley, 2007). The first case involved a 4-year college that moved from an urban location to a suburban setting, with leaders expecting that the larger campus would lead to increased enrollment. When this increase did not happen, various leaders sought input from their superiors and focused on long-term planning without the input of relevant stakeholders. Eventually, fiscal fears led to the closing of the school. Randall and Coakley (2007) noted that the first step in enacting change is to assess whether the problem is technical or adaptive. In this case, leaders viewed the problem as technical and addressed it as such. In the second case study, a nationally ranked graduate program experienced a 20% decline in enrollment over 5 years. Leaders determined that behaviors and attitudes were at the root of the problem and used an adaptive approach to address the situation (Randall & Coakley, 2007). Crucial to this adaptive process was managing conflict and creating a place where people could feel safe to express their views as well as involving relevant stakeholders. The school was able to successfully redesign the program. These cases highlight the relevancy and transferability of adaptive leadership strategies, particularly related to shifting mindsets, behaviors, and attitudes within school cultures. A third case involved a higher education program where educators decided curricular reform was crucial if they were to

meet the changing needs of its students. Change had been attempted before but without success and with much resistance. However, when leadership engaged more stakeholders and helped staff work adaptively over time through experimentation and building on the past (Heifetz et al., 2009), curricular change was achieved (Wolfe, 2015). Reflections on the adaptive process revealed the importance of leaders observing before acting, evidence of resistance due to loss, the need for an experimental mindset, and a commitment to adapt. The identification of the need for and use of adaptive leadership to address various challenges at the university level is promising. Such research can serve as a foundation for expanding of investigations at the K-12 levels.

Although the adaptive leadership studies relating to K-12 education are few, interest in adaptive leadership continues to grow as recent studies have focused on how adaptive leadership strategies help leaders navigate the discomfort and resistance that comes with change (Kershner & McQuillan, 2016; Notman, 2017). Researchers are also beginning to address the role of adaptive leadership in developing school leaders, including teacher leaders, and that teachers and administrators need to develop adaptive skills to meet the demands and expectations of the educational system (Boylan, 2018; Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2013). Most recently K-12 schools have drawn on adaptive leadership to manage the COVID-19 pandemic which required school leaders to rely on technical and adaptive approaches. School systems had to navigate remote learning while simultaneously finding ways to address the mental health of students (Bagwell, 2020; Hastie, 2023). Studies such as these highlight the progress being made regarding adaptive leadership research, but much more is needed at the K-12 level.

Adaptive Leadership and Change

Elements of Kotter's (2012) eight-stage process for leading change converge with the adaptive leadership model. Like Kotter, Heifetz et al. (2009) identified the importance of relying on more than one individual to lead change in an organization, the need for more than positional power, the cultivation of leadership capacity, and the building upon of existing structures. Leaders implementing SEL programs in their organizations will need the full buy-in of the staff as well the ability to cultivate emerging leaders to sustain SEL effectiveness. Fullan (2006) contended that the future of educational change must focus on sustainability, or systems thinking, for an organization to grow. Sustainable organizations are consistently improving, adapting, and problem solving as they address complex challenges.

Sustainability also requires the development of leaders, given that the responsibilities of school leaders have expanded beyond the depth of ability of a single person (Fullan, 2006). Fullan regards systems thinking as described by Senge (1990) as an adaptive challenge and within the eight elements of sustainability, which include elements that align with principles of adaptive leadership such as deep learning and capacity building. Senge's five disciplines of learning also reflect Heifetz's (1994) perspective that adaptive organizations are committed to learning. Adaptive leaders recognize what they do not know but are willing to engage in ongoing learning to solve problems (Heifetz et al., 2009). This recognition of limitations on the part of the leader would serve well in establishing SEL programming because SEL is a shift from traditional approaches and mindsets. Senge described personal mastery, or continual

learning as critical to an organization's growth. Senge's fifth discipline of systems

thinking further intersects with the adaptive leadership model in that it acknowledges that

everything is connected and there must be a "shift of mind." This shift is about deep

learning that propels organizations to increase capacity and accomplish more (Senge,

1990) or "to tackle difficult problems" (Heifetz et al., 2009). Adaptive leaders allow for

this increase in capacity because there is a commitment to learning that makes room for

experimentation and mistakes, various perspectives, reflection about (and

acknowledgement of) failure, and a willingness to make changes as needed. These

changes will inevitably involve emotions; adaptive leaders are willing to share their own

emotions, which in turn allows others to do the same (Heifetz, 1994).

Adaptive Leadership Behaviors and SEL Competencies

Despite the need for additional research, adaptive leadership principles and SEL

competencies are reflected within current school leadership principles of setting

direction, building relationships, developing people, redesigning the organization to

support desired practices, and improving the instructional program (Leithwood et al.,

2020).

Setting Direction

The adaptive leader sets direction by stepping back from the organization. Heifetz

et al. (2009) stated that leaders should *get on the balcony* and recognize when current

approaches no longer work and commit to the change process. The adaptive leader also

acknowledges that the organization reflects a larger system and determines which

elements of current processes should remain in place. Principals can set direction by

ensuring that SEL competencies are reflected in all aspects of the school including classroom instruction, routines, relationships, climate, and discipline.

Building Relationships

A fundamental principle of SEL is the importance of cultivating healthy relationships among students and between adults and students throughout the school. Developing strong relationships supports positive behaviors and a healthy school climate. When students feel safe and cared for, there are fewer discipline problems (da Cunha et al., 2021). Additionally, adaptive leaders understand the importance of building trust, inspiring people, and listening with compassion as people experience change.

Developing People

Social emotional competencies are designed for adults and children. The adaptive leader develops people by helping them to confront and shift their mindsets, or as Northouse (2016) stated, "regulate distress" (p. 266). Adaptive leaders also commit to developing people and to continuous learning (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Redesigning the Organization

SEL relies on schoolwide implementation to be effective and adaptive leaders understand that lasting change must occur throughout the entire organization. Such leaders are not afraid to experiment and take risks so that the organization can thrive.

Improving the Instructional Program

Through SEL programs, students can experience emotional safety in school, which may help them perform better academically. Additionally, SEL competencies can

be integrated into curriculum to support learning through culturally responsive teaching and other strategies that address individual student academic needs.

Demonstration of adaptive leadership behaviors could be building blocks for SEL implementation and the schoolwide systemic change it requires. Additionally, this study may expand the limited research regarding the role of principals in implementation of SEL, specifically how SEL implementation aligns with individuals' leadership practices and approaches to address issues of equity in discipline and school climate.

Summary and Conclusions

In this literature review, I addressed the origins and benefits of SEL and its positive influence in schools. I also explored elements of effective implementation and how the five competencies of SEL may be applied in classrooms and schoolwide. I addressed the origins, principles and practices of adaptive leadership, and related studies.

Major themes in SEL research center on teacher implementation, the positive influence of SEL on student outcomes, the importance of evidence-based programs, and schoolwide implementation. More research is needed regarding the role of school leadership in the implementation of SEL. However, the work of leading SEL in schools must include adaptive elements. Adaptive leaders can ensure schoolwide implementation of SEL and support teachers and staff as they reflect on how their beliefs, mindsets, and behaviors align with SEL goals. Additional research is needed regarding the potential for SEL to improve discipline equity. This study may fill a gap in literature and practice regarding leadership behaviors that support implementation of SEL to improve school climate. In Chapter 3, I present the methodology for this study, the process for recruiting

participants, the instrumentation, procedures for data collection, and the data analysis plan. I will address protecting participants' rights and privacy and explain the trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how school principals adapted implementation of a districtwide SEL intervention to correspond with their leadership practices and how they adapted their leadership practices to implement the intervention. The involvement of school leaders is critical to successful implementation of SEL programs in schools (Kennedy, 2019; Meyers et al., 2019). School leaders have the power to establish vision, provide training, and ensure SEL is infused into daily school activities (Oberle et al., 2016).

In this chapter, I explain the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methods, recruitment procedures, data collection methods, and data analysis plan. I address ethical issues and procedures used to establish trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

The phenomenon studied was the leadership behaviors used by principals throughout implementation of SEL to improve school climate, increase student performance, and decrease disciplinary suspensions. I used the following RQs to guide this basic qualitative study:

RQ1: How do secondary school administrators in a Northeastern school district adapt implementation of a SEL intervention to correspond with their leadership practices?

RQ2: How do secondary school administrators in a Northeastern school district adapt their leadership behaviors to support SEL competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making?

Research Tradition and Rationale for Selection

For this study I chose a basic qualitative design to explore secondary school principals' understandings about how they adapted an SEL intervention in their schools. While all qualitative research is concerned with how meaning is constructed, "the primary goal of basic qualitative research is to uncover and interpret these meanings" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 25). The phenomenon studied was the leadership behaviors that support effective implementation of SEL to improve climate and culture. The focus was on identifying leadership behaviors used by secondary school principals throughout implementation of SEL to improve school climate, increase student performance, and decrease disciplinary suspensions.

To identify these behaviors, I used individual interviews within a basic qualitative study which allowed for the discovery of a phenomenon or process and the perspectives of the people involved in the study (see Merriam, 2002). While a historical narrative approach would have allowed me to share individual experiences, my goal was not to share a life history but to explore a variety of experiences in the context of school leadership (see Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Using a case study was an option for this research because case studies are used to explore an event or process in its natural setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, case studies also rely on multiple sources of evidence to construct meaning and are bound by the "unit of analysis" not the study topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) as is the case with my research. I used one source of evidence to construct meaning, interviews. Additionally, the unit of analysis in this study—school administrators—was not bound

because an indefinite number of administrators could be studied. Phenomenological and grounded theory were possible options because each focus on individual experiences. However, phenomenological researchers are concerned with the essence of an individual's experience and not the individual's perception of that experience. I explored principals' perceptions of their leadership practices in relation to implementing SEL. Additionally, grounded theory is used to build "substantive theory" and for examining a process (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). In this study I explored SEL as a process.

I also did not choose a program evaluation approach. Program evaluations are used to determine the effectiveness of a program (Merriam, 2009). This study was not designed to evaluate the quality of the district's SEL program but rather to explore the perceptions of secondary school administrators as they adapted the SEL program to correspond with their leadership practices. A basic qualitative design was appropriate for this study because I used one method of data collection, interviews, to understand the experiences of different administrators who adapted an SEL intervention.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the key instrument for data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Uniquely placed within the study, the researcher reflects a particular culture, background, and set of experiences that will determine how the study evolves (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, in this role the researcher must reflect on personal beliefs and assumptions that may influence the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Qualitative researchers are transparent about how their personal background and perspectives may be reflected in their interpretation of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I am an educator with 22 years of experience including being a teacher, reading specialist, and administrator. I am an assistant principal at a high school in the study district. I am familiar with some of the principals who were participants, but I have no supervisory role over them. I have also attended district SEL trainings with some of the participants. In my prior school, I worked with other school leaders to support SEL initiatives. I also received district SEL training alongside other school and district leaders. This training, along with my experiences as an assistant principal at a previous school that used SEL strategies to build school climate and address discipline, has made me a proponent of SEL. I believe that SEL strategies support academic success and improve school climate and culture.

As the researcher for this study, I conducted interviews to collect data and analyze interview transcripts using the SEL and adaptive leadership models which comprise the conceptual framework for this study. To reduce possible bias, I reflected after each interview. I used a reflexive journal to write about my opinions and thoughts related to SEL and leadership. This process helped me to remain aware of how my perspective may affect my understanding and interpretation of the data.

Reflexivity is the consistent awareness and evaluation of the researcher's role and influence on the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Ravitch and Carl (2021) suggested four methods to help researchers engage in structured reflexivity: composing researcher memos, keeping a reflexive journal, engaging in dialogic engagement, and conducting researcher interviews. I maintained a reflexive journal during the data collection and

analysis process to record my opinions and to respond to data reflexive collection questions as suggested by Ravitch and Carl (2021).

Methodology

I conducted a basic qualitative study to identify and describe how secondary school principals in one school district in a Northeastern state adapted an SEL intervention to correspond with their leadership practices and how their leadership practices are adapted to fit with the SEL program. In the next sections I have outlined the participant selection, instrumentation, recruitment process, and data analysis plan.

Participant Selection

I used purposeful sampling to identify and recruit participants for this study. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to gather data from those who understand the problem being addressed by the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Potential participants were identified using school profiles posted publicly online on the state department of education website. Because all district schools were expected to implement SEL programs, the criteria for selection included all secondary (middle and high school) principals who have been at their schools at least 2 years and received the district mandate to implement SEL programs at their schools. The sample size for qualitative research should be small to allow for detailed explanation (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). In qualitative research there is less focus on sampling size because qualitative researchers do not seek to generalize information but to answer RQs thoroughly by providing diverse and complex perspectives (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

To recruit participants for this study, after receiving approvals from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the district, I secured email addresses of all secondary administrators in the district which were available publicly through school and district websites. Administrators at the school where I worked were not included in the study.

I sent an email containing information regarding the purpose of the study, the nature and length of the interview, the research study letter of approval from the school district, and the consent form. Prospective participants were asked to respond to the email invitation within one week indicating their interest in participation. After 10 days, a reminder email was sent to administrators who had not responded to the initial invitation.

There are 40 secondary principals in the district. I met my target sample size of recruiting 10 school principals for participation in the study. However, if this had not occurred, the invitation process would have been repeated with assistant principals at the schools where principals were not participating.

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument for this study was an interview protocol (Appendix) that I designed to include one-on-one, semistructured open-ended questions. Qualitative researchers choose interviews as a key data source to construct full, detailed, and contextualized descriptions about the phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In qualitative research, semistructured interview questions relate to the RQs and allow for additional probing of participant responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I developed the interview questions for this study to align with the RQs and the conceptual framework

which is comprised of the Heifetz (1994) model of adaptive leadership and the SEL

(Weissberg et al., 2015) model and related literature. I asked additional follow-up and

probing questions based on participant responses. Samples of potential follow-up and

probing questions were included in the Interview Protocol (Appendix).

Qualitative interviews allow researchers to explore and delve into the perspectives

and experiences of others. These interviews differ from ordinary conversation in that the

focus is on the RQs (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I interviewed secondary (middle and high

school) principals about their perspectives on implementing SEL in their schools and

adapting their leadership practices to correspond with SEL programming. Good interview

questions are detailed and descriptive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview protocol

(Appendix) allowed participants to offer detailed information about how SEL

implementation was experienced in their individual settings. Each participant was asked

the same questions listed in the interview protocol which were developed to answer the

RQs. To ensure content validity, interview questions aligned with what participants were

taught during training about the SEL program and the five competencies. I also asked

three elementary school administrators who received SEL training and were

implementing the program at their schools to review interview questions for content and

clarity. Table 1 illustrates the alignment between interview questions and RQs. The

context questions were not meant to align with a specific RQ.

Table 1

Alignment of Interview Questions and Research Questions

Context Questions:

- How long have you worked in education?
- How long have you worked in this district?
- How long have you been a principal at this school?
- How would you describe your leadership practices (as opposed to management practices)?
- Have you participated in district SEL training? How would you describe your experience?
- Do you use the five competencies (self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making) to improve discipline at your school? Explain.

RQ1: How do secondary school administrators in a Northeastern school district adapt implementation of a SEL intervention to correspond with their leadership practices?

- Describe ways you have implemented SEL in your school.
- Does SEL programming align with your leadership practices, or did you modify the suggested implementation to increase alignment?

RQ2: How do secondary school administrators in a Northeastern school district adapt leadership practices to support SEL competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision making?

- How do your leadership practices promote the five competencies of SEL? Explain.
- Did your leadership practices present any obstacles to promoting the five SEL competencies? If so, how were these overcome?

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I used email communication to recruit potential participants for the study.

Potential participants were not offered incentives for participation. For initial selection, I

invited principals from all public middle and high schools in the district, other than the

school where I work. Seven principals responded to my initial email. Fewer than 10

principals expressed an interest in participating in the study within 10 days; therefore, I

sent a follow-up email with a second request and received responses from three

additional principals. If I still had been unable to recruit at least 10 principals, I would

follow the recruitment procedure with assistant principals at secondary schools where

principals are not participating.

Potential participants were asked through email communication sent from my

Walden University email address if they were interested in participating in the study. The

email explained the purpose of the study, listed several sample interview questions, and

specified the time commitment for the interview and member checking follow-up. The

email also explained the confidentiality process and that participation was voluntary with

the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The consent form was attached to the

initial email.

Potential participants replied via email with "I consent," indicating they had

reviewed the consent form and were agreeing to participate in the study. Within one day

of each participant's response, a follow-up email was sent to participants who agreed to

participate in the study to arrange an interview time. The recruitment window was set to

last for 2 weeks but was extended to 6 weeks because, initially, there were not enough

responses. Seven principals responded to the initial email and three more responded to the follow-up email**.**

Interview Procedures

Due to restriction of visitors in the schools because of the Covid-19 pandemic, and to ensure confidentiality, interviews were conducted via Zoom individually with participants at times that were convenient for them after school hours. Interviews were audio recorded via Zoom and later downloaded and stored on an external hard drive. The interview protocol (Appendix) consisted of 10 prepared questions including context questions. The number of questions changed to include follow-up questions. Follow-up questions provided clarification and detail and allowed me to further explore an interviewee's responses and to request additional information as necessary (see Rubin & Rubin, 2021).

Data collection occurred approximately three times a week after school hours until all interviews were completed over the course of 6 weeks. Each participant was interviewed once for approximately 1 hour.

At the start of the interview, I thanked the principals for their participation in the study and reviewed their rights and confirmed informed consent. I explained that I would ask one question at a time and informed participants that they may ask for questions to be repeated or clarified, if necessary. I asked participants if they had questions and whether they were prepared to begin the interview and I indicated when I began to record the interview. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were asked if they had any additional information that they would like to add. I explained the process for member

checking and thanked them for their participation. Member checking occurred via email after I analyzed the data for each interview and prior to producing the final report during the coding process. Participants checked the summary findings from their interview for accuracy and responded within 7 days if modifications were requested. I sent a final email thanking administrators for their time and participation and informed them that the study would be available in ProQuest after it is completed.

Data Analysis Plan

Qualitative data analysis is the systematic and careful process researchers use to understand their data (Saldaña, 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2021) explained that this systematic examination of data occurs throughout the research process and involves organization, management, immersive engagement, and the writing and representation of the data. Qualitative researchers use inductive analysis to make sense of the data and ultimately answer the RQs. Inductive analysis consists of combining, reducing, interpreting, and examining small pieces of data, larger concepts, and descriptions to make meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is an iterative process that leaves opportunity for discovery throughout the analysis process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), preparing an accurate transcript is the first step in data analysis and to prevent bias when coding**.** I used the Zoom audio transcription function to transcribe interviews. The transcripts were first deidentified by assigning pseudonyms for each participant (Principal 1, Principal 2, and so forth). After downloading the interview transcripts to my computer, I crosschecked the transcripts with the audio recordings for accuracy. Interviews were transcribed verbatim without

reliance on memory to ensure accuracy and to prevent bias when coding (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I w listened to the audio recordings multiple times to check for accuracy, including the removal of filler language such as um, uh, and repeated words. I then used the transcribed interview data to begin the coding process.

Coding Process

Coding is an approach to data analysis in which the researcher assigns a brief description to the data (Saldaña, 2016). A six-step process, modeled after Braun and Clarke (2012), will be followed. The six steps are: (1) familiarize yourself with your data, (2) assign preliminary codes to your data to describe the content, (3) search for patterns or themes in your codes across different interviews, (4) review themes, (5) define and name themes, (6) produce your report (Braun & Clarke, 2012, pp. 60-69).

Familiarize Myself with the Data. I read and reread the interview transcripts to familiarize myself with the data (see Braun & Clarke, 2012). I made notes on the printed transcript of key ideas, initial thoughts, and keywords relating to the RQs, and summarized concepts in relation to my RQs.

Assign Preliminary Codes. I began my coding process using a priori coding. *A priori codes* are preliminary codes that are derived beforehand, often based on RQs and study goals (Saldaña, 2013). I used a priori codes based on the conceptual framework. Adaptive leadership codes were used to identify principles relating to how principals adapted their leadership practices to support implementation, specifically, codes for setting direction; building relationships, and developing people; redesigning the organization; and improving the instructional program. SEL codes indicated the five SEL

competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.

Open coding is a search for repetition of words, phrases, or concepts. Open coding can involve multiple rounds of reading transcripts looking for repetition, agreement, and disagreement between participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I applied open coding by searching for similar and repeated words, phrases, and concepts. I began broadly and narrowed down to specific codes, using descriptive categories. I then moved beyond description and assigned meaningful labels to similar words, phrases, and concepts.

Search for Patterns or Themes. Following a priori and open coding, I determined temporary themes by searching for similarities and differences among codes, looked for overlap among codes, and areas where codes could be combined and clustered around a similar issue or topic. My analysis process involved critically reflecting and writing about the relationships between codes. I then examined the relationships to develop temporary themes.

Review Themes. I determined whether these temporary themes indicated something meaningful and whether some themes should be combined or eliminated. I then created a set of themes with supporting data. I reviewed the temporary themes to determine whether they answered the RQs using the framework to guide data analysis.

Define and Name Themes. The search for themes in data is a critical part of the data analysis because it involves the study goals, RQs, conceptual framework, and the literature review (Saldaña, 2013). In this step, each theme was defined. The themes

should be distinct, related without too much overlap, and address the RQs (Braun &

Clarke, 2012).

Produce a Report Based on Themes. The result of qualitative inquiry should

convey what the researcher has learned based on the research (Merriam, 2002). I

produced a report and built a logical narrative that explained the phenomenon of the

study. I used specific quotes from the interview transcripts to support the themes and how

they answered the RQs.

Discrepant Cases. Discrepant case analysis is when the researcher looks for data

that challenges study findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reporting discrepant data adds

to the credibility of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2009). I describe the discrepant case in

this study and allow the reader to determine the value of the discrepancy. The discrepant

case in this study involved one principal who described SEL programming as an

approach that is not culturally responsive. In the data analysis, I discuss the SEL

competencies that are designed to address diversity and culture and the need for further

research relating to SEL and cultural relevance.

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Trustworthiness

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In qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to the quality of the research, its

rigor, and the results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). According to Saldaña (2011), the data

collected, the people interviewed, and the conclusions drawn must be convincing.

Concerns about the trustworthiness of qualitative research often include issues relating to

the researcher as the main instrument for data collection and researcher biases. However,

there are methods to address trustworthiness in qualitative research (Merriam & Grenier,

2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed four criteria to ensure trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility is the assurance that the study is an accurate reflection of the data collected (Shenton, 2004). Creswell (2018) further described credibility as how the researcher addresses the complexities that arise in a study including those related to design, instrumentation, and data. Credibility can be established through member checking and reflexivity. In this study I used member checking which consists of gathering feedback on emerging findings from study participants (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process helped me to avoid misinterpretation of participant responses and helped to identify possible biases in my findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Transferability

Transferability is whether the results of one study can be applied to another context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative researchers support transferability through detailed descriptions of participants, setting, and circumstances that can be assessed for applicability to other contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I facilitated transferability by clearly describing the context of the study and the procedures for data collection and analysis. Such detailed description allows the reader to decide whether findings can be applied to another setting (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Dependability

In qualitative studies, *dependability* relates to findings that are consistent, meaning the data collected can be verified by others (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). An

audit trail is a detailed account of how data were collected and analyzed in a study. I used an audit trail to support dependability by documenting my thinking process throughout the data collection and analysis processes, including my reflections and questions. This documentation also included information about my decision making throughout the research and data analysis process (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Confirmability

Confirmability is whether data interpretation is free of researcher bias and easily determined by the data itself **(**Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In this study, I used a reflexive journal to ensure confirmability by documenting and monitoring my interpretation for alignment with the data. The use of a reflexive journal is a method for documenting possible biases during data analysis and collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal was for me to remain aware of my personal opinions to minimize my influence on study findings. Throughout this study, I reflected on my own thinking and responses by maintaining a researcher journal to support reflexivity by capturing thoughts, responses, and biases during the data collection and analysis processes. This type of introspection provides an opportunity for the researcher to identify and minimize biases. Through reflexivity, the researcher can ensure confirmability by helping readers understand researcher perspectives and thoughts about the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transparency regarding the researcher's thinking and analysis process helps to establish credibility (Saldaña, 2011**).**

Ethical Procedures

The responsibility for conducting an ethical research study resides with the researcher (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Ethical issues must be considered at every step of the research process. The appropriate approvals and permissions to conduct research must be obtained prior to the start of the study and the purpose of the study must be specified. For this research, approvals were obtained from the Walden IRB and the district serving as the research site. Issues relating to data collection, findings, and the treatment of participants were addressed (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Participants must agree to participate, and researchers are to protect participants and ensure confidentiality (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Treatment of Participants

Ensuring that participants are protected is an essential component of the research process. Participants should be fully informed about the purpose of the study to be conducted and their privacy should be protected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When seeking participants for this study, the purpose of the study was specified via email so that all potential participants understood the process and purpose of the research study. The email communication included information on why invitees were being asked to participate in the study, confirmation that participation is voluntary, and assurance that interviews will be confidential and scheduled at their convenience. I also communicated that participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

All participants for this study were protected by informed consent, confidentiality, and the use of pseudonyms to prevent identification of participants, schools, or the

district. All participant names, schools, and the district were kept confidential. I assigned

each participant an alphanumeric code such as Principal 1, Principal 2, and so forth.

Treatment of Data

Transcribed interview data were stored on a password-protected hard drive that

only I could access. During data analysis, hard copy transcripts were stored in a locked

filing cabinet in my home only accessible by me. Participants' data were identified with

alphanumeric codes. Any documents containing actual participant names (such as email

confirmations of participation and scheduling) were maintained separately from the data.

After 5 years beyond completion of the study, I will shred the hard copies and

permanently delete participants' data from the password protected hard drive. Participant

data will be deleted from the external hard drive using the reformatting function which

erases all data from the hard drive. This information regarding storage and destruction of

data was communicated in the initial email inviting administrators to participate in the

study.

I obtained approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board

before data were collected. In addition, I obtained permission from the district to conduct

this research. This process involved securing and completing the application materials

from the research office and signing the required Memo of Understanding between the

district and Walden University.

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Summary

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In Chapter 3, I explained the research design and methodology. I also described

the procedures for recruitment, data collection, and the data analysis plan. Individual

interviews with secondary principals were conducted using the Zoom platform to study the phenomenon of leadership behaviors used throughout implementation of SEL to improve school climate, increase student performance, and decrease disciplinary suspensions.

I used purposeful sampling of 10 principals from middle and high schools in the same district. The findings of this study may help district leaders train prospective principals in how to effectively implement SEL in their schools. Chapter 4 includes a description of data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how secondary school principals adapted implementation of a districtwide SEL intervention to correspond with their leadership practices, and how they adapted their leadership practices to implement the intervention. The study was guided by the following RQs:

RQ1: How do secondary school administrators in a Northeastern school district in the United States adapt implementation of a SEL intervention to correspond with their leadership practices?

RQ2: How do secondary school administrators in a Northeastern school district adapt their leadership behaviors to support SEL competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making?

In this chapter, I will discuss details related to the setting, data collection processes, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness and summarize answers to RQs.

Setting

I conducted this basic qualitative study in a large northeastern school district with middle and high school principals. At the time of this study, school principals in the district were still focusing on student learning loss and teacher anxiety following the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. Although it was not within the original intent of the study, several principals expressed the importance of addressing teachers' and students' SEL needs in the aftermath of the pandemic. To collect data for this study, invitations to participate were emailed to all middle and high school principals in the study district who had worked for 2 years at the same school.

Participant Demographics

This study consisted of a purposeful sample of 10 secondary school principals who were interviewed using semistructured interviews. Participants' gender, years as a principal, years working in education and years in the district were documented to provide contextual information. There were five females and five males in the sample. Females' years working in education ranged from 17 to 23 with 4 to 10 years as a principal. Males' years working in education ranged from 16 to 23 with 5 to 9 years as a principal. Nine of the 10 participants were African American and one participant was Caucasian, The demographics of the participants reflected the demographic composition of the larger participant pool and that of the school district.

Data Collection

After gaining approval from the Walden IRB and the study site, I emailed invitations to participate to secondary principals (middle and high school) who met the selection criteria. Eight principals responded and reminder emails were sent to recruit two additional principals. Participants completed the consent procedure and agreed to be interviewed and audio recorded via Zoom, with times arranged that were convenient for each principal. Interview data were collected from 10 secondary school principals, nine from high schools and one from a middle school. Each interview was completed in one session. At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the consent form and asked if there were any questions. During the interview, I remained objective and created a comfortable environment for principals to freely share their perspectives and experiences with implementing SEL programming at their schools. No unusual situations occurred

during the data collection process, which took place over a 6-week period. Data for this basic qualitative study were recorded and transcribed using Zoom technology. The interviews ranged from 25 minutes to 54 minutes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a repetitive and cyclical process that builds as information is examined and explored in relation to other collected data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I began my data analysis process by downloading the audio transcripts from Zoom. I listened to each audio recording several times after each interview, following along on the digital transcript first and making corrections so that I would have an accurate transcript before printing. I replaced participant names with pseudonyms so that they appeared as Principal 1, Principal 2, etc., on the transcript before printing.

After printing the transcripts, I then spent time familiarizing myself with the data by listening and following along as I read the transcripts. On the transcript I circled key words and phrases that stood out, made comments in the margins, posed questions, summarized concepts, wrote down initial thoughts, noted possible patterns and themes and highlighted interview language relating to SEL competencies and adaptive leadership behaviors. I used subsequent listening sessions to summarize the data for the member checking process, which allowed me to become further immersed in the data and to reflect on responses to my RQs before starting the coding process.

A Priori Coding

Before beginning the coding process, I organized 10 a priori codes based on my conceptual framework, drawn from two models—SEL and adaptive leadership. In the

column next to the a priori codes, I left space for supporting text from interview

transcripts. As I read and reread each interview transcript, I looked for evidence of

application of the SEL competencies and adaptive leadership practices. I marked the

transcripts using the following a priori codes: SEA (self-awareness), SA (social

awareness), SM (self-management), RS (relationship skills), RB (responsible decision

making), BR (building relationships), DP (developing people), RD (redesigning the

organization), and IIP (improving instructional program).

     I marked the language that supported all SEL competencies and selected text

which I believed best aligned with the codes. I followed the same process as I sought out

interview language that aligned with the principles of adaptive leadership. Like the

competencies, certain adaptive leadership principles emerged. Setting direction and

developing people were mentioned most by the participants. A sampling of descriptors

for these a priori codes is listed in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2

First Cycle A Priori Coding – Social Emotional Learning Model

A priori code (SEL)	Descriptors	Participant
Self-awareness	Model respectful communication with all stakeholders.	Principal 1
	Accept that others are watching your leadership moves.	Principal 2
	Reflect on leadership choices.	Principal 5
Self-management	Preserve community even when mistakes are made.	Principal 7
	Train staff in how to respond to difficult situations.	Principal 6
Responsible decision making	Set clear and high expectations for students.	Principal 8
	Give students an opportunity to make decisions.	Principal 10
Social awareness	Always consider the needs of the community.	Principal 2
	Ensure cultural awareness when implementing SEL.	Principal 8
Relationship skills	Demonstrate care and concern about staff well-being.	Principal 3
	Building connections with staff.	Principal 5
	Teach relationship building skills.	Principal 9

Table 3

First Cycle A Priori Coding – Adaptive Leadership Model

A priori code (AL)	Descriptors	Participant
Setting direction	Manage resources to meet student needs.	Principal 2
	Model high expectations for staff.	Principal 8
	Consistently respond to data.	Principal 5
Building relationships	Be visible and available to students, staff, and families.	Principal 9
	Make personal connections with staff members.	Principal 4
	Commit to resolving conflicts between stakeholders.	Principal 1
Developing people	Identify capacity of staff by identifying strengths.	Principal 7
	Respond equitably and fairly around student discipline.	Principal 6
	Teach staff how to receive feedback.	Principal 3
Redesigning the organization	Implementing SEL structures schoolwide	Principal 4
	Creating supplementary curriculum.	Principal 2
	Using student interest to design curriculum.	Principal 10
Improving instructional program	Focus on rigor to close learning gaps	Principal 9
	Cultural relevancy in classroom instruction.	Principal 4
	Develop quality instruction in all classrooms.	Principal 5

Open Coding

Open coding allows the researcher to think deeply about all possibilities reflected in the data and to begin making initial interpretations (Saldaña, 2016). I reread the text I selected to support a priori codes and reviewed the early notes I made in the margins. I then began the process of open coding. I looked for repeated words, phrases, and concepts throughout the transcripts, comparing participant responses. I summarized my thoughts on each transcript and made additional notes in the margins to capture my thinking. As I made a list of the open codes, I looked for alignment between the open codes and the a priori codes.

I started with the a priori codes that were based on the conceptual framework—

the five competencies of social emotional learning and principles of adaptive leadership. I

ultimately generated 15 open codes listed in Table 4.

Table 4

First Cycle Open Coding

Open codes	Descriptors	Participant
Cultural relevance	Help students appreciate their unique culture.	Principal 1
	Reflect on our own beliefs about other cultures.	Principal 7
	Embrace diversity.	Principal 8
Building teams	Develop commitment and growth among staff.	Principal 2
	Include staff in decision making.	Principal 9
	Collaborate and provide support.	Principal 5
Setting expectations	Establish schoolwide priorities.	Principal 1
	Remembering the mission of the school.	Principal 2
	Focus on school community.	Principal 7
Student voice	Allow for student input.	Principal 10
Sharing the vision	Ensure vision is shared consistently.	Principal 6
Responding to data	Use data to drive decision making.	Principal 4
Modeling	Demonstrate the behaviors I want to see in my staff.	Principal 9
Restorative practices	Focus on restoration not punitive responses to misconduct.	Principal 2
Developing curriculum	Be willing to adjust curriculum to meet student needs.	Principal 6
Training/PD	Provide professional development for SEL.	Principal 1
Embracing change	View change as an opportunity for growth.	Principal 5
Student-centered decisions	Consider the needs of students when making decisions.	Principal 3
Collaboration	Provide time for teacher collaboration.	Principal 9
Teacher care	Pay attention to adult SEL needs.	Principal 6
Advisory structures	Use advisory structures to meet students' SEL needs.	Principal 5

After aligning the a priori codes with the open codes, I searched for alignment

with the RQs. RQ1 addressed adaptations to the SEL intervention, so I looked for

transcript data indicating how principals were implementing SEL at their schools in alignment with their leadership. For example, most principals indicated they were using advisory as a structure for implementing SEL programming. Another repeated concept was cultural relevance and student voice. For the second RQ, I focused on principal behaviors. Principals discussed using restorative practices, responding to data, sharing their vision, and embracing change in relation to SEL competencies. I continued this process as I reread and relistened to transcripts. The process of connecting a priori and open coding with each RQ was repetitive as I analyzed and reflected on adaptations to the SEL intervention versus adaptations to leadership behaviors. Table 5 displays the final alignment between the RQs, a priori codes, and open codes.

Categories

I looked for commonalities among the a priori and open codes and then identified a category with which to associate the codes. This grouping process was iterative as some codes could fit in several categories. I continued the process of searching for codes and examining transcripts to ensure I had identified all patterns in the data. There was overlap among codes as I continued to determine how to link codes to categories. The four categories revealed from the data were: leadership practices, climate and culture, student-centered decisions and setting expectations (see Table 6).

Table 5

Alignment of RQs, A Priori Codes and Open Codes

Research Questions	A priori codes	Open codes
RQ1 How do secondary school administrators in a northeastern school district adapt implementation of a SEL intervention to correspond with their leadership practices?	Social awareness	Cultural relevance Student voice Student-centered decisions
	Self-management Self-awareness Relationship skills Responsible decision making	Restorative practices Establishing expectations Advisory structures
RQ 2 How do secondary school administrators in a northeastern school district adapt their leadership behaviors to support SEL competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making?	Setting direction	Sharing the vision Responding to data Reflecting and responding to feedback
	Developing people	Modeling Restorative practices Training/PD
	Redesigning the organization	Embracing change Student voice Setting expectations
	Improving instructional program	Responding to data Developing curriculum
	Building relationships	Collaboration Teacher care/SEL

Themes

I considered how to connect these categories to broader themes. During this process, I continued to move codes between categories, trying to group codes appropriately. I decided to allow for some overlap because some codes could fit in more than one category. Ultimately four major themes emerged from participant responses:

Theme I – Applying Strategies for School Improvement.

Theme II – Building a Strong School Culture.

Theme III – Responsiveness to Student Needs.

Theme IV – Establishment of School Identity.

These themes explain the perspectives and approaches of secondary principals who have adapted an SEL intervention to fit their leadership practices and who adapted their leadership behaviors to support SEL competencies. They provide insight into how secondary principals support SEL implementation that is in alignment with their unique leadership styles and school context. My process for coding and categorization involved repeated examinations of the transcripts and code revisions as I compared and contrasted participant responses, seeking to identify key words, phrases, sentences, and concepts (see Saldaña, 2016). The process of codes to categories to themes is reflected in Table 6.

Table 6

Data Analysis Process

Codes	Categories	Themes
Training Responding to data Reflect and respond to feedback Modeling	Leadership practices	Strategies for school improvement
Restorative Practices Teacher care/SEL Collaboration	Climate & culture	Building a strong school culture
Student voice Advisory structures Developing curriculum	Student centered decisions	Responsiveness to student needs
Clear vision Cultural relevancy Embracing change	Setting expectations	Establishment of school identity

Results

The RQs for this study were developed from the conceptual framework, which is comprised of the SEL model and the adaptive leadership model. The problem that was addressed by this basic qualitative study is that no follow-up was conducted to explore how school principals adapted implementation of a districtwide SEL intervention to correspond with their leadership practices, nor how they adapted their leadership practices to implement the intervention.

RQ1: How do secondary school administrators in a Northeastern school district in the United States adapt implementation of a SEL intervention to correspond with their leadership practices?

In response to this research question, interview data revealed an alignment with Theme I Applying Strategies for School Improvement and Theme II Building a Strong School Culture. Principals adapted implementation of SEL to correspond with their leadership practices by applying strategies for school improvement and by building a strong school culture for students and adults. Specifically, principals provided SEL training for staff, used data to develop SEL programming at their schools, and were willing to reflect and respond to feedback. Principals also used restorative practices, teacher care, and collaboration to build a strong school culture.

Theme I – Applying Strategies for School Improvement

SEL Training. Principals identified training as a key component to support SEL implementation. Principal 9 regards training as essential along with feedback and coaching so that teachers can build their capacity. Similarly, Principal 5 said training and giving opportunities for teachers to be a part of the process is crucial, noting that "We're training teachers to lead restorative circles.*"* Principal 1 pointed out the importance of training for new teachers.

> For many of our teachers this was like the first time that they are fully responsible for not only the teaching, but responsible and accountable for a student's education and the general well-being. So, during pre-service we would train our teachers in how to check in with students and within those check-ins how to

incorporate those general SEL check-ins into an academic exercise making sure

that you know, in addition to the academic portion you're also getting a sense of

the student like making like you, tries towards mastering material.

Principal 4 felt it was important to inform and educate staff about the need for SEL.

So, I had some speakers come in to train staff. We also made it a component of

our pre-service where everybody was responsible and engaged and learning about

social emotional learning and why there's a need for it. That was the biggest piece

for me. We followed up with other pieces and that's kind of how we rolled it out.

We set up what the strategies would be to get there, and we put in progress

monitoring.

Across the board training was a priority for principals taking different forms, sometimes

occurring one-on-one, during pre-service week and as part of general staff meetings.

Participants also acknowledged the need for district-level training to be differentiated

based on individual school needs. Some principals expressed the need for more in-depth

training while others communicated a need for training that was more practical and

relevant to their school needs. For example, one principal commented that, "our school

was further along. We've been talking about relationship building for 10 years and we

wanted to dig deeper." Another principal, Principal 2, suggested that the district "can

only go but so deep given the wide range of people's abilities and experiences with the

topic." Principal 1 reflected on enjoying the training but wanting more hands-on

strategies for implementation. "If the bottom-line message is that relationships are

important and communicating with students is important, I feel like that should've been

the bulk of the training." The principals clearly felt there was room for improvement in the SEL training.

   Responding to Data. A key leadership behavior adopted by principals in support of SEL was the consistent use of data to improve academic achievement and behavior, and often it was the data that drove change. Principals' willingness to follow the suggestion of Heifetz et al. (2009) to "get on the balcony" and responding to data was a persistent theme. "I respond to data; I follow the data, observe the data; I'm results oriented" noted Principal 5. Principal 1 reflected that "We asked ourselves about the *why* behind the numbers." Principal 2 responded,

   The data will drive you. That's the first thing I look to when we have a failure. I'm

   always data driven unless there is a crisis. So, you're looking at what the students'

   numbers are telling you, what are the trends. I review what went wrong by

   looking at the data and looking at our process and procedures. At least that's the

   first flag that I look to when we have a failure. But how things could have been

   done differently.

Principal 1 recalled having to respond to an increase in suspensions after the COVID 19 pandemic.

   We had to change course and think about what we needed to do and what sorts of

   changes needed to happen. So, the first question was to ask the why behind the

   numbers. We had all these suspensions, but we had to ask ourselves what they

   were for, particularly those that were not physical in nature. We had to ask

   ourselves why we went toward suspension as the response. And then we would

arrive more often than not at the conclusion that when we get tired, we're just

falling back on what we knew and what felt like made sense.

Principal 5 had a similar response when reviewing data.

We had an increase in suspensions which we did not anticipate. I think there's

more to do and I think a lot of it is going to come from us making sure we have

the things that we need. We will be a school that is rooted in restorative practices.

Student mediations will occur so that students get to try to work out their issues.

In addition, principals also regarded reflection and feedback as elements that aligned with

SEL competencies and were willing to make adjustments to their leadership behaviors.

Reflecting and Responding to Feedback. Similarly, principals implemented

social and self-awareness when reflecting and responding to feedback from staff.

Principal 6 shared an anecdote about being a stickler about time.

I didn't realize the anxiety I was causing staff with my response when people

were late, so I changed when I found out and I believe I'm seen as more

humanistic. I think that maybe my style, to a certain extent was so, you know,

rigid that you know folks did not feel like they could come to me to share with

me like what was going on with them. I may have been perceived as more so like

a drill sergeant, and a person that wasn't really as understanding."

Principal 2 communicated a similar reflection when a conflict arose at the school, "I was

really kind of blindsided by our kids' needs. I had to reevaluate what I thought was

needed versus what was really needed." Principal 3 encourages team leaders to receive

feedback. "We have a process every year where people have to sit without speaking and

get feedback on their leadership and it has led to an authentic open environment."

Principal 10 shared:

> I'm always constantly looking for and seeking out feedback. I don't believe that
> there's just one type of way to do SEl, and I'm always evolving and being
> responsive to any needs. For example, for my staff, I push self-care. We have
> early release days, or short and abbreviated curriculum days and I'll release them
> early. I try to give them some time back to themselves. I do stuff like in October.
> I'll do activities all throughout the month of October, because that's the time
> period where a lot of staff are, you know, feeling something. The morale may be
> low, or they may be feeling burnt out already.

Principal 5 believes that responding to data must be a constant if you want results.

> Whether it's instruction, whether it's programmatic, whether it's, you know
> whatever it is. There's this constant idea of assessing, analyzing and acting. You
> know, assess, analyze, and act on what you see, analyze it together, create an
> action plan and just keeping it going.

Participants used these data as they focused on building strong cultures in their schools.

Theme II – Building a Strong School Culture.

Restorative Practices. Restorative practices reflect SEL programming because
students learn to manage their emotions, resolve conflict, build relationships, and make
healthy decisions. All principals in this study believed in the power of restorative
practices as a response to discipline issues but also emphasized the power of this strategy

as a preventive measure when it comes to student behavior and a way to build a strong school culture. Principal 4 said,

> It's important to recognize how we are leveraging this strategy to impact students. We use a lot of restorative practices, and in that restored process you kind of go through those competencies as well. And one of those competencies you really try to go through is the whole self-awareness piece. Recognize who you are and who this other person is and know that you may be connected. It's recognizing that there could be like cultures, or they could be different cultures.

Principal 5 regarded the use of SEL as a discipline with the restorative practices as part of the daily work of SEL.

> Discipline is something you do consistently every day and sometimes you're really good at doing it and sometimes you are not, but consistency and being aware of the person's cultural, emotional, social, spiritual, intellectual aspects as much as you can so that way you can help them reflect on their choices when a problem arises. You want to be able to go back to that. However, that doesn't mean that there are some situations where you don't have to have an exclusionary response.

 Similarly, Principal 9 shared that "if there is a suspension, it doesn't occur without the restorative piece. There's always a restorative piece at our school." Additionally, several principals were careful to point out that restorative practices did not replace the need for accountability when discipline issues arise. As Principal 5 and Principal 8 explained, "there will be consequences for behavior." Principal 5 agreed that restorative justice and

restorative practices and accountability all fit under SEL practices. Principal 8 stated, "I'll

suspend you with counseling and bring you back with counseling." Participants also

discussed applying SEL strategies to support teachers.

Teacher Care. Interview data indicated that principals understand that caring for

teachers, which aligns with social awareness and relationship skills, is critical. Principals

in the study prioritized the well-being of adults. They recognized the value in knowing

their staff members, beyond the roles they held, responding to their feedback, providing

support, and caring about their social and emotional health. "I encourage staff to engage

in self-care as much as possible. One of our priorities this year is to focus on more

trauma-informed practices, not just for the students, but also for the adults" said Principal

6. Principal 8 and Principal 10 shared their practice of conducting check-ins with

teachers.

Principal 10 said, *"*We talk about their goals for the year, what they want to

achieve, how I can support them, and the staff has started to look forward to this." **"**It's

not just about the work, but about your mommy, your daddy and your dog," said

Principal 3 when expressing that caring about their staff is a staple of their leadership

practices. Principal 6 says adults also need SEL support.

> I feel like there's been a lot of SEL targeted at students and not enough for adults.
>
> I feel like we could do a better job with supporting the adults with how they can
>
> engage in practices to rejuvenate and motivate themselves. I have conversations
>
> with my assistant principals on a consistent basis. I text staff members at the end
>
> of the week just to say, hey, thank you. You don't need to text back. Just

appreciate the work and look forward to seeing you next week. I even give staff

comp days when I feel like they need a personal day.

Principals also believed that prioritizing opportunities for teachers to work together

supported SEL within their schools.

Collaboration. Through collaboration and building teams, principals

demonstrated how relationships skills and social awareness skills are formed in their

schools. The emphasis on relationship building was prevalent constant as principals

discussed helping teachers build relationships with students as well as cultivating their

own relationships with their teams. Principal 4 collaborates on everything in the school

because of their distributive leadership style: *"*I meet with my leadership team around

decision-making and the same thing happens with my instructional leadership team and

teacher groups." Principal 9 described their approach as being "big on committee work"

and wanting as many voices at the table as possible. For Principal 4 collaboration is

central to decision making. "That's something that's extremely important to me. So, you

can see collaboration around any decisions that are being made to enhance those

decisions." Study principals build teacher planning time into the school schedule.

Principal 5 created additional teams just to allow time for more collaboration. Principal 3

said,

I love collaboration. And it's funny because I thought everyone just did like, but

apparently not. There are a lot of people who really prefer to work on their own. I

really love the team approach. I spend a lot of time nurturing the idea of teams

and nurturing leaders of teams and helping us understand that we all work better

together towards the same goal.

Principal 7 said,

Collaboration is mandatory. They're required to have people on the team that have

a different lens from theirs. That person's role on that collaborative team is to

provide insights to things that a lot of times get lost in translation.

Principals also demonstrated an ability to use the SEL competencies to meet the needs of

students and to cultivate their school identities.

RQ2: How do secondary school administrators in a northeastern school district

adapt their leadership behaviors to support SEL competencies of self-awareness,

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

making?

Theme III Responsiveness to Student Needs and Theme IV Establishment of

School Identity, aligned with RQ2. Interviews indicated that principals adapted their

behaviors to support SEL competencies through the incorporation of student voice, use of

advisory structures, and by developing curriculum. By establishing a clear vision,

embracing change, and ensuring cultural relevancy, principals established school identity.

These strategies each reflect how the leaders adapted their behaviors to support and

reflect the five competencies. For example, when principals listened and responded to

students, they reflected their own social and self-awareness. Similarly, principals adapted

their behaviors by establishing school identity through a clear vision and cultural

relevancy further incorporating social awareness, responsible decision making and relationship skills.

Theme III – Responsiveness to Student Needs

Student Voice. Principals recognized that by including student voice in school decisions, students develop self-awareness, social-awareness, and relationship skills because they are learning to express themselves, engage in self-efficacy, and to communicate with others effectively**.** Principal 7 explained that "we often listen to other voices in the building but not students." Principal 2 echoed a similar response when discussing the creation of a student task force. "It was a space that became a place for us to talk as a community. It was a turning point for us to learn how to have discourse." Students at Principal 10's school co-create lessons with teachers based on their learning and their interest. Principal 6 used assemblies to celebrate the achievement of students, boosted up greetings at the door and increased student conferencing. Principal 7 shared that "listening communicates respect, even in situations where there is disagreement. Everyone wants to be respected—students and adults."

Another way that students are listened to involved the addition of advisory classes within scheduled time blocks.

Advisory Structures. Principals incorporated advisory classes to address students' SEL needs, particularly helping students develop relationship and self-management skills**.** Advisory classes are added to student schedules to address different concerns including academic and social emotional learning needs. The use of advisory structures, to implement SEL competencies was consistent, and principals shared how

they used this time block**.** Eight of the 10 principals used advisory time to address students' SEL needs. Principal 8 and Principal 3 reflected on how advisory time had evolved each year depending on student needs, leading them to organize around themes and topics over the years. Principal 9 noted that having an advisory period is essential.

> There needs to be a place where staff are engaging with students and helping them build their own social emotional learning**.** I think advisory is one place we create the opportunity for it to happen between students. And good advisory teachers model the kind of vulnerability and sharing about themselves that get kids comfortable with learning about each other. For example, we had a few students that were arguing today in the hallway, and we separated them. And they had a chance to sit down and have a restorative conversation, and like reflect a little bit and resolve their issue, and then move on with their day.

Creating curriculum, often used during advisory classes to meet student interest and needs was also important to principals.

Developing curriculum. Principal 8 created a course to help students develop SEL skills while staff at Principal 3's and Principal 9's schools design their own SEL curriculum. Principal 9 said establishing the foundation is a major task but eventually the process becomes easier. Principal 2 collaborated with an external partner to create an SEL class to address students' mental health needs, and Principal 5 is developing a class where students will learn restorative practice strategies. Principals reflected on the need for a change that involved students, as noted by Principal 9,

I just wanted to develop something with a sense of self-worth and self-pride and school pride. And because a lot of students come in with baggage and trauma and triggers, I thought it was important to focus on curriculum and what students needed. It was time to do something different. I wanted to create a dynamic space for students and staff so it's the best place for teaching and learning. Students get to co-create what they are learning and what's interesting to them.

Student involvement was an indicator of how principals saw their schools as they demonstrated a commitment to developing their unique school identity.

Theme IV – Establishment of School Identity

Clear vision. Across the board, principals communicated a clear vision for their schools that is reflective of SEL programming, particularly relationship building, self-awareness, and social awareness. Principal 3 stressed a commitment to collaboration and compassion in working with school teams. Principal 9 stated **"**I believe in leading by example and also doing a lot of work with people and beside people, not just dictating." Principal 1 and 2 explained their commitment to their schools' unique identity. Principal 2 emphasized the school's creed and mission that is recited and discussed regularly. Principal 1 mentioned a schoolwide focus on writing that is reflective of the school's identity.

Cultural relevancy. Principals discussed the importance of focusing on cultural relevancy throughout their schools. "We committed to working on diversity, equity and inclusion and it was tough," shared Principal 1. The approach to SEL at Principal 7's school is grounded in culturally responsive teaching, taking students' cultural lens into

account. Principal 4 repeated a similar sentiment: "When I think about culturally relevant pedagogy I think about the implementation of social emotional learning. What are we doing to engage our students as they come into the classroom or any other room inside the building?"

Principal 8 stated emphatically,

I'm really about our Black and Brown kids and really making sure that we do things to really support their needs. We talk a lot about how we have to be very intentional when it comes to black and brown futures. We can't leave anything to chance. We talk a lot about what we do today, how that impacts the individuals that we're serving. They have a need to be grounded and rooted—a need to be seen and acknowledged as a whole person, the need to understand yourself through your culture.

In addition, participants communicated a positive attitude regarding change, describing it as an essential aspect of growth within their schools

Embracing change. Interview data from all principals reflected a positive attitude about change. *"I think change is necessary, particularly in startup years,"* said Principal 1. "It's evidence of growth," responded Principal 8. "Growth happens through change and as a leader I have to be someone who embraces change and celebrates change," Principal 5 commented. "Change is the one constant. So, change is just part of our practice," said Principal 2. Principal 3 and Principal 8 regarded change as a sign of growth and life and an opportunity to improve. According to Principal 10, change is about being flexible and

adaptable; "It's setting new goals, even when outcomes are unknown." Principal 6 believes in planning for change.

> I engage in practices to train my team to be responsive and adaptive. We talk about change. We have things that happen naturally, such as you know, operational things. I pull folks together and we come up with, you know, a set of action steps that we're gonna engage in as a team. Even we changed curriculum it was challenging for some, but we've been able to meet the mark.

Principal 7 said,

> Change is about giving people the opportunity to grow and understand. Help people listen to why the change has to happen and opportunities to learn about what's needed for the change to happen, and then obviously help them to observe the change in small increments and consistently repeat that cycle. And within that cycle there is reading, learning, and understanding.

Discrepant Cases

While most principals discussed strategies for implementing SEL competencies based on the definitions from CASEL, Principal 5 expressed a belief that this definition of SEL lacks cultural considerations relating to the trauma experienced by African American children and commented that SEL focuses on the individual and not the collective. Principal 5 stated,

> Our SEL practices actually begin with helping each other. We help students understand the who, how, and why they are through their own cultural lens—their community lens, their family lens and help them see their value and their

contributions before we start telling them how to act and how not to act so that

they're able to understand cultural norms and values within the school and the

reasons behind them.

However, according to CASEL (n.d.-a), social awareness is understanding the

perspectives of and empathizing with others, including those from diverse backgrounds,

cultures, & contexts Two competencies—relationship skills and responsible decision

making—both address the ability to navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups

and to make healthy choices about personal behavior and social interactions that will

affect the collective (CASEL, n.d.-a). To address this discrepant case, my analysis

identifies the incorporation of cultural relevancy into SEL implementation and is

addressed in response to RQ 2. Schoolwide implementation of SEL is designed to

cultivate an open and inclusive environment that is respectful of students and adults

(CASEL, n.d.-e)

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is especially important

because the data reported are based on the interviewer's understanding of the data

received (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Trustworthiness is established through credibility,

transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

In qualitative research, credibility relies on research design and the instruments

used to collect the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To ensure credibility, I used member

checking which consisted of gathering feedback on emerging findings from study

participants (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After the interview, each participant received an emailed summary of their responses. Study participants were asked to check for accuracy and respond by email within 7 days if modifications were requested. None of the participants requested modifications.

Transferability

Transferability relies on rich and thick description, and it relates to whether findings from one study can be applied to another study or setting (Creswell, 2013). Transferability strategies for this study consisted of clearly reporting the context of the study, the process for collecting data, and the steps in data analysis. To establish transferability, I interviewed a variety of secondary level principals with different approaches and perspectives about implementing SEL programs at their schools and described their experiences in their own words.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research reflects the consistency of findings (Korstjen & Moser, 2017). As I analyzed the interview data, I was reflective about my process. I used an audit trail during data collection to record my thoughts and reactions as I examined the data and to capture steps in my coding and analysis process. There were no adjustments to the strategies discussed in Chapter 3.

Confirmability

During interviews I remained objective and aware of my personal biases relating to SEL and principal leadership practices. As an assistant principal in the study district, I have worked with SEL programming, and I believe in the benefits of this SEL

intervention. To ensure confirmability, I documented and monitored my interpretation of the data by reflecting during the analysis process. Instead of a journal I kept notes as I searched for patterns and themes. When developing my analysis, I stayed as close to the data as possible. I remained aware of my biases, constantly challenging myself to ensure my interpretation aligned with the interview data.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I presented findings for the two RQs of this basic qualitative study. RQ1 addressed how principals adapted implementation of a SEL intervention. Findings revealed that principals embedded their adaptations within school improvement strategies and focused on building a strong culture. They accomplished this by providing SEL training, relying on data to make decisions and by responding to feedback from staff and students. RQ2 focused on how principals adapted their leadership behaviors to support SEL competencies (self-awareness. social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making). Principals adapted their behaviors to support competencies by responding to student needs and by establishing school identity. They focused on listening to students, incorporating advisory classes, and developing curriculum. In Chapter 5, I will provide an interpretation of the findings, the study's limitations, recommendations, and implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this chapter, I will offer a discussion and meaningful conclusions based on the findings of this basic qualitative study exploring secondary school principals' perspectives about the implementation of SEL. I will discuss how my findings confirm and extend knowledge regarding leadership and the implementation of SEL in schools. I also share the interpretation of my findings in relation to the two RQs and the conceptual framework. The limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and implications regarding positive social change are also discussed.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore how secondary school principals adapted implementation of a districtwide SEL intervention to correspond with their leadership practices, and how they adapted their leadership practices to implement the intervention. This study was conducted in one urban school district to identify which leadership practices support effective implementation of SEL programs in secondary schools. Using semistructured interviews, data were collected to explore the perspectives of 10 secondary school principals' experiences with an SEL intervention.

I conducted this study to address a gap in literature and practice regarding leadership behaviors that support implementation of SEL to improve school climate. I found that principals focused on applying school improvement strategies and school culture to adapt a SEL intervention in their schools. They also adapted their leadership behaviors to implement SEL competencies by addressing student needs and establishing school identity.

Interpretation of the Findings

The conceptual framework that grounded the study and aligns with the RQs,

encompasses the five competencies of SEL (self-awareness, social awareness, self-

management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) and principles of

adaptive leadership which focus on supporting people through the change process and

distinguishing between technical and adaptive challenges.

Findings Related to RQ1

In response to RQ1, about how secondary school administrators in a northeastern

school district adapt implementation of a SEL intervention to correspond with their

leadership practices, I found that principals adapted the SEL intervention through the

application of school improvement strategies. These strategies—providing SEL training

and responding to data and feedback, indicate that leaders are committed to the work of

developing people and continuous learning (Heifetz et al., 2009). There was a consistent

theme around the need for teacher training and support from school leadership to

effectively implement SEL, confirming the critical nature of this training for teachers as

discussed in the literature review (e.g., Bridgeland, 2019; CASEL, 2020; Ferreira et al.,

2020; Hunter et al., 2022). Principals emphasized the importance of professional

development and building teacher capacity for implementing SEL programming,

including helping teachers understand the rationale behind the need for SEL. Participants

understood that effective implementation of SEL was directly related to the training

teachers received. Principal 4 explained that "you have to give them training in the whys,

give them the materials, let them practice and reflect."

Principal 2 stated that SEL training is part of their professional development early in the year and they continue practicing and coaching around it throughout the year. Principal 9 even provided training to teachers around brain development, "this was so they understand some of the brain-based sciences around students' social emotional development, specifically related to trauma." Principal 1 also used district professional development days to offer training, drawing on expertise in the building. In contrast, Principal 4 and Principal 8 relied on external training to ensure teachers have the support they need. Principal 8 commented, "I don't personally know how to do the training but I'm going to bring people in who do." In alignment with the SEL model, principals also said this training and support should include attention to adult SEL needs. They communicated an awareness that adult SEL needs were just as important as those of the students. Principal 1 explained, "I have to understand what their needs are outside of what my needs are. Their only life responsibility is not what they do at school, it's just a part of who they are." Principal 3 shared a similar sentiment in referencing the trauma that teachers have experienced and a commitment to being intentional about training. "We have experienced a good deal of grief and trauma due to death, incarceration, and loss of loved ones. Those moments live in the school, and they show up in different ways."

In addition to training and support, participants discussed using data and responding to feedback to drive their decision-making about students' SEL needs— confirming the use of data as a key practice of principals to adapt implementation of SEL programming. Mahoney (2020) described the collection and use of data as essential to

continuous improvement. Study participants also saw data as an essential component of their SEL programming. By using data to "diagnose the system" (Heifetz et al., 2009) school principals were able to adapt SEL to meet their school needs and make changes that will potentially improve school climate. Adaptive leaders are responsive to their environment because they are constantly "getting on the balcony" (Heifetz et al., 2009), observing and reflecting about what is happening in their schools. According to Randall and Coakley (2007), the ability of an organization to analyze and frame their own issues allows for the adaptive work needed to solve problems.

In this study, principals adjusted and implemented programming because of the data but also in response to feedback. Participants engaged in a consistent cycle of assessing, analyzing, and responding to their data. For some principals this meant redirecting resources while also focusing on student and adult mindsets. Principal 3 found that using book clubs helped adults with self-awareness as they reflected on how their beliefs influenced their work: "self-awareness is huge. I'm always asking people to reflect; I'm always asking us to reflect on our impact and our intention."

As it relates to students, Principal 8 said "I sweat the small stuff. I don't let certain things slide. I'm setting high expectations as to how students show up." Principal 2 and Principal 6 spoke about their reliance on data to make decisions "I stay on top of data," emphasized Principal 6. "I pull people together and we come up with action steps we will use as a team to address the problem." Principal 2 talked about the decision to invest in a program to help students with self-regulatory skills: "we had high referrals for social emotional learning needs."

Such collaborative and responsive work is an essential aspect of adaptive leadership explains Dunn (2020) in writing about adaptive leadership in the educational setting. He explains that while schools typically have clear goals the path to reaching these goals is not linear. Within education, the work is complex and unpredictable. As evidenced in this study, principals worked adaptively to implement SEL allowing space for collaboration and feedback from different stakeholders. Most principals regarded collaboration as essential, with one principal describing it as a core value.

Principals also communicated that they valued feedback from their students and staff as they implemented SEL. They used the feedback to make decisions regarding implementation. This key practice offered insight into how principals adapted the SEL intervention to meet their individual school needs. Principal 1 worked with staff to develop an internal SEL curriculum, encouraging staff to reflect on whether they were "thinking or just pushing information to be regurgitated." Principal 8 took a similar approach allowing teachers a chance to develop the SEL curriculum to use during advisory periods. Whether it was creating new curriculum or co-planning with students, principals acted on feedback. Principal 10 said a focus on project-based learning stemmed from student interest, that "it was important for us to focus on what students need versus trying to say here's a curriculum and we're going to force them to follow it." Principal 2 and Principal 8 developed courses to address students' SEL needs, both agreeing that students needed additional support. This responsiveness to feedback revealed an adaptive approach because leaders demonstrated an openness to change and a respect for all voices that also reflects the leaders' self and social awareness. Participants

in the study considered feedback from individuals in their schools, including students, as they made changes. Adaptive leaders respect all voices and are not centered on who has the official authority (Heifetz et al., 2009). Principals agreed about the importance of understanding and including student perspectives when making decisions. "If we're really listening to kids and understanding their lens, then we understand how our decisions impact their wellness," said Principal 2. Several principals discussed codesigning lessons and policies with students. "This allows us to dive into student interest," said Principal 10.

In addition to student input, participants saw building school culture as a key component to adapting SEL in their schools. For example, principals shared a belief in the power of restorative practices, often used to develop SEL competencies of responsible decision making and relationship skills in students. As discussed in the literature review, restorative practices in schools can be used to build and improve relationships and to address discipline issues both proactively and reactively (Garnet et al., 2022; Huguley et al., 2022). Principals consistently used and agreed this strategy helps students make better decisions but also can be used to hold them accountable for their choices. They discussed restorative practices as an alternative to suspensions and as a strategy to address school discipline, confirming recent research regarding the use of this strategy to improve school climate and culture (e.g., Garnett et al., 2022; Huguley et al.,2022; Lodi et al., 2021). Echoing these researchers, some principals expressed concerns about training for teachers so that implementation of restorative practices is

consistent throughout the school. Given the variations of how restorative practice is implemented, continuous training for teachers is crucial (Garnet et al., 2022).

Another aspect of school culture, also in alignment with the SEL framework, was the importance of caring for and collaborating with teachers. Principals demonstrated social awareness and self-awareness as they prioritized caring, supporting, and collaborating with teachers. Several principals directly stated the need for more attention to adult SEL. Adaptive leaders recognize how important it is to engage with adults knowing their "values, beliefs and anxieties" (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 38). Principal 6 said the challenges staff must face in the workplace require attention to adult self-care. Principal 10 shared similar thoughts in demonstrating care for adults. "I let people know when I'm asking how they're doing I want a real response; don't tell me everything's okay if it's not." Creating opportunities for adults to process and build their capacity to support students is a critical practice because they also need to feel supported and valued. The sense of belonging and shared purpose by adults supports their ability to implement SEL successfully (CASEL, 2020).

Findings Related to RQ2

The second RQ, RQ2, queried how secondary school administrators in a northeastern school district adapt their leadership behaviors to support SEL competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision making. Principals in the study adapted their leadership behaviors to establish school identity while addressing student needs in order to support implementation of SEL competencies. Specifically, principals used advisory structures to teach SEL

competencies, confirming current research that teaching SEL skills in the classroom yields positive student outcomes and improves school climate (Hunter et al., 2022). "We've done all kinds of approaches with advisory. We've taken a wholistic approach and used themes or topics to address social emotional learning during this time," said Principal 3.

Principals viewed the use of advisory as critical to implementation of competencies. "There needs to be a place where staff are engaging with students and helping them build their own SEL," said Principal 9. Similarly, Principal 2 communicated that the advisory program is a way to target students who struggle with self-management.

The establishment of school identity as a strategy for implementing competencies emerged as principals spoke about a commitment to their unique school identity. Study participants used modeling to develop and ensure a strong school identity. Principal 1 and Principal 9 expressed similar thoughts about modeling the behavior they want to see in their schools. "I try to make sure that I treat people with kindness, always open to the idea that the other person has the best possible intent," commented Principal 9. Similarly, Principal 1 discussed speaking respectfully to everyone, saying, "There is a way I will address all parents, all students, all staff members. I set that as an expectation for everyone." Additionally, principals recognized that students are a crucial part of creating school identity.

Principal 8 works to ensure students feel like they belong by investing funds into items like clothes which promote the school. "It gives them a sense of pride." Principal 5

is working for their school to become the premier institution for post-secondary learners, even working to change the culture around foul language by students. I push back when people tell me it just has to be that way. We have to teach them how to interact in this environment. Principal 7 said, *"my goal is for Black children to know they have value, know they are full of joy and genius."*

In alignment with adaptive leadership principles, implementation of SEL competencies required principals to embrace and expect change and to lead with a clear vision. Principals who participated in the study were energized by change and recognized it as part of the job. This perspective about change allowed principals to think deeply about the SEL needs of students in their schools and to respond appropriately. "Change is something that is going to happen. As the leader I choose to see it as something positive. Unless you have 100% students achieving at 100%, there are still things that can be done," said Principal 5.

Cultural relevancy as a key component of school identity emerged throughout the interviews. Principals felt strongly about the role of culture in relation to SEL. Principal 7 and Principal 4 both commented on the importance of SEL practices that are grounded in culturally relevant practices**.** Principal 1 explained "we had a strong diversity, equity and inclusion focus and it required all of us to really examine ourselves, our beliefs, our privilege, and it was tough, but it didn't make it any less necessary."

SEL practices that are steeped in cultural relevancy are a commitment that both Principal 7 and Principal 8 discussed in interviews. "All our SEL practices actually begin with helping students understand through their own cultural lens," explained Principal 7.

"I'm centered on cultural relevance. It shows up in all my leadership. I also know it's important to embrace other cultures and people too. There's beauty in all of us," said Principal 8.

Adaptive leaders understand the culture of their organizations and know how to determine which elements need to change and which need to stay. As stated by Principal 8, "Culture matters, and from my experiences being in inner city schools, we focus so much on standardized testing that students leave our high schools not inspired." Principal 8 worked to create a joyful environment for students, noting "If you're not intentional about it, it doesn't happen." Similarly, Principal 10 stated "I just wanted to develop a sense of self-worth and self-pride and school pride."

Principals also adapted their leadership behaviors by responding to student needs in tangible ways. They developed their own curriculum, created new classes and programs to address student SEL needs, reflecting an adaptive approach of experimentation and risk taking (see Heifetz et al., 2009). Principal 3 worked with staff to promote self-management in students by giving rewards for completing assignments. "We had a system of rewards and celebrations for students as they completed their work on time. They needed extrinsic celebrations to have the intrinsic motivation." Principals in the study believed in listening to students and adjusting school policies based on student responses. In Principal 10's school, students can come and go as they desire in the classroom, without asking permission. Principal 2 developed a space for students to engage in activism so they would have a place to express themselves. These decisions by

principals promoted self and social awareness competencies as they considered individual and collective needs, and also provided an opportunity to respond adaptively.

Limitations of the Study

This study included some limitations to the trustworthiness of the findings. Ravitch and Carl (2021) explained that the goal of a qualitative research study is not to produce results that directly apply to another setting; however, readers may be able to make comparisons through rich descriptions. As explained in Chapter 1, only secondary principals participated in this research study. Secondary principals were defined as middle school and high school principals. Other school leaders, such as assistant principals and directors, who are also involved in the implementation of SEL programming, were not included as participants in this study. Their perspectives on how SEL interventions were adapted in their schools may have provided additional insight. The use of restorative practices (Fallow et al., 2024) and the inclusion of cultural relevance when implementing SEL are also possible limitations. While researchers have found that restorative practices improve academic achievement, school safety, and student behavior (Darling-Hammond, 2023), further research is needed to determine whether restorative practices reduce suspensions. Likewise, there are few studies addressing cultural relevance within the implementation of SEL (Barnes, 2019; McCall et al.; Vera, 2022).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, three areas indicate a need for additional research: leadership strategies that support SEL implementation; the use of restorative practices to build SEL skills; and the factors of SEL programming that address cultural relevancy. As discussed in the literature review as developed in Chapter 2, few studies detail leadership strategies that support the implementation of SEL programming. Further research is needed to support principals who are charged with leading the work of SEL (Kennedy et al., 2019). School leaders need a framework that is specifically designed to support implementation of SEL. This framework should address leadership practices, including the actions and beliefs of school leaders (Kennedy et al., 2019).

Study participants expressed a belief that restorative practices have the power to improve discipline and enhance overall climate and culture. Principals communicated their commitment to use this strategy preventively and in response to discipline issues. However, several principals expressed concerns about training and implementation. Although current research supports the positive outcomes associated with restorative practices (Garnett et al., 2022; Lodi et al., 2021; Mahoney, 2020), researchers acknowledge the need for additional studies regarding the use of restorative practices to address discipline and improve climate and culture (King Lund et al., 2021).

Principals in the study also prioritized cultural relevancy in relation to SEL implementation and worked to include culturally responsive teaching in their SEL programming. While SEL is designed to consider student differences, research is needed on how to integrate SEL in culturally relevant ways (Kennedy, 2019; Vera, 2023).

Implications

The potential impact for positive social change based on the findings of this study is greatest at the district level. Principals who participated in this study expressed a desire for training that is appropriate for their secondary school site community. If current and prospective principals can receive training in leadership behaviors and strategies that support effective implementation of SEL strategies, there are potential positive implications for improved school climate and culture. This training should include district- and school-level progress monitoring, based on data, so that principals can determine if their approach to SEL is working for their schools.

Additionally, one reason the study district initiated the use of SEL programs was to reduce suspensions. Several principals shared their belief that implementing SEL helped to lower suspension rates in their schools. An examination of public data indicated that, since 2018, four of the six schools in this study experienced a steady decrease in suspension rates. Five schools noted that their suspension rates remain relatively the same since 2021. The role that SEL may play in reducing suspensions and addressing inequities, particularly among African American students, is still under study, but some districts have reported decreases in expulsions with the use of restorative practices (Darling-Hammond, 2023; Fallo et al., 2024; Gregory et al., 2018; Manassah et al., 2018).

Using the adaptive leadership model as a theoretical approach to support the implementation of SEL programming provides principals with a heuristic framework for thinking about SEL implementation within the school site. The SEL competencies cannot

be implemented with a standard technical approach because they address an individual's

ability to manage emotions, which cannot be easily measured. Adaptive leaders focus on

managing change and shifting mindsets, making adaptive leadership an appropriate

framework for understanding how SEL is reflected in schools.

Conclusion

This basic qualitative study explored the perspectives of 10 secondary principals

and their experiences with the implementation of SEL in their school sites. I examined

how they adapted their leadership behaviors and applied SEL to meet their unique school

needs. The principals devised strategies within the work of school improvement, to adapt

SEL for their school population. They used training, data analysis, and feedback to

customize their SEL intervention and develop a strong culture that included restorative

practices, caring for teachers, and collaboration.

This research also revealed that leadership behaviors, focused on student needs

and school identity, were critical to the adaptation of SEL competencies. Principals in

this study prioritized student voice, instituted flexible advisory structures, and developed

curriculum in support of SEL competencies. In addition, the principals led with a clear

vision, cultural relevancy, and a willingness to embrace change.

The findings from this study reflect participants' belief that improved student

behavior and enhanced school culture can follow when SEL is implemented. While there

were commonalities among principals, each leader's implementation was unique. And

implementation was reflected differently at each school site because each school is

different, each context is different, and each school community's particular needs may

vary at different times. SEL programming is an intervention that is most effective when leaders can create, adjust, and adapt based on the needs of students and adults in their community.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Hello _____

Thank you very much for participating in this research study designed to explore how principals implement social emotional learning at their schools and how they adapt their leadership practices to accommodate SEL.

This interview session should last about one hour as noted in my email to you. After the interview, I will be reviewing your responses as I analyze the data. As a follow-up, I will use a process called "member checking" by providing you with the opportunity to review a summary of your responses. I will send these to you through email.

To repeat several key points from the Consent Form that you received when you agreed to participate, please note that I will not identify you in my documents or any reports that are created based on these interviews. You can request that I repeat or clarify questions and you may choose to stop this interview at any time. Also, as a reminder, this interview will be audio recorded for transcription purposes.

 • Do you have any questions?
 • Are you ready to begin?

Context Questions
- How long have you worked in education?
- How long have you worked in this district?
- How long have you been a principal at this school?
- How would you describe your leadership practices (as opposed to management practices)? For example,
    o What key practices do you feel define your leadership?
    o Are there ways that you serve as a role model?
    o Do you share your vision of the future with the staff? Explain how.
    o How do you deal with change, especially goal setting, and the inevitable failures that will occur?
    o Do you encourage collaboration and working in teams? Explain how.
    o How do you recognize the accomplishments of your staff?
- Have you participated in district SEL training? How would you describe your experience?

1. Describe ways you have implemented SEL in your school.
   Potential Follow-up: How are self-awareness and social awareness skills developed at your school?
   Potential Follow-up: How are self-management and responsible decision-making skills developed at your school?

Potential Follow-up: How do you build teacher capacity for implementing SEL programming?

2. Did you modify the suggested SEL implementation to increase alignment with your leadership practices?
Potential Follow-up: Which aspects of SEL fit well with your leadership practices?
Potential Follow-up: Which aspects of SEL did not fit well with your leadership practices?

3. How do your leadership practices promote the five SEL competencies? Explain.
Potential Follow-ups for specific competencies
   a. self-awareness,
   b. social awareness,
   c. self-management,
   d. relationship skills, and
   e. responsible decision making
Potential Follow-up: Did you modify or augment any of your leadership practices to support SEL programming? If so, how?
Potential Follow-up: What happened as a result of those changes?

4. Did you modify or augment any of your leadership practices to support SEL programming? If so, how?
Potential Follow-up: What happened as a result of those changes?
Potential Follow-up: Are there further leadership behavior changes needed? If so, what, and why?

5. Do you use the five competencies (self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making) to improve discipline at your school? Explain.
Potential Follow-up: How successful has this been? Explain
Potential Follow-up: Which of these five competencies would you recommend to others wanting to improve discipline at their school?

Closing
This concludes the interview questions. Is there any additional information that you would like to add?

After this interview I will summarize your responses. As mentioned earlier, I will use member checking by sharing my summary of your responses with you via email so that you can verify accuracy. Thank you for your participation and time.