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What are the Perspectives of School District Staff on the Barriers & Benefits of Implementing the Second Step Curriculum within a School District?

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the Second Step Curriculum within a School District?

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Abstract

This qualitative research set out to explore district staff members' ideals of implementing a social-emotional learning curriculum in their district. Interviews of individual staff members was the source of data for this study. Participants noted that the addition of the SEL program has had positive impacts on current students. Participants also indicated that, although, the addition of this program is necessary, it is also necessary that all staff have some type of training to better support the student population. Also mentioned by the participants was the need for teaching the program with fidelity and including the teaching throughout the day, not just a one lesson a week and done. Recommendations for further research include expanding the study to other school districts to validate and add to the findings of this study, while also assist in understanding the results. Additionally, further research should include a wider group of diverse populations within other school settings; including this diverse population may produce different results not seen in this study.

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CHAPTER 1

By the age of 18, many children will face some level of trauma (Riley, 2018). When

students are facing trauma or are showing a lack of social-emotional skills, school staff needs to

be sure that they include them in the classroom, giving them opportunities to grow socially and

emotionally (Riley, 2018). While many students are not labeled with a diagnosable disability,

there are still many that face challenges every day (Elias et al., 2003). Today's schools not only

need to offer traditional academic subjects, but they also need to include a robust social-

emotional education, focusing on positive youth development (PYD) to all students (Meyers et

al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2017). Administrators, teachers, special education staff, and other school

staff feel they have a moral obligation to ensure all students receive the best education

imaginable, not only academically but also by providing a rich social-emotional education

(Ransford et al., 2009). Schools can choose from various social-emotional programs; when

selecting these programs, schools can choose an entire plan or fragments of an application

(Riley, 2018). There is an extensive selection of programs and curriculums that may be selected

to teach social-emotional education. Some programs that may be chosen include Restorative

Practices, Positive Behavior Intervention, and Supports (PBIS), Second Step, Responsive

Classroom, and Morning Meetings. "If students leave our school walls with the capacity to self-

advocate, regulate emotions, and exercise empathy, they will be able to learn anything" (Riley,

2018, p. 17).

Statement of the Problem

Employing any new curriculum within a school faces many challenges; implementing a

new social-emotional curriculum is no exception, "Roadblocks" will present themselves within

any school (Grover & Gondek, 2018, p. 12). When implementing new programs, the success of the program is hugely dependent on the commitment of the teachers (Martinez, 2016). Teachers often receive little training and support during this implementation process (Martinez, 2016). While teachers need to maintain the culpability of students' performance on academics and standardized testing, they are also being asked to teach additional non-academic subjects (Martinez, 2016). One of these subject areas is intended to help our students develop the skills needed to manage their emotions, build positive relationships, and make reasonable decisions (Martinez, 2016).

Background of the Problem

The employment of any curriculum within a school setting can present countless challenges (Martinez, 2016). Discussing the new programs with staff and allowing time for reflection can minimize some of the problems. When people decide to become teachers, they go into the profession with all intentions of helping the whole child and want to work towards the positive development of our youth, focusing on enhancing students' strengths and trying to decrease risk factors within their family, peers, school, and community (Taylor et al., 2017). Before making these changes, it is important to explore possible roadblocks that may be faced; these will fall within three different categories: mindset, instructional practice, and logistics (Grover & Gondek, 2018).

When talking about mindset, it is paramount to think not only about the child but also to consider the adults in the classroom. Teaching has been reported to be one of the most stressful occupations, and when you have a stressed-out teacher, this leads to students who are also feeling stressed (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Schonert-Reichl (2017) states that "teachers are the

engine that drives Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs and practices in schools and classrooms, and their social-emotional competence and wellbeing strongly influence their students" (p. 137). Schonert-Reichl goes on to say that "teachers are also at risk for poor social-emotional wellbeing" (p. 137). Besides having the mindset, teachers need to feel confident in what they teach their students; having this confidence will show in their lessons (Martinez, 2016).

Considering instructional practices, several barriers may present themselves to classroom teachers and special education teachers. An extremely critical issue is the scheduling of lessons for students. Any child participating in a social-emotional curriculum should be included in the full regular education classroom setting. Excluding any student with special needs can be very problematic in the long run. According to Grover and Gondek, these children need to learn specific skills such as interacting with their peers, socially interact with others, managing their emotions, and increasing their practice on how to be a productive member of their class (Grover & Gondek, 2018).

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is also known as Character Education Programs (CEP); these education types are becoming increasingly popular within districts. There are various program options from which to choose from that need to be selected and planned for before training and implementation can happen (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). Once a program has been selected, districts may find there is inadequate funding and, or time to adequately train staff properly prior to implementation. (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). Therefore, the potential costs and time associated with a successful implementation should be considered by the planning team.

Research indicates as students enter middle school and high school, they become less connected to school due to their lack of social-emotional skills (Durlak et al., 2011). These

students also report they feel teachers, staff, and peers do not care for them or care how they do in school (Durlak et al., 2011). Students that have reported a lack of caring are also at a higher risk for problem behaviors, depression, alcohol or drug use, violence, or sexual encounters (Durlak et al., 2011). Providing students successful education and allowing them to graduate with the requirements is only part of what is needed (Durlak et al., 2011).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gather perspectives from district staff (administrators, teachers, instructional coaches, school counselors, school social workers, and other staff) on barriers and benefits of implementing the Second Step Curriculum within a school district. Research shows that the implementation of this type of curriculum has the advantages of reducing substance abuse, risk-taking behaviors, and problem behaviors (Taylor et al., 2017). Evidence has also shown that students who take part in these programs can significantly improve attitudes, social behaviors, and academic performance even after they no longer are partaking in a program (Meyers et al., 2019). Over time, studies have found that students in K-8 grade levels participating in social-emotional learning programs have displayed an improvement in their personal, social, and academic lives, both in school and in after-school settings (Payton et al., 2008).

Theoretical Framework

"A theoretical framework serves as the foundation for your research study" (Lochmiller & Lester, 2018 p. 31). This framework conveys to the readers the position the researcher is taking (Lochmiller & Lester, 2018). SEL programs are said to be among the most effective

programs focusing on youth development for school-aged children (Payton et al., 2008). These programs, when implemented in schools, have success in increasing students' academic performance, reducing stress, and fostering positive social behavior (Payton et al., 2008).

Research Questions

The primary research issue being explored in this research study is, what are the perspectives of school district staff (administrators, teachers, school counselors, school social workers, and instructional coaches) on the impact of implementing the Second Step Curriculum with a school district? The following secondary research questions will assist in the primary research question:

RQ1: How do school district staff perceive the implementation of a Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum will benefit students, teachers, administrators, and staff?

RQ2: What is the impact as perceived by school district staff for implementing a Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum in the school building and across the district?

A semi-structured open-ended interview guide will be developed by the researcher for individual interviews based upon literature on organizational change. This interview guide will be presented in Chapter 3 and included in the Appendix after the research is completed.

Research Design

This qualitative research sets out to explore district staff members' ideals of implementing a social-emotional learning curriculum in their district. Qualitative research looks to "understand social life as it unfolds in its natural environment (Lochmiller & Lester, 2018, p. 93). The purpose of this study is to gather perspectives from district staff (administrators,

teachers, instructional coaches, school counselors, school social workers, and other staff) on barriers and benefits of implementing the Second Step Curriculum within a school district.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following operational definitions will be used.

English Learners (EL): Based on district terminology refers to students not yet proficient in English.

Learning: Children gaining knowledge to put to use in the real world (Elias et al., 2003).

Positive Youth Development (PYD): Focusing on enhancing young people's strengths, establishing engaging and supportive contexts, and providing opportunities for bidirectional, constructive youth-context interactions (Taylor et al., 2017).

PD: Professional development based on district terminology.

PGP: Professional growth plan based on district terminology.

Relationship Skills: Establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation, resisting inappropriate social pressure, preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict, and seeking help when needed (Payton et al., 2008).

Responsible Decision Making: Making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and likely consequences of various actions; applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations and contributing to the well-being of one's school and community (Payton et al., 2008).

Self-Awareness: Accurately assessing one's feelings, interests, values, and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence (Payton et al., 2008).

Self-Management: Regulating one's emotions to handle stress, controlling impulses, and persevering in addressing challenges' expressing emotions appropriately, and setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals (Payton et al., 2008).

Social Awareness: Taking the perspective of and empathize with others, recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences, and setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals (Payton et al., 2008).

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL): The process through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to recognize and manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations effectively (Payton et al., 2008).

Trauma: An event that is emotionally painful or distressful and often results in lasting mental and physical effects – have difficulty establishing relationships, paying attention, regulating emotions, and controlling behavior (Riley, 2018).

Limitations of the Study

All participants will have a varied level of implementation experience with SEL. Participants will be asked to share their professional point of view based on their years of educational experience, their time in a classroom setting, and their time and experiences in a school setting. Participants will also respond to specific questions created by the researcher.

Delimitations of the Study

This study is limited to two elementary schools in a Minnesota district of 18,000 students. One of the schools is using the Social-Emotional Curriculum (Second Step) with fidelity, this has

been ongoing for five years, and the other school is just beginning their implementation of the

curriculum. Participation in this study will include administrators, teachers, social workers,

counselors, instructional coaches, and other school staff who have been using the curriculum in

the school district. The participants will have varied experiences, some using the curriculum for

as little as one year, while others up to six years, and some in between.

Significance of the Study

"One-third of all children report experiencing some level of trauma by the time they are

16 years of age" (Riley, 2018, p. 15). It is imperative for our schools to help students facing

trauma or life disruptions in a responsive manner while offering a level of social-emotional

education (Desautels, 2020). By providing such education, students are given the opportunity to

learn by feeling safe and know in their school (Desautels, 2020). While many of the students

faced with trauma or life disruptions do not have an IEP or 504 plan, educators need to build

relationships and foster a sense of attachment to the school community for these students

(Desautels, 2020).

This study may be significant to other school district officials and teachers when looking

at the addition of a social-emotional curriculum. This study's outcomes may guide others on

what barriers may be seen while offering suggestions on how one might overcome these barriers.

The study will also provide valuable input on curriculums that have or have not worked within

the study setting. When looking at the participant's feedback, the researcher's goal is for

individuals of similar positions within other school districts to get a strong sense of how to

implement a program of this magnitude positively for their staff and students.   Even though

research has shown that implementing a robust social-emotional program can be beneficial to

students, after careful planning, schools must implement the program with fidelity. (Meyers et al., 2019). This study will support the readers in planning and implantation, highlighting the difficulties and how to overcome them; additionally, it will provide the positive attributes of the curriculum.

Summary

This chapter provided the introduction of the study, the statement of the problem, along with the background of the problem. It also looked at the study's purpose, the theoretical framework of the study, three research questions, the research design, and definition of terms. Finally, we explored the significance of the research and its limitations as well as the delimitations of the study.

CHAPTER 2

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to gather perspectives from district staff (administrators,

teachers, instructional coaches, school counselors, school social workers, and other staff) on

barriers and benefits of implementing the Second Step Curriculum, an SEL curriculum within a

school district. Research shows that the implementation of this type of curriculum has the

advantages of reducing substance abuse, risk-taking behaviors, and problem behaviors (Taylor et

al., 2017). While the benefits of social-emotional learning can be extremely valuable to students,

there are still barriers that educators face (Grover & Gondek, 2018). Although implementing

social-emotional learning can be positive, educators may experience a deficiency of support from

their school or school district (Grover & Gondek, 2018). With and implementation of a program,

the key to success is teachers having a healthy level of comfort with the content, ample training

in place for staff, and a high level of commitment toward the program (Martinez, 2016).

Research shows a rise in violence in our schools and an increased level of bullying and

harassment (Martinez, 2016; Riley, 2018). According to Martinez, such behaviors lead

educators to look for program content that looks beyond the traditional language arts, math,

science, and social studies curriculum. Classroom instruction focuses on incorporating social

and emotional skill building alongside traditional education (Martinez, 2016).

Research shows the implementation of this type of curriculum has the benefits of

reducing substance abuse, risk-taking behaviors, and problem behaviors (Taylor et al., 2017).

When individuals decide to become educators, they go into the profession with intentions of

helping the whole child (Taylor et al.). Teachers work towards the positive development of

youth, focusing on enhancing students' strengths and decreasing risk factors within their family,

peers, school, and community (Taylor et al.). With the implementation of an SEL Curriculum, staff will have the opportunity to work with their colleagues and find effective ways of teaching this new curriculum. Students will be introduced to many tools to aid in balancing their social-emotional learning. Over time, it will be essential to identify, within a district, if the research holds that Social Emotional Learning programs are the most effective of youth-development when offered to school-age youth (Payton et al., 2008).

Research indicates as children enter middle school and high school, students become less connected to school due to their lack of social-emotional skills (Durlak et al., 2011). These students also report feeling that teachers, staff, and peers don't care for them or care how they do in school (Durlak et al., 201). Students that have reported the lack of caring are also at a higher risk for problem behaviors, depression, alcohol or drug use, violence, or sexual encounters (Durlak et al., 2017). Providing students a successful education and allowing them to graduate with the requirements is only part of what is needed (Durlak et al., 2017). "SEL programs are among the most successful youth-development programs offered to school-age youth (Payton et al., 2008)". Ensuring successful implementation of an SEL program is vital to its success and the success of students'.

Historical Background

Many schools rely on school psychologists and other support staff to fix students who are often removed from a mainstream educational setting due to social inabilities (Elias et al., 2003). Building relationships with students, both socially and emotionally, is critical (Elias et al., 2003). Forming such relationships based on individual needs will help create ways to help these students to co-exist and have positive roles within their school day (Elias et al., 2003).

Choosing Programming

Reviewing programs can be a daunting task. When a district considers new applications, it is essential to evaluate those programs that foster positive social behaviors, school performance, and attitudes toward self, school, and others (Payton et al., 2008). Equally as important is looking for programs that will lessen conduct problems and emotional distress (Payton et al., 2008). Critical skills to the success of social-emotional programs include children's ability to calm themselves when angry, create friendships, resolve struggles courteously, make responsible and safe choices, and be able to contribute in a positive way to the community, both at school and away from school (Payton et al., 2008).

Implementation of social-emotional programs will add to teachers' workloads; however, teachers feel positive with this approach to student learning (Ransford et al., 2009). Many educators believe they have an ethical, moral, and professional obligation to not only support students academically but also to encourage them socially and emotionally (Ransford et al., 2009).

The key to implementing a new program relies on administrative support, training, and coaching the individuals who will be presenting and teaching the curriculum (Ransford et al., 2009). When teachers witness a strong buy-in from the administrative team, by seeing monitoring, a dedication to the resource, a verbal commitment, and participation, much more fidelity will show in implementing the program (Ransford et al., 2009). Training and coaching are vital to the success of a new program (Payton et al., 2008). Those on the receiving end of the coaching will be able to deliver the program with much more fidelity (Ransford et al., 2009). Training and coaching allow for continued professional development and continuous improvements in the delivery of material (Ransford et al., 2009).

"Teachers are the engine that drives social and emotional learning (SEL) programs and practices in schools and classrooms, and their social-emotional competence and wellbeing strongly influence their students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017, p. 137)." When teachers work to implement an SEL curriculum effectively, they are working to ensure students' emotional well-being (Payton et al., 2008). Classrooms that nurture robust teacher-student relationships afford deeper learning as well as resilient social and emotional development among students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Benefits

Research has shown that students with the ability to manage their emotions, problem-solve successfully, and work collaboratively with others have a higher level of academic success (Elias et al., 2003). Giving students these opportunities to participate in an SEL Curriculum will help to decrease risk-taking behaviors and will afford more engagement and a higher level of attachment to school (Elias et al., 2003).

Many educators are becoming much more interested in implementing some social-emotional education, focusing on social, emotional learning within their district (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). Finding the balance for students using an SEL program has been found to improve students' attitudes and their connectedness toward school (Payton et al., 2008). Students also show increased academic performance, improved beliefs of themselves and others, and improved social-emotional skills (Payton et al., 2008). Payton shares that "SEL programs are among the most successful youth-development programs offered to school-age youth" (p. 4).

It is essential to know that the addition of an SEL program can increase the academic performance of all students, regardless of socio-economic status, racial or ethnic background

(Payton et al., 2008). Students have shown a theoretical gain on test scores of 11 to 17 percentile points while participating in an SEL program compared to an average student not afforded similar opportunities (Payton et al., 2008). Schools that have implemented an evidence-based SEL program have seen a considerable improvement in academic performance, attitudes, and behaviors; these improvements continue to be observed even after students have no longer participated in these programs (Meyers et al., 2019).

When students learn, they learn within a partnership; this partnership includes teaching staff, other school staff, peers, and their families (Durlak et al., 2011). Students' emotions can both support or obstruct an academic work ethic, commitment to school, participation, and ultimately the success they will experience in school (Durlak et al., 2011).

Research has shown that there is validation that SEL can be taught and measured (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Implementing SEL will ensure the positive development of students, lessening problematic behaviors, increasing social skills, as well as improved academic performance (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). These skills can then be transferred into lifelong lessons, giving students the skills needed to succeed in higher-level education or securing employment after graduation (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Challenges

Once an SEL Curriculum has been selected, staff turnover must be low (Elias et al., 2003). Starting a new curriculum requires fidelity and consistent staff presenting the material; this will ensure staff has the knowledge to deliver the content (Elias et al., 2003). The delivery of the material to students can often not go as planned (Elias et al., 2003). There can be various reasons that lead to derailed lessons, children become disengaged, classrooms become chaotic, or

the material may be beyond the children's developmental level (Elias et al., 2003). The implementation also needs to fit into an academic day carefully; now and again, finding that right fit can take time and careful planning (Elias et al., 2003).

Teacher burnout rates are becoming increasingly prevalent in education due to the high demands of educators, the delivery of additional social-emotional curriculums, and other prevention interventions (Ransford et al., 2009). When defining professional burnout, it is the repeated exposure to stressors within the workplace environment, including a lack of school organization or poor classroom behavior (Ransford et al., 2009). School employees often experience emotional fatigue, a feeling of low individual accomplishments, and a sense that lessons are lacking personalization (Ransford et al., 2009). Fatigue is experienced differently among teachers. When emotional resources become depleted, teachers feel physically and emotionally unable to provide students what they need (Ransford et al., 2009). Additionally, there can be a perception of negative feelings towards colleagues, which can cause poor attitudes towards other colleagues and students (Ransford et al., 2009).

Unfortunately, teachers are also at risk for reduced social-emotional well-being (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Teaching is reportedly one of the most stressful jobs; this stress can carry-over into the classroom and can cause students likewise to be stressed (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). The role teachers' play in implementing social-emotional training has recently come into question (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Schonert-Reichl reports, "if we don't accurately understand teacher's wellbeing and how teachers influence students' SEL, we can never fully know whether and how to promote SEL in the classroom (p. 138)."

It is a frequent problem that funding for the implementation of social-emotional programming can be inadequate (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). This funding relates to both the

actual purchase of a program and sustaining funding and support for the program (Meyers et al., 2019). When choosing such a program, it is important to define why this education is essential and what students need to learn from this education (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

Other barriers regarding students faced during the implementation of social-emotional programs include how to address students who become embarrassed and how can the needs of all students be met (Grover & Gondek, 2018)? Additional obstacles faced in teacher preparation for social-emotional planning include the time set aside for preparing lessons, delivery of the experiences, and can a co-teaching model be successful (Grover & Gondek, 2018)? Scheduling a new curriculum into an already tight master schedule can cause significant conflicts when co-teaching with special area staff (Grover & Gondek, 2018). School staff must recognize this work's value and intentionally create a master schedule around the new SEL Curriculum (Grover & Gondek, 2018). Once implementation occurs, it is necessary for the program to be followed with fidelity and continuously improve the delivery of the program as well as practices within their classrooms (Meyers et al., 2019). It is vital to integrate the SEL program into various schoolwide structures, policies, and routines across grade levels (Meyers et al., 2019).

Challenges often facing schools that implement a social-emotional program include varying levels of academic and social abilities for students, a culturally diverse population of students, as well as the full range of motivations students have for learning (Durlak et al., 2011). As students move to higher grade levels, the less engaged some of them become in their education (Durlak et al., 2011). Unfortunately, there is also a higher level of high-risk-taking behavior (including substance use, sex, violence, depression, and attempted suicide) that can impede school performance and potentially endanger future life successes (Durlak et al., 2011).

Reports indicate that one-third of our students have experienced some form of trauma by the age of sixteen (Riley, 2018). These students show signs of mental and physical effects, including troubles with relationships, showing symptoms of attention deficit, regulating emotions, and maintaining safe and controlling behaviors (Riley, 2018).

Theoretical Background

Providing students with positive youth development (PYD) nurtures the strengths they already have allows for positive interactions among peers (Taylor et al., 2017). PYD also focuses on building positive social skills and attitudes and building relationships (Taylor et al., 2017). Similarly, it also helps acquire positive social supports and allows for opportunities where students can display the skills they have practiced (Taylor et al., 2017). Social-emotional learning has many of the same qualities as PYD (Taylor et al., 2017). These qualities support students' and adults' ability to apply skills learned to improve social relationships, ethical behavior, and work productively (Taylor et al., 2017).

A semi-structured open-ended interview guide (SOIG)will be developed by the researcher for individual interview-based up literature on organizational change (Lochmiller & Lester, 2018). Using this method of interviewing will allow the researcher the flexibility to ask clarifying questions of the participant if necessary (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). While conducting the interview, it is crucial for the interviewer to have knowledge of the topic being discussed while also allowing the participant to share their knowledge without feeling threatened (Leech, 2002). Following this format will allow for a rich conversation, allowing the participant to share their expertise at the same time, allowing the interviewer the ability to clarify any misunderstood

information (Leech, 2002). This interview guide will be presented in Chapter 3 and included in

the appendix after the research is completed.

Connection to Research

There can be many benefits as well as barriers for school district staff when

implementing a new curriculum. Finding a balance to meet the needs of staff and students may

prove to be a challenge. Social-emotional learning instruction can be valuable when

concentrating on restorative practices through evidence-based programs, such as Second Step

Curriculum (Riley, 2018). The purpose of this study is to gather perspectives from district staff

(administrators, teachers, instructional coaches, school counselors, school social workers, and

other staff) on barriers and benefits of implementing the Second Step Curriculum within a school

district. Research shows that the implementation of this type of curriculum has the advantages of

reducing substance abuse, risk-taking behaviors, and problem behaviors (Taylor et al., 2017).

Over some time, it will be essential to identify, within a district, if the research holds that Social

Emotional Learning programs are the most effective with youth-development when offered to

school-age youth (Payton et al., 2008).

This study will provide the perspectives of school district staff on both barriers and

benefits of implementing the Second Step Curriculum within a school district. The research will

also offer the perspectives school district staff have on the value the Social-Emotional

Curriculum has on an individual building as well as at the district level.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the literature pertaining to the Second Step Curriculum. While research is substantial that the implementation of an SEL Curriculum can offer a positive and lasting impact on students, it is still unclear how this transition can be seamless with educators. Looking more deeply into a school district with implementation underway will help to provide insight from educators on how to make the change valuable to both the staff and students of the school district. Collecting data from a diverse population of educators will guide others to successfully implement a new SEL Curriculum. Considerable research needs to be done before districts can choose a suitable curriculum for their students'. In Chapter 3, the research methodology and procedures will be present for the conduct of this study.

CHAPTER 3

Employing any new curriculum within a school district faces many challenges. Implementing a new social-emotional curriculum is no exception. Roadblocks to curriculum development will present themselves within any school (Grover & Gondek, 2018). The purpose of this study is to gather perspectives from district staff (administrators, teachers, instructional coaches, school counselors, school social workers, and other staff) on barriers and benefits of implementing the Second Step Curriculum within a school district. This chapter discusses the research processes, including research design, the rationale for the method, research questions, setting, sampling, selection of participants, and the researcher's role, instrumentation, Institutional Review Board (IRB) Process, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design

This qualitative research design will explore district staff members' perceptions about implementing a social-emotional learning curriculum in their school district. The purpose of this study is to gather perspectives from district staff (administrators, teachers, instructional coaches, school counselors, school social workers, and other staff) on barriers and benefits of implementing the Second Step Curriculum within a school district. The research will consist of in-depth interviews and look at multiple individuals' experiences (Lochmiller & Lester, 2018). The researcher will then analyze the data gathered based upon a phenomenological approach using grounded theory.

Rational for the Method

Using the Grounded Theory method will allow the researcher to focus on the process, actions, and practices our participants are taking while using a social-emotional program (Lochmiller & Lester, 2018). The researcher will be able to understand the views and perspectives of a variety of participants through this study.

While interviewing participants with a semi-structured open-ended interview guide (SOIG), this will allow the researcher flexibility to ask clarifying questions during the interview. This method will also allow for an interview to take place using a more conversational manner, allowing the participant to provide additional information they feel is necessary for clarity (Lochmiller & Lester, 2018).

Research Questions

The primary research question being explored in this research study is, what are the perspectives of school district staff (administrators, teachers, school counselors, school social workers, and instructional coaches) on the barriers and benefits of implementing the Second Step Curriculum with a school district? The following secondary research questions will assist in the primary research question:

RQ1: How do school district staff perceive the implementation of a Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum will impact students, teachers, administrators, and staff?

RQ2: What are the barriers and benefits as perceived by school district staff for implementing a Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum in the school building and across the district?

Setting

The participants of the study will include educators from a public school district located in the Midwest. This school district employs over 3,000 staff members; 63.3% of these educators hold a master's degree or equivalent degree. As one of the largest districts in this mid-western state, 18,200 students are educated each year: in seventeen elementary schools, four middle schools, three high schools, and one alternative learning center. Two different elementary buildings within the district will be selected. There is other leadership in each of these two buildings.

Sample

Study participants will be educators that include both men and women of varied ages, ethnicity, having various levels of education, as well as years of experience. Participants will consist of principals, teachers, instructional coaches, school social workers, school counselors, and other school staff from within the two selected schools in the district. All participants work with elementary school students in a public setting. These participants will be given a choice as to whether they will participate in the study.

Selection of Participants

When choosing participants, purposeful sampling will be used. These individuals will be selected based on their knowledge and experience of SEL Curriculums (Palinkas et al., 2015). Also, participants will be selected based on their willingness and availability.

Participants will be from the same public-school district but two different district sites. The first group will be educators who are in the foundational phase of the SEL Curriculum

implementation. The foundational stage is the building with less than one year of experience

using this particular curriculum. The second group will be in the knowledgeable phase of the

SEL Curriculum, having used the curriculum with fidelity for five years.

The researcher will contact potential participants through e-mail or phone call and ask for

their help in this study. Once participation is confirmed, the researcher will provide the

participant's survey questions in a scheduled interview. Participants will be informed that this

interview will in no way affect their employment, and all responses will be kept confidential.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher was a non-traditional student while completing her undergraduate work,

graduating at the age of forty. Before college, earlier years were spent being a mother, wife, and

doing volunteer work with her children's activities in schools, community, and church. Her

career with the school district began as a secretary for eight years at a local high school while

attending college. A teaching career started with two years of teaching second-grade students,

then spending the next eight years teaching fourth grade. After being in the classroom and

starting graduate studies, she was inspired to step out of her comfort zone to help teachers. In the

new role as an Instructional Coach in an elementary setting, much work is being done assisting

teachers.   There have been many changes in the eighteen years of working as a school district

employee. There is a high level of passion in helping children be successful, as well as finding

ways to assist teachers and other staff members in aiding in the success of the students. The

research will be face to face interviews, transcribed, and analyzed before being reported.

Transcripts and data will be sent to participants for review for meaning and verification. A peer

will be asked to review the coded data and themes exposed by the researcher to ensure the

integrity of the analysis. Once the data is ready to report, it will be published as-is presented to the researcher.

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, a practitioner-scholar will be the one doing the primary research by collecting the data, as well as interpreting and making sense of the collected data (Lochmiller & Lester, 2018). This type of research typically has "less distance between the researcher and their data" and can also be more "subjective" when interpreting the data (Lochmiller & Lester, 2018, p. 93). These researchers are very close to their research and become extremely familiar with the framework (Lochmiller & Lester, 2018). A semi-structured open-ended interview guide (SOIG) will be developed by the researcher for individual interviews based on organizational change literature. The SOIG consists of the following questions, given to each participant in the same order. Prompts will be used for gaining clarity and understanding of the response at the time the question is asked.

Semi-Structured open-ended interview guide:

Question 1… Demographics:

    a) What is your age:

- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65 years or older

- Prefer not to answer

b) Gender:

- Male

- Female

c) Years of experience:

- 1-10 years' experience

- 11-15 years' experience

- 16-20 years' experience

- 20-25 years' experience

- 25 or more years' experience

- Prefer not to answer

d) Ethnic origin:

- White

- Hispanic or Latino

- Black or African American

- Native American or American Indian

- Asian/Pacific Islander

- Other

- Prefer not to answer

Question 2… What barriers did you face with scheduling the instruction of the Second Step Curriculum? Will you be teaching the lessons, or will you have another staff member leading the lessons?

Question 3… How has the implementation of the curriculum supported your schools' mission statement?

Question 4… Have you seen the value in this added curriculum? Do you believe anything can be done to enhance the value of the program?

Question 5… What barriers have you seen with ensuring all students are being taught the Second Step lessons? Are special education students, ESL students, or students with other needs given the same instructions as other students?

Question 6… Do you feel you can be supported differently from the district level? Or do you think you have been given adequate support?

Question 7… Was the training you received enough to implement this new curriculum successfully? What more could have been added?

Question 8… Do you believe the Second Step Curriculum is a valuable program that has been added? Is there another program you feel would have been a better fit?

Question 9… Please provide any additional information regarding your thoughts on the Second Step Curriculum and the impact on students.

Thank you for participating in this study.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Process

Before contacting, selecting, or communicating with potential participants or collecting any form of data, IRB approval will be obtained from the WSU Institutional Review Board. Getting approval will consist of completing the Winona State University IRB education program, completing the protocol form, as well as any other documents needed. Once all materials are

collected, the package will be submitted for IRB review through IRBNet. The researcher will follow any recommendations by the IRB administrator or reviewer.

Data Collection

Once IRB approval has been obtained, the research will commence. Recruitment of the volunteer participants will begin. This qualitative research will be done by collecting data through interviews, observations of staff, and other documentation. The meetings will be conducted as one-to-one interviews with all participants; if approved, there will be observations for triangulation to authenticate the validity of the discussions.

One-to-one interviews will be used to gather data. This data will be collected as a series of questions presented in the SOIG. The SOIG will be administered to each participant individually by the researcher. These participants will be scheduled at mutually agreed upon individual times. Once the interviews have been finalized, the data will then be transcribed and analyzed using the Grounded Theory.

Observation notes taken by the researcher will be used to examine Second Step Curriculum practices put into place, staff instruction while implementation is happening, as well as observing staff interactions. These observations will help the researcher analyze the data with higher fidelity and triangulation. Authors Lochmiller and Lester (2018) describe triangulation as a way to validate procedures when practitioner-scholar looks at using evidence across multiple types of data. This method allows numerous data points to help generate a concrete case for the analysis of the reported data.

Data Analysis

In this research, we will explore the individual parts of the curriculum's implementation, along with the relationships, and how this will function within the district (Lochmiller & Lester, 2018). The research will look at both barriers and benefits and will be reported accordingly. The data collected will be coded and analyzed for patterns using the Ground Theory for analyzing data (Lochmiller & Lester, 2018). This method codes the text of the transcripts into selective, axial, and thematic codes to allow emergent theory to answer the research questions.

Summary

In this qualitative study, it will be determined what school staff believe to be the benefits and barriers faced during the implementation of a Social-Emotional Curriculum in the elementary school setting. Chapter four will present the study results, and Chapter five will share findings and conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 4

Results/Findings

In this chapter, the data collected by the study participants will be examined. Delving

into the implementation of the Second Step curriculum as adopted into their district, their

experiences will be studied. As seen by staff of this SEL curriculum, the benefits, as well as

feedback regarding barriers they observed during this implementation process, will be explored

and reported on.

Description of Sample

Sixteen educators from a public school district located in the Midwest participated in the

study. The participants who participated were from two different elementary schools within the

school district, as well as from the district lead office. Participants were professionals with a

span of ages and gender, varied years of experiences, and an array of positions held. The four

graphs below provide the participant demographics.
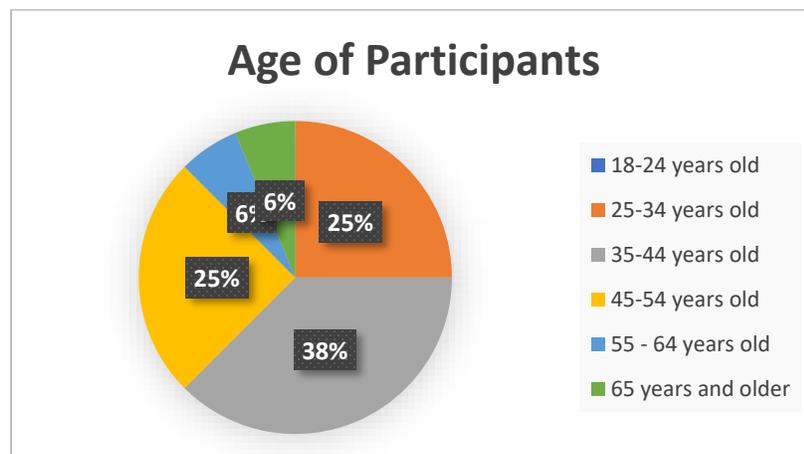
Figure 1

Age of Participants
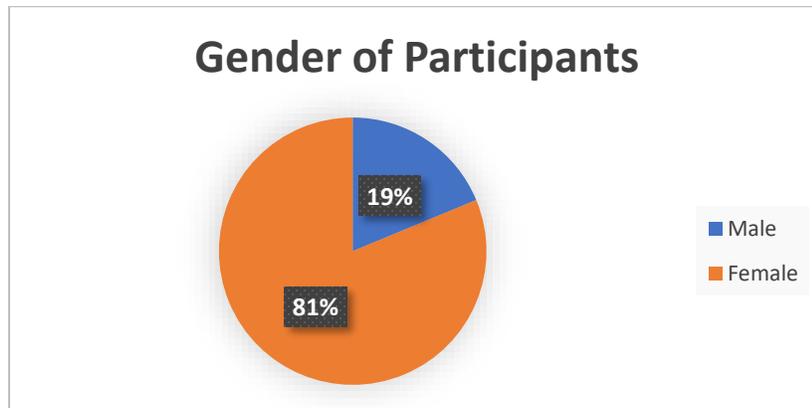
Figure 2

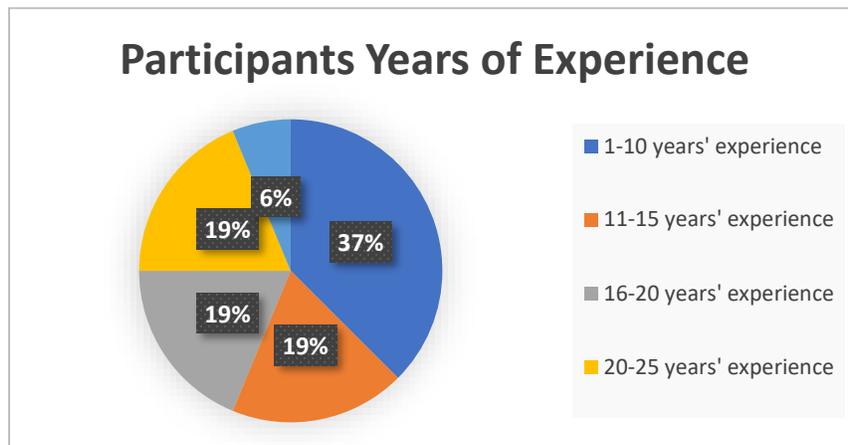*Gender of Participants*
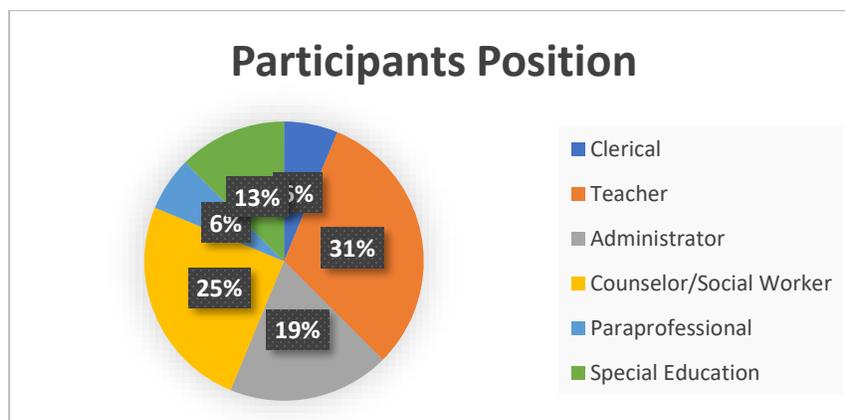

Figure 3

Participants Years of Experience

Figure 4

Participants Position

Participants Position

- Clerical
- Teacher
- Administrator
- Counselor/Social Worker
- Paraprofessional
- Special Education

13%   5%
6%
31%
25%
19%

Data Analysis

Question 2… What barriers did you face with scheduling the instruction of the Second Step Curriculum? Will you be teaching the lessons, or will you have another staff member leading the lessons?

Most participants felt the most significant barriers were fitting a new curriculum into an already full schedule. P1 stated, "starting into the new year, it was difficult finding a chunk of time that was not already dedicated to something else. It was difficult to ensure something else did not suffer while trying to fit in this new curriculum." P9 indicated, "finding a consistent time was the biggest barrier, but once it fits in the schedule, it worked well." "Time is the biggest barrier for our staff when it comes to implementing a new curriculum," responded P10. P14 shared, "At first, we only had one kit, so that was an issue, as was finding the time to teach new lessons. As with anything, when you add something, something else must go." P8 also shared that, "We were the first school to have an elementary counselor and the first to work with Second Steps, our school loved it, they wanted it and made it easy to schedule lessons. The most

difficult thing was to find a time for scheduling and finding that time in the week or during the day that the students are there and not getting pulled. It is really that the timepiece when there are so many other things that the teacher needs to get done, finding that half-hour once a week or once a cycle with everyone present can be difficult." P11 also shared, "The barriers I saw were teachers were not provided additional planning time with the added curriculum. It was also difficult to find where in the schedule, this new curriculum could take place."

Teachers also had some barriers regarding feeling nervous or unprepared to teach this content to their students. P7 said, "thinking about the implementation, I had the barriers of feeling nervous about how to start this new program but having the support of the counselors was reassuring, especially for the first few lessons. We started with counselor led lessons and then transitioned to classroom teachers teaching the lessons while implementing the follow-up lessons throughout the week. I also was not sure that the students would buy into it, but now having that year behind me, those barriers are behind me."

When asked who was teaching the lessons, many of the participants responded that they were grateful to have had the opportunity to observe a counselor teach the lessons before them having to present the material to their students. P8 shared, "It was nice; our counselor taught all the lessons; it was like a mini counseling session that was scheduled once a cycle for half an hour." Similarly, P10 said, "I felt it was important for the teacher to teach the lesson, but I also feel that it is just as important for the counselor to be the right-hand person in this program. I liked how we started the implementation with our counselors introducing the lessons. This allowed them the opportunity to get in front of the class and then can become support for the teachers." P11 reported, "In some of our classes, the counselor taught the lessons; in other classes, it was a co-taught model, while in other classes teachers taught lessons independently. It

was nice to have the counselor teach some of the lessons as this allowed her to meet and get to know the students. I do feel that the lessons have more success when taught by the classroom teacher for the simple reason that he/she can pull in more day-to-day experiences and examples of the curriculum."

Question 3… How has the implementation of the curriculum supported your school mission statement?

All participants in the study agreed that the addition of the new SEL curriculum supported our schools' mission statements very well. Building relationships is a large part of the mission of most of our district buildings. P2 shared, "The curriculum fits well, especially since we stress relationship at our building level. When you talk about character, problem-solving, and empathy, it all ties into relationships. This curriculum is encouraging kids, teaching them to learn how to listen, how to understand feelings that they have, all while keying into themselves and each other, which ties into relationships." P8 also shared, "At our school, we are very much relationship-driven. The mental health of our students and social-emotional needs are a top priority. Second Step does a great job with that, in that it is looking at the mental health of our students, working on those coping skills, and trying to build up those skills for them." "The implementation of the curriculum fully supports our mission statement of building relationships. It is trying to build meaningful, sustainable relationships with kids and the kids with each other," this shared by P10.

This same feeling was also felt at the district level. P3 agreed, "It aligns well with the district mission statement to lead, inspire, empower, and challenge all students. We also looked at the Strategic Priorities that were developed through input from our community. A lot of skills that are explored in those different strategic priorities about resilient learners, ethical

contributors, critical thinkers, skilled communicators, effective collaborators, and success-ready individuals are taught in the Second Step curriculum. It is not just about their academic growth, but it is also about having the ability to work with others and being contributing members of their community."

Similarly, P5 said, "This is fitting the needs of our district's graduate profile (Ethical Contributor, Critical Thinker, Skilled Communicator, Effective Collaborator, Resilient Learner, Success-Ready Individual). This is helping with our student's mental health needs. Teaching SEL skills ties into all the district level lead, inspire, challenge, and empower mission goals. Teacher's social-emotional skills are the foundation for having and maintaining healthy relationships and being respectful. It is the foundation for being successful and empowering one and another." P12 and P14 respectfully shared, "None of the things are possible without a strong SEL curriculum. As we know more, all students need to have more than just academic skills; those include SEL skills." "Our entire mission statement is geared around building relationships, so this SEL curriculum lends itself very well to our mission statement."

Question 4… Have you seen the value in this added curriculum? Do you believe anything can be done to enhance the value of the program? (Figure 5 below shows a graph of staffs' perception in adding this curriculum.)

Figure 5

Staff response to finding value in adding this curriculum
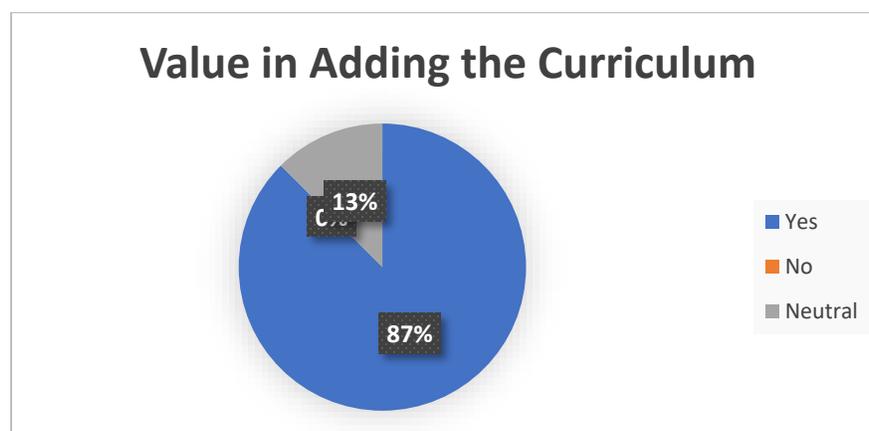
Fourteen participants felt value in this added curriculum, "Yes, there is a value," was the response from those fourteen individuals. The other two participants had mixed feelings on its value; however, none of the participants reported not seeing any value. ALL participants reported seeing some value or said that they are confident over time they will see value in adding this SEL curriculum. As with adding anything new, we can always do things to enhance the value of a program; it is realizing that and growing from the need we are seeing.

In addition to the comment of "yes, there is a value" by fourteen of the participants, P3 said, "When we talk about SEL, there is often a question about what curriculum you are referring to. When I think about the broader umbrella of implementing SEL, explicit instruction is one important component. Still, it serves the overall purpose of building the social-emotional skills of our students and staff while creating a culture and a place where students can build those skills. SEL curriculum (Second Steps specifically) is most helpful in that it provides us a common language in order to be able to talk about the SEL skills. We then know what the skills are that we are working on. We want to see it infused within academics, be it across grade spans, we

want to see it out on the playground, in specials, in conversations with an admin. It gives us the language to be able to build skills." P4 shared, "our building is so unique, we do not always have someone in house to help with behavior needs. The staff does all the steps they need before the problem goes to the office. We are seeing teachers in the halls with kids talking things out, coming up with other ways to deal with situations." P10 also added, "It has streamlined some of our social-emotional needs. It has given a nice platform for staff to springboard from. Before this, it was piecemealed together. I hear things like common language and see kids reacting to that common language." From P13, it was shared, "there is a great value in the curriculum. I feel like there are too many kids coming into school today that do not have those basic foundational social skills, knowing how to work with each other, how to accept differences, and knowing how to solve problems." "I see that everyone is using common language, and there is a lot of good peer interactions," said P16.

Those participants who did not report seeing value at this point feel that we will see the value over time. P1 declared, "I am not seeing the immediate value; however, over time, I do believe it will be valuable." Additionally, P9 shared, "Yes and no, I see some of the kids learn from it, they point out examples during class and will talk about it, while others don't take a whole lot from it and they could do without it."

Many participants reported how they felt the instruction of this curriculum could be enhanced. P2 shared several ideas for improving teaching, "build a partnership of the family unit and with the school and community unit, widen who we impact and get information to, include PTA to help families use similar language to what we are using with their children at school, and include information into our Listening Posts and Newsletters. I also encourage teachers to incorporate more of the follow-up lessons within the classroom and try to incorporate the

language into other academic areas." P6 added, "we could use some more hands-on activities because there is a lot of sitting and talking, which is great. Still, sometimes kids do not have that attention span just to sit and talk. Allowing for more movement may increase more engagement for younger grades." P8 reported, "We are looking at ways to enhance the program specifically for more culturally responsiveness. As Second Step looks to improve their culturally relevant teaching to the curriculum, it is important for those teaching the lessons to bring in their own experiences based on the needs of their student population. The Second step lessons are intertwined within restorative circles. Some grade levels have made it their mission to incorporate Second Step into their academic lessons as well. Second Step is incorporated into the building blocks of our school." P12, P14, and P16 all shared similar feelings in enhancing this instruction, "I think it would be great if we see aspects of Second Step woven into all parts of a student's day. We do not want to use only our stand-alone Second Step lessons and maybe a couple of brain builders here or there; we would like to see it incorporated into other academic areas or our special areas. Our goal is to weave them throughout the day because that is what SEL is, all day all the time and not just a one-time lesson." "As far as enhancing the value, I feel like a lot of people feel like this is something extra to do and do not see the value in it. I can see both sides of it; it just depends on what you see or feel you need (or what the kids need). It would just be nice if everyone just actually did it, and did the whole thing, not just a part of it." "I think that using follow-up lessons would very much enhance the program."

Question 5… What barriers have you seen with ensuring all students are being taught the Second Step lessons? Are special education students, ESL students, or students with other needs given the same instruction as other students?

When looking at barriers to ensure all students had the same instruction, nine participants felt that not all students were able to be present during the core instruction time. Many believe special education students, EL students, and students with additional needs miss some of the core instruction. These students need to be present for the core instruction, but they need additional support based on their individual needs in many cases.

P3 reflected, "we want to see our groups of students, such as our special education students, our EL learners, and others receiving support to receive SEL instruction at the core level. These students may also benefit from other levels of support. We want these students to have access to the general education curriculum within their classroom from their classroom teacher. With special education, one way we talked about Second Step was it maybe pre-teaching a lesson, allowing them to be familiar with the vocabulary. They can then have a conversation with their case manager to understand what the concepts are, so when they get to the classroom lesson, they know it, and it gives them a place to shine. It might also mean that we follow-up with the lessons using the language with some special education students (more of those who struggle behaviorally) to learn additional skills that they may need. Looking at lessons that might be coming later in the curriculum, if there is a student who is having difficulty with emotional regulation or anger management, we can pre-teach and practice some of these skills. This will allow students to continue to have a common language with their peers and across different school settings. With our EL learners, I think of their barrier mainly from a vocabulary standpoint. This is vocabulary that all people need, helping increase our emotional vocabulary. There is a lot of vocabulary around the SEL skills that are important for students to engage in their community but may not be taught in their academic vocabulary. Pre-teaching allows students to learn and understand the vocabulary; it also allows them the opportunity to

have conversations with a trusted adult in a smaller setting ” P5 said that, "one barrier we faced

was that when the school counselor was teaching lessons, she found that many students with

special education needs were being pulled out of her time, which is completely backward of how

it should be, especially since most of these students have social-emotional goals on their IEP, but

because of scheduling that is how it unfortunately fell. We need to make this priority; there are

no pullouts during this time! Since this is a curriculum that builds year after year, if we are to

see the impacts, all students need to hear all lessons and schedule them with fidelity." P7 added,

"no special accommodations are made for special education students. Still, so many of these

students have extra social skills goals in their IEP. Second Step in and of itself does not have

recommendations to support students with specific social skills goals. It is more like a one size

fits all. There are many visuals presented to kids, a lot of scenario type instruction, and videos.

These allow students to see it; it helps alleviate some of the barriers like the language piece, but

then comes the question, is it more of an Americanized thing? If I grew up in a different culture,

would I have the same reaction as those in the video? It needs to be a bit more culturally

relevant teaching." P8 also shared, "there is so much that must be packed in during the day.

Students being pulled for EL services, reading/math support, special education, so it is finding

the time that kids are in the classroom for those main lessons. Exciting to see that the teachers at

our school see the curriculum's importance and are intertwining it throughout the day. Social

skills are so important. Sometimes pullouts can be a barrier. Teachers are super mindful at the

beginning of the year to choose when students are not getting pulled. There are always times

when this will not work so that it can be a barrier." P12 shared, "in theory… all students should

be receiving the same, plus…when we talk about universal SEL, every single student enrolled in

our district should be receiving Second Step lessons. Students with additional needs, which

might be EL students, special education students, or students with increased needs, should be receiving additional supports on top of that. The reality…Second Step does not have a complete Spanish speaking curriculum; therefore, some of these students, who do not have a good grasp of the English Language, might not be receiving the same quality instruction. It goes along with pockets of strong implementation and pockets of implementation that could use a little bolstering. I believe most schools have prioritized the SEL lessons as core instructional time. Students with specific social-emotional goals in their IEP's should be receiving tiered support and layered support of SEL. So, they are hopefully getting more SEL instruction than that of general education students. I also believe this is varied with sped students based on need." Finally, P13 explained, "barrier is the overlapping service time, but generally we try to work with that and reschedule things, so it fits. A group of kids will have difficulty understanding the curriculum, like kids with cognitive disabilities or kids with autism. It helps there is quite a bit of video. If there is a video presentation, then that really supports all the students."

Another barrier was that of the hesitation or "buy-in" from some staff members. Four participants saw this to be a barrier in this implementation process. P2 stated, "barriers might have been starting something new; people are often hesitant about the unknown; it takes time to get people on board. Barriers could be the comfort of teachers and getting used to the curriculum. Some people will run with it, are ahead of others, and do not feel they need any outside help, while others need the support of Counselors or other supports.' P3 also felt this was a barrier, saying, "Barrier is always that of implementation fatigue, we ask teachers to do so much, and so often, it is often mind-blowing to keep up with. So, the challenge of implementation is balancing, providing enough support, and finding time for offering support because support takes time too, and then the support adds one more thing to the teacher's plate.

Some teachers are really excited about it, feel comfortable, and run with it, and it is a natural fit for them. Some teachers feel uncomfortable with this material and feel it should be delivered by the counselor. So, how do we partner with them to build their confidence? So, the two main barriers I see are implementation fatigue and the wide levels of comfort going into the implementation." P7 added, "teacher buy-in has been one of the barriers, I have heard from some staff, not necessarily our building but across the district, these comments "do not have teacher buy-in," "we do not have time for this," "this is dumb, I need to teach academics." So, suppose the teachers are not really into it and do not take it seriously. In that case, that is a barrier." P12 also shared, "hesitance from pockets of teachers, certainly not a universal hesitance, but I think there are pockets of teachers that feel this is outside of their scope. Without that unanimous buy-in, it is hard to guarantee that all students receive the same level of instruction."

Once participant shared there was no barrier, P6 said, "No barriers, even though at our school we had a lot of pullouts due to special education, EL services, speech, etc., we very much tried to protect the counseling time where Second Step was taught. We really tried to keep kids in the classroom, so we did not see barriers that everyone was getting the instruction, and everyone understood what they were talking about."

Question 6… Do you feel you can be supported differently from the district level? Or do you think you have been given adequate support?

Apart from three, all participants felt that they were supported well from the district level in the implementation process. Those who did not feel supported felt that there could have been additional training for staff members. P4 shared, "it would have been nice to have some universal training for all staff, including clerical, paraprofessionals, custodial, and special area

staff. We usually talk to the students more as friends than the disciplinary, which is left to the administration.   Having the knowledge of similar language or tips of how to help handle situations would help support staff in this role." P9 felt, "if the expectation were for me to teach it fully on my own, I would like more time for training, or even to just look through the curriculum to get a better understanding of all of it together." While P16 said, "I feel it would have been helpful to have it tied into the Special Education common language. There was no training for these teachers, and it was left these individuals to build their own."

Those who felt supported shared that they can get help when they need it. P2 stated, "I felt we were given adequate support at the principal, coach, social worker, and counselor level." P7 said, "I appreciate the counselor's support and their want to help with SEL. I felt comfortable going to the counselor with questions or advice. I feel like I have enough to teach it and roll with it. Yes, felt supported." P8 says, "the district is doing a lot of great things to support us, getting us the materials, having district-level support available to help with any questions if we are struggling with anything. I think we get a lot of great support from the district when it comes to Second Step." P12 said, "I feel from the top down we received a lot of support. This is our priority, and it is important to the education of our students. The Superintendent has prioritized SEL heavily." Finally, P14 reported, "no, I feel like they have given us what we need. It is not that hard to teach, especially if you have done it once."

Some suggestions were shared in getting additional support. P7 thinks, "The district could spend some time looking to see how we could make it more culturally relevant, more interchangeable, and a bit more differentiated for some of our EL learners. This would be helpful, especially since our district has Culturally Relevant Teaching at the forefront of our goals."

Question 7… Was the training you received enough to implement this new curriculum successfully? What more could have been added?

Nine participants felt there was not enough formal training to implement the curriculum, depending on your position. Many, not just classroom teachers, felt classroom teachers did not receive enough. P2 shared, "the training for counselors and social workers was good, teachers not so much. Some teachers felt a bit uncomfortable with a lack of training." P4 stated, "there was not a training offered to this group of staff. Although we do not teach the lessons or get in front of students, some basic knowledge would be helpful." P5 remarked, "training for teachers was very sparse, if any, therefor it feels like an extra task. It is also hard to get buy-in from teachers when they are not being given the same training as the counselors to do this job. Teachers could have received extra training; they felt like this was dumped on them from the district level." P6 declared, "teachers learned alongside the counselors. There was no additional training for teachers. No training that I recall, it was like, here is your kit." P7 also added, "no, really was not much training, if any for teachers was provided. We felt like we were just given a book and told to run with it." P9 said, "if the goal was for classroom teachers to implement it on our own, I do not feel we received enough training. If the goal were for us to team teach with a counselor, then my answer would be yes, the training was sufficient." P10 also felt, "there could have been more training, it was very quick, especially due to the importance of the material we want our teachers to teach. The training our teachers received felt a little rushed."

Three participants felt there was enough training. P1 stated, "we received no formal training, but it was enough. Our coach, counselor, and social worker did the training at the beginning of the year. Being in it and doing it was the most helpful. Having seen the lessons

taught was helpful." P14 shared, "There was not much. I had experience with this curriculum before its implementation in my school, so I felt prepared."

As far as follow up many shared ways, we could have added to the implementation's success. P2 concluded, "implementing more training within the PD in our building would be helpful. I can see our counselors leading this training. Another possibility would be to have our teachers visit other buildings that may have had this in place for several years." P3 said, "If there are struggling teachers, we need to support the teachers by offering the level of support they need. Counselors are the content expert and can be co-teachers in the classroom with the teacher until they feel comfortable with the material. Counselors can be modeling the lessons." P7 stated, "a little more front-loaded training would have been helpful." P10 shared, "With that said, I feel like the counselors have a good idea of what the Second Step lessons look like. I do like the yearlong training, where the counselor provides some support to the teachers. Each time the counselors go into a classroom to team with a teacher, it is like a mini-PD (professional development) session (like training in the moment from counselors). Then some follow-up dialogue from the counselor would be helpful to help the teacher grow. A different type of PD, but it can still work since they (counselors) have that social-emotional training in their background."

Question 8… Do you believe the Second Step Curriculum is a valuable program that has been added? Is there another program you feel would have been a better fit? (Figure 6 below shows a graph of staffs' value in the Second Step Curriculum)

Figure 6

Staff response to finding value in Second Step
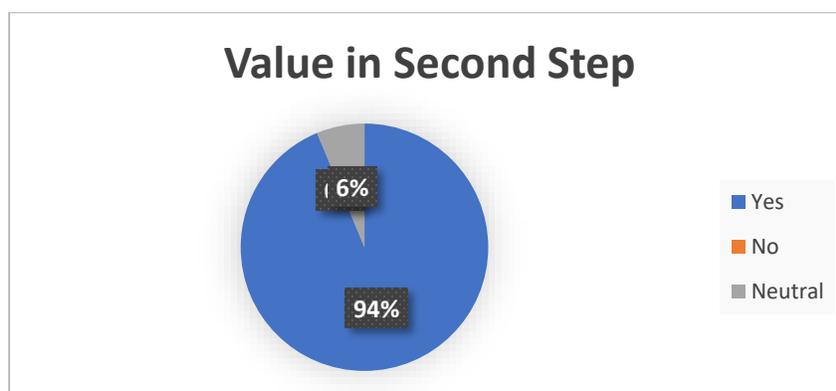
The overwhelming belief is that there is value in the Second Step Curriculum. All participants saw that adding this curriculum was positive. Most also felt they did not have enough background or knowledge with other curriculums to decide as to another program that may have been better for this district. P1 and P2 had the same thoughts, "Yes, it is valuable… I have not researched enough other curriculums, so not sure. Helpful how it builds on different steps and skills. Interested to see how it looks after students have had some time in the curriculum and how they grow." "Yes, it is valuable… I have not heard of anything else. Other schools have had this for several years, and have heard that this is a good program, heard incredibly positive things from other sites." P8 shared, "Second Step is a valuable curriculum. I was a part of the group that looked at the different curriculums and found that Second Step was the most comprehensive, easy curriculum out there." P11 said, "It is a valuable program, easy to implement, designed to be taught by classroom teachers. I also like the Mind Up curriculum; it has more why questions answered. I am torn between the two but understand for the ease of implementing why Second Step was chosen." P12 recalled, "I feel like each program we looked at had its pros and cons; there is no perfect curriculum. There are ways to improve Second Step,

but I am not sure there would be a different curriculum that would somehow magically fix all the nuances that I would like to fix with Second Step." P 15 believes, "it is valuable. There are important teaching moments for students happening. Social-Emotional education is essential." P16 stated, "Yes, kids have more social-emotional needs and are not prepared for the social-emotional skill of the next grade. This curriculum helps them prepare for the next level."

One participant had mixed feelings as to the overall value of the program. P3 shared, "it is a booming field right now, and there are lots of different curriculums. Second Step has some areas where they are not as strong. There are some things that I appreciate; I like that it is Pre-K-8 I and that we are implementing it that way, and I appreciate the alignment that comes with that. I hear that sometimes the students may get a little annoyed with it; some of the concepts, like I have heard this before, are dry. I am okay with that, it would be nice if they loved it, but we get annoyed with repetition (like multiplication facts) like anything. However, we still do it; that is how we learn things; we hear them repeatedly and apply them to new situations and further those skills as we practice. As we look at Second Steps from an anti-racism lens, there are some areas where the curriculum has some microaggressions that are not there yet. I think Second Step realizes this and is working on it. From the anti-racism lens, it could be stronger. We have not found any other SEL curriculum that was better, and they are better than some. But I think that this is a downfall of SEL curriculums, in general, is that they often teach skills from a white culture lens and can be a downfall in wanting to have a consistent language or consistent way to talk about things. There is no differentiation that would allow the adult to focus on the cultural representation of their students and help draw that out. I would hope and know some of the teachers are skilled in doing that, just like academic areas could be dry. Have the teachers use their knowledge to enhance the curriculum as they would any other academic area. (If the

material appears to be dry, feel free to enhance it, just like you would a math lesson). This

curriculum provides the scope and sequence, and teachers have the teaching background. I still

like it, but also realize it has its faults."

Question 9… Please provide any additional information regarding your thoughts on the

Second Step Curriculum and the impact on students.

Many great additional thoughts were shared with the researcher. P1 shared, "I believe it

is terrific that we have a district-wide social-emotional curriculum because it is defiantly a huge

need. I appreciate the teachers have Second Step versus having to pull materials and create our

own lessons. It is good that everyone is using the same materials. Happy that the district is

noticing and recognizing the need for social-emotional instruction." P2 said, "The impact will be

more visible in the coming years. We can implement it well, and this is a great time to talk about

it. Talking about feelings that the kids are having, calming down, being able to talk about them,

or name the feelings is extremely important. We must do these things, and this is a great time to

really be learning about it. There is a lot of division, so it is a great time to talk about it. I think

we will see the impact on our Panorama data while following the cohort as they progress in age.

I feel it is a good program. If there is no impact, then you are not implementing it with fidelity.

As we use it more, the language will come easier and be easier to use within the school day. The

more comfortable we get, the better it will be." P3 stated, "Having a curriculum Pre-K-8 grade is

one of the important building blocks to building a comprehensive system to support the SEL

needs of students. I think it is an important piece that we were able to adopt district-wide, that

we had support from our administration, support from the school board, superintendent, and

cabinet. It is an exciting step and a step in the right direction." P4 believes, "we are not seeing

students in the hallways as much as we have in the past. Teachers are talking to kids more; I feel

students feel a bit more valued than in past years. We do not hear as much commotion in the hallways (kids yelling, having temper tantrums, leaving classrooms when dysregulated)." P8 feels, "this is super, super valuable for all students. It is great to see how students can implement the materials they have developed over the years. I can see kids in kindergarten when I first started are now in fifth grade and how they can retain the information and implement it. Advice for teachers who have just started the program is to implement with fidelity and incorporate it throughout your day. It is not just a one-shot of the main lesson; it is continuing to talk about it and intertwin it within your day." P12 states, "feedback from buildings that are strong implementors is that they are seeing students have the language that they did not have before to explain how they are going to solve a problem or how they might be feeling about something. It has given teachers more of a universal language to talk with students, and that feels comfortable for a lot of teachers (they know how to help and what words to use). There are some tweaks that I would love to see in terms of being more culturally responsive in our instruction of Second Step." Finally, P16 shares, "We need more time to do this with fidelity and time to build the relationships with teachers and staff. This cannot be treated as just another academic subject that has to be taught. It needs teaching in its intended form."

Summary

The information collected above represents the thoughts and opinions of sixteen individual district staff members. Each staff member was interviewed individually. Their identity and data have been kept confidential. This has allowed each participant the freedom to share their true vision of this implementation process.

Overall, there was inspiring feedback on the value of adding a Social-Emotional curriculum within this district. Given some time and fidelity with the program, the staff is encouraged to see growth and benefits from this implementation. There are some mixed feelings from staff, depending on their position, who should be delivering this material to students. Some felt that the counselors would be the best for the job, while others believed that having teachers deliver the curriculum would be the best choice. Both groups of people had very valid reasons for the conclusions; ultimately, the teachers are presenting the lessons to students.

Another key takeaway was that of ensuring every student in grades Pre-K – Kindergarten receives their core lessons. Many individuals were very animate of the importance of students receiving this training daily. It is not just a once-a-week lesson; it needs to be every day and in all areas of a child's school day. With this mindset, each staff member must have some basic knowledge of the program. This will ensure common language throughout the building and across grade levels.

CHAPTER 5

The purpose of this study was to gather perspectives from district staff (administrators,

teachers, instructional coaches, school counselors, school social workers, and other staff) on

barriers and benefits of the implementation of the Second Step Curriculum within a school

district. Research shows that the implementation of this type of curriculum has the advantages of

reducing substance abuse, risk-taking behaviors, and problem behaviors (Taylor et al., 2017).

Evidence has also shown that students who take part in these programs can significantly improve

attitudes, social behaviors, and academic performance even after they no longer are partaking in

a program (Meyers et al., 2019).   Over time, studies have found that students in K-8 grade levels

participating in social-emotional learning programs have displayed an improvement in their

personal, social, and academic lives, both in school and after-school settings (Payton et al.,

2008).

This chapter will analyze the findings as reported to the researcher by the sixteen

participants.

Discussions, Conclusions, and Implications

Interview Question 2… What barriers did you face with scheduling the instruction of the

Second Step Curriculum? Will you be teaching the lessons, or will you have another staff

member leading the lessons?

Conclusion: The barrier that I found to be the most prevalent in the scheduling of instruction for

Second Step lessons was time, as identified by ten participants. The overarching feeling is that

the amount of material being presented by our elementary teachers to their students leaves little

time for additional material to be added to their schedule. When new material is added to the

schedule, there is fear that something else may have to be pushed aside or not taught as thoroughly as they would like.

Teaching a new curriculum always comes with uneasiness. Six staff shared this feeling of nervousness and lack of experience with a social-emotional curriculum. Of those who did not share this unease feeling, most participants agreed that seeing the counselors teach the lessons was beneficial. They were grateful for the time to co-teach lessons before them taking over the reins.

Implication: When adding a new curriculum, all staff members must be given an adequate amount of time to work with their schedule. This time includes working with special area teachers, special education teachers, and other support teachers to ensure all students are present during the SEL lessons' core instruction.

It is equally important that teachers have the tools they need to learn what it is they are expected to teach their students. With the increasing need to implement a new SEL curriculum, time is not something that should be taken for granted. Those that will be presenting this material need the time to feel comfortable and prepared to deliver such complicated subject matter to students.

Interview Question 3… How has the implementation of the curriculum supported your school mission statement?

Conclusion: Many of our schools' mission statements are that of building relationships with our students and families. Unanimously participants agreed that the implementation of an SEL curriculum supports the building of relationships successfully. This also aligns with empowering young people to have the tools they need to become skilled communicators, effective collaborators, and success-ready individuals.

Similarly, it was mutually agreed that this new SEL curriculum also supports the district

mission statement, to inspire, challenge, and empower all students with the knowledge and skills

required to reach their full potential, to contribute to future generations, and to become involved

members of a global community, of this school district. The skills taught in this program help

the students in their academic experiences and their social experiences, both in and out of the

classroom.

Implication: When it is time to present the possible implantation to your staff, you must ensure

you have researched and explored all your options. You must include members from all

stakeholders to make this decision. This cannot be a one-person decision, and it is also critical

that the program your team agrees on meets the criteria for following your mission statement and

district goals.

Interview Question 4… Have you seen the value in this added curriculum? Do you believe

anything can be done to enhance the value of the program?

Conclusion: There was an overwhelming agreement that adding an SEL curriculum to the

schedule has been extremely valuable. While the value is there, many suggestions were made on

ways the program could be enhanced. What came to the top of the list was increasing the

culturally responsiveness in the teaching of the program, being more aware of who the audience

is, and guaranteeing that all students can find a way to connect and relate to the material. The

other suggestion that was shared overwhelming was ensuring the program is taught with fidelity.

This does not just mean teaching the core lessons but incorporating the material into other

academic areas and when students are with other staff members, making this a universal

teaching.

Implication: It is essential to allow those who teach the lessons and the autonomy to expand on the lessons using their professional judgment. Encouraging teachers to bring in outside support when they feel it is necessary can help with the added understanding of lessons. As with any curriculum, this is just a guide for the teaching staff. Staff must expand and use real-life situations to enhance the value of its intended outcome. Equally important is allowing time for the new curriculum to work. Nothing happens overnight; allowing time for fidelity with the program will yield rewards that are accepted.

Interview Question 5… What barriers have you seen with ensuring all students are being taught the Second Step lessons? Are special education students, ESL students, or students with other needs given the same instructions as other students?

Conclusion: The barriers that were faced were of similar nature. The expectation across buildings in this district is for all students enrolled to be present for every core lesson. Nine participants reported that this expectation is not being followed with fidelity. These participants remarked that having all students present during this instruction is vital to its success. There was a feeling of implementation fatigue with staff and pockets of staff not buying into this implementation practice. As many were able to reflect on their practices, this will become a higher priority across this district.

The other barrier that proved to be a challenge was ensuring there is the follow-up with students, both general education students and those who may need additional services. Participants agreed that pre-teaching, individual conferencing, and follow-up lessons were extremely important for these students to have success in the program with some of the students with a language barrier or special education needs.

Implication: As a district, it is imperative to make sure all your sites receive the same message and expected to adhere to similar guidelines. Staff must be diligent in teaching the core SEL curriculum and incorporating follow-up lessons into the school day. Some of these follow-up lessons are prepared lessons. At the same time, others are impromptu lessons, using situations that arise throughout the school day or school week, in the classroom, on the playground, or even in the community or world. The premise for implementation must be every student every day.

Interview Question 6… Do you feel you can be supported differently from the district level? Or do you think you have been given adequate support?

Conclusion: It is very apparent that this is a top priority for this school district, as discussed by thirteen participants. Although the findings indicate that most felt support at the district level and would be able to get the resources needed, many felt there could have been more of a universal training. It is vital to provide more information and training before Workshop Week (the week before our students enter our classrooms). The overall feeling was this was too quick of a role out.

Implication: Looking at the implementation of a new curriculum, it takes time and resources. It is crucial not to rush this process.

Interview Question 7… Was the training you received enough to implement this new curriculum successfully? What more could have been added?

Conclusion: The feedback received on training was all over the board. Nine participants, not all teachers, felt that there was not enough training for the teaching staff to successfully implement this new curriculum successfully. Training that was done felt too rushed! With the importance of this new curriculum, it was felt that there should have been a more substantial training program. Additionally, those who received no training thought they should have been given

some necessary curriculum background. When moving towards a universal curriculum, staff felt strongly that the training, just like the teaching of the curriculum, every student every day, should also be every staff member should have some knowledge of the material being taught to students. Those that were familiar with the program, to some extent, felt comfortable with the training they received.

Implication: Knowing your audience and who will be delivering the material to students is essential to be aware of. Ensuring that all staff has the training they need is key to successful implementation. Staff needs to understand the material and need to be comfortable having difficult conversations with students. When implementing new programs, the success of the program is hugely dependent on the commitment of the teachers (Martinez, 2016). Teachers often receive little training and support during this implementation process (Martinez, 2016).

Interview Question 8… Do you believe the Second Step Curriculum is a valuable program that has been added? Is there another program you feel would have been a better fit?

Conclusion: It was exciting to see that the overall opinion of the value of Second Step was a positive one. Many of the participants are seeing a value in their classrooms with student engagement and being able to advocate for themselves. They are seeing that students are acquiring the skills needed to help self-regulate their emotions. Many did not have enough background knowledge in other programs to viably choose another. Over time, studies have found that students in K-8 grade levels participating in social-emotional learning programs have displayed an improvement in their personal, social, and academic lives, both in school and in after-school settings (Payton et al., 2008).

Implication: Research your options! Although there are numerous programs from which to choose, it is critical to look at the programs individually. When doing the research, it is vital to

look at each program's differing components, ensuring you choose the one the most clearly

supports and aligns with the mission of your district.

Interview Question 9… Please provide any additional information regarding your thoughts on

the Second Step Curriculum and the impact on students.

Conclusion: It was inspiring to see so many encouraging comments coming from the

interviews. It is reassuring to see that students who have been afforded the instruction of an SEL

curriculum are seeing benefits in their education as well as their social lives.

Implication: Encouraging the implementation of a curriculum with fidelity will be the key to its

success. It is also imperative that we give the new curriculum time to work, allowing all students

the opportunity to learn and put their learning into practice. While an implementation is in

progress, understanding that there will be difficulties along the way, and having the where with

all to adjust as needed is critical. It is also essential to accept feedback from all stakeholders

when these adjustments need to be made, realizing that some of them are in front of their

students and can offer some unbelievably valuable input.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study examined the implementation of a new SEL curriculum and the impact it had

on staff and students. Employing any new curriculum within a school faces many challenges;

implementing a new social-emotional curriculum is no exception, "Roadblocks" will present

themselves within any school (Grover & Gondek, 2018, p. 12).

Additional research is needed to further explore the impact on the addition of an SEL

curriculum. Replicating this study in other varieties and sizes of districts may validate and add

to the findings of this study, while also assist in understanding the results. Additionally, further

research could include a wider group of diverse populations within other school setting; including this diverse population may produce different results not seen in this study.

Summary

After conducting the research and conducting interviews with many staff members, the information received was incredibly valuable and reassuring. The information provided helped to understand that implementing a new program, although beneficial, is viewed very differently among staff members. The realization of the value is unquestioned. Each participant agreed on the importance of implementing an SEL curriculum. The delivery of the instruction and the role of the participants varied from person to person.

Should one be given the task of implementing a new curriculum, it is vital to provide time for all stakeholders to review and prepare material before presenting it to a control group. It is equally as important to include additional PD for staff during the implementation process of any new curriculum; it should not be a one-time training and then no further follow-up. Material is consistently changing, and with these changes, we must ensure the staff is prepared to have these critical conversations with their students.

While implementing any curriculum in an educational setting is essential; this is not always a simple task. Many considerations need to be studied. Your team needs to be a group of individuals representing all stakeholders. The implementation needs to be carefully planned and presented to staff once a program is selected. The most important message I have heard from the staff was to ensure everyone is given an opportunity for training and that the message is universal across schools.   When students learn, they learn within a partnership; this partnership includes teaching staff, other school staff, peers, and their families (Durlak et al., 2011).

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Appendix A

RESEARCH GROUP STUDY INVITATION EMAIL

E-Mail to prospective participants:

Dear (name of participant),

My name is Debra Olson. I am an employee with Rochester Public Schools and a graduate student at Winona State University. I am working towards the completion of my master's degree and am working on my thesis.

My topic for my thesis is "What are the Perspectives of School District Staff on the Barriers & Benefits of Implementing the Second Step Curriculum within a School District?". I will be conducting 15-20 semi-structured open-ended interviews and would appreciate your assistance with my research. All questions will refer to your school's Social-Emotional Curriculum. Attached you will find a list of the questions that will be asked during the interview.

All interviews will take place either virtually or in-person unless you can let me know your preference. The meeting will take approximately one or two hours of your time. I would like to conduct interviews before November 10, 2020.

Your participation in this interview is strictly voluntary and will in no way affect your position or relationship with any persons.

Please let me know if you would be willing to participate.

Thank you for your time,

Debra Olson

Debra Olson

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

Consent Form: What are the Perspectives of School District Staff on the Barriers & Benefits of Implementing the Second Step Curriculum within a School District?

What is this research study about?

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to gather perspectives from district staff (administrators, teachers, instructional coaches, school counselors, school social workers, and other staff) on barriers and benefits of implementing the Second Step Curriculum within a school district. We hope to learn *how best to implement a social-emotional learning program within a school district.*

What activities will this study involve?

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in a short one-time interview with predetermined questions. The questions will focus on your school's Social-Emotional curriculum. The interview will take place in person unless you feel more comfortable participating in a virtual meeting.

How much time will this take?

The interview will take place before November 1, 2020, at a time that is workable in your schedule. The estimated time participating in the interview will one or two hours of your time.

What will be done with the data collected during this study?

The information you give will be anonymous, which means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data. All information you provide will be handled confidentially. Your data will be recorded by hand, no audio recordings will be used, and your data will be filed under a pseudonym. No names will be published in the final thesis.

All information collected will be stored on a password-protected computer. When the study is complete, the data will be reported in my thesis. Once completed, the data will be destroyed.

Are there any benefits for participating?

There are no appreciable benefits from participating in this study

What are my rights as a participant?

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may stop at any time. You may decide not to participate or to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. A

decision not to participate or withdraw will not affect your current or future relationship with Winona State University or Rochester Public Schools on whose behalf the research is being conducted.

Who can I contact if I have questions or concerns about this study?
The principal researcher conducting this study is Debra Olson, 507-269-7625, debra.olson@go.winona.edu, a student at Winona State University. The faculty advisor for this study is Dr. Steven Baule, 507-457-5375, steven.baule@winona.edu. You may ask any questions regarding your participation or questions about the study now or during the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about my rights as a participant?

If you have questions or concerns about your participation in the study, contact the Human Protections Administrator Brett Ayers at 507-457-5519 or bayers@winona.edu. This project has been reviewed by the Winona State University Institutional Review Board to protect human subjects.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Agreement to Participate

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time. Your signature indicates that the study has been explained, you have had an opportunity to ask questions, and you have decided to participate.

Your signature: _____ Date_____

Your name (printed): _____

Signature of person obtaining consent: _____ Date_____

Name of person obtaining consent (printed): Debra Olson_____