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## **The Effects of Social-Emotional Learning and Teacher Relationships on Middle School Student Well-Being**

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The Effects of Social-Emotional Learning and Teacher Relationships on Middle School Student  
Well-Being

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in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

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**Abstract**

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) consists of explicit instruction of the five social-emotional skill sets: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making (Yoder, 2014). This action research paper will explain social-emotional competence, examine the connection between social-emotional learning and well-being, academic success, and attendance. The study focused on ten middle school students in seventh and eighth grade over a period of four months; three of these four months were affected by COVID-19 school closure. Findings indicated that enhanced positive student-teacher relationships and teacher-guided SEL curriculum positively impacted overall student well-being. In addition, the data indicated there remains a need for more studies in the school-wide SEL curriculum for more definitive results.

*Keywords:* social-emotional learning, social-emotional competence, social-emotional well-being, academic achievement, student-teacher relationships, student-teacher connectedness

Educators and parents want students to succeed in their academic, personal, and social lives (Payton et al., 2000). Parents and educators also want students to have the social-emotional skill sets that will set them up for that success (Payton et al., 2000). Social-emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of every educational community among children, parents, and teachers. SEL can be the common building block for a diverse population of students to be successful in and out of the classroom. SEL is important for various reasons and can start being taught to children in school as early as preschool. Children and adolescents who lack social-emotional competence are more likely to suffer from public health problems like obesity, substance abuse, and violence (Jones et al., 2015). Along with public health problems, students with inadequate social-emotional skills lack academic motivation, self-discipline, and interpersonal skills (Jones et al., 2015). Consequently, educators are including social-emotional skills in their larger curriculum (Mahoney et al., 2018; Payton et al., 2000).

SEL is described as a process where students acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage their emotions, set and achieve goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2015). SEL is grounded in five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Teaching students the skills to recognize and regulate their social-emotional well-being can help them to be successful not just in the classroom, but in social situations encountered at school, at home, and in their everyday lives.

The Every Student Succeeds Act requires all states to create plans that ensure a well-rounded education for all students which prepares them for a career or college; one way that

public schools can do this is by explicitly teaching SEL (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). According to CASEL (2018), only 18 states have articulated PreK-12 SEL standards or curriculum. SEL is not currently required in the public school systems in Minnesota, but schools are on the verge of being required to embed social-emotional learning standards into the curriculum due to the Every Student Succeeds Act (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). In Minnesota, the Safe and Supportive Minnesota Schools Act identifies SEL as a key strategy for creating positive learning environments for students and student well-being (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017).

Schools and teachers can have a significant influence on the social-emotional competency development of students. There are various instructional strategies that educators can teach and use to promote social-emotional competence and foster positive relationships within their classrooms. Teachers can foster social-emotional competencies in their classrooms by creating warm and nurturing learning environments, having positive relationships, using effective praise, and incorporating social-emotional skills into their curricula (Yoder & Gurke, 2017).

There are many confounding factors as to why students may lack SEL skills. Students may lack SEL skills and competencies for a variety of reasons including social or economic family backgrounds (Greenberg et al., 2017). Schools are also becoming more diverse in cultures and languages, which can create SEL struggles for students. The use of technology by students can decrease SEL due to the large amounts of information they have access to, the pathways of communication, and lack of person-to-person interaction (Greenberg et al., 2017; Schafer, 2020). Lastly, students have different abilities socially and academically due to disabilities that can

affect their social-emotional competence (Elias, 2004). Clearly, SEL skills are essential to learning to be a successful adult.

Students displaying low social-emotional well-being, who also struggle academically, are the focus of this research project. We used reflective educational action research to study middle school learners and classroom settings, to investigate social-emotional support practices to improve learning and foster positive relationships with students to enhance the learning environment. We used collaborative action research to get to know students, both academically and personally and to increase mutual understanding and respect between the teacher and the student (Hendricks, 2013). This action research project will help provide data to improve classrooms and ultimately lead to school improvement.

### **Problem Statement**

Social-emotional learning is a buzzword in education presently, and many administrators across the nation are looking for SEL curricula and standards for educators to implement into their classrooms. Even with a plethora of available information and studies about the positive effects of SEL on students' well-being, many schools are not including this research in their curriculums. In order to be academically successful, middle schoolers must first possess a wealth of social-emotional competence (Yoder, 2014). Social-emotional competence can be achieved through interventions such as explicit instruction of the five skill sets: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making (Yoder, 2014). Social emotional competence can also be supported through positive student-teacher relationships, which will increase student well-being and achievement (Pianta et

al., 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this action research study is to explore ways teachers can embed SEL into their classrooms by fostering positive relationships with students and supporting students' social-emotional well-being and will address the question: What effects can SEL and enhanced teacher relationships have on increased student well-being and academic achievement in a middle school setting?

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Social-Emotional Learning**

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) as the “process through which children and adults understand and manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL, 2015). CASEL’s SEL framework is based on five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2015). Schools and teachers that use CASEL’s framework are promoting intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competencies to their students. Under CASEL’s framework, the approaches to implement SEL for schools and teachers range from free-standing lessons on SEL skills, embedded skills into the regular curriculum, teacher practices such as cooperative learning, and school-wide initiatives. Schools and teachers that use CASEL’s framework have positive outcomes from students, such as positive social behaviors, improved academic performance, less emotional distress, and fewer conduct problems at school (CASEL, 2015). The five competencies of the framework can be closely related to Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence Theory.

Gardner's theory includes interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, and linguistic intelligence (Davis et al., 2011).

CASEL's SEL framework and the five competencies are the basis for this action research project. The explicit instruction of these five competencies is the guiding factor in increasing students' social-emotional competency in order to increase their academic success in the middle school classroom. By teaching, modeling, and creating a community that fosters self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making as outlined in CASEL's SEL framework, we hope to increase students' social-emotional well-being and increase academic success. From Gardner's theory, interpersonal intelligence includes sensing people's feelings and motives and can be connected to CASEL's social awareness, relationship skills, and decision-making competencies. Intrapersonal intelligence includes understanding oneself, what one feels, and what one wants and bodily-kinesthetic intelligence includes coordinating one's body with one's mind. These theories from Gardner can be connected to CASEL's self-awareness, decision-making, and self-management competencies. Lastly, linguistic intelligence includes finding the right words to express what one means which can apply to all five of the competencies in the CASEL framework, but to relationship skills in particular (CASEL, 2015; Davis et al., 2011).

In researching SEL and enhanced teacher-student relationships, the literature supports explicit instruction of the five skill sets (Yoder, 2014). It also examines the connection between SEL and well-being including academic success, and explores interventions or conditions to help improve the social-emotional competence of middle-level students. With a deeper understanding

of social-emotional competency and how it relates to academic success, educators can foster relationships and an environment to promote student success in the classroom more effectively.

### **Review of Literature**

#### **SEL and Schools**

Educators and schools are more successful when they integrate efforts to promote academic, social, and emotional learning to their students (Elias et al., 1997). For students to be successful in and outside of school, Mahoney et al. (2018) suggested that educators and schools focus on, and integrate social-emotional competencies and learning into their school days. Thousands of schools across the United States have implemented some SEL programming, and many states have created SEL standards, to ensure that students are prepared for the real world when they graduate (Mahoney et al., 2018; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013).

Social-emotional skills, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making, contribute to academic and career success (Yoder, 2014). For students to be successful and to increase academic achievement, students should be educated on social-emotional competencies to manage effective, cognitive, and social behaviors (Yoder, 2014). This literature review will explain social-emotional competence, examine the connection between SEL and academic success, and analyze types of interventions or conditions to help improve the social-emotional competence of middle-level students.

In order to be academically successful, middle schoolers must first possess a wealth of social-emotional competence (Yoder, 2014). Social-emotional competence can be achieved

through interventions that include explicit instruction of the five skill sets: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making (Yoder, 2014) and through supportive positive student-teacher relationships (Pianta et al., 2012). Supporting and implementing SEL alongside a more conscious effort toward enhanced teacher-student relationships will increase student well-being and achievement within the junior high setting.

### **What Is Social-Emotional Competence?**

Social and emotional learning requires adults and children to acquire and effectively apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills that allow them to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, feel and show empathy, create and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2015). The CASEL model and framework are prominent in many social and emotional competency studies (Durlak et al., 2011; Payton et al., 2000; Zins & Elias, 2007; Zins et al., 2007). As described above, the CASEL model has five competencies: self-management, self-awareness, social-awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision making. See Table 1 for descriptions of each of the competencies (CASEL, 2015). The CASEL model suggests that these five competencies have an impact on attitudes, behaviors, problem-solving, academic success, mental health, and well-being in students (Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003; Zins et al., 2007). These five skills set the foundation for better academic performance, positive social behaviors, fewer negative behaviors, less emotional distress, and improved grades (Greenberg et al., 2003; Zins et al., 2007).

**Table 1***CASEL'S Five SEL Competencies and Descriptions*


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Self-Management	The ability to regulate thoughts, emotions, and behaviors
Self-Awareness	The ability to recognize one's emotions and accurately assess one's strengths and weaknesses
Social-Awareness	An awareness of the culture, beliefs, and feelings of the people and world around them
Relationship Management	The ability to effectively communicate, work well with peers, and build meaningful relationships
Responsible decision-making	The ability to make plans for the future, follow moral/ethical standards, and contribute to the well-being of others

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**SEL Competencies are Important to Student Well-Being**

Self-management includes the ability to manage stress, control impulses, and motivate oneself to set and achieve goals effectively. According to Jacobson et al. (2011), the transition to middle school from elementary school includes increasing demands on students as one navigates class changes, manages increases in schoolwork, and establishes peer groups. The stress created from these increasing demands requires teens to be effectively able to manage and motivate themselves.

Social awareness includes the ability to look at different perspectives, possess empathy, appreciate diversity, and respect others (Zins et al., 2007). This ability can help students work together more efficiently and effectively in a group or social setting. Social awareness, especially when paired with empathy, can lead to less aggressive behavior from students (McMahon &

Washburn, 2003). Less aggressive behavior will only help build a sense of community and trust within the classroom environment while allowing more time and energy to be focused on academic achievement.

Building and managing relationships is a crucial skill in the development of adolescents (Klem & Connell, 2004). Social-emotional competence in relationship management includes the ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate within groups, seek help when needed, and constructively problem solve (CASEL, 2015). Part of relationship management includes connectedness to others. Students who are connected within their families and in school relationships may have positive effects related to their mental health, which, in turn, can lead to success in academics (Steiner et al., 2019)

CASEL (2015) states that students who are socially-emotionally competent in decision-making should be able to make positive choices about behavior and social interactions that are both ethical and safe. Zins et al. (2007) suggested that responsible decision-making involves identifying the problem, analyzing the problem, solving it, evaluating the decision, and reflecting on the process. CASEL's five competencies set the foundation for academic performance, including better grades and test scores, positive social behaviors, fewer negative behaviors, and less emotional distress (CASEL, 2015; Greenberg et al., 2003; Zins et al., 2007). Unfortunately, many students lack a foundation in the social-emotional competencies and become less connected as they move from elementary, to middle, to high school (Blum & Libbey, 2004; as cited in Durlak et al., 2011). With educational success being the ultimate goal, it is necessary to help students strengthen social-emotional competence.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2017), suicide prevention has an impact on adolescent well-being. The CDC (2017) suggested SEL has a strong connection to preventing suicide in adolescents. According to the CDC (2017), there are several preventative ways to reduce the risk of suicide or suicidal thoughts through the use of SEL programs in school, promotion of connections between students and their communities, and the creation of protective environments. SEL programs provide students with skills to resolve problems in relationships, school, and with peers, and help them address other negative influences associated with suicide (CDC, 2017).

### **Social-Emotional Competencies and Academic Success**

The literature makes a case that social-emotional competence is linked to academic success in students. Students' abilities to regulate emotions, attention, and behaviors can be related to school successes and academic achievements (Greenberg et al., 2003; Zins et al., 2007). Strong social-emotional skills help students to build their cognitive abilities, learn academic content, and apply their knowledge (Cunha & Heckman, 2008; Zins et al., 2007). Social and emotional competence is as predictive of academic and career achievement as is IQ (Duckworth et al., 2007). Students with high social-emotional competencies have greater motivation to learn, more profound commitment to school, increased time devoted to schoolwork, and better classroom behavior (CASEL, 2015). Likewise, research documents that students with stronger social-emotional competence are more likely to stay in school, graduate, and function at higher levels in their adult lives (as cited in Davidson et al., 2017). There is no shortage of research and data to support the link between social-emotional competence and academic success. A meta-analysis of school-based SEL programs, involving over 270,000

students, documented an 11% improvement in academic scores, as well as improved attitudes, behavior, and an increase in social-emotional competencies (Durlak et al., 2011).

Middle school students face many challenges related to biological and social changes that occur during this developmental stage (McGill et al., 2012). These challenges can lead to poor social and academic adjustment and hinder academic success. While learning social-emotional skills is vital for all students, it is particularly essential for middle school students as their brains are still developing (Durlak et al., 2011). Neuroimaging studies have found that the amygdala is a key region of the brain involved in emotional reactivity, and successful emotional regulation can help modulate reactivity from the amygdala (as cited in Pagliaccio et al., 2015). CASEL (2015) suggested that the developmental needs of middle-school must be supported by both academic and personal development, including social and emotional competence.

### **Absenteeism and SEL**

Attending school is essential for students to make academic growth. “Chronic absenteeism is an indirect measure of student treatment, school climate, and social-emotional competencies” (Melnick et al., 2017). Other reasons why students may miss school that can be addressed with SEL education are disengagement from academics, lack of success in the classroom, resilience deficit, fixed-mindset, and bullying (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Absenteeism may signal a weak relationship between home and school. Students who develop strong positive relationships with their teachers are less likely to be chronically absent from school (Kearney, 2008). Students who are not attending school cannot either develop social-emotional competence or experience academic success.

An issue with absenteeism is that it is not accurately reported within many school districts (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Melnick et al., 2017). Schools and communities should track chronic absenteeism with their students, and identify why students are not attending school, to better address their individual needs (Melnick et al., 2017). Some school districts do have student information systems available to track daily attendance.

## **Interventions and Strategies to Improve SEL**

### ***Identifying Students***

To aid in identifying students who need social and emotional support, schools can use universal screening. Universal screening is a quick and efficient process to further identify students at risk for social and emotional difficulties (as cited in Jenkins et al., 2014). In addition to universal screening, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a short questionnaire that can be filled out by parents, teachers, or students themselves. The SDQ is an accessible and free tool that measures five areas: emotional problems, conduct problems, inattention problems, peer relationship problems, and prosocial behavior (Jenkins et al., 2014). The SDQ is desirable because it is free to use and easy to administer, score, and interpret (Jenkins et al., 2014). Score reports can be generated and downloaded in parent-friendly “readable” reports breaking down scores across the previously mentioned five areas above.

### ***Positive Teacher-Student Relationships***

Positive relationships with adults are some of the most essential components of developing positive social-emotional lifestyles (Pianta et al., 2012). Teacher-student

relationships can have an impact on social-emotional competence levels of students (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Weissberg and Cascarino (2013) theorized that classrooms with warm teacher-student relationships help support more “in-depth” learning, and nurture positive social and emotional development among students. When teachers create safe learning environments for students to express emotions, they build closer relationships, which can result in a proactive approach to improved classroom management (Zins et al., 2007). Positive relationships create clear and high expectations, foster open communication between stakeholders, such as parents and the community, and enforce classroom structures and rules that support the social-emotional competencies (Zins et al., 2007).

These supportive learning environments also need social-emotionally competent adults that use evidence-based, developmentally appropriate, and culturally responsive ways to teach and foster the competencies to the students (Jones et al., 2013). Teachers and classrooms that create a sense of community are more likely to produce students who develop social-emotional competencies and are more academically motivated (Solomon et al., 2000). Schaps et al. (2003) suggested four components of caring classroom communities: (1) respectful and supportive relationships between students, teachers, and parents; (2) frequent opportunities for student collaboration; (3) opportunities for student voice and agency; (4) a sense of shared purpose among all in the classroom.

Teachers can measure their relationships with students using the Student-Instructor Relationship Scale (SIRS), which is a thirty-six question inventory that evaluates student-teacher relationships, connectedness, and anxiety (Creasey et al., 2009). Creasy et al. (2009) studied a large sample of college students documenting instructor connectedness and instructor anxiety

using the SIRS. Their study found a close relationship between positive student-teacher relationships and academic achievement. The SIRS also showed that students who reported connected and non-threatening relationships with their instructors reported less anxiety than those students who felt less connected to their instructors (Creasey et al., 2009).

Even though the measurement was successful for Creasey et al. (2009), it is suggested that more studies should be done to strengthen the claim that positive student-teacher connectedness relates to academic achievement. There are other potential factors that may play into the student-instructor relationship besides connectedness and anxiety, such as demographics, communication skills, and teaching style (Creasey et al., 2009). Instructors and teachers can use the SIRS as a formative tool to identify students who are less connected and those who may have anxiety, and then make adjustments to instruction and ways of building relationships to better serve students (Creasey et al., 2009).

### ***Teacher Praise***

Teachers can foster a positive relationship with students through praise (Conroy et al., 2009; Lampi et al., 2005; Marchant & Anderson, 2012). Positive and effective teacher praise toward students can build strong positive relationships, teach desired classroom behaviors, and increase the frequency of desired behaviors (Conroy et al., 2009; Marchant & Anderson, 2012). Effective teacher praise can be characterized as being specific, immediate, teacher-initiated, focused on effort, sincere with appropriate voice, and void of comparison (Conroy et al., 2009).

Marsh (2018) suggests several positive ways to build school connectedness through praise, such as giving visual cues like a “thumbs up” gesture, modeling desired behaviors,

writing notes, giving praise immediately after desired behaviors, giving praise to all students, and making eye contact while giving the praise. Yoder (2014) suggested that praise should be encouraging and specific. For example, teachers should not say, “You did a great job,” but instead say, “I see you worked hard on your math problems. When you think about your work and explain your thinking, you get more questions correct” (Yoder, 2014).

Teachers can use a “Praise Self-Monitoring Data Collection Tool” to track praise in their classrooms (Conroy et al., 2009). This tool gives teachers a way to track who they give praise to, the type of praise given, specific wording in the praise, and other characteristics of the praise. Using a data collection tool such as this can help teachers to monitor how they are interacting with their students and adjust accordingly, to make the classroom environment and their relationships with students more positive.

Teachers may face some struggles while giving praise to older students. Some older students may find praise to be aversive, as it draws unwanted peer attention, but teachers can also make a plan to provide discreet praise to students at more appropriate times (Markelz & Taylor, 2016). Praise can also affect students differently based on gender, socio-economic status, and ability level (Conroy et al., 2009). Overall, effective use of praise can promote success and well-being in children within a positive environment, such as a classroom (Conroy et al., 2009). Incorporating praise (Conroy et al., 2009) along with social-emotional practices embedded in the classroom curriculum can increase student success and well-being (Jones & Kahn, 2017).

### ***Out-of-Class Communication***

Taking time to get to know your students in your classroom can make a difference between frustration and achievement (Martinez, 2010). One way to get to know your students and their interests is by using out-of-class communication (Dobransky & Frymier, 2004). Out-of-class communication as “interactions outside the formal classroom that may be initiated by students or faculty” (Dobransky & Frymier, 2004). Examples of this are advising, students seeking out teachers for questions, teacher involvement in student organizations, or teacher-student discussions about non-class related issues (Nadler & Nadler, 2000).

Marzano (2011) suggested that teachers can build relationships with students by knowing their name, asking them their opinions on non-school related topics like the latest NFL football game or popular movies, asking them what they are interested in, and asking them how school is going. These types of out-of-class communications promote interpersonal relationships that develop intimacy and trust (Dobransky & Frymier, 2004). Students who have out-of-class discussions with their teachers view the relationship as more interpersonal than students who do not engage in out-of-class communications with their teachers (Dobransky & Frymier, 2004). Getting to know students outside of academics can encourage a positive student-teacher relationship (Marzano, 2011).

Part of out-of-class communication includes that teachers also share things about themselves with students. Powell (2011) states that teachers who share things about themselves and foster trust and security to their students create a safe environment along with building relationships with students. Teachers can develop positive relationships with their students

outside of their curriculum through out-of-class communication by engaging in conversations about things that interest students or about themselves (Powell, 2011).

### ***Teacher Practices that Improve SEL***

Teachers can combine academic content and SEL into instruction, which allows students to understand their emotions, empathize with others, create trusting relationships, problem-solve, and make thoughtful decisions (CASEL, 2015; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013; Zins et al., 2007). Teachers should use curriculum and instructional practices that integrate academic content with SEL skills (Jones & Kahn, 2017).

Yoder and Gurke (2017) suggested instructional practices that teachers can use in their classrooms to promote SEL in Table 2. When these teaching strategies and focuses are used in the classroom, both students and teachers are able to develop their SEL skill sets and create more positive environments (Yoder & Gurke, 2017). For teachers to better implement these classroom actions, they need coaching. Coaching focuses on supporting or modifying new practices to meet the needs of current students. Effective coaching focuses on the humanness of teachers and creates safe spaces for teachers to try new things and figure out what works best for them within their classrooms for their students (Yoder & Gurke, 2017). If school administrators want teachers to support SEL for their students, they also need to support the process.

Yoder and Gurke (2007) offered a toolkit to help administrators guide teachers to think about how they can incorporate SEL into their classrooms. The tools offered in this toolkit are observational and provide feedback to teachers on their implementation of SEL strategies (Yoder & Nolan, 2018). Teachers need to be supported by instructional coaches and administration in

their SEL work through observation, feedback, and the reflective process (Yoder & Gurke, 2007).

**Table 2**

*Instructional Practices to Promote SEL*

Type of Teaching Practice	Theme	Classroom Actions
Social Teaching Practices	Student-centered discipline	Disciplinary strategies are developmentally appropriate for students.
	Teacher Language	The teacher talks to the students with a focus on encouraging students.
	Responsibility and choice	Students are provided opportunities to make responsible decisions.
	Warmth and support	The teacher creates a classroom where the students know that the teacher cares.
	Cooperative learning	Students work together toward a collective goal in accomplishing an instructional task.
	Classroom discussions	Students and teachers have a dialogue about the content.
Emotional Teaching Practices	Self-assessment and self-reflection	Students actively think about their own work.
	Balanced instruction	Multiple and appropriate instructional strategies are used.
	Academic press and expectations	The teacher provides meaningful and challenging work and believes that all students can achieve rigorous work.
	Competence building	The teacher helps develop students' social-emotional skills through the typical instructional cycle.

*SEL Programs*

Presently, many districts across the United States are investing in SEL types of programs and prioritizing SEL learning for their staff and, more importantly, for students (Shriver, 2015). There are many types of programs that focus on SEL, and the strategies they use have much in common.

When implementing an SEL program, staff must be trained with the SEL curriculum and instruction as professional development (Weissberg & Cascario, 2013). With proper training, classroom teachers can administer SEL programming effectively to students (Durlak et al., 2011; Mahoney et al., 2018). When trained staff can systematically teach, model, and facilitate the social-emotional competencies, this allows students to apply them to their everyday lives (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). When students see these strategies used by adults in action throughout their days, they can mimic the behaviors and increase their competencies

Strategies that are school-based and designed to promote student SEL have the most success when embedded into a school's day-to-day curriculum (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013) and are consistent throughout other school activities (Greenberg et al., 2003; Zins & Elias, 2007). Students need opportunities throughout their days to practice SEL skills (Zins et al., 2007). Teachers can incorporate things like breathing practices into their classroom routines. Effective SEL instruction and curriculum should start in pre-school and consistently follow the students through graduation (CASEL, 2015; Greenberg et al., 2003; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013).

### ***Move This World: SEL Program***

*Move This World* is one SEL program that encourages, enhances, and builds safe and supportive learning environments for students from preschool through twelfth grade. *Move This*

*World's* curriculum is based on CASEL's core competencies and is reviewed by the American Institutes of Research each year (Move This World, 2018). *Move This World* uses a triangulated, system-wide, approach to monitor program quality, evaluate effectiveness, and measure impact. The program uses a series of surveys completed by administrators, support staff, and teachers to assess specific school goals, identify challenges, and monitor progress in social-emotional skills (Move This World, 2018).

### ***Struggles for Schools Implementing SEL***

One struggle that schools face is teachers who hold low levels of social-emotional competence. When teachers demonstrate low social-emotional competence, they have less success with SEL interventions with students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). While some teachers have high social-emotional competencies, their college education programs may have failed to educate them on evidence-based SEL practices (Gubi & Bocanegra, 2015).

Another struggle schools face is system-wide implementation. Schools can adopt evidence-based SEL programs, but to be successful, they must ensure that implementation of the program is of high quality (CASEL, 2015). CASEL (2015) also warned that if programs are implemented poorly, they can harm students; this is why coaching and support are important for teachers. SEL programs are not a remedy for all academic and behavioral challenges that students may face (Aidman & Price, 2018). Aidman and Price (2018) also stated that it is difficult to determine the impact of SEL programs when schools are also implementing other types of programming or initiatives. Research shows that short-term and unorganized efforts to promote SEL programs are not as effective as long-term organized efforts (Zins et al., 2007).

Schools and SEL programs often lack the environmental supports at home and school, such as modeling and reinforcement of healthy behaviors by teachers and parents (Payton et al., 2000). This contributes to a lack of students being able to learn and maintain what they have learned.

Lastly, a lacking resource in the SEL world is the ability to measure social-emotional competencies accurately. McKown (2017) stated there are a few usable, attainable, and measurable tools for educators to assess children's SEL skills. Also, many methods may not be best suited for the type of social-emotional skills being assessed (McKown, 2017). Currently, few tools assess a child's true social-emotional capacity, most tools simply measure a child's behavior (McKown, 2017).

Using the information gathered from the literature about SEL, positive teacher-student relationships, and interventions to support social-emotional well-being in the classroom, the action research methodology was formed as outlined in the following section.

### **Methodology**

We collaboratively utilized reflective educational action research as we studied our own learners and classroom settings, investigated social-emotional support practices to improve the learning, and fostered positive relationships with students to enhance the learning environment. Throughout the action research process, we got to know students, both academically and personally, to increase mutual understanding and respect (Hendricks, 2013). Teachers used strategies such as praise, SEL curriculum, classroom activities and discussions, as well as our advisory periods to work one to one with students to develop relationships and get to know our

students. Working collaboratively and within our classrooms helped provide us with qualitative data to improve our classrooms and ultimately lead to school improvement (Hendricks, 2013). Artifacts, observational data, and inquiry data were obtained to help identify if the interventions had an impact and illustrate why the interventions were successful or unsuccessful as well as to provide participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the interventions (Hendricks, 2013).

The population of this action research project was seventh and eighth-grade students enrolled in a middle school in a small town in Minnesota. Table 3 is a representation of the students who participated in our action research project. The sample of the action research project included focus groups of five seventh and five eighth-graders. Focus groups were chosen based on data collected as explained in the following sections. Due to the focus group students being minors they have each been assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity.

**Table 3**

*Student Demographics*

Groups	Males	Females	Total
7th grade	42	56	98
8th grade	61	55	116
Focus group	5	5	10

Student self-reported data was collected in the form of several surveys. These surveys focused on the SEL program *Move This World*, social-emotional health, and relationships with their teachers. The survey questions for the SEL program *Move This World* were adapted from the Washoe County School District's Social and Emotional Competency Assessment (Davidson et al., 2017). Social-emotional health survey questions were adapted from the Minnesota Student

Survey (Minnesota Department of Health, 2019), Student-Instructor Relationship Survey (SIRS) (Creasey et al., 2009), and the Teacher Reported Strength and Difficulty Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997). We used the model of praise (Conroy et al., 2009) to track our efforts to improve teacher relationships and social-emotional competence of students identified by the above process as being in our intervention group and we documented out-of-class communication with targeted students. Out-of-class communication between students and their teachers can positively impact their relationship (Dobransky & Frymier, 2004). Lastly, we used Classroom Observation Tools for Teacher Practices in SEL (Yoder & Gurke, 2007) to observe and give feedback on how to foster more SEL skills with our students.

Our school was already involved in a school-wide effort to improve students' social-emotional competence. Initially, students were identified with low social-emotional competence based on a school-wide self-report questionnaire. Students were further narrowed into a focus group of five seventh-graders and five eighth-graders with a high number of difficulties in social-emotional competence using the previously mentioned SDQ. All students were given the student-instructor relations survey (SIRS) to identify students with perceived lack of connections with teachers. The results of this survey were cross-referenced with SDQ results to identify focus groups.

After the focus groups were identified we used the model of praise (Conroy et al., 2009) to track our efforts to improve teacher relationships and the social-emotional competence of students identified for the focus groups. In an effort to improve the student and teacher relationship, teachers greeted students as they entered the classroom, fostered safe learning environments for students to express emotions, facilitated frequent opportunities for students to

collaborate, and gave students many opportunities for student voice and agency within the classroom (Schaps et al., 2003).

A teacher reflection log was used to document out-of-class communication with focus group students in an effort to positively impact relationships. Additionally, formative assessment data was collected through student self-reported data to obtain feedback on school-wide SEL curriculum integration. Schoolwide integration of *Move This World* consisted of six minutes in the morning and six minutes in the afternoon daily. Videos were played during this time to guide students while teachers facilitated, modeled, and led students through the lesson or activity. All *Move This World* lessons and activities worked on at least one, but usually up to two or three, of the five competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship building, and responsible decision making). At the end of the school year, grade book and attendance data were also collected through the school district's learning management system. Lastly, summative data was gathered through post-assessment student self-reported surveys to measure progress.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze qualitative data, we used the five-phased cycle as presented in Hendricks (2013) which includes: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. The majority of our compiled qualitative data came from self-reported survey results in textual form. Population data was disassembled into a focus group sample, where we then coded the data appropriately based on data collection tools. The coded data were then reassembled into themes and categories that are related to each other (Hendricks, 2013). By interpreting the reassembled data, we were able to identify how SEL and teacher-student relationships impacted student well-being in focus group students. Conclusions drawn from the data analysis show a

positive correlation between SEL and teacher-student relationships in relation to student well-being and academic success.

To analyze quantitative data, we used the five-step process of organizing and analyzing as presented in Hendricks (2013) including gathering data, creating graphical displays, examining displayed data, sharing analyses, and documenting connections to our action research question. Grade book and attendance data reports were collected from our learning management system through the school district. A table was created to graphically represent grade book and attendance data and illustrate positive or negative changes. We worked collaboratively to interpret and analyze our data in relation to our action research question.

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to explore ways teachers can embed SEL into their classrooms by fostering positive relationships with students and supporting students' social-emotional well being and will address the question: What effects can SEL and enhanced teacher relationships have on increased student well-being and academic achievement in a middle school setting?

### **Social-Emotional Learning & Enhanced Teacher Relationships**

The research question that this study addressed focused on SEL embedded in the classroom curriculum to increase student well-being and academic achievement. Additionally, there was a focus on enhanced teacher-student relationships to also promote student well-being and academic achievement. To answer this question teachers used strategies such as praise, SEL curriculum, classroom activities, and discussions, as well as our advisory periods to work one to one with students to develop relationships and get to know our students. Throughout the process,

student self-report surveys were administered to provide data and feedback and researchers collected grade book and attendance data from the schoolwide learning management system.

Our district implemented an SEL curriculum, *Move This World*, for the 2019-2020 school year and needed to set a baseline for the current status of our student's social-emotional health. To establish this baseline, students in grades 7-12 self-reported in survey format, and the questions for the survey were adapted from the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey. To see the whole set of questions in this survey see Appendix A. This action research project focused on the statements in Table 4. The statements in Table 4 align with CASEL's (2015) competencies of responsible decision making, self-awareness, and self-management. Table 4 illustrates the changes in the focus groups' average from fall to spring. The fall average number represents the baseline prior to the implementation of our action research interventions and the spring average number represents the average after interventions. When analyzing the data, there is a positive correlation of change for each statement within the focus group. Students at the end of the school year felt more in control of their lives and future, felt better about themselves, and dealt with disappointment without getting too upset than they did at the start of the school year.

**Table 4**

*Students' Competency Perceptions and Change*

Statement	Fall	Spring	Change
I feel in control of my life and future. (Responsible Decision-Making)	3.2	2.3	+0.9
I feel good about myself. (Self-Awareness)	3.2	2.4	+0.8

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I deal with disappointment without getting too upset. (Self-Management)	3.1	2.6	+0.5
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*Note.* Students self-reported on a Likert scale where 1=Extremely, 2=Very, 3=Somewhat, 4=Not at all. Fall and Spring numbers reported below show the average from the 10 focus group students.

Students self-reported in a survey their level of connectedness and anxiety about us as their teachers. This survey was adapted using the Student Instructor Relationship Scale (SIRS). See Appendix B for questions used in the survey and how scores are calculated. Table 5 represents the results of the focus groups on how connected they felt to us as their teachers. The higher the score the stronger the student's feelings of connectedness are to us as teachers and the low scores communicate avoidance or a tendency to eschew a close relationship with the teachers. It is evident in the data presented that a majority of the focus group students made a positive change in their connectedness to the teachers from winter to spring. The average score of teacher connectedness in the winter was 36.6 and in the spring was 38.3, demonstrating an overall positive change in connectedness. When examining the change from winter to spring, 60% of students reported having a positive change in connectedness to their teachers, 20% reported no change in their feelings of connectedness, and 20% reported feeling less connected to their teacher. The average score of change was 1.7, indicating that overall there was an increase in connectedness to their teachers for the group.

**Table 5**

*Teacher Connectedness*

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Student*	Winter	Spring	Change**
Kristin	37	37	0
Liam	11	15	<b>+4</b>
Greg	32	36	<b>+4</b>
Brian	46	33	-13
Alyssa	42	49	<b>+7</b>
Tyson	42	31	-11
Misty	36	53	<b>+17</b>
Mitchell	38	42	<b>+4</b>
Jackie	29	34	<b>+5</b>
Jane	53	53	0

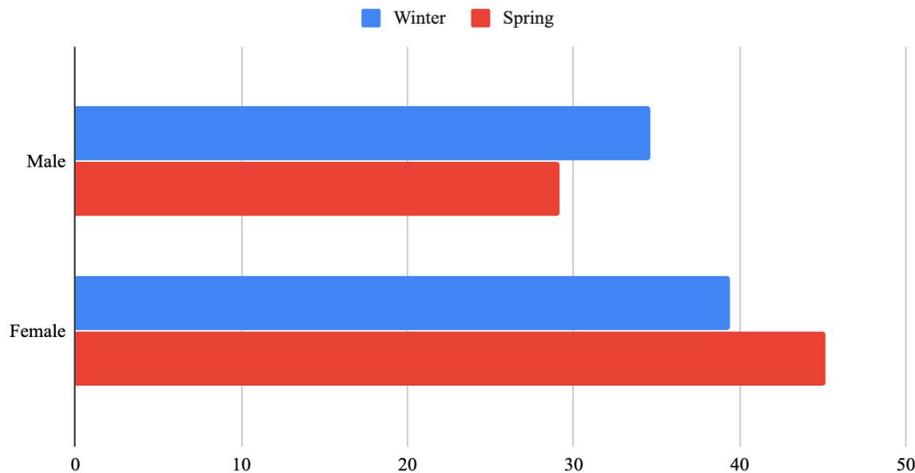
*\*Names have been changed.*

*\*\*Bold represents a positive change*

When examining Table 5 data by gender, female students had an average connectedness score of 39.4 in winter, 45.2 in the spring, and an average increase in the connectedness of 5.8. Male students had an average connectedness score of 34.6 in winter, 29.2 in the spring, with a change decrease of 2.4. Female students increased their average connectedness score by 3.4 more points than males. Female students had an increase in connectedness while males had a decrease from winter to spring. Figure 1 is a visual representation of connectedness scores of males and females comparing winter to spring connectedness scores.

### **Figure 1**

*Connectedness to Teacher Scores*



The second piece of information that is measured from the SIRS survey is the level of anxiety a student has about their teacher. Table 6 reflects the scores of the focus group and the change from winter to spring. Higher scores reflect generalized anxiety regarding a relationship with the teacher whereas lower scores reflect less threatening perceptions of this relationship. The average score of the anxiety of the focus group in the winter was 21.3 and in the spring was 16.4, demonstrating an overall decrease in anxiety levels with the teachers. When examining the data change from winter to spring, 90% of focus group students reported a decrease in anxiety with their teachers, while 10% of focus group students had an increase in anxiety. Students in the focus group who reported having a more connecting and non-threatening relationship with their teachers also reported less anxiety than those students who felt less connected to their teachers. The average change score for the focus group was -4.9, indicating that as a focus group student anxiety with the teachers decreased.

**Table 6**

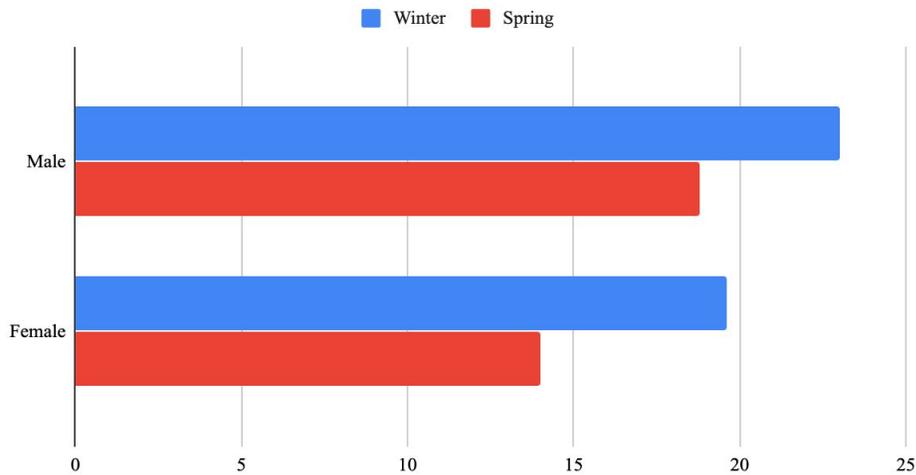
*Teacher Anxiety*

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Student	Winter	Spring	Change*
Kristin	25	16	<b>-9</b>
Liam	26	20	<b>-6</b>
Greg	24	16	<b>-8</b>
Brian	30	19	<b>-11</b>
Alyssa	24	15	<b>-9</b>
Tyson	16	24	+8
Misty	14	8	<b>-6</b>
Mitchell	19	15	<b>-4</b>
Jackie	25	22	<b>-3</b>
Jane	10	9	<b>-1</b>

*\*Bold numbers show less anxiety towards teacher*

When examining Table 6 data by gender, female students had an average anxiety score in the winter of 19.6, 14 in the spring, and an average decrease in the anxiety of 5.6. Male students had an average anxiety score in winter of 23, 18.8 in the spring, with a change decrease of 4.2. Both males and females had a decrease in their anxiety levels with their teachers from winter to spring. Figure 2 is a visual representation of the average anxiety scores of males and females from winter to spring.

**Figure 2***Anxiety Scores*

The SIRS tool typically shows that when students feel more connected to the teacher, student levels of anxiety with the teacher decrease, which is true for 90% of students in this action research project. SIRS also often demonstrates that if a student feels less connected to the teacher that their anxiety levels should increase.

There are two outliers in this data: Brian and Tyson. Brian's data illustrates that from winter to spring his levels of connectedness and levels of anxiety both decreased. In other words, Brian felt less anxious about his teachers but not more connected to them. Another outlier in the data was Tyson, who had an increase in anxiety from winter to spring and a decrease in teacher connectedness from winter to spring. Brian's decrease in connectedness and anxiety and Tyson's increase in anxiety and decrease in connectedness is possibly due to the transition to online learning due to COVID-19. Due to online learning, researchers lost their ability to connect one to one with students on an everyday basis to foster a positive relationship. Tyson also receives one-on-one special education services and experienced family events that could have led to his

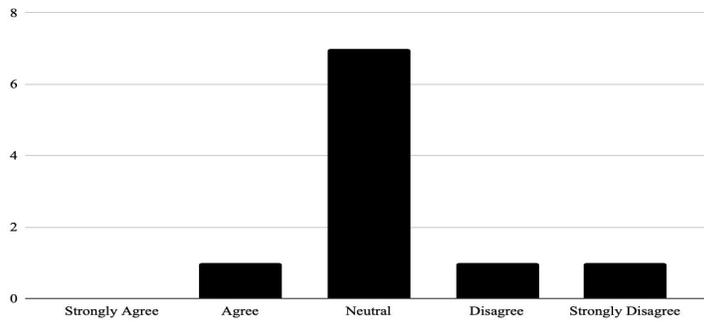
increase in anxiety and a decrease in connectedness. During the school closure, Brian had only four contacts over two months with his teacher which did not reinforce the positive relationship that was developing prior to closure. For students already suffering from anxiety prior to school closures due to COVID-19, their anxiety may increase as a result (Neighmond, 2020), which may be a reason for the increase in anxiety for Tyson.

### **Move This World**

Students self-reported in six surveys throughout the study to share their perceptions of *Move This World's* impact on their social-emotional competence. Figures 3-8 illustrate whether the students felt *Move This World* helped them in each of the five competencies. Weekly surveys asked specific questions regarding students' reflections (see Appendix C). The majority of students felt that *Move This World* did not make an impact on their self-awareness and self-management. However, we found that students did feel that *Move This World* helped to increase their social awareness, relationship management skills, and their ability to make responsible decisions. Overall, students self-reported a majority of neutrality regarding *Move This World's* impact on their social-emotional competence, but there is at least one student in each competency who felt that the curriculum had helped them in each of the competencies.

**Figure 3**

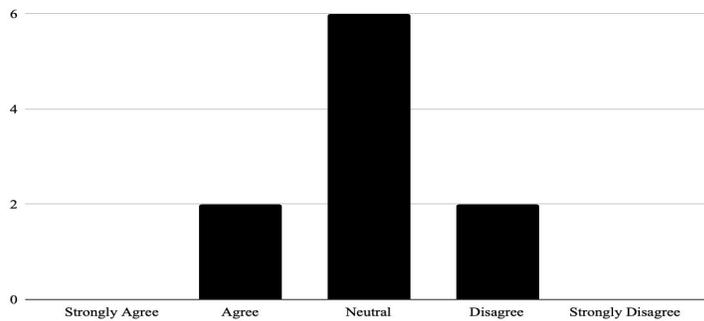
*Self-Awareness*



*Note.* Students are mainly neutral or disagree that *Move This World* helped them in the self-awareness competency.

**Figure 4**

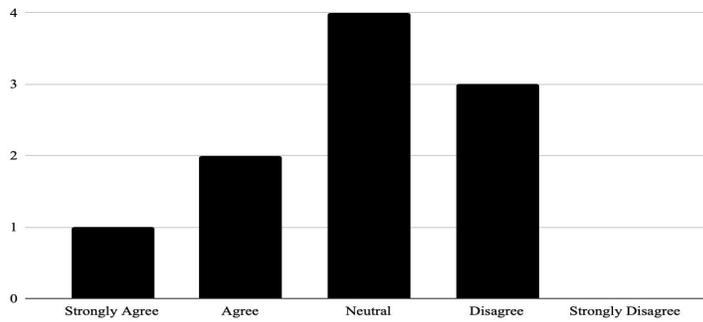
*Self-Management*



*Note.* Students are mainly neutral in their perception that *Move This World* helped them in the self-management competency.

**Figure 5**

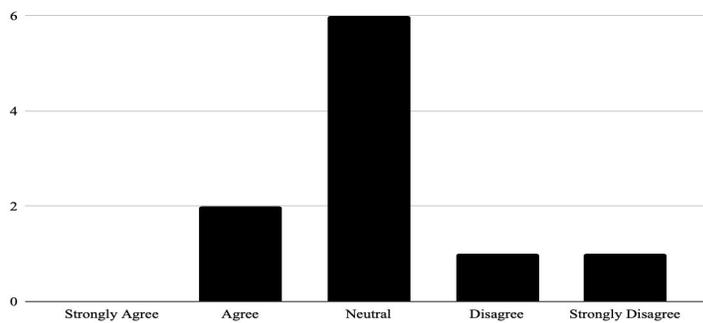
*Social Awareness*



*Note.* Students are divided regarding their agreement, neutrality, and disagreement in their perception that *Move This World* helped them in the social awareness competency.

**Figure 6**

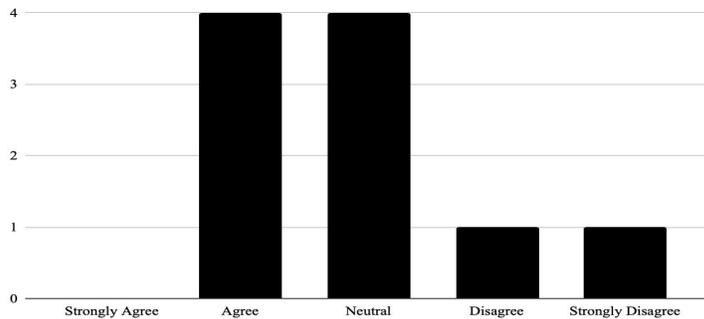
*Relationship Management*



*Note.* Students are divided regarding their agreement, neutrality, and disagreement in their perception that *Move This World* helped them in the relationship management competency.

**Figure 7**

*Responsible Decision-Making*

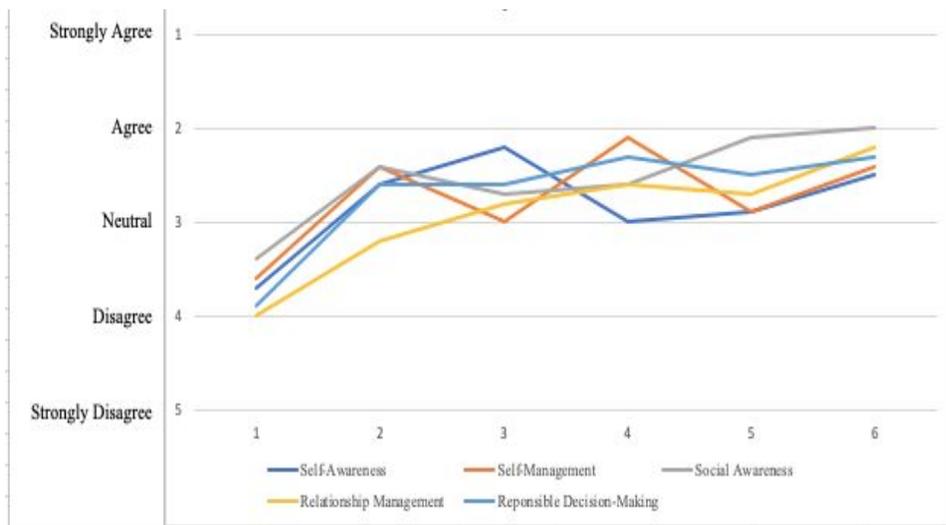


*Note.* Students are divided regarding their agreement, neutrality, and disagreement in their perception that *Move This World* helped them in the responsible decision-making competency.

The averages of students' perceptions as self-reported in six weekly surveys for each of the five competencies are shown in Figure 8. An average score for each competency showed an increase in student perceptions of *Move This World* in connection with their application of skills taught through the lessons administered twice daily.

**Figure 8**

*Student Perceptions of Move This World*



### Student Grades

Grade book data was collected through the school district's learning management system for each student in the focus group for each semester as illustrated in Table 7. When looking at the data, 90% of students had a positive increase in their academic performance from semester one to semester two while 10% had no change in their grade. 50% of students improved one letter grade from semester one to semester two. 40% of students improved two letter grades from semester one to semester two.

**Table 7**

*Grade Book Data*

Student	Semester 1	Semester 2*
Kristin	B+	<b>A</b>
Liam	B+	<b>A</b>
Greg	C	<b>A-</b>
Brian	D	<b>B</b>
Alyssa	C+	<b>A-</b>
Tyson	D-	<b>C</b>
Misty	B	<b>A</b>
Mitchell	D	<b>B</b>
Jackie	A	<b>A</b>
Jane	C	<b>B</b>

\*Bold indicates a grade improvement

### Student Attendance

Attendance data for each student for each semester in the focus group is illustrated in Table 8. Attendance data was collected using the district's learning management system. A majority of students, 70%, had a decrease in absences from semester one to semester two, while 30% of students either had no change or a slight increase in the number of days absent. The focus group had an average of 4.7 absences during the first semester and an average of 2.3 absences during the second semester, showing an average decrease of 2.4 in the number of absences during the action research project. The decrease in the number of absences from semester one to semester two could be attributed to positive teacher relationships and an improvement in SEL competencies.

**Table 8**

*Absences*

Student	Semester 1 Days Absent	Semester 2 Days Absent*
Kristin	2	5
Liam	3	3
Greg	3	1
Brian	3	1
Alyssa	16	6
Tyson	3	4
Misty	3	1.5
Mitchell	3	0
Jackie	2	1.5
Jane	9	0

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\*Bold indicates a decrease in absences

It is evident from our findings that fostering positive student-teacher relationships and implementing an SEL curriculum had a positive impact on students' well-being, academic performance, and attendance. There is a positive correlation between the five social-emotional competencies and the schoolwide SEL curriculum, *Move This World*. It is also evident that distance learning interferes with teacher-student interactions that can promote positive relationships in the classroom. Overall, the effects of the SEL curriculum and enhanced teacher-student relationships showed a positive impact on middle school students.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this action research project was to explore SEL in the classroom by fostering positive relationships with students and supporting students' social-emotional well-being. The research addressed the question: What effects can SEL and enhanced teacher relationships have on increased student well-being and academic achievement in a middle school setting?

After analyzing the data produced by this action research study, we have concluded that embedded SEL curriculum and enhanced teacher-student relationships had a positive impact on middle school student success in our classrooms. The data and findings show increased perceptions of social-emotional competence, and grade book and attendance data show positive outcomes.

There are a number of confounding factors that can contribute to social-emotional well-being and student success in the classroom. While this study focused on purposefully embedded SEL curriculum in the classroom alongside positive teacher-student relationships and

interactions, other confounding factors can be considered and could have also contributed to student success and academic achievement.

### **Recommendations**

The inclusion of an SEL curriculum at a district-wide level is valuable for students' social-emotional well-being. For teachers to better implement an SEL curriculum, they need effective training and ongoing coaching. Effective training and coaching focuses on the humanness of teachers and creates safe spaces for teachers to try new things and figure out what works best for them within their classrooms for their students (Yoder & Gurke, 2017).

Teachers can combine academic content and SEL into instruction, which allows students to understand their emotions, empathize with others, create trusting relationships, problem-solve, and make thoughtful decisions (CASEL, 2015; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013; Zins et al., 2007). Teachers should use curriculum and instructional practices that integrate academic content with social-emotional learning skills (Jones & Kahn, 2017).

When choosing a model for an SEL curriculum, CASEL's model with a focus on the five competencies should be considered. CASEL's five competencies set the foundation for academic performance, including better grades and test scores, positive social behaviors, fewer negative behaviors, and less emotional distress (CASEL, 2015; Greenberg et al., 2003; Zins et al., 2007).

The effort to foster positive teacher-student relationships within the classroom proved effective in enhanced feelings of connectedness. When we began our research, we noted that teachers can foster a positive relationship with students through praise and used this throughout the intervention process (Conroy et al., 2009; Lampi et al., 2005; Marchant & Anderson, 2012). Positive and effective teacher praise toward students can build strong positive relationships,

teach desired classroom behaviors, and increase the frequency of desired behaviors (Conroy et al., 2009; Marchant & Anderson, 2012). Effective teacher praise can be characterized as being specific, immediate, teacher-initiated, focused on effort, sincere with appropriate voice, and void of comparison (Conroy et al., 2009). In addition, teachers can develop a positive relationship with students by making a conscious effort to engage in one-to-one conversations with students on a daily basis or as frequently as possible.

While the number and types of confounding factors can be beyond the control of the classroom teacher, the direct benefit of increased social-emotional well-being for middle school students outweighs any potential risks associated with SEL instruction and intentional positive relationship building. Further research is needed in the effectiveness of SEL curriculums that are available for school districts. The action research project was affected by a school closure and a switch to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Without this closure, this project may have shown stronger results in teacher connectedness and a decrease in anxiety in our students.

In conclusion, efforts to promote academic, social, and emotional learning in students will make educators and schools more successful (Elias et al., 1997). Teachers can foster these social-emotional competencies in their classrooms by creating warm and positive learning environments, having positive relationships, using effective praise, and incorporating social-emotional skills into their curricula (Yoder & Gurke, 2007). For teachers to be successful, they need proper training (Gubi & Bocanegra, 2015) and coaching in SEL strategies (Yoder & Gurke, 2007). Fostering social-emotional competencies, enhancing student-teacher relationships, and successfully incorporating the social-emotional skills within their classrooms teachers can provide students with an optimal setting for promoting academic achievement.

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**Appendix A**

1. At my school teachers care about students.
  - a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly Disagree
2. I feel safe going to and from school.
  - a. Strongly Agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly Disagree
3. Which of these adults can you talk to about the problems you are having? (check all that apply)
  - a. Parent or guardian
  - b. Adults at school
  - c. Some other adult
  - d. I don't have any other adults that I can talk to about problems I am having
4. How much do you feel your parents care about you?
  - a. Very much
  - b. Quite a bit
  - c. Some
  - d. A little
  - e. Not at all
5. How much do you feel other adult relatives care about you?
  - a. Very much
  - b. Quite a bit
  - c. Some
  - d. A little
  - e. Not at all
6. How much do you feel friends care about you?
  - a. Very much
  - b. Quite a bit
  - c. Some
  - d. A little
  - e. Not at all

7. How much do you feel teachers or other adults at school care about you?
  - a. Very much
  - b. Quite a bit
  - c. Some
  - d. A little
  - e. Not at all
8. How much do you feel adults in the community care about you?
  - a. Very much
  - b. Quite a bit
  - c. Some
  - d. A little
  - e. Not at all
9. I feel in control of my life and future.
  - a. Extremely or always
  - b. Very or often
  - c. Sometimes or somewhat
  - d. Not at all or rarely
10. I feel good about myself.
  - a. Extremely or always
  - b. Very or often
  - c. Sometimes or somewhat
  - d. Not at all or rarely
11. I feel good about my future.
  - a. Extremely or always
  - b. Very or often
  - c. Sometimes or somewhat
  - d. Not at all or rarely
12. I deal with disappointment without getting too upset
  - a. Extremely or always
  - b. Very or often
  - c. Sometimes or somewhat
  - d. Not at all or rarely
13. How often do you feel you appropriately manage your emotions?
  - a. Extremely or always
  - b. Very or often
  - c. Sometimes or somewhat
  - d. Not at all or rarely

14. Do you know what coping skills are?
  - a. Absolutely
  - b. Somewhat
  - c. Not really
15. How often are you taught coping and stress management skills?
  - a. Often
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Not at all

**Appendix B****Student Instructor Relationship Scale**

The following statements concern how you feel about your relationship with your instructor.

Respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Disagree Strongly			Neutral Mixed			Agree Strongly

1. I wish this instructor were more concerned with the welfare of students.
2. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on this instructor.
3. The instructor is concerned with the needs of his or her students.
4. I'm afraid that I will lose this instructor's respect.
5. I worry a lot about my interactions with this instructor.
6. It's not difficult for me to feel connected to this instructor.
7. This instructor makes me doubt myself.
8. I am nervous around this instructor.
9. Find that the instructor does not connect well with students.
10. The instructor only seems to appreciate certain students.
11. I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts with this instructor.
12. I find it relatively easy to get close to this instructor.
13. Sometimes this instructor's mood is unpredictable.
14. This instructor shows favoritism to some students.
15. This instructor seems uncomfortable interacting with students.
16. I prefer not to show this instructor how I truly think or feel.
17. It's easy for me to connect with this instructor.
18. I get uncomfortable when instructors try to get too friendly with students.
19. I rarely worry about losing this instructor's respect.

20. It makes me mad that this instructor does not seem to pay attention to the needs of his or her students.
21. I am very comfortable feeling connected to a class or instructor.
22. I'm scared to show my thoughts around this instructor; I think he or she will think less of me.
23. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with this instructor.
24. I don't feel comfortable opening up to this instructor.
25. I'm afraid that if I shared my thoughts with this instructor that he or she would not think very highly of me.
26. I do not often worry about losing the respect of this instructor.
27. I find it easy to depend on this instructor for help.
28. If I were to get into trouble in this class, I do not think the instructor would be very motivated to help me.
29. I could tell this instructor just about anything.
30. I feel comfortable depending on this instructor.
31. I worry that I won't measure up to this instructor's standards.
32. I worry that this instructor does not really care for his or her students.
33. I prefer not to get too close to instructors.
34. I often worry that my instructor doesn't really like me.
35. If I had a problem in this class, I know I could talk to the instructor.
36. I know this instructor could make me feel better if I had a problem.

**Scoring:**

**Instructor Connectedness Items:** Add Items: 3, 6, 11, 12, 17, 21, 23, 29, 30, 35, and 36.

Add Items: Higher scores denote stronger feelings of connectedness and low scores on this scale communicate avoidance or a tendency to eschew a close relationship with the instructor.

**Instructor Anxiety Items:** Add items: 4, 5, 7, 8, 22, 25, 31, and 34.

Add Items: Higher scores reflect generalized anxiety regarding a relationship with the instructor whereas lower scores reflect less threatening perceptions of this affiliation.

**Appendix C**Self-Awareness

“Move This World” curriculum has helped me ....

- \_\_\_\_\_ become more aware of my feelings and emotions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ become more aware of my personal strengths.
- \_\_\_\_\_ know when my feelings are making it hard for me to focus. (etc)
- \_\_\_\_\_ accept things I can't control.
- \_\_\_\_\_ be okay with who I am.
- \_\_\_\_\_ know ways I can calm myself down.

Self-Management

“Move This World” curriculum has helped me ....

- \_\_\_\_\_ stay calm when I feel stressed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ get through something when I feel frustrated.
- \_\_\_\_\_ do my schoolwork even when I do not feel like it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ control my temper when I am upset.
- \_\_\_\_\_ make the best of a situation when I can't control it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ finish tasks even if they are hard for me.

Social Awareness

“Move This World” curriculum has helped me ....

- \_\_\_\_\_ know when someone needs help.
- \_\_\_\_\_ know what people may be feeling by the look on their face.
- \_\_\_\_\_ know how to get help when I'm having trouble with a classmate.
- \_\_\_\_\_ pay attention to my classmates' feelings.
- \_\_\_\_\_ know how my actions impact my classmates.
- \_\_\_\_\_ know that other students may learn differently than I do.

Relationship Management

“Move This World” curriculum has helped me ....

- \_\_\_\_\_ share what I am feeling with others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ talk to an adult when I have problems at school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ get along with my classmates.
- \_\_\_\_\_ get along with my teachers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ stop myself before I hurt someone's feelings.
- \_\_\_\_\_ talk to classmates about why they feel a certain way.

Responsible Decision Making

“Move This World” curriculum has helped me ....

\_\_\_\_\_ think about what might happen before making a decision.

\_\_\_\_\_ think of different ways to solve a problem.

\_\_\_\_\_ to make my school a better place.

\_\_\_\_\_ stick to my beliefs when making decisions.

\_\_\_\_\_ to not give in to peer pressure at school.

\_\_\_\_\_ follow through with my responsibilities in class.