THE PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS TOWARDS A PROGRAM IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

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THE PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS TOWARDS
A PROGRAM IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Elizabeth Anne Kennedy

Professional Diploma in School Psychology, Fordham University, 2007
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A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership
in the
Department of Education and Educational Psychology
at
Western Connecticut State University
2020
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Elizabeth Anne Kennedy, Ed.D.
THE PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS TOWARDS
A PROGRAM IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Elizabeth Anne Kennedy, Ed.D.
Western Connecticut State University

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand how educators perceive their role with meeting the social and emotional needs of students, as well how educators and students experience participation in a school-based social emotional learning (SEL) program, with particular focus on the experience of educators and students participating in the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program. As part of this analysis, educators and students were asked to share their views regarding the implementation of this particular SEL program. Data were collected through a qualitative multiple case study design. Study participants were invited to share their views through individual and small group semi-structured interviews. Interview transcripts along with other data sources (program artifacts, classroom observations, demographic surveys) were analyzed and coded. The coded data presented the following themes: Perceived Role of SEL in Schools, Purpose of SEL Instruction, SEL Implementation Requirements, and Benefits of SEL. The findings of the study suggest the following: Educators view SEL as playing an important role in schools, while educator opinions regarding who should deliver SEL instruction vary; Educators and students alike view SEL Instruction as having a multi-faceted purpose that is critical to supporting students; Educators and students feel that schools must meet various implementation requirements in order for an SEL program to be successful; SEL programming offers a vast array of benefits for both educator and student participants.
THE PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS TOWARDS

A PROGRAM IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Presented by

Elizabeth Anne Kennedy, Ed.D.
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the participants who made this study possible, and all of the educators who seek to advance the field of social and emotional learning in schools. It is also dedicated to the Lewis Family. Thank you for your support and assistance which made this research possible. You have endured an unimaginable loss yet inspire us all with your continued demonstration of the “Choose Love” formula in action. May this work inspire others who will continue to support your mission.
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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The social and emotional needs of students in grades K-12 are vast and directly impact student academic achievement (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). According to the 2017 Children’s Mental Health Report, depression and bipolar disorder affect 14.3% of youth age 13-17, and nearly one in three adolescents (31.9%) will meet criteria for an anxiety disorder by the age of 18 (Child Mind, 2017). When students struggle with unmet social and emotional needs, they encounter obstacles that impede their efforts and ability to successfully participate in the learning process (Rossen & Cowen, 2015). Students may struggle to execute the basic skills needed in order to adequately function in the school setting (i.e., engaging in lessons, concentrating, or self-regulating in order to meet behavioral expectations), which can inhibit the individual’s progress towards achieving one’s potential (Child Mind, 2016). According to the 2016 Children’s Mental Health Report, “being at risk for mental health problems in first grade leads to a 5% drop in academic performance in just two years” (Murphy et al., 2014, p. 3). When students struggle emotionally without proper support, they become increasingly at-risk for behavioral difficulties (Rossen & Cowen, 2015). This can result in the loss of instructional time during classes, increased risk of dropping out of school, and other negative consequences for the surrounding school community such as increased disciplinary referrals and a compromised school climate (Rossen & Cowen, 2015).

The importance of understanding the diverse array of needs students present in the school setting has been researched over time (Desrochers, 2015). A theory such as Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943) is taught in education preparation programs to help future educators understand the impact of students’ social and emotional experience on their ability to learn
In Maslow’s *Theory of Human Motivation* (Maslow, 1943), he suggests that individuals must first have their basic physiological and safety needs met in order for them to make progress towards reaching their potential and becoming self-actualized. Additionally, Systems Theorists such as Urie Bronfenbrenner posit that an individual’s development is influenced by the interrelated environmental systems (including the microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem, and ecosystem) in which one lives (Ashiabi & O’Neal, 2015). One’s school environment constitutes a microsystem, and the experiences including the interactions one has within this environment affect one’s development (Ashiabi & O’Neal, 2015; Bronfenbrenner, 1986). On a national level, the “Every Student Succeeds Act” (ESSA) of 2015 requires state representatives for education to develop plans to address issues of bullying, harassment, and discipline in order to promote safe and supportive school environments. ESSA also supports efforts on behalf of states and districts to implement positive behavior interventions and supports, as well as other activities to support the development of skills such as conflict resolution, effective problem solving, and appropriate relationship building (www.ed.gov/essa).

Since the importance of meeting the diverse needs of students is emphasized at theoretical, federal, and state levels, the ways in which schools implement programs to meet the needs of students necessitates further exploration (Child Mind, 2016). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) promotes the implementation of research-based social and emotional learning programs that teach the five core competencies identified in CASEL’s Framework for Systemic and Social Emotional Learning. These competencies (see Figure 1) are (a) Self-Awareness, (b) Self-Management, (c) Responsible Decision-Making, (d) Relationships Skills, and (e) Social Awareness (www.casel.org/core-competencies/).
One example of a CASEL endorsed SEL program is the Responsive Classroom approach. This approach encourages the creation of classrooms that “are responsive to children’s physical, emotional, social, and intellectual needs through developmentally appropriate educational experiences in kindergarten through sixth grade” (https://casel.org/guideprogramsresponsive-classroom/, 2019, para. 1). The Responsive Classroom approach promotes the use of essential teaching practices outlined in the program (i.e., morning meetings, academic choice, collaborative problem solving) as well as regular communication with parents of children in the classroom (https://casel.org/guideprogramsresponsive-classroom/, 2019).
Initiatives such as Responsive Classroom (Desrochers, 2015) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS; Simonsen, Sugai, & Negron, 2008) are implemented in schools to assist students with developing their social and emotional skills and improve student behavior in ways that are conducive to learning (Belfield et al. 2015; Child Mind 2016; Desrochers, 2015). Although PBIS is not a social emotional learning program that focuses on the 5 competencies outlined by CASEL, “Positive Behavioral and Interventions Supports (PBIS) is a framework for providing a range of systemic and individualized strategies for achieving important academic and behavior outcomes while preventing problem behaviors” (Office of Special Education Programs Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, n.d., as cited in the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2010, p. 1). School-wide supports such as PBIS and social and emotional learning (SEL) programs are receiving more attention and consideration as having a place in the school day alongside academic subjects (Vega, 2012). The field of education continues to make strides with these evolving practices as the benefits of social and emotional learning and positive behavior supports are recognized.

According to Durlak et al. (2011), SEL programs that address students’ levels of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making increase student academic performance by 11 percentile points as compared to students who do not participate in such programs. An increase in academic achievement is one anticipated benefit of the successful implementation of research based SEL programs, while other benefits include supporting student mental health and enhancing positive school climate (Desrochers, 2015).
Researchers suggest that the successful implementation of interventions such as SEL programs depends on multiple influences, including the perceptions of educators towards the implementation of such programs (Hicks-Hoste, 2015). While there is research demonstrating that SEL interventions positively impact student achievement, there is a need for additional research regarding the perceptions of educators towards meeting students’ social and emotional needs in order to help promote the successful development and implementation of these programs in the future (Conley, Marchant, & Caldavella, 2014). According to Aarons (2004), a practitioner’s attitude towards trying new practices, their sense of self-efficacy, and view towards how the practice may fit into the context of their daily work may influence their willingness to adopt Evidence-Based Practices. Additionally, Durlak and Dupre (2008) argue that “those who recognize a need for an intervention or believe the implementation will result in positive outcomes are more likely to adopt and implement Evidence Based Interventions (EBIs) with greater fidelity” (p. 336). This suggests that the perceptions an educator has toward evidence-based interventions, such as SEL programs, could influence whether or not they are likely to adopt such programs, and the success they experience in their implementation.

The implementation of structured SEL programs into the fabric of the school day prompts further conversation about the perspective educators have towards such programs. All programs require ongoing assessment to promote their successful implementation (Brackett & Rivers, 2014). One SEL program that is currently being implemented in schools is the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program. Since the fall of 2015, schools throughout the nation have begun implementing this SEL program, some through whole school approaches and others within individual classrooms. According to its website, this program is a comprehensive Pre-K to Grade 12 curriculum that is aligned with Common Core State Standards and the American
School Counselor Association Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success (www.jesselewiscooselove.org, 2019). The perceptions that educators and students have of their experiences with this program will be explored in conjunction with educators’ perceptions towards meeting students’ social and emotional needs through delivering SEL programs in general.

**Rationale for Selecting the Topic**

Social and emotional adjustment is positively correlated with student academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011). Students who are struggling in areas of social emotional development (i.e., self-regulation), may also encounter difficulty with the executive functioning skills needed in order to effectively access their education, make academic progress, and achieve their potential (Daunic et al., 2013). These executive functioning skills include inhibition of impulses, cognitive or attentional flexibility, working memory, and self-monitoring. When students are unable to adequately utilize these skills, their levels of academic achievement may be compromised as a result (Daunic et al., 2013, p. 43). The hindering effects of compromised executive functioning may have a further debilitating impact on the student’s academic growth and their preparation for post-secondary schooling as well as employment opportunities (Hwang et al., 2014; Tomlinson, 2015). However, when students have the opportunity to participate in social and emotional learning initiatives in school, they receive the support they need to develop the coping and pro-social skills necessary to help them become well-adjusted overall (Child Mind, 2016). Students are better able to participate in the learning process and teachers also benefit from the positive impact that positive behavior can have on classroom management (Jones, 2014). Through providing students with learning opportunities that help them effectively manage their emotions and develop pro-social skills, schools can play an active role in helping
students make needed social and emotional progress throughout their development (Desrochers, 2015).

While schools can play an active role with supporting the SEL needs of students, the role of school personnel in meeting the social and emotional needs of students vary across educational settings (Brackett & Simmons, 2015). The perceptions that educators have of their role in meeting the social and emotional needs of students can influence the level of support provided to students (Conley et al., 2014). Therefore, the perceptions educators have of their role in meeting the social and emotional needs of students can influence the degree to which SEL supports are provided to students, and their effectiveness when implemented (Conley et al., 2014). As the field of SEL advances, it is important for school leaders to understand the role of educators in providing these supports, and further understand how educators view their roles in addressing the social and emotional needs of students (Brackett & Rivers, 2014).

Many schools are now implementing structured SEL programs into their daily routine (Brackett & Rivers, 2014). How schools are doing this, and perceptions educators have towards these programs remains understudied (Brackett & Rivers, 2014; Conley et al., 2014). The Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2016) is one SEL initiative which provides students with instructional activities that are aimed at facilitating the growth of positive coping skills in children and adolescents. Through exploring the perceptions of educators towards social and emotional learning initiatives such as the Choose Love Enrichment Program, as well as the perceptions of educators and students who experience this program, additional information will be gathered that could enhance the research about ways to aid the successful implementation of such programs in the future.
Statement of the Problem

Despite research which suggests that SEL programs have a positive impact on academic achievement, many schools have either not identified social and emotional learning initiatives as a priority or they have not implemented SEL initiatives in ways that are productive to achieving desired goals (Brackett & Rivers, 2014). Many educators often feel pressured by accountability requirements and other mandates (i.e., state testing), and may in turn struggle to dedicate time to other instructional areas such as SEL (Brackett & Rivers, 2014). The amount of energy teachers believe they can devote towards developing relationships with their students and managing student behavior, as well as cultivating an atmosphere of community within their classrooms and schools in general, can impact how well they are able to contribute to the development and implementation of SEL programs in their classrooms (Collie, Shapka, & Perry 2012).

Researchers support the notion that when school personnel engage in SEL initiatives and incorporate SEL into the daily routine, students benefit in ways that promote both academic achievement and mental health (Desrochers, 2015). Understanding the perceptions of educators towards meeting the social and emotional needs of students is an important step in figuring out ways to cultivate and implement SEL initiatives in schools (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Therefore, the goal of this research study is to explore the perceptions of educators towards meeting the social emotional needs of students when an SEL program is being implemented throughout a school, particularly with respect to implementing the Choose Love Enrichment Program (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2016).

Significance and Potential Benefits of the Research

Through researching how educators view their roles and responsibilities for implementing an SEL program, there will be a greater level of understanding as to how educators
perceive meeting the social and emotional needs of students in school. More information will be gathered to help identify strategies that could assist in the future development and implementation of SEL initiatives. The information gathered through this study will advance understanding in this area that could inform school leaders about when and how to successfully incorporate SEL activities into the school day. Additionally, the experience of educators and students involved with the Choose Love Enrichment program will be studied. This could help identify areas of strength that are particularly successful within this program, as well as ways in which the implementation of this program could be improved for the future.

**Brief Definition of Key Terms**

The following is a list of key terms and definitions that will be referred to throughout this qualitative research study.

1. The *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)* is a leading and nationally renowned organization that “strives to advance SEL science, evidence-based practice, and policy” (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2013, p. 3). According to its website, “CASEL supports educators and policy leaders and enhances the experiences and outcomes for all PreK-12 students” (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2019, para. 1).

2. The *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* is a federal law which was passed in December 2015 and replaces No Child Left Behind (NCLB). ESSA allows more flexibility to individual states and local school districts for defining student success than NCLB. States are now allowed to have at least one nonacademic indicator of school quality/success (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning,
ESSA also includes new provisions that support SEL through specific recommendations to provide instructional practices for developing relationship-building skills as well as implementing school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (www.ed.gov; www.casel.org).

3. The Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program (CLEP) is a social and emotional learning curriculum for students in pre-school through 12th grade. This curriculum includes lessons that focus on courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion in ways that support an individual’s social emotional learning (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2016). The program promotes the “Choose Love Formula” (as depicted in Figure 2) of courage + gratitude + forgiveness + compassion in action to help children cope with challenges and make good choices.

![Figure 2. Choose Love Formula. From https://www.jesselewiscooselove.org/. Copyright 2019. Reprinted with permission; Refer to Appendix B.](image)
4. **Social Emotional Learning (SEL)** is the process of acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations effectively. SEL provides schools with an evidence-based framework for preventing problems and promoting students’ well-being and success. (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2019).

**Research Questions**

In order to understand how educators perceive their role with meeting the social and emotional needs of students, as well as how educators and students experience participation in a school-based SEL program (the Choose Love Enrichment Program), the following research questions were developed to guide this study:

1. How do educators (teachers, counselors, administrators) view their roles when participating in a structured SEL program (the Choose Love Enrichment Program)?

2. How do educators (teachers, counselors, administrators) and students experience a structured SEL program (Choose Love Enrichment Program)?

**Methodology**

**Description of Setting, Participants, and Sampling Procedures**

This study was conducted using a qualitative multiple-case study design involving schools which self-reported that they had implemented the Choose Love Enrichment Program since the fall of 2015. Each case consisted of a school, including educator and student participants who were willing to be interviewed, that was selected via a purposeful sampling process. The researcher was introduced to Ms. Scarlett Lewis in August 2016 who shared the names of five schools which had consistently implemented the Choose Love Enrichment
Program since the 2015-2016 school year. Ms. Lewis provided contact information for individuals who were actively supporting the implementation of the Choose Love Enrichment Program and willing to serve as program liaisons on behalf of each school. The researcher then contacted each of the liaisons and presented the proposed research request. Following initial correspondence with these five schools, a sample of two schools (one public, one private) which had implemented the Choose Love Enrichment Program utilizing a whole-school approach since the 2015-2016 school year, was obtained.

Case A is a public school for students in grades K-4 located in the South-Central Region of the United States. Case B is a private school for students in grades Pre-K through 8 located in the Northeast Region of the United States. Convenience and chain sampling strategies were employed to recruit educator and student participants to this study (Merriam, 2009). The liaison for each school assisted the researcher in recruiting educators who selected to participate in the implementation of this program, as well as students who were observed to change the most as a result of their participation in the program. Case A consisted of 11 educator and 15 student participants. Case B consisted of three educator and seven student participants. Data were collected over the course of 10 months, between September of 2017 and June of 2018.

**Instrumentation**

The researcher used seven instruments to gather data that aimed to address the research questions, and developed semi-structured protocols as part of four of the instruments (educator demographic survey, educator interview, student interview, classroom observation). The protocols were adapted according to age level of participants in order to facilitate their engagement and elicit information from their perspectives.
**Educator Demographic Survey.** The researcher developed a nine-item demographic survey to educator participants (see Appendix C) in order to gather basic information about each, including name, gender, age, number of years in education, current role (i.e., teacher, counselor, administrator), subject area, years in current position and ethnicity. This survey also asked educator participants to provide their definition of social and emotional learning. The survey was brief and took less than 10 minutes for participants to complete.

**Educator Interview.** The Educator Interview protocol (see Appendix D) was created by the researcher to conduct semi-structured interviews with educators. This form consisted of 13 questions which assessed the respondents’ views on SEL programs, in general, and for the Choose Love Enrichment Program, in particular, with respect to meeting the social emotional needs of students. Each interview was completed in less than one hour, was audio-recorded, and later transcribed.

**Classroom Observation.** The researcher developed and utilized a semi-structured classroom observation protocol (see Appendix E) to observe Choose Love Enrichment Program lessons in progress while also serving as the instrument in completing this observation in the role of a “nonparticipant-observer” (Creswell, 2013, p. 167). While conducting the observations, the researcher took detailed field notes including descriptions of the physical setting (i.e., classroom and school) in which the lesson took place and general structure of the class (i.e., the type of class, number of male and female students, grade level, etc.). The dialogue, activities and sequence of events that took place during the observed lesson were noted while the researcher did not directly interact with those present in the class and did not engage in any part of the observed lesson. The length of each observation varied according to the length of the lesson that was delivered as part of the Choose Love Enrichment Program.
**Student Demographic Survey.** The researcher developed a five-item demographic survey in order to gather basic information about each student participant. This survey consisted of items relating to each student participant’s name, age, gender, ethnicity, and grade level (see Appendix F).

**Student Interview.** The Student Interview protocol (see Appendix G) was developed by the researcher to conduct semi-structured interviews with groups of students. This form consisted of 11 questions which yielded information pertaining to the overall research question of how students experienced participating in the Choose Love Enrichment Program. Each group interview was completed in less than one hour, audio-recorded, and professionally transcribed.

**Program Artifacts.** The researcher collected and reviewed a parent newsletter as well as an essay which served as program artifacts that teachers and students were willing to provide for the purpose of this study (see Appendices H and I). These artifacts provided a glimpse into how one educator communicated with parents regarding the Choose Love Enrichment Program, as well as how one student applied her learning regarding the Choose Love Enrichment Program to an instructional activity such as essay writing.

**Reflexive Journal.** The researcher maintained a reflexive journal to monitor and record any particular emotions, thoughts, feelings of bias or other experiences that arose throughout the data collection and analysis process. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative researchers engage in reflexivity “in which the writer is conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study” (p. 216). The use of a reflexive journal also assisted the researcher in ensuring the credibility of her findings.
Research Design and Data Analysis

This study was conducted using a qualitative multiple-case study design (Merriam, 2009). Each case consisted of a school which self-reported having implemented the Choose Love Enrichment Program since the fall of 2015, and included educators and students who were willing to participate in this study. Data were collected over the course of 10 months, between September 2017 and June 2018. Following data collection, the researcher analyzed the data gathered from each school in a separate within-case analysis, followed by a cross-case analysis, initially utilizing an open/inductive coding process (Saldaña, 2016). The researcher noted ideas that emerged alongside interview transcripts as well as data gathered from the other instruments used throughout this study. Following this initial phase of coding, the researcher then engaged in “Axial Coding” to identify categories and themes which emerged from the data (Saldaña, 2016; Merriam, 2009).

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented an overview of how the social and emotional needs of school-aged children impact multiple aspects of their lives such as mental health as well as academic achievement (Child Mind, 2017; Durlak et al., 2011). The importance of ensuring that the basic needs of children are met in order to help them achieve, as suggested in Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation including the Hierarchy of Needs, was also discussed (Maslow, 1943). Research supporting the role of SEL programs in schools, such as the Choose Love Enrichment Program, as one way of addressing the social and emotional needs of children was also examined.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to gather information regarding how educators (specifically teachers, counselors, administrators) view their role in adopting and
implementing a structured SEL program, as well as how educators and students experience a structured SEL program such as the Choose Love Enrichment Program. Through identifying patterns and emerging themes through this cross-case analysis, the views of educators and students who participate in the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program (www.jesselewiscooselove.org) may provide insight regarding this particular SEL program which is designed for grades PreK-12. The findings of this study could help inform the development and implementation of this and other SEL programs in the future. This information could assist educators in facilitating the successful implementation of SEL programs in order to effectively meet the social and emotional needs of students.
CHAPTER TWO:
RELATED LITERATURE

This qualitative multiple-case study was designed to investigate the views of educators (defined as teachers, counselors, and administrators) toward their roles with participating in a structured SEL program (the CLEP), as well as how educators and students experience a structured SEL program (specifically the CLEP). This chapter presents a review of literature, including both quantitative and qualitative studies, that demonstrates why it is important to explore these areas in order to advance the research on SEL. This chapter has been divided into the following sections: (a) An overview of the CLEP, (b) an explanation of the Literature Review Process, (c) a discussion of theories related to social emotional learning, (d) a discussion of studies suggesting the need for and promise of SEL programs, (e) a discussion of policy briefs supporting a nationwide emphasis on implementing SEL programs in school, (f) a discussion of SEL programs as prevention and intervention supports for all students, (g) an overview of research on the contextual factors influencing the implementation of SEL programs, (h) a review of research on the perceptions of educators and students towards SEL programs, and (i) Chapter Summary.

Program Description

The Choose Love Enrichment Program (CLEP) is a structured SEL curriculum available for students across grades preK-12 (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2016). According to the Choose Love Enrichment Program Educator Guide, the goal of the program is defined as follows:

The Choose Love Formula teaches the foundational concepts and skills of social and emotional learning (SEL), and is informed by current brain research and neuroscience.
The goal of the Choose Love Enrichment Program is to provide children with the knowledge, attitude, and skills they need to choose love in any situation. These abilities include:

- Understanding and managing emotions (self-awareness and self-management),
- Setting and achieving positive goals,
- Feeling and showing empathy and compassion for others (social awareness),
- Establishing and maintaining positive relationships, and
- Making responsible decisions. (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019, p. 9)

The CLEP is further described by its *Program at a Glance* as a comprehensive and evidence-based program which was “created by educators for educators and is aligned with Common Core State Standards and American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success, and CASEL’s five core competencies” (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2018, para. 3 & 4). The CLEP’s curriculum includes lessons that can be implemented on a flexible schedule to facilitate integration into school routines despite the challenges and time constraints that may arise within school schedules: program lessons at the elementary level are 20 to 30 minutes, middle-school lessons are 10 to 15 minutes, and high school lessons are 5 to 10 minutes in length (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019). The program can be implemented by teachers or other educators (i.e., school counselors) in a classroom and through a school-wide approach (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019). The curriculum consists of four major units: Courage, Gratitude, Forgiveness, and Compassion in Action which together equal the “Choose Love Formula” promoted by the program (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019). According to the *Choose Love Enrichment Program*
Educator Guide, the definitions of each of these values as emphasized within the program are described below:

**Courage:** Courage is the willingness and ability to work through obstacles despite feeling embarrassment, fear, reluctance, or uncertainty.

**Gratitude:** Students learn that gratitude is mindful thankfulness and the ability to be thankful even when things in life are challenging.

**Forgiveness:** Forgiveness means choose to let go of anger and resentment toward yourself or someone else, to surrender thoughts of revenge, and to move forward with your personal power intact.

**Compassion in Action:** Compassion is the understanding of a problem or the suffering of another and acting to solve the problem or alleviate the suffering. Students apply their empathy and communication skills to support one another through compassionate action. (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019, p. 13)

Educators can access and download the curriculum for free via the CLEP’s website (www.jesselewiscooselove.org, 2019). The program is currently being implemented in schools throughout the United States (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019). At the time of this writing (2019), the program has been in existence for 3 years as it officially launched in 2016 (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2016). The CLEP curriculum is aligned with the five SEL competencies outlined by CASEL, while it is not, at this time, identified as a CASEL SELeect Program (www.casel.org, 2019; www.jesselewiscooselove.org, 2019). In order for an SEL program to meet inclusion criteria as a CASEL SELeect program, the program must meet the following criteria:
Specifically, SELect programs are well-designed classroom-based programs that target all five areas of social and emotional competence, provide opportunities for practice, and offer multi-year programming; offer training and other implementation support, including initial training and ongoing support to ensure high-quality implementation; and are evidence-based with at least one carefully conducted evaluation that included a comparison group and pre and post measures that documented a positive impact on academic performance or other important student behaviors, including increased prosocial behavior, reduced conduct problems, and/or reduced emotional distress. (https://casel.org/guide/inclusion-criteria/, 2019, para. 1)

As the CLEP is still relatively new since its inception in 2016, aspects of the aforementioned CASEL SESelect criteria (i.e., an evaluation including a comparison group and pre and post measures…) have not yet been satisfied as of the date of this dissertation.

**Literature Review Process**

This literature review was conducted using multiple search methods. The literature comprising this review was primarily found through searching online databases, while also discovering resources (i.e., research-based reports, articles regarding quantitative and qualitative studies, policy briefs related to SEL) during professional experiences, and reading *The Handbook of Social-Emotional Learning* (Durlak, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Gullotta, 2015) that the researcher learned about from reading peer-reviewed articles in which this book was cited. The researcher also utilized professional journals to which she subscribes, such as *Phi Delta Kappan*, as well as reviewed the www.jesselewischooselove.org and CASEL websites to seek relevant literature. Online databases were accessed via the university’s library website which included
the Academic Search Premier, eBooks collection, Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), Education Research Complete, EBSCO Combined Database, JSTOR, PsyARTICLES, PsycINFO, Teacher Resource Center and Professional Development Collection. Studies that were not available for full download via these search engines were sought out on the website ResearchGate.

**Initial Search Process**

These online searches were conducted by entering keywords relevant to the research questions, such as “social emotional learning,” and utilizing advanced search options (such as adding keywords) in order to narrow the results. For example, when utilizing the EBSCOhost Database (which included Academic Search Premier, Education Research Complete, ERIC, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Teacher Reference Center, eBook Academic Collection, and Professional Development Collection), search results were limited to only include full text, peer reviewed articles written in English and published within the past 10 years (since January 1, 2009). The initial search of publications that contained “social emotional learning” anywhere within the text yielded 7,924 results. Considering this large number, a search was conducted within these results for publications that had “social emotional learning” in the title. This process yielded 531 results. When the word “program” was added to this search, there were 428 results, followed by adding the term “school,” which yielded 411 results. Within these 411 results, articles that included “social emotional learning” within the subject major heading were identified. This process yielded 17 articles which decreased to 13 after exact duplicate results were removed. After reviewing the title and abstract for each of these 13 articles, the search was then narrowed to results that were primary sources and either quantitative or qualitative studies. Articles that specifically focused on studies conducted outside of the US, and publications that
were not studies (i.e., book reviews, or reflection or opinion pieces), were excluded which further reduced the number of results to seven.

Each of these seven articles were then reviewed to determine whether or not the focus of each study was relevant to the research questions. In order to do this, studies were selected that focused on the overall topic of SEL programs in schools, or evaluated the impact of SEL programs on students, or included participation of students or teachers in the study. This excluded three studies that provided some discussion of SEL programs in schools but primarily focused on a separate and more specific topic (i.e., a social emotional assessment instrument, dimensions of school climate, diversity reporting). The remaining four studies were selected as part of this literature review. An overview of this aspect of the overall literature search process is depicted in Figure 3.

![Diagram of Initial Literature Search Process]

*Figure 3. Initial Literature Search Process*
One of these four selected studies was a meta-analysis conducted by Durlak et al. (2011), in which the authors analyzed the effectiveness of school-based SEL programs. This publication is considered to be a seminal work in the field of SEL (Jones & Kahn, 2017). After reading this article, its reference list was reviewed to locate studies about SEL program implementation that were part of the meta-analysis. This yielded 203 results. The titles of these 203 results were then reviewed to locate studies that related to students, teachers, or SEL programs applicable for students in grades K-8 through searching for keywords such as “elementary” or “middle school.” Additionally, upon further review of the publication dates for these references, studies that were not published by the date of the Durlak and colleagues (2011) meta-analysis publication in peer-reviewed journals were excluded, which reduced the results to 46 articles. In order to obtain the most up to date research, studies conducted before the year 2000 were excluded, which further reduced the total number of results to 18. The abstracts of each of these 18 studies were reviewed and two studies that were conducted outside of the United States were subsequently excluded, which then reduced the results to 16. Only studies conducted within the US were included in an effort to ensure that the schools involved shared basic similarities with those comprising this study, such as grade level structure or standards. This was also done to avoid complicating variables that could exist with fundamental differences in structure or standards that may exist in schools located outside of the US. Out of the remaining 16 results, only studies that focused on the effects of whole-school SEL approaches without specific focus on particular subgroups (i.e., rural females) were considered, which reduced the number of studies available to 14.

Abstracts were read for each of these 14 studies and articles selected that mentioned the participation of teachers or students within the abstract, which reduced the results to 12. The
titles and abstracts of these 12 articles were reviewed in order to determine their relevance to this study and its research questions. The full texts of these articles were then sought out via online search engines such as EBSCOhost (including Academic Search Premier, eBooks collection, Education Resource Information Center, Education Research Complete, EBSCO Combined Database, JSTOR, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Teacher Resource Center and Professional Development Collection) as well as ResearchGate, Academia, and Google Scholar. Out of the 12 sought after articles, nine were retrieved from these online sources, while attempts to obtain the other three were not successful. The references within each of the remaining nine articles were closely reviewed to locate studies that mentioned either Bronfenbrenner or Maslow in their titles. There were no articles found with reference to Maslow, while there were two articles found that referenced Bronfenbrenner. Although these two articles were used as part of this literature review, both of these articles referencing Bronfenbrenner discussed quantitative studies and did not capture qualitative information including the perspectives of student and teacher voices. The qualitative studies retrieved through the initial search process were reviewed in addition to these two articles. The gap in literature pertaining to qualitative analyses of the perspectives of student and teacher voices towards SEL programs has motivated the researcher to add to the research base in this area.

**Literature Search by Theory**

In order to gather more literature related to Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theories, a separate search was conducted based on each theory. Studies related to Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model in connection to SEL were located by searching EBSCO (including Academic Search Premier, Education Research Complete, ERIC, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Teacher Reference Center, eBook Collection, and Professional
Development Collection) and typing in the search term “Bronfenbrenner” with the parameters of publications in English that were also peer reviewed and based within the US. This search yielded 13,333 results. In order to narrow the search, the same parameters were used with the added term “social emotional learning” which generated 691 results. The keyword “school” was then added which yielded 687 results, followed by also adding the search term “program” which generated 642 results. The abstracts of these 642 studies were searched for the term “social emotional learning” which yielded 54 results that decreased to 32 once exact duplicates were removed.

In order to narrow the results further and stay within the scope of this study which involved students and teachers across grades K-8 within the United States, the researcher then read the abstracts for these 32 results and proceeded to exclude studies that were conducted in countries other than the United States (for aforementioned reasons), studies about students outside of grades K-8 (i.e., preschool or college students), and studies about specific topics that were not directly related to the scope of this study and its focus on SEL (i.e., parenting practices and child temperament). This search finally resulted in six articles related to Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model which were all used throughout this review of literature.

Articles related to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory were found by searching through EBSCOhost (Including Academic Search Premier, Education Research Complete, ERIC, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Teacher Reference Center, eBook Collection, Professional Development Collection, and eBook Academic Collection) for articles with the key term “Maslow” anywhere within the text, with the parameters of only full text and peer reviewed sources which were published in English. This yielded 12,737 results. The researcher then used “and” to add the word “school” to the search which yielded 9,208 results. The term “social
emotional learning” was also then added which yielded 211 results and decreased to 116 after exact duplicates were automatically removed by the search engine. Out of the 116 results, studies that were conducted outside of the US and distinctly focused on populations in other countries were excluded, which reduced the number of results to 100.

Upon further review of the abstracts for these studies, the search terms were revised to include “Maslow” and “social emotional learning” anywhere in text, but with “school” in the title. This search generated 27 results, of which each title and abstract was reviewed. The following exclusion criteria were used to narrow the search and obtain results most relevant to this study: (a) results that were not studies (i.e., book reviews), (b) studies about topics outside the scope of school-based social emotional learning related to students in grades K-8, and (c) studies conducted outside of the United States. This resulted in six studies that pertained to social and emotional learning in schools and referenced Maslow within the text which were used throughout this literature review.

In an effort to obtain more specific literature about how Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory relates to the experience of students in schools and SEL, a new search using the term “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs” was conducted which yielded 2,900 results. The search was limited to peer-reviewed articles written in English. The keyword “school” was then added which yielded 2,160 results. Lastly, the search term “belongingness or connectedness or belonging” was added which yielded 843 results. This search was then limited to publications dated within the past 10 years (since 2009) which then narrowed the field to 529. In order to narrow the results, the search term “social emotional learning” was added which reduced the number of studies to 22. Upon reading the abstracts for each of these 22 articles, four studies that clearly pertained to students outside of grades K-12 (i.e., studies about preschool, college,
and graduate students) were removed, which reduced the number of results to 18. An additional three results which were not quantitative or qualitative studies were excluded, which reduced the number of results to 15. Out of these 15 results, four articles were subsequently excluded because they either did not describe quantitative or quantitative studies, focused on populations other than students in grades K-12 (i.e., studies about preschool or college students were excluded), were conducted outside of the US, or focused on specific subgroups (i.e., children of prisoners). This reduced the number of remaining articles to 11.

In order to keep this search consistent with aforementioned search processes, studies that primarily focused on populations outside of the United States were excluded. This narrowed the search to one article which included studies conducted in multiple countries, including the US. After further review of the article, the researcher deemed it appropriate for use in light of the fact that it included studies conducted within the US and also related to other aspects of this study (i.e., both Maslow and Bronfenbrenner’s theories).

Original texts written by Bronfenbrenner and Maslow, as well as The Handbook of SEL (Durlak et al., 2015), were also consulted for the purpose of seeking relevant literature. This overall search and review yielded 21 articles about studies, in addition to other literary resources, that are discussed or referenced throughout this chapter. A table summarizing the information from relevant studies is provided within each section of this chapter.

**Theories Related to Social Emotional Learning**

In light of the scope and complexity of SEL programming for school-aged children, it is necessary to consider multiple theories that support the development and implementation of SEL programs, as well as inform current SEL practices and future SEL strategy development (Brackett, Elbertson, & Rivers, 2015). These include systems, learning, child development,
information processing, and behavior change theories (Brackett et al., 2015). As part of this study’s focus on the views of educators toward their roles with participating in a structured SEL program, as well as how educators and students experience a structured SEL program, this section will focus on Systems and Motivation theories in particular, specifically Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Human Development (previously Ecological Systems Theory) and Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Maslow, 1943).

**Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model**

The social emotional experiences and developmental outcomes of children are influenced by elements of the contexts, or immediate environments, in which children spend their time (Brackett et al., 2015; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model defines these immediate environments, which can include a child’s home or school, as “microsystems” (Ashiabi & O’Neal, 2015, p. 2). According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), the processes occurring within these two microsystems (home and school) “are not independent of each other” (p. 723), as events occurring in one’s “home can affect the child’s progress in school, and vice versa” (p. 723). The interrelationship between microsystems, such as home and school, comprises a “mesosystem” according to Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 723). Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory, which evolved into the Bioecological Model, identifies five systems influencing human development: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems which may include major life events, transitions, and societal events that collectively interact with the first four systems and (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). These systems and the way in which they relate to one another are often illustrated via concentric circles as shown in
A brief visual summary of the systems is provided in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model. Graphic developed by researcher.

Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model theorizes about the ecological contexts and interpersonal processes that influence how a child’s behavior is shaped and learning takes place, positing that an individual’s psychological development is influenced by the degree of balance within and between these systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Balance leads to harmony which is conducive to one’s developmental process. However, when there is disruption within or between these systems, one’s developmental process may be negatively affected. Bronfenbrenner explored the possible interconnections between Microsystems and settings “in which the child
actually participates, such as home, day-care center, pre-school, and school” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 847). As part of his bioecological theory, Bronfenbrenner argued that a disconnect, or lack of integration, between a child’s home and school Microsystems (which together create a mesosystem) can have negative effects on a child’s developmental experience. Bronfenbrenner posited that the relationship between a child’s family and their school is a powerful factor that affects a child’s ability to learn in a classroom (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The mesosystem consisting of a child’s school and home environments influence a child’s psychological, including social and emotional, development (Brackett et al., 2015; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model also theorizes about the influence of contexts within each microsystem on one’s psychological development. The ways in which this applies to an individual’s learning experience in school has been investigated, with researchers agreeing that the “environment or setting in which students and adults learn and teach is a critical variable impacting development” (Brackett et al., 2015, p. 23). A child’s experience in their home or school microsystem will influence his or her development, including SEL, over time (Brackett et al., 2015; Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The conditions present within the microsystem either facilitate or inhibit an individual’s developmental growth. Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed that there are two types of conditions, or contexts, which must exist within settings in order for the context to support an individual’s developmental process. These two propositions are:

**Proposition 1.** A primary developmental context is one in which the child can observe and engage in ongoing patterns of progressively more complex activity jointly with or under the direct guidance of persons who possess knowledge and skill not yet acquired by the child and with whom the child has developed a positive emotional relationship.
Proposition 2. A secondary developmental context is one in which the child is given the opportunity, resources, and encouragement to engage in the activities he or she has learned in primary developmental contexts, but now without the active involvement or direct guidance of another person possessing knowledge and skill beyond the levels acquired by the child. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 845)

According to Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model, it is essential for children to be afforded the opportunity to learn within these contexts that are conducive to their development. Without this opportunity, a child’s developmental progress may be hindered as a result. In addition to these necessary contexts, Bronfenbrenner also emphasized the importance of children having the opportunity to learn directly from others who can teach them the skills they strive to develop (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The proximal and contextual elements of the systems within which a child exists play an integral role within the child’s developmental process. The proximal elements are described as the reciprocal interactions that a person has with other people, objects, and symbols within their immediate external environment that become “progressively more complex” over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 797). The contextual elements of the system are described as the constructs of each system outlined within Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model, i.e., socioeconomic status as part of a child’s macrosystem (Ashiabi & O’Neal, 2015).

The interrelationships and interactions between proximal and contextual elements of Bronfenbrenner’s theory were studied by Ashiabi and O’Neal (2015) who aimed to investigate Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical propositions as described in his Bioecological Model of Human Development. The driving purpose of this study was to explore the influence of proximal and contextual processes on child developmental outcomes. Ashiabi and O’Neal’s goal was to
investigate this and add to the body of research surrounding Bronfenbrenner’s theory, as well as clarify any misunderstandings of Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model due to a lack of research pertaining to its evolution from the Ecological Systems Theory (Ashiabi & O’Neal, 2015, p. 1). Using a subset of data previously gathered from the National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH), 2007, Ashiabi and O’Neal (2015) hypothesized the following:

(a) contextual influences (SES, a macrosystem construct, and neighborhood and parenting factors, microsystem constructs) will be mediated by proximal processes (parent-child interactions),

(b) proximal processes will have a more powerful impact on children’s developmental outcomes than contextual factors, and

(c) the effect of contextual and proximal processes will vary as a function of child characteristic (child gender). Contextual influences were identified as SES and child outcomes, SES and family and parenting effects, neighborhoods and child outcomes, neighborhoods and parenting. (Ashiabi & O’Neal, 2015, p. 3)

The NSCH, 2007, was a national cross-sectional telephone survey sponsored by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the Health Resources and Services Administration to analyze factors contributing to the physical and emotional health of children between the ages of 0 to 17 years (Ashiabi & O’Neil, 2015; Blumberg et al., 2007). The NSCH collected data between April 2007 and July 2008 via 91,642 child-level interviews completed with an adult who lived in the same household and identified as being the most knowledgeable regarding the child’s health and health care needs (Ashiabi & O’Neil, 2015). Ashiabi and O’Neil (2015) utilized data on 28,064 children between the ages of 6 and 11 for their study. In following the suggestion of Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000), Ashiabi and O’Neil (2015) utilized a
multigroup structural equation model with a research design known as the “process-person-context-time (PPCT) model” (p. 2) to identify “associations among contextual factors, proximal processes, and child developmental outcomes” (p. 7). Ashiabi and O’Neil (2015) analyzed the data previously collected as part of the NSCH, 2007, to determine whether or not these data supported their hypotheses.

The results indicated support for hypotheses A and C, indicating that contextual influences (i.e., SES, neighborhood, and parenting factors) were mediated by proximal processes (i.e., parent-child interactions), and that the effects of contextual and proximal processes vary depending on child characteristics (Ashiabi & O’Neal, 2015). Partial support was found for hypothesis B suggesting that proximal processes had a more powerful impact on child development than contextual factors (Ashiabi & O’Neal, 2015). For example, positive correlations were found between indicators of SES and indicators of social capital as well as parent-child interactions, while negative correlations were found between positive social behavior in children and family stress (Ashiabi & O’Neil, 2015). Parent-child interactions were positively linked with positive social behaviors and negatively linked with negative social behaviors (Ashiabi & O’Neil, 2015). Based on their study’s findings, Ashiabi and O’Neal (2015) recommended future research in the area of exploring different domains utilizing Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model.

Ashiabi and O’Neal (2015) acknowledged multiple limitations within their study, particularly noting that secondary analysis of cross-sectional data did not allow for them to consider all elements of Bronfenbrenner’s theory, including how neighborhood and contextual factors associated with this may influence human development (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). The effect of time on the child developmental outcomes for the children in the sample could also
not be addressed, thereby limiting the PPCT approach to this study (Ashiabi & O’Neal, 2015). Ashiabi and O’Neal (2015) also echo what Bronfenbrenner once said which is that all aspects of the theory could not be studied within one single investigation (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). While this study did not focus on child experiences specifically in the school setting, its focus and findings support Bronfenbrenner’s theory regarding the influence of proximal and contextual interactions on child development (Ashiabi & O’Neil, 2015).

The influence of contextual factors within the overall ecology of a system was studied by Bryan, Klein, and Elias (2007) through a case study analysis of SEL programs implemented in an urban school district located within New Jersey. Bryan et al. (2007) described how their study, along with the field of community psychology, have been influenced by Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory with respect to how the systems relate and influence each other. Similar to the interaction and interrelationship between systems comprising Bronfenbrenner’s theory, the ways in which action research focuses on how an intervention at one level relates to other ecological levels were described by Bryan et al. (2007). Bryan et al. (2007) highlighted the need to understand the ecological context of a system in order to overcome challenges to action research which they used to conduct their case study analysis.

Through an approach guided by Price and Smith’s (1985) four-cycle model of action research, Bryan et al. (2007) studied the issues and challenges of coordinating SEL programs in the school district’s elementary and secondary schools throughout a seven-year time period. Bryan et al. (2007) define this qualitative research approach, which involves study participants in the research process, as a “process of creating change based on cycles of action and reflection” (p. 383). Noting that schools face pressure to meet mandates for academic performance which may compel schools to eliminate SEL programs that are not effectively implemented, Bryan et
al. (2007) sought to study the factors hindering the adoption and successful implementation of SEL programs in this school district.

The participating school district (Plainfield, NJ) was described as an urban, high-risk district with an entire student population of minority background, which was identified by the State of New Jersey as a “special needs district” (Bryan et al., 2007, p. 388). Through describing their 7-year experience in an action research context, Bryan et al. (2007) shared the evolution of SEL program implementation throughout this district, including all of its 10 elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school via a case study analysis. The researchers began the process in 1998 when they contacted the district administration to discuss how to address academic and behavioral challenges amongst the student population which led to a decision to implement a coordinated SEL initiative throughout the district (Bryan et al., 2007). Over the course of the next seven years, the district implemented the “Talking with TJ” SEL program at the elementary level and the “Laws of Life” SEL program across all grades (Bryan et al., 2007, p. 388). As a result of the school district’s previously unsuccessful efforts to implement SEL programs, the research team aimed to develop and implement SEL curriculum that addressed the needs of students of varied ages, skills, and cultural backgrounds. Bryan et al. (2007) also sought to ensure that the initiative’s implementation was feasible and engaging to students. The challenges of program implementation at the high school level were discussed in connection with organizational theory along with the contributing ecological factors (Bryan et al., 2007).

The action research process was divided into multiple phases. The first was the problem analysis phase which required the researchers to fully understand ecological aspects of the school district’s setting including its organizational structure and goals (Bryan et al., 2007). Bryan et al. (2007) discussed the need to ensure that the district’s SEL objectives were aligned across
elementary and secondary grade levels (Bryan et al., 2007). The second phase of the action research process involved “innovation design” in which the researchers developed plans to address the school district’s unique needs and goals (Bryan et al., 2007, p. 390). Bryan et al. (2007) discussed the need for this phase to be driven by a collaborative process in order to adequately design a program that was “sensitive to the ecology of the implementation setting” (Bryan et al., 2007, p. 390). The third phase of the process involved training participating educators in the SEL programs and then monitoring and evaluating the program’s implementation and effectiveness (Bryan et al., 2007). The final stage of the action research process was the “Innovation Diffusion” phase which aims to facilitate widespread adoption of the initiative (Bryan et al., 2007, p. 393). The importance of promoting a culture throughout the district that was supportive of SEL was discussed (Bryan et al., 2007).

The ways in which various aspects of an organization’s context influence the implementation and success of social emotional programs is discussed throughout this article. Bryan et al. (2007) describe how organizational culture serves as a contextual influence which affects the outcome of attempts to implement SEL programs throughout a school district. Bryan et al. (2007) concluded that change efforts need to take place and capacity needs to be built at multiple levels of the organization in order to ensure the sustainability over time. Bryan et al. (2007) also concluded that systemic efforts to facilitate sustainable change take time (multiple years) as it is important for each educator to go through his or her own “mini-action research cycle” to engage in the initiative, then reflect and figure out how to successfully integrate this within their practice (p. 396). Lastly, Bryan et al. (2007), claim that critical mass of expertise and commitment must be built within a school system in order to facilitate change in the ways necessary in order to adequately meet the needs of students, particularly in schools
which may experience challenges such as a lack of resources or frequent staff turnover. Limitations of this study include that it was a single case study (one school district) and therefore the findings cannot be generalized to the general population; it would also be difficult (if not impossible) to replicate this study given the time period and individuals involved who participated in the process over multiple years (Merriam, 2009). While this study focused on more than the connections between Bronfenbrenner’s theories and this case study analysis, this study demonstrated the need for these researchers to thoroughly understand the ecological context in order to initiate and effectively conduct the action research process.

Another study which examined connections between Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory and school systems was conducted by Leonard (2011) which examined the interrelationship between a school microsystem and school-community mesosystem through a historical case study of an urban high school located in Boston. Leonard (2011) argued that there is a gap in the research with understanding the reasons contributing to the success and failure of school-community partnerships. The purpose of this study was to better understand how Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory can help identify school-community partnering that promotes student development (Leonard, 2011). Throughout this study, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory was used as part of an analysis of the school’s evolution throughout time (Leonard, 2011). The researchers engaged in a mixed-methods case study between 2002-2005 which consisted of gathering and analyzing data about the school from the previous 60 years, with a focus on student development (Leonard, 2011). These data included school and district records such as measures of student attendance, achievement, promotion and graduation rates as well as yearbooks, student publications, and interviews. Qualitative data regarding school-community partnerships and school culture were also gathered through a review of
records such as yearbooks as well as interviews with former students, staff, and community partners as well (Leonard, 2011).

The results of this mixed-methods case study highlighted the importance of “cultural cohesion” in which collaborative relationships support students in the systems that surround them (Leonard, 2011, p. 2). The influence of an exosystem supporting progress and facilitating positive change for school systems and their students is emphasized (Leonard, 2011). According to Leonard (2011), “relationships at the level of the exosystem can also improve outcomes for students and, sometimes, turn around an entire school or steer a district in a new direction” (p. 31). This study was based on Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory and provided support for this model from a historical case study analysis (Leonard, 2011). A limitation of this study include that it is a case study focused on one school and therefore the results cannot be generalized to a larger population (Merriam, 2009).

The ways in which the concentric circles of Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model portray the experience of individuals within their surrounding systems is also echoed by Allen, Kern, Vella-Broderick, Hattie, and Waters’ (2018) meta-analysis of research related to belonging in school-aged children (Allen et al., 2018). Allen et al., (2018) argue the importance of belonging and the ways in which schools offer opportunities for school-aged students to experience this. Allen et al., (2018) identify a gap in the literature related to research on school belonging, stating that research in this area has been inconsistent due to “fragmented” efforts and “inconsistency in the use of terminology” (p. 1). Goodenow and Grady (1993) note that school belonging is most consistently defined as “the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment” (as cited in Allen et al., 2018, p. 2). Allen et al., (2018) review literature and research suggesting the benefits of
school belonging throughout child and adolescent development. Allen et al., (2018) review the micro, meso, exo, macro, and chrono level factors related to school belonging which have been researched by others.

In reviewing studies that have been conducted on school belongingness, this meta-analysis aimed to examine to what extent do each of the 10 identified themes which exist in the bioecological model “(academic motivation, positive and negative personal characteristics, gender, race/ethnicity), microsystem (parent, peer and teacher support) and mesosystem (extracurricular opportunities, school environment)” relate to school belonging (Allen et al., 2018, p. 6). The purpose of the meta-analysis also sought to address whether publication year, country and geographic location moderate these associations (Allen et al., 2018). Allen et al., (2018) conducted a literature search between September 2012 and March 2013 by seeking studies which were conducted between 1993 and 2013, were written in English and based in an English-speaking country. This search conducted by Allen et al., (2018) yielded 588 peer-reviewed studies which were quantitative in nature, focused on participants between the ages of 12 and 18 years with data collected in secondary school settings, and included a consistent definition of school belonging as what was defined by Goodenow and Grady (1993) (as cited in Allen et al., 2018). The total number of participants in all of these studies was 67,378.

Allen et al., (2018) conclude with the assertion that school belonging is an important factor in students’ academic and social emotional developmental progress. Limitations of this study include that it does not imply causality. Also, not all students reported age and thus age could not serve as a moderator. Allen et al. (2018) recommended future research in examining pattern of school belongingness across adolescence, noting that the need for an individual to experience feelings of belonging within their systems is critical to their development and
progress in school. Allen et al. (2018) noted that positive personal characteristics also are influential and should be supported in order to support the academic as well as the social and emotional development of students. The research findings affirm that relationships within one’s microsystem and relationships between surrounding systems can be highly influential on an individual’s child and adolescent development (Allen et al., 2018, p. 29).

**Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation**

The interrelationship between a child’s school and home systems can either promote or inhibit a child’s social emotional development, resulting in either met or unmet needs that can influence the child’s motivations and behavior. If the school - home mesosystem is not in harmony, then this is not conducive to a child’s development and may inhibit the child’s progress as well as desire to pursue higher level goals or endeavors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Similar to Bronfenbrenner, Abraham Maslow (1943) also theorized that behavior is influenced by multiple factors as well, particularly those which are biological, cultural, and situational. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory posits that an individual’s ability to attend to various activities in one’s life depends, at least in part, on the satisfaction of basic prerequisite needs. This theory is often illustrated in a triangle with tiers representing each need as depicted in Figure 5.

Maslow argued that a person may not have every prerequisite need entirely met in order to desire or pursue higher level goals, but the primary needs must be basically met enough in order for an individual to progress towards higher objectives (Maslow, 1943). For example, an individual who is physically starving would likely be entirely focused on the need to eat rather than concerned with seeking stability and organization in their home environment (Maslow, 1943). However, someone who experiences only moderate hunger and has access to food, would comparatively be less focused on finding food but more motivated to seek a stable and predictable home environment (Maslow, 1943). Maslow’s theory refers to physical needs (also defined as physiological needs), as the most basic necessities one must have in order to stay alive, such as food or shelter. Safety needs include feelings of security and not experiencing
threats that can lead to feelings of anxiety (Prince & Howard, 2002, p. 28). It is also important to note that the triangle is not one directional, as people experience fluidity of moving between the phases depending on their life experiences and how each drive is satisfied or dissatisfied (Maslow, 1943).

The social needs include being loved by others, such as one’s primary caregivers, and a sense of belonging within one’s social environment (i.e., school). The ego is also referred to as esteem needs, includes self-respect, self-esteem, and the esteem of others (Maslow, 1943). Maslow theorized that people who have a positive view of their self-competence are more likely to persevere through challenging tasks (Prince & Howard, 2002). Finally, Maslow’s theory identifies self-actualization as the highest tier, representing an individual’s need to reach one’s unique potential. According to Maslow (1943), “A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualization” (p. 382). For example, upon having the subordinate needs basically met, a person with creative prowess may feel compelled to create and might also feel unsatisfied, as well as restless, if he or she does not have the opportunity to fulfill this desire (Farmer, 1984).

The manner in which Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation applies to student learning has been studied by multiple researchers. In his review of literature, Farmer (1984) emphasized that schools should not solely focus on the academic success of students, and that using Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation would help educators to view students from a whole child perspective. Farmer also discussed the role of educators who most effectively support students on their path towards achieving their potential. Farmer discussed the results of studies which showed a positive connection between teachers who were self-actualized and their
students, along with a distinct difference in the effectiveness between self-actualized teachers and teachers who were not self-actualized. These studies indicated that students perceived self-actualized teachers as more concerned with students than teachers who were not perceived as self-actualized (Farmer, 1984).

Farmer (1984) further elaborated that without considering the needs of the whole child, educators are likely to maintain a myopic view of a student, giving the example of how teachers of specific subjects might only see the student through a lens specific to their role. For example, a reading specialist may be more focused on a student’s reading difficulties rather than other aspects of the child’s persona. The importance of educators considering a child’s needs, beyond specific aspects of his or her academic school experience, has been emphasized by other researchers as well (Desrochers, 2015).

In their article, *Children and their Basic Needs*, Prince and Howard (2002) reviewed literature including multiple studies to support their argument that Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs has numerous applications to the experience of children, and should be considered when developing strategies to address the needs of youth, particularly youth living in poverty. Prince and Howard (2002) assert that challenging circumstances such as poverty (which can cause feelings of anxiety or unpredictability) can impede a child’s progress towards reaching his or her potential, emphasizing the need for children to feel a sense of physical and emotional safety (Prince & Howard, 2002). In describing how stressors such as poverty interfere with a child’s ability to attend to the learning process, Prince and Howard (2002) elaborate upon the ways in which children might perceive their environment and be preoccupied with concerns about potential threats or danger, which impede their ability to engage in academic tasks. These stressors can further interfere with a child’s ability to socialize effectively with peers, and
develop relationships with others that would foster the desired sense of belonging (Prince & Howard, 2002). Based on Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation and research indicating that students living in poverty have greater struggles in school, Prince and Howard (2002) argue that schools must do more to address the basic needs of economically disadvantaged youth.

Prince and Howard (2002) further expand upon Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation to discuss how a child’s sense of love and belonging relates to a child’s social and emotional experience in school. Children who feel unloved in their home environments may seek love and belonging from their school setting, only to experience further disappointment by not having these needs met as schools may rarely address this (Prince & Howard, 2002). Prince and Howard (2002) argue that Maslow’s Theory can help generate ideas as part of a solution in order to develop and allocate more resources that may help meet the basic needs of children in school. This may include, but is not limited to, looking at the structure and organization of the school in order to create conditions that support students and foster feelings of connectedness (Prince & Howard, 2002). The importance of creating conditions that foster feelings of belonging within one’s school is also discussed by Hartnett (2007) in a study on the influence of peer groups on absenteeism in high school students (Prince & Howard, 2002; Hartnett, 2007).

According to Hartnett’s (2007) research article, Does Peer Group Identity Influence Absenteeism in High School Students?, “the organizational structure and culture of a school setting contributes to how students experience the system” (p. 35). In this article, Hartnett reviews findings of studies about absenteeism and compares attendance policies at two different schools to argue for the need to increase educator awareness of how factors such as family identity, income, choice of peer group influence a student’s developmental trajectory (Hartnett, 2007). Hartnett (2007) implores educators to apply practical strategies on an individual and
school-wide basis to reach more students in an effort to foster relationships, build connections, and increase feelings of belonging which could inspire better student attendance (Hartnett, 2007).

Hartnett argues that schools can take an important step in helping students develop positive feelings of connection with their school system by prioritizing the need to address students on the affective level (Hartnett, 2007). The ways in which schools can implement practical strategies for accomplishing this, and subsequently help students on their path to self-actualization, is also discussed by Hartnett (2007). Based on his review, Hartnett (2007) recommends that schools strive to include all students in assemblies, survey students about their feelings of emotional connectedness in school, partner with parents and strive to help students become hopeful for their future. Hartnett emphasizes the positive role that these factors play in the development of resilience in children and adolescents,

When students feel cared for, included, and can connect to the purpose of schools, they can challenge the values of the peer group, such as whether or not to attend school, and they may attach to people in the school setting such as teachers, administrators, and staff, who will help them carry the vision for their lives. (Hartnett, 2007, p. 43)

Systemic approaches and interventions to support feelings of connectedness throughout the school community are also described in Mallett’s 2015 literature review regarding underlying factors contributing to student truancy (Mallett, 2015). In his article Truancy: It’s Not About Skipping School, Mallett (2015) reviews literature suggesting that students who are truant tend to be more at-risk for problematic outcomes in the future, including but not limited to legal troubles. Literature regarding protective factors for children and adolescents, as well as evidenced-based strategies for truancy prevention, are also discussed. Emphasizing the need for educators to consider the developmental stages that students are navigating and how this relates
to their decision-making skills, Mallett (2015) discusses how adding protective factors, and reducing factors that may deter students from coming to school, should be employed to support student attendance. Mallett (2015) recommends integrating screenings and assessments to proactively identify students who may be at risk of becoming truant. Encouraging schools to discontinue zero tolerance policies, Mallett (2015) suggests reviewing and advancing other practices, i.e., enhancing the school’s code of conduct so that it focuses more on restorative practices. The effectiveness of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports is also highlighted as an effective strategy for teaching all students skills and behavior management early in the academic year (Mallett, 2015). Mallett (2015) also advocates for the implementation of social and emotional learning programs in schools to help students develop the social and emotional skills they need in order to cope with challenging situations. The state laws of Ohio and Colorado pertaining to truancy are contrasted, highlighting Colorado’s proactive and restorative approach to addressing truancy. Finally, Mallett (2015) reiterates that zero tolerance policies further alienate students who are already disconnected and at-risk, and stresses the need to maximize efforts to work towards preventing poor outcomes and providing thorough supports to students in need.

These aforementioned studies holistically illustrate the ways in which unmet needs or struggles within one’s environment influence social and emotional development and behavior. A brief summary of the primary references related to Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model and Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation are provided in Table 1 and brief summary of the studies related to Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Systems Theory and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is also depicted in Table 2.
Table 1

Primary References for Bronfenbrenner and Maslow

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maslow (1943)</td>
<td>A Theory of Human Motivation</td>
<td>Discusses how an individual’s physiological and emotional needs exist and interrelate on a hierarchy. The ways in which an individual’s needs are met or unmet influences his or her behavior.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bronfenbrenner (1979)</td>
<td>Contexts of Child Rearing: Problems and Prospects</td>
<td>Seeks to address a gap in research regarding how the environment in which a child lives influences his or her development. An individual’s development is influenced by the settings and contexts in which he or she lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic/Author</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Method/Purpose</td>
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<tr>
<td>What Schools Need to Know About Fostering School Belonging: A Meta-analysis; Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, Hattie, and Waters (2018)</td>
<td>N = 67,378 students (ages 12 to 18) from 51 studies</td>
<td>Quantitative meta-analysis; study and provide guidance on the factors schools should recognize and emphasize to best support students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Social Development in Context: An Examination of Some propositions in Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory; Ashiabi and O’Neal (2015)</td>
<td>N = 28,064 children (ages 6-11) whose information was retrieved from the National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH) 2007</td>
<td>Quantitative survey analysis; determine the effects of contextual influences and proximal processes on child development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying Organizational Theories to Action Research in Community Settings: A Case Study in Urban Schools; Bryan, Klein and Elias (2007)</td>
<td>N = 1 school district</td>
<td>Qualitative case study; applying organizational theories to action research in community settings in three areas: the ecological context, collaboration and consensus, and sustainability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory to Understand Community Partnerships: An Historical Case Study of One Urban High School; Leonard (2011)</td>
<td>N = 1 school district</td>
<td>Qualitative, historical case study analysis; understand the how a school district evolved over time within an ecological context.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Literature Supporting Need for SEL Implementation in Schools

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has published multiple reports over time which share the findings of studies demonstrating the benefits that SEL programs offer students (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2019; Payton et al., 2008). One such publication is CASEL’s 2008 Technical Report, The Positive Impact of Social and Emotional Learning for Kindergarten to Eighth Grade Students, which discussed the findings of three scientific reviews on SEL (Payton et al., 2008). This 2008 report includes CASEL’s three-part review of program evaluations conducted by numerous independent investigators, including its Universal, Indicated, and After-school reviews. This overall report addresses the following research questions:

(a) What skills, attitudes, behaviors, and academic outcomes do SEL programs achieve for elementary- and middle-school (K-8) students?
(b) Do SEL program effects endure over time?
(c) Are SEL programs effective in school and after school and for students with programs (Indicated Review) and without problems (Universal and After-School Reviews)?
(d) What features are associated with highly effective SEL programs? (Payton et al., 2008, p. 6)

Studies deemed eligible for inclusion in this report emphasized the development of one or more SEL competencies, involved students between the ages of 5 and 13, included a control group, and reported information for calculating effect sizes (Payton et al., 2008). In order to include a nationally representative sample, the researchers engaged in a systematic search of published and unpublished reports via computer databases and websites, reference lists and bibliographies, manual searches of journals with relevant studies from January 1970 through
December 2007, and contacting professionals in the field who presented relevant work at conferences (Payton et al., 2008).

The Universal Review focused on school-based SEL interventions that were designated to support a general, whole-school student population, and included 180 school-based studies involving 277,977 students (Payton et al., 2008). The Indicated Review focused on school-based interventions for students who have been identified as displaying behavioral or emotional problems, but were not diagnosed with a mental disorder or identified as needing special education services (Payton et al., 2008). The Afterschool Review focused on SEL interventions provided in after-school programs that were implemented outside of school hours, supervised by adults, and had a goal of enhancing personal or social skills (Payton et al., 2008).

The findings of the Universal, Indicated, and Afterschool Reviews revealed that SEL programs offer multiple benefits for schools in which they are implemented (Payton et al., 2008). The findings of the Universal Review suggest that SEL programs can be effectively integrated into routine educational practice and taught by school staff (Payton et al., 2008). The results of the Indicated and Afterschool Reviews suggest that SEL programs can be effective for students with or without emotional difficulties, and when implemented during or after school hours. Overall, this three-part review found that SEL programs effectively support the whole child in their personal, social, and academic development (Payton et al., 2008). Increases in academic achievement were noted along with SEL interventions proving to be successful with supporting a diverse array of students across a range of grades and settings, i.e., students in grades K-8, attending schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas, as well as racially and ethnically diverse student populations (Payton et al., 2008).
Further description regarding each of these reviews is provided in Table 3 and within a summary of each review below.

Table 3

*CASEL’s Three-Part Program Review of SEL Programs (2008)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review</th>
<th>Universal Review</th>
<th>Indicated Review</th>
<th>After-School Review</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(N = 277,977)</td>
<td>(N = 11,337)</td>
<td>(N = 34,989)</td>
<td>(N = 324,303)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of studies</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Criteria (if any)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Included students who showed signs of social, emotional, or behavioral problems, but had not been diagnosed with a mental disorder or need for special education (Payton et al., 2008).</td>
<td>Implemented outside of school hours during at least part of a school year</td>
<td>Supervised or monitored by adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Findings</td>
<td>SEL Programs were effective when conducted by school staff, suggesting that these interventions can be incorporated into routine educational practice (Payton et al., 2008).</td>
<td>SEL Programs were effective when conducted by school staff, suggesting that these interventions can be incorporated into routine educational practice (Payton et al., 2008).</td>
<td>SEL interventions were effective in both the school and after-school setting and for students with and without presenting problems (Payton et al., 2008).</td>
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</table>

*Note.* The total number of students who participated in all three reviews was 324,303 with a total of 317 studies (CASEL, 2008).
CASEL’s 2008 Technical Report defines Social and Emotional Learning as “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, p. 5). According to Payton et al. (2008), CASEL has also identified and defined five core social and emotional competencies that SEL programs should address which are defined below and also depicted in Figure 1.

**Self-awareness:** Accurately assessing one’s feelings, interests, values, and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence;

**Self-management:** Regulating one’s emotions to handle stress, controlling impulses, and persevering in addressing challenges; expressing emotions appropriately; and recognizing and making best use of family, school, and community resources;

**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;

**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;

**Social Awareness:** Being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others; recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; and recognizing and making best use of family, school, and community resources. (Payton, et al. 2008, p. 4)
Studies Supporting the Efficacy of Social Emotional Learning Programs

Since the publication date of CASEL’s 2008 Technical Report, additional studies have been conducted which demonstrate the continued need for SEL program implementation in schools, as well as the effectiveness of properly implemented SEL programs in supporting the social and emotional needs of students (Durlak et al., 2011; Low, Cook, Smolkowski, Desfosses, 2019; Payton et al., 2008). Researchers have found that the successful implementation of SEL programs yields positive outcomes such as higher levels of academic achievement as well as improving student behavior and the classroom management experiences of teachers (Desrochers 2015; Jones, Bailey, & Jacob, 2014).

One leading study in this area was a meta-analysis conducted by Durlak et al. (2011) of 213 school-based SEL programs involving 270,034 Kindergarten through high school students. Working from the premise that learning in school is naturally a social experience for students, as students learn alongside their peers and in collaboration with their teachers, Durlak et al. (2011) conducted an extensive review of literature on prior studies related to SEL program implementation, (p. 2). This study focused on programs that were provided to a school’s entire student population (universal interventions) and did not include programs for individual or small groups of students (Durlak et al., 2011). The following research questions were addressed:

(a) What outcomes are achieved by interventions that attempt to enhance children’s emotional and social skills?

(b) Can programs be successfully conducted in school setting by existing school personnel?

(c) What variables moderate the impact of school-based SEL programs? (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 4)
The results of this meta-analysis revealed multiple significant and positive outcomes that enhance children’s social and emotional skills, particularly with respect to enhancing social and emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school (Durlak et al., 2011). Students who participated in these programs were also noted to demonstrate an increase in prosocial behaviors and a reduction in conduct as well as internalizing problems (Durlak et al., 2011). One of the key findings of this study which is referenced in other studies about SEL indicate that students’ participating in universal SEL programs had an 11 percentile-point gain in academic achievement as compared to control groups (Durlak et al., 2011). This increase in academic achievement was assessed by school records of grades and standardized achievement test scores (Durlak et al, 2011). Follow up results were also gathered at least 6 months following the SEL program implementations in order to assess the sustainability of the impact and provided additional support for the benefits of SEL programs overall (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 15).

The results of this meta-analysis addressed research question (b), indicating that the classroom teachers and other school staff who participated in the programs comprising this study effectively conducted SEL programs (Durlak et al., 2011). Therefore, SEL interventions can be integrated into daily educational practice by educators within a school (Durlak et al., 2011). The results of this study also addressed research question (c), indicating that the use of four recommended practices as part of program implementation do moderate program outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). The acronym S.A.F.E. was developed to reflect criteria used to “capture the application of evidence-based practices,” (Payton et al., 2008, p. 10) and is defined as:

*Sequenced:* Program uses a connected and coordinated set of activities to achieve objectives related to skill development;

*Active:* Program uses active forms of learning to help youth learn new skills;
Focused: Program has at least one component devoted to developing personal or social skills; and

Explicit: Program targets specific SEL skills rather than targeting skills or positive development in general terms. (Payton et al., 2008, p. 10)

Although this meta-analysis was not able to fully investigate the effects of these four recommended practices, the impact of these practices on skill development was recommended as an area for future research (Durlak et al., 2011). While the results of this meta-analysis suggest the promise of SEL programs, Durlak et al. (2011) also affirm that in order to be effective, SEL programs must be well designed and implemented with fidelity. A limitation of this meta-analysis was the small percentage (16%) of studies which collected post-test data on academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011). Suggestions for future research include more investigations regarding the impact of SEL programs on academic outcomes as well as the effect of SAFE practices on skill development during program implementation (Durlak et al., 2011).

Durlak et al. (2011) argue that a child’s emotional experiences either facilitate or impede their motivation and ability to engage in academic tasks, thereby influencing their levels of academic achievement. This viewpoint is also expressed by researchers Brackett and Simmons (2015) who stress that a child’s emotions contribute directly to his or her performance in the classroom. Brackett and Simmons (2015) reiterate this viewpoint by describing how emotional distress has a physiological effect by triggering the sympathetic nervous system. The compromising effect that this has on a child’s executive functioning and working memory, key skills needed in order for students to succeed academically, was also described in further detail by Brackett and Simmons (2015).
These views are further supported by the findings of a study on Classroom Emotional Climate, Teacher Affiliation, and Student Conduct, which emphasized the positive effect that supportive classroom environments can have on student conduct (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2011). This multi-methods study “examined the link between classroom emotional climate and student conduct, including as a mediator the role of teacher affiliation, i.e., students’ perceptions of their relationships with their teachers” (Brackett et al., 2011, p. 27). Participants included 63 teachers and 2,000 students from 90 fifth- and sixth-grade English Language Arts classes (Brackett et al., 2011). Data collection methods included classroom observations that were conducted via digital videorecorders, which participating teachers set up in their class on three separate days over the course of two weeks (Brackett et al., 2011). Members of the research team became trained in the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and then later viewed, as well as coded, the video recorded data using this measure (Brackett et al., 2011). Student participants also completed an eight-item Affiliation with Teacher Survey which asked students to rate their response to statements on a 5-point Likert scale, indicating the extent to which they agree or do not agree with items that assess the quality of their relationships with their teachers (Brackett et al., 2011; Cook, Greenberg, & Kusche, 1995). Student report cards which included a 5-point Likert scale ranging from unsatisfactory to excellent were used to collect data related to student behavior (Brackett et al., 2011).

The researchers then conducted mediation analyses examining the association between emotional climate and conduct through teacher affiliation (Brackett et al., 2011). The results of these analyses indicated moderate to strong positive correlations among Classroom Emotional Climate, Classroom Organizational Climate, and Classroom Instructional Climate. The findings of this study demonstrated a positive relationship between Classroom Emotional Climate and
student conduct which was mediated by student relationships with their teacher (Brackett et al., 2011). One limitation of this study was the subjective nature of the ratings that teachers gave students for conduct scores and the lack of clarity as to what factors may have influenced certain teachers to assign certain ratings. Bracket et al. (2011) recommend future research in the area of examining the relationship between Classroom Organizational Climate and classroom conduct. Brackett et al., (2011) conclude with an emphasis on the need for teacher training in the area of SEL, emphasizing that when teachers establish an environment in their classroom that emotionally supports students, students are better able to behave and engage academically which leads to positive outcomes as they grow older. The connection between childhood behavior during adolescence and future success in adulthood further demonstrates the need for school-based supports to help students develop their social emotional competencies (Brackett et al., 2011).

Jones, Greenberg, and Crowley (2015), studied the connection between children’s prosocial skills in Kindergarten and outcomes in young adulthood. The ratings that Kindergarten teachers gave children for pro-social skills at the time these students began school was studied in connection with their adolescent and adult outcomes, particularly those related to education, employment, public assistance, crime, mental health, and substance abuse (Jones et al., 2015). The researchers used data from a previously conducted study of an intervention program that aimed at reducing aggressive behavior in children who were identified as high-risk in this area (Jones et al., 2015, p. 2284). Associations between social and emotional skills in kindergarten and key outcomes when these students entered young adulthood were measured using a sample size of 753 (high-risk, control group, n = 367; non-high risk, normative group, n = 386) (Jones et
Jones et al., (2015) analyzed this longitudinal data with particular focus on the results of a rating scale (the Pro-social Communication Skills subscale of the Social Competence scale), which was relied upon to represent social competence in Kindergarten students. The results indicated significant associations between the measured social and emotional skills in kindergarten and key young adult outcomes later in life (Jones et al., 2015). The findings of this study suggested that levels of social competence measured in Kindergarten students were found to be predictive indicators of future outcomes as young adults with regards to social adjustment. In particular, the researchers found that students who were rated to demonstrate prosocial skills in Kindergarten were less likely to have police involvement by the time of the follow up (Jones et al., 2015). One limitation of this study is the focus on a single measurement at an early age considering other noncognitive factors and positive traits that have not yet fully emerged in children as young as five years old and could not be accounted for, such as conscientiousness (Jones et al., 2015, p. 2288). The researchers concluded by highlighting the need for SEL programs that can provide the intervention necessary to help students develop necessary prosocial skills early on in order to develop into socially adjusted adults (Jones et al., 2015; Desrochers, 2015).

The possible effect of SEL programs on social and emotional and academic outcomes for elementary aged children was assessed by Low, Cook, Smolkowski, and Desfosses (2018) in their intervention study on the impact of an SEL program on student social and emotional and academic outcomes following two years of implementation. One program that aims at helping children to develop the social competency and relational skills necessary in order to succeed in
later years is *Second Step*. *Second Step* is a research based SEL program which provides students with instruction and structured learning opportunities to practice social and emotional skills (Low et al., 2019). *Second Step* includes grade level curriculum which can be delivered in classrooms by teachers, include lesson materials, posters to provide visual references and reinforcements of outlined skills, games to promote skill development and letters for families (Low et al., 2019). The program curriculum focuses on skills for learning, empathy, emotion management, and problem solving through 25 to 40-minute lessons which teachers can implement as part of their regular classroom routine (Low et al., 2019).

This study sought to address a gap in the literature related to multiyear effects of this program’s implementation (Low et al., 2019). The importance of evaluating the outcomes over multiple years was defined due to how students have more time to practice behaviors as well as receive reinforcement for their appropriate behavior and use of social skills taught as part of the program (Low et al., 2019). This study included 61 participating schools, 321 teachers, and 8,941 early elementary (Grades 1 and 2) students (Low et al., 2019, p. 415).

Data were collected from a treatment group participating in *Second Step* and compared to a control group that did not participate in Second Step at their school (Low et al., 2019, p. 415). Assessments administered included online surveys of student behavior to teachers in the mid-Fall of each year followed by spring assessments two weeks prior to the end of the school year (Low et al., 2019). Behavioral observations were used to gather data related to on-task behavior and disruptive behavior that interfered with the learning environment. Curriculum Based Measures were also administered using the Aimsweb Curriculum Based measures or oral reading fluency and math calculation twice during each year. The results of these measures indicated that students tended to demonstrate improved behavior during the school year as they participated in
the program, but not over the summer (Low et al., 2019). The results also suggested that boys showed improvement in conduct problems as a result of participation in the program (Low et al., 2019).

The findings of this study were limited to early elementary populations, similar to the schools which participated in this study, that have used or plan to use Second Step (Low et al., 2019). The *Second Step* program can support the efforts of school personnel to enhance and promote behaviors that are conducive to learning such as emotional management, while reducing negative behaviors that can disrupt the learning process (Low et al., 2019). The researchers concluded that the results confirmed the importance of supporting student social and emotional learning throughout their development, as well as implications to consider with program implementation in the early elementary grades (Low et al., 2019).

The implementation of SEL programs such as *Second Step* was also highlighted through Aidman and Price’s (2018) case study analysis of a middle school’s experience with implementing SEL initiatives. Aidman and Price (2018) focused on Clear Stream Middle School which is located in an urban area in the southwestern United States, serves a diverse population of more than 900 students, and is one of 18 middle schools in its school district (River School District). Clear Stream’s adoption of its SEL initiative was prompted by outreach provided by CASEL through a program called the Collaborating Districts Initiative (Aidman & Price, 2018). The school district agreed to become part of this initiative which required a commitment to implement a districtwide SEL program and collaborate with others regarding aspects of SEL program implementation (Aidman & Price, 2018). The district chose to adopt the *Second Step* program (Aidman & Price, 2018). The program was subsequently piloted by three teachers during the spring semester prior to possible whole school roll out the following fall (Aidman &
Price, 2018). The teachers were provided with the materials they needed in order to deliver the lessons, as well as the time needed through an advisory period (Aidman & Price, 2018). Teachers were also provided support from campus facilitators of the program as well as SEL coaches from the district office. These SEL coaches provided teachers with professional development which included observing program lessons in progress and providing feedback (Aidman & Price, 2018, p. 31).

In studying Clear Stream Middle Schools’s whole school approach to implementing the Second Step program, Aidman and Price (2018) particularly aimed to understand the social emotional experience of students participating in Second Step at Clear Stream Middle School as part of a district wide initiative to implement SEL and provide students with explicit SEL instruction at each grade level. This case study analysis include data gathered from student and teacher focus group interviews as well as Likert scale questionnaires developed within the district and administered at the building level to gather information about how educators and students feel in response to items such as “SEL lessons have made a positive difference in our school” (Aidman & Price, 2018, p. 32). Information shared by students and educators participating in Second Step at Clear Stream indicated consistent views that were positive towards the program as well as towards some less preferred aspects of the program, i.e., outdated videos and lessons that may seem repetitious (Aidman & Price, 2018).

The findings of this study suggested that Clear Stream educators made a distinct and consistent effort to not only provide students with SEL lessons as part of an SEL curriculum, but to also creatively integrate aspects of SEL throughout each school day. One finding of this case study indicated that both students and teachers especially valued lessons that teachers creatively developed on their own by expanding upon the outline and ideas provided by the SEL
curriculum. For example, one teacher designed a lesson focused on the topic of micro-aggressions which helped students to understand the definition of micro-aggressions and then encouraged them to share related personal experiences (Aidman & Price, 2018).

Aidman and Price (2018) emphasized the need for teamwork between school district faculty and administration in order to facilitate effective program implementation, as well as the program being prioritized when planning the school’s master schedule. Stressing the need for schools to include time for SEL instruction within the master schedule, Aidman and Price (2018) noted that schools may encounter challenges with SEL program implementation without the presence of an advisory class period or another structured block of time specifically dedicated to providing SEL instruction during the school day. The need for continuous reflection and professional development towards practices in the area of SEL was also identified as a recommendation of this case study analysis (Aidman & Price, 2018). A limitation of this study includes its small sample of one school, therefore the findings of this case study may be difficult to generalize (Merriam, 2009). Finally, Aidman and Price (2018) highlight the strong effort which Clear Stream exhibited to embrace SEL and integrate it into the fabric of their school day. Aidman and Price (2018) further emphasize that it is incumbent upon schools to prioritize SEL and establish a culture that supports the whole child.

The ways in which the implementation of a school-wide SEL approach may support student engagement through promoting teacher-student and student-student relationships, as well as teaching of social emotional competency, was studied by Yang, Bear, and May (2018). Working within an ecological systems framework, Yang et al., (2018) also argue that the school-wide SEL approach is a multilevel process because of the manner by which the implementation of SEL throughout the school is influenced by individual and organizational features. Yang et
al., (2018) state that there is a gap in the literature related to the association between the teaching of social and emotional competencies and student engagement, particularly with respect to empirical studies that directly examining this (Yang et al., 2018, p. 46). In an effort to address this issue, Yang et al., (2018) conducted a multilevel analysis of the associations between student perceptions of their cognitive-behavioral and emotional engagement in schools and three factors that are tenets of school-wide SEL approaches. The three factors studied include teacher-student relationships, student-student relationships, and teaching of social and emotional competencies (Yang et al., 2018). Data were gathered from the administration of the Delaware School Climate Survey – Student completed by 25,896 students across grades 4-12 (elementary, middle, and high school) from 114 U.S. public schools in Delaware. Students also completed the Teaching of Social and Emotional Competencies (TSEC) subscale of the Delaware Techniques-Scale-Student (DTS-S), and the Teacher-Student Relationships and Student-Student relationships subscales of the 2014 version of the Delaware School Climate Scale-Student (DSCS-S-2014; Bear, Gaskins, Blank & Chen, 2011; Bear et al., 2014; Yang et al, 2018). Student participants were randomly selected by their schools and administered surveys during the school day between late February and April 2014. Students were informed prior to taking the survey that responses were completely anonymous, as neither pseudonyms nor numbers would be used to identify them (Yang et al., 2018).

The results of this study indicate that all three factors aligned with the major aims of school-wide SEL (i.e., teacher-student relationships, student-student relationships, and teaching of social and emotional competencies) were significantly associated with cognitive-behavioral engagement, as well as emotional engagement at both the student and school levels. The findings of this study indicated that teacher-student (TS) relationships were influential with
promoting student engagement (Yang et al., 2018). While these results shed useful insights, there were limitations to this study that should be taken into consideration, including that causation or directionality cannot be inferred by the correlational analyses (Yang et al., 2018). It is also possible that student self-report measures might have been biased or that students may have felt a sense of pressure to respond in a certain manner (Yang et al., 2018). Finally, Yang et al., (2018) concluded by emphasizing the importance of systematic and quality SEL instruction, as well as an emotionally safe and supportive school culture, with promoting student engagement.

The findings of these studies highlight the benefits of SEL programs in schools on promoting student achievement and cultivating a supportive school climate. Table 4 provides brief descriptions of the studies supporting the efficacy of SEL programs.
Table 4

Studies Supporting the Efficacy of SEL Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/Author</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Method/Purpose</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social and emotional learning at the middle level: one school’s journey;</td>
<td>$N = 1$ middle school consisting of 900 students</td>
<td>Qualitative case study; Analysis of perceptions towards whole school implementation of Second Step program.</td>
<td>Lessons that teachers creatively developed on their own by expanding upon scripted SEL curriculum were well received. SEL is an essential part of supporting the whole-child.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aidman and Price (2018)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom emotional climate, teacher affiliation, and student conduct;</td>
<td>$N = 2000$ students from 90 fifth- and sixth-grade classrooms</td>
<td>Multi-methods analysis to examine factors related to classroom emotional climate and student conduct.</td>
<td>Supportive classroom environments can have a positive effect on student conduct.</td>
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<td>Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, and Salovey (2011)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The impact of enhancing students’ social and emotional learning: a meta-</td>
<td>$N = 270,034$ K - High School Students who participated in 213 School-based SEL programs</td>
<td>Quantitative Meta-Analysis</td>
<td>Academic achievement improved for students who participated in school-based SEL programs.</td>
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<td>analysis of school-based universal interventions; Durlak et al., (2011)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early social-emotional functioning and public health: the relationship</td>
<td>$N = 753$ (high-risk control group, n = 367; non-high-risk, normative group, n = 386)</td>
<td>Quantitative, Longitudinal and nonintervention study of associations between prosocial skills in Kindergarten and outcomes in young adulthood</td>
<td>Levels of social competence measured in Kindergarten students were found to be predictive indicators of future outcomes as young adults with regards to social adjustment.</td>
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<td>between kindergarten social competence and future wellness; Jones, Greenberg, Crowley (2015)</td>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two-year impact of a universal social-emotional learning curriculum: group differences from developmentally sensitive trends over time; Low et al. (2019)</td>
<td>$N = 9,262$</td>
<td>Mixed methods; assess student outcomes following 2 years of Second Step program implementation.</td>
<td>Students in Second Step schools showed more improvement than students in non-Second Step schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher $n =$ 321</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student $n =$ 8,941</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multilevel associations between school-wide social-emotional learning approach and student engagement across elementary, middle, and high schools; Yang, et al., (2018).</td>
<td>$N = 25,896$</td>
<td>Quantitative; examine the student and school level main effects of student relationships in school.</td>
<td>Student engagement is a multilevel construct that is influenced by ongoing and reciprocal interactions between multilevel systems across individuals and school context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students from elementary, middle, and high school</td>
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**Rise in Mental Health Concerns**

According to the 2018 Children’s Mental Health Report published by the Child Mind Institute, the percentage of anxiety disorder diagnoses by health care providers in youth under age 17 increased from 3.5% in 2008 to 4.1% in 2018, with some studies indicating as much as a 17% increase in Anxiety Disorder Diagnoses (Bitsko et al., 2018; Child Mind, 2018). Symptoms of anxiety manifest in children present differently based on an individual child and his or her unique experience, as some may demonstrate anxious-avoidant behaviors, while others act out with aggression (Child Mind, 2018). The percentage of children and adolescents who will meet criteria for an anxiety disorder at some point is reported to be 30%, with 80% of these children never receiving help. It is reported that “Anxiety disorders can impact every aspect of a child’s life, but particularly their social and educational functioning” (Child Mind, 2018, p. 3). This report also provides an overview of the subtypes of Anxiety Disorders that children and
adolescents experience, i.e., separation anxiety, social anxiety, selective mutism, generalized anxiety, specific phobias, and panic disorder (Child Mind, 2018, p. 4).

There is growing understanding regarding risk factors that may contribute to this increase (Child Mind, 2018). Child temperament is noted to be an indicator of possible risk factors, i.e., people may assume that a child who demonstrates reserved social behavior is shy, while this could be an indicator of the child’s tendency to develop anxiety over time (Child Mind, 2018). Studies have shown that the average age of onset for some anxiety disorders occur the most in school aged children (Child Mind, 2018). The average age of onset for Separation Anxiety Disorder and Specific Phobias is 11 years, while the average age of onset for Social Anxiety Disorder is 14 years (Child Mind, 2018). Additionally, studies show that children and adolescents who meet the criteria for anxiety disorders are also at risk for other emotional difficulties and problematic behavior in the future, i.e., depression, continued anxiety, behavior problems and substance abuse (Child Mind, 2018). It is also noted that the likelihood of a child becoming depressed or developing a substance use disorder in the future is twice as much as youth without anxiety (Child Mind, 2018).

Ways to prevent the onset, or mitigate the extent, of anxiety in youth is also discussed, with research suggesting that prevention programs can help reduce anxiety symptoms in youth by up to 60% (Child Mind, 2018, p. 13). The efficacy of interventions such as mindfulness meditation which can be introduced to children in schools is also discussed. The authors argue that the impact of anxiety on youth in the U.S., is a serious public health issue that merits further attention, and that despite efforts to address this, many children in need continue to go without treatment (Child Mind, 2018). The debilitating impact that anxiety has on preventing children from reaching their full potential, and the tendency for youth experiencing anxiety to suffer in
silence is stated (Child Mind, 2018). The authors stress that anxiety is highly treatable, that early intervention support is effective, and schools have the potential to provide students much needed support through education (Child Mind, 2018, p. 17). While in some cases anxiety may require medical or other clinical interventions to be fully treated, there are ways in which school-based social emotional learning programs can support children and adolescents who struggle with anxiety-related disorders or other feelings of emotional distress. Research has shown that these programs can effectively serve as another layer of support to help children and adolescents develop coping skills that will help prevent, or alleviate, symptoms of emotional distress including, but not limited to, anxiety (Desrochers, 2015; Rossen & Cowan, 2015). Schools can employ a multi-tiered system of supports which includes social and emotional learning programs in an effort to address this need (Desrochers, 2015; Rossen & Cowan, 2015).

**Policies and Guidance Promoting SEL**

The need for educational policies and guidance related to SEL in schools, at both the state and federal levels, has become increasingly recognized over recent years. Researchers such as Brackett et al., Durlak et al., (2011), and Jones et al. (2015), have stressed that providing SEL instruction in schools is imperative to supporting the development of children and adolescents. Durlak et al. (2011) implored policy makers and educators to support SEL programming in schools so as to support the healthy development of children. Brackett and Rivers (2013) argue that providing SEL in schools alongside academics is necessary in order to help children and adults reach their potential. Jones et al. (2015) claim that,

> The growing body of literature that demonstrates the importance of noncognitive skills in development should motivate policymakers and program developers to target efforts to improve these skills to young children. Enhancing these skills can have an impact in
multiple areas and therefore has potential for positively affecting individuals as well as community public health substantially. (p. 2289)

Steps have been taken at the state and federal level to emphasize the importance of these findings and to support progress towards these goals, including, but not limited to, the development of new federal laws and policies. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) signed into law in 2015 replaced No Child Left Behind and supports SEL through providing a broader definition of student success for schools (Gayle, 2017). In providing guidance regarding state accountability plans, ESSA allows states to expand their focus beyond academics and consider how schools support student development through a whole child approach (Gayle, 2017). The revised accountability system for states now allows at least one additional nonacademic indicator of student success and provides funding via Title II grants to support initiatives that will facilitate progress in this area (Gayle, 2017). Some of these initiatives include providing professional development for educators. Title II grants are also being provided to schools in order to fund professional development for educators in the area of SEL (Gayle, 2017). These initiatives are geared at helping schools and educators develop their capacity with supporting at-risk students by helping them learn skills such as making safe decisions and engaging in school (Gayle, 2017). Gayle (2017) suggests five ways that policy makers can integrate SEL into their approach which include articulating a well-rounded vision of student success, providing professional development to improve educator SEL capacity, identifying evidence-based SEL interventions as a school improvement strategy, leveraging Title IV grants to implement SEL strategies, and making data related to SEL transparent to the public (p. 1-6).

Many states throughout the nation have already integrated SEL approaches into their standards for students across grades K-12 or are making progress with doing so (Weissberg &
Cascarino, 2013). All 50 states have identified SEL standards for preschool with integrating SEL into their accountability plans and academic standards, while some but not all states have identified standards for students across grades K-12 (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). For example, NYS has identified the following goals to guide SEL benchmarks for NYS schools:

1. Develop self-awareness and self-management skills essential to success in school and in life.
2. Use social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.
3. Demonstrate ethical decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts. (NYSED, 2018, p. 1)

NYSED has issued a position statement that emphasizes the need for schools to promote the development of SEL skills, stressing that this is a critical component safe and supportive schools, in addition to ensuring high quality academic instruction (NYSED, 2018). As part of this, schools are required to distribute climate surveys to prompt reflection and intervention as needed in order to improve school climates. This is one of multiple steps emphasized within the NYSED Guidance on SEL (NYSED, 2018).

The ways in which ESSA is effecting change by prioritizing SEL on state and national levels were acknowledged by the Aspen Institute’s 2017 Consensus Statement. This Consensus Statement issued by the Aspen Institute’s National Commission on Social Emotional and Academic Development’s Council of Distinguished Scientists claims that social, emotional, cognitive, and academic skills are “intertwined and interdependent” (Berlinski, 2018, para. 4). The Aspen Institute’s 2017 Statement also promotes the concept of SEL program
implementation in schools, claiming that schools are an ideal setting in which to teach students so that they may develop the necessary social and emotional skills (Jones & Kahn, 2017).

Jones and Kahn (2017) also discuss how SEL skills are malleable over time and can be positively influenced by school-based SEL instruction. Claiming that social, emotional, and academic development is an essential part of preK-12 education, Jones and Kahn (2017) argue that teaching SEL can help students learn necessary 21st century skills (Jones & Kahn, 2017). The benefits of allocating resources towards SEL is highlighted as worthwhile for the positive impact that this has on students and eventually on society as whole. Lastly, the ways in which SEL programs can universally support all students and promote equity were underscored, with Jones and Kahn (2017) expressing that SEL serves as the foundation for student success and therefore contributes to the well-being of society. The findings of research studies that these statements are based on highlight the benefits of SEL as both a prevention as well as an intervention measure in supporting children and adolescents throughout their school years.

**SEL Programs as Prevention and Intervention Supports**

Regarding SEL implementation in schools, the literature also demonstrates how SEL serves as both prevention and intervention supports, thereby promoting and enhancing a multi-tiered system of supports within schools. Public schools are responsible for educating all students and therefore need to provide a continuum of supports that address the presenting needs of the student population (US Department of Education, FAPE, https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/frontpage/pro-students/issues/dis-issue03.html). Through a multi-tiered system of support, schools are able to evaluate and address the social, emotional, and academic needs of students (Desrochers, 2015).
Desrochers (2015) asserted that schools which embed well-developed SEL programs into their multitiered system of supports (MTSS) have better outcomes than schools which do not have these supports built within. Through “Tier 1” or universal prevention supports, schools implement strategies that promote positive behaviors for all students and facilitate the development of a supportive school environment which cultivates feelings of connection and belonging amongst students (Rossen & Cowan, 2015, p. 10). For specific students or groups of students who struggle in school, “Tier 2” (p. 10) supports are implemented and may take the form of school-based group counseling by support staff (psychologists or social workers). The third tier focuses on “individual/tertiary intervention” (p. 10), which may include direct counseling support as well as other supports that may comprise a wrap-around plan to support students with a diverse array of ability and skill levels. The Multi-tiered System of Support is often depicted in a tiered triangle similar to that shown in Figure 6. A more detailed visual of a tiered model of support illustrating a continuum of school mental health services is available in Communication Planning and Message Development: Promoting School-Based Mental Health Services (National Association of School Psychologists, 2006).
The provision of these services can help to mitigate the extent of emotional difficulties students may experience as their mental health needs develop or increase over time (Desrochers, 2015). The MTSS framework also promotes proactive and school-wide efforts to screen students for emotional or behavioral issues early on so that intervention strategies can be appropriately developed (Desrochers, 2015).

Maras, Thompson, Lewis, Thornburg, and Hawks (2015) studied the role of various support staff (school psychologists, social workers, and school counselors) with implementing MTSS supports and SEL. Maras et al., (2015) identified and addressed a gap in the literature with respect to how these professionals coordinate efforts within the tiered system of support that often guide prevention and intervention services in schools. Maras et al., (2015) aimed to “describe the initial steps of a multiyear project intended to (a) enhance and improve existing SEL curricula/interventions through SEL assessment within a tiered response model and (b) develop a comprehensive tiered system of support for academics, behavior, and SEL” (p. 202).
Utilizing a consultation approach, Maras et al., (2015) engaged in a collaborative project with other school personnel in a small, Midwestern rural community. During the first year of this project, Maras et al., (2015) sought to explore connections between SEL assessment and existing SEL interventions in one elementary building serving students K-3. Additionally, Maras et al., (2015) sought to use existing data to illustrate the importance of utilizing SEL assessments within an multitiered support model.

Participants in this study included 9 teachers, and 138 students evenly distributed across grade levels K, 1, 2 (Maras et al., 2015). Participants completed the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment-mini (DESSA-mini) and the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) which are used to assess social and emotional competences for children ages 1 month through 14 years (Maras et al., 2015). Academic skills were assessed using common core assessments and standardized assessments such as the STAR Early Literacy (Maras et al., 2015; Renaissance Learning, 2009). This study was used to describe how SEL data were used to inform SEL supports for students at the school after an analysis of their setting (school, classroom, group) and individual situations. Behavioral data were collected via office disciplinary referrals.

Study procedures included collecting student demographic data as well as administering the SEL, academic, and behavioral outcomes at three points during the school year (October, December, May). Students were placed in one of three categories, low, moderate, and high risk. Maras et al., (2015) then engaged in consultation sessions with faculty and support staff involved with these students to help develop intervention strategies. This study described the process by which SEL screening data were utilized to inform interventions across tiers and help mobilize teams within the school to coordinate intervention efforts (Maras et al., 2015). Maras et al. (2015) further emphasize their view that school psychologists were equipped with the
consultation, assessment and evaluation skills, necessary to increase engagement by other professionals in the MTSS process.

**Class and School-wide Preventions**

In 2014, Jones, Bailey, and Jacob discussed how SEL as a universal approach supports the classroom management practices of teachers. Jones et al. (2014) posit that high-quality and trusting relationships between students and teachers promotes effective classroom management. This article elaborates upon the view that classroom management and SEL are related. Jones et al. (2014) also proposed that understanding a child’s social and emotional developmental experience can help teachers to devise new and productive strategies for addressing behavior when needed. Through helping children to develop social and emotional skills, children develop a foundation upon which they can learn and exercise more complex skills in the future (Jones et al., 2014, p. 21). This article also summarized the work of Jones et al., (2014) with developing a SEL intervention called SECURe. SECURe aims to support self-regulation skills in students as well as responsive approach by teachers. The strategies emphasized within this program are described, and the positive impact that programs such as this have on the development of social emotional skills in children, as well as the related positive impact that this has on academics, were discussed (Jones et al., 2014).

Smith and Low (2013) discussed the role of SEL in bullying prevention efforts and referenced studies that supported research indicating that SEL approaches help prevent bullying in schools. The ways in which bullying and the multiple levels of the social-ecology of schools relate were also discussed by Smith and Low (2013). This article discussed how SEL programs have been effective in bullying prevention and intervention programs (Smith & Low, 2013). Through fostering the development of empathy, emotion management, social problem solving,
social competence, SEL programs teach students the skills that will deter them from bullying and also promote resilience when faced with challenging situations (Smith & Lo, 2013). For example, students learned assertive communication skills through SEL programs. The manner in which SEL programs can contribute to a positive school climate that offers social skill training to children were discussed (Smith & Low, 2013).

Researchers have also studied the ways in which SEL programs have supported students with a diverse array of backgrounds and abilities. A literature review conducted by Feuerborn and Tyre (2009) researched how SEL programs also support the skill development of specific student populations, particularly students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). Feuerborn and Tyre (2009) claimed that the US federal definition of specific learning disability fails to indicate that social and emotional deficits commonly found amongst students with SLD. It is noted that the definition of Learning Disability according to the United States Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) does not mention social and emotional deficits, while research indicates that students with specific learning disabilities tend to struggle with SEL.

Through their overview of relevant studies and literature supporting the need for schools to implement practical SEL strategies for students with SLD in the U.S., Feuerborn and Tyre (2009) provided practical school-based strategies for addressing the SEL needs of students with SLD, recommendations for successful implementation of SEL initiatives, and discuss common barriers to SEL implementation. Some of the practical school strategies offered include teaching perspective taking in order to help students with SLD sustain positive relationships. Feuerborn and Tyre (2009) highlight the benefits of taking an integrated approach (i.e., parent contact with newsletters, meetings, phone calls) as well as structured SEL programs that could be effective, such as PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies), Check and Connect, and Second
Step (p. 24). These evidence-based SEL practices are encouraged while educators are also cautioned that SEL efforts fail when efforts are short-term and disjointed. Leaders in the field say that it should be explicitly taught in a manner similar to that of reading, writing, and math (Feuerborn & Tyre, 2009). Student peer support and interactions are highlighted as a way to promote program implementation and student participation (Feuerborn & Tyre, 2009).

**Contextual and Implementation Factors Influencing SEL Program Success**

A study conducted by Anyon, Nicotera, and Veeh (2016) identified contextual factors that support the successful implementation of SEL program in schools. Acknowledging the research indicating that the low implementation quality of approaches can lead to nonsignificant impacts on participants, Anyon et al. (2016), conducted this study in an attempt to add to the research base on how to improve treatment fidelity (Anyon et al., 2016; Durlak & Dupre, 2008). Anyon et al., (2016) conducted a mixed-methods study that examined the contextual influences on the whole-school implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach. The purpose of the study was to identify factors that constrained or enabled high-fidelity implementation of Responsive Classroom in a diverse K-8 urban public school (Anyon et al., 2016).

Anyon et al., (2016) discussed the Responsive Classroom approach and prior research which indicated that this approach was effective in improvement academic and social and emotional outcomes for economically disadvantaged students. Utilizing a convergent mixed-methods design, the researchers recruited 30 participants of whom 24 were teachers, three were administrators, and three were social work interns. The researchers collected quantitative data through utilizing the Classroom Practices Observation Measure (CPOM) which is developed specifically to assess Responsive Classroom implementation (Anyon et al., 2016). A survey, the Classroom Practices Frequency Survey (CPFS), was also used to obtain teacher self-reports of
how they integrated the Responsive Classroom Approach into their daily practice. Qualitative data were collected through focus group protocols in which participants were asked to respond and help sort answers to questions about what they thought were the most challenging and rewarding experiences to date using the Response Classroom approach, and what were their greatest hopes and fears for using this whole-school approach (Anyon et al., 2016).

The results of quantitative analysis indicated that elementary teachers reported using Responsive Classroom strategies significantly more than middle grade teachers (p < .01). Qualitative analysis yielded nine codes which were organized into three categories. The findings of this study suggest that “compatibility between the intervention model and the host organization’s mission and values” supports effective program implementation, and that it is important for there to be flexibility of the intervention to adapt to a school’s individual needs (Anyon et al., 2016). The ability to integrate the intervention into existing structures and routines, as well as maintain shared vision and buy-in, were also identified as key areas to support Responsive Classroom implementation. A limitation of this study is that the quantitative sample size was small, and the qualitative study results may not be generalizable beyond the scope of this study (Anyon et al., 2016; Merriam, 2009). Anyon et al., (2016) also discussed the influence of the ecological orientation of the system on the implementation process. Suggestions for future research include investigating teacher and administrator beliefs about effective behavior management, particularly at the secondary level.

The prevention and intervention approach of School-wide Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (SWPBIS), while not an SEL program, can shed light on factors contributing to the successful implementation of Evidence Based Interventions (EBIs) such as SEL programs (Coffey & Horner, 2012; Hicks-Hoste, 2015). Coffey and Horner (2012) studied the
sustainability of school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports through administering sustainability surveys to 117 schools which had implemented PBIS for at least three years. The surveys administered to the sample schools consisted of 40 items inviting participants to share their views about what components are necessary to effectively implement SWPBIS (Coffey & Horner, 2012). Data were collected through the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET) which is designed to assess and evaluate the critical features of SWPBIS for each school year. This assessment is conducted by an external reviewer who “administers the 28-item research tool on site by receiving materials that relate to SWPBIS, performing observations, and conducting staff and student interventions” (Coffey & Horner, 2012, p. 411). The Team Implementation Checklist (TIC) and the Sustainability Survey were completed by study participants. Surveys of sustaining and non-sustaining schools were analyzed. The findings indicated that PBIS was more prevalent in elementary schools than secondary schools. A limitation of this analysis is that it was exploratory and the results may not be generalizable to a larger or other population (Coffey & Horner, 2012).

Findings suggested that schools which maintain practices with communication, administrative support, data-based decision sustain PBIS over multiple years (Coffey & Horner, 2012). The findings of this study also suggested that ‘continuous regeneration’ by assessing the effectiveness of practices on achieving desired outcomes, and modifying practices as needed, is an important component of ensuring sustainability” (Coffey & Horner, 2012, p. 409). Schools that attempted to use Evidence Based Interventions (EBIs) for students with intensive behaviors are more likely to be successful when there's already a universal approach in place (Coffey & Horner, 2012). Teacher responses suggested that support from building or district leadership was found to be the most commonly reported element of what helped programs sustain over
time. Teacher participants shared their views that some obstacles to effective implementation and sustainability include funding, time constraints, administration turnover, and resistance from other educations (Coffey & Horner, 2012). The communication and collaboration between staff, and also between staff and administrators, were also noted to be essential factors in program implementation and sustainability (Coffey & Horner, 2012).

The findings of this and other aforementioned studies suggests that the system of supports that each school has influences the implementation and success of SEL programs. A brief summary of studies on the contextual influences of SEL program implementation is provided in Table 5.
Table 5

*Studies on the Contextual Influences of SEL Program Implementation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/Author</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Method/Purpose</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contextual influences on the implementation of a school-wide intervention to promote students’ social, emotional, and academic learning; Anyon, Nicotera, and Veeh (2016)</td>
<td>( N = 30 ) (24 teachers, 3 administrators, 3 social work interns)</td>
<td>Mixed Methods convergent analysis of focus group, observation, and survey data to examine contextual influences on the whole-school implementation of the Responsive Classroom model</td>
<td>Three contextual factors influence implementation fidelity: (1) staff members’ beliefs about behavior change and management, (2) organizational capacity such as principal and teacher buy-in, and (3) intervention support system such as training and technical assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sustainability of school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports; Coffey and Horner (2012)</td>
<td>( N = 117 ) schools</td>
<td>Quantitative logistic regression analysis to determine sustainability features of SWPBIS implementation</td>
<td>Schools that attempt to use EBIs for students with intensive behaviors are more likely to be successful when there's already a universal approach in place;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a tiered response model for social-emotional learning through interdisciplinary collaboration; Maras et al. (2015)</td>
<td>Teacher ( N = 9 ) Student ( N = 138 )</td>
<td>Mixed methods study including Rating scales (administered to assess the social-emotional skills of students between grades K-2) and other data (office disciplinary referrals, academic skills)</td>
<td>A tiered response model for SEL is needed to address the mental health needs of youth. School psychologists are well positioned to utilize their consultation skills and training to help promote systems change with integrating, continuously assessing, and enhancing SEL approaches in school.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Educator and Student Perceptions of SEL Programs

The perceptions that educators have towards their roles with participating in social and emotional learning initiatives can influence the degree to which such initiatives are ultimately effective when implemented (Hicks-Hoste, 2015). Many educators are not aware of the evidenced-based SEL programs that exist (McKevitt, 2012). Even with educators who spend a significant amount of their time addressing the social and emotional needs of students as part of their roles in schools (i.e., school psychologists), the ways in which educators approach students’ SEL needs can vary significantly (McKevitt, 2012).

Studies Including Educator Perceptions of SEL Programs

McKevitt (2012) conducted a mixed-methods study by surveying 331 school psychologists’ knowledge and use of evidence-based, SEL interventions through a Likert Scale Instrument and also an open-ended format. The purpose of the study was to investigate how practicing school psychologists learn about effective SEL interventions, whether school psychologists are aware of and use existing evidenced based SEL interventions, and what factors influence a school psychologist’s decision to use a particular intervention program (McKevitt, 2012). Participants in the study were practicing school psychologists in grades pre-K through 12 and members of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) at the time. Individuals who met these criteria were randomly selected from the NASP membership database and 1,400 surveys were mailed out for completion, of which 331 were returned. Respondents were from 44 of the United States and averaged 13.08 years of experience.

McKevitt (2012) developed the Social/Emotional/Behavioral Intervention Survey, a Likert Scale instrument, for use in this study. This survey contained 42 items divided into four parts which requested information about the respondents’ employment characteristics, how they
learn about evidenced-based SEL interventions, their knowledge and use of 16 published and
evidence-based SEL programs, and their decision-making about selecting interventions. A
descriptive analysis of the survey results suggested that the majority of respondents (71%) rely
on professional development activities to gain information about effective SEL interventions,
while many others (57.4%) rely on past experiences. Only 27.8% indicated relying on journal
articles and 34.7% indicated that they consult internet resources. Participants also shared that
they had overall limited knowledge of the 16 evidenced-based SEL interventions mentioned in
this survey, with the following percentages summarizing responses of “very familiar” regarding
these programs, Second Step (28.7%), I Can Problem Solve (21.8%), Good Behavior Game
(19.9%), Olweus Bully Prevention Program (18.4%), and Project Achieve (11.8%). These
results suggest that there are many evidence-based SEL interventions that are not frequently used
by practicing school psychologists (McKevitt, 2012).

When ranking the factors that influence a school psychologist’s decision to use a
particular intervention program, participants in this study indicated that the research supporting a
program’s effectiveness and the amount of time required for implementation were important to
consider (McKevitt, 2012). The perceived pressures of time constraints were noted as
influencing participant responses throughout this study (McKevitt, 2012). Also, following the 42
survey items, respondents were also invited to add anecdotal comments and 43 respondents
chose to do so. The following themes emerged from these open-ended comments:

1. School psychologists in the district do not implement SEL interventions;
2. School psychologists in the district only test;
3. Respondents used other interventions that were not listed, such as school-wide
   positive behavior support;
4. Individuals, schools, or districts make their own programs and do not rely on published interventions;
5. Preparation for the state test is emphasized over SEL interventions; and
6. Interventions used are theory-based, not research-based. (McKevitt, 2012, p. 40)

In consideration of the survey responses which indicated a strong tendency for school psychologists to rely on professional development opportunities to learn about evidenced-based SEL interventions, McKevitt (2012) recommends more professional development opportunities which focus on developing school psychologist knowledge-base and capacity with supporting the implementation of SEL evidence-based programs. While study participants reported spending a significant portion of their time addressing the social and emotional needs of their students, survey results suggested that school psychologists lack awareness regarding the majority of evidence-based SEL programs (McKevitt, 2012, p. 33). However, this finding also connects with one of the study’s limitations, that the survey studied participant self-perceptions of their awareness of SEL evidenced-based programs, and not their actual knowledge in this area (McKevitt, 2012). It is possible that participants may have underrated their true knowledge base in these areas.

Other limitations to this study included the population consisting only of NASP members, while not all school psychologists are NASP members (McKevitt, 2012). Also, only school psychologists were invited to participate, while other practitioners (i.e., school counselors or social workers) who were also involved with the implementation of evidenced-based SEL programs in schools may have had additional insights to contribute (McKevitt, 2012). Lastly, the survey mentioned 16 evidenced-based SEL programs while there are other evidence-based SEL programs with which participants may also be familiar. Despite these limitations, the study
results and findings are informative for reasons including, but not limited to, that the respondents reported spending a substantial amount of their time (over 25% on average) with social and emotional learning consultation and interventions (McKevitt, 2012). It is important to understand the perceptions that educators, including school psychologists as well as teachers and others, have towards their role with meeting the social and emotional needs of students, so as to identify ways to help ensure the effective implementation of evidence-based SEL programs in schools (Hicks-Hoste, 2015; McKevitt, 2012).

The perceptions of teachers towards the need for schools to implement positive behavior supports were studied by Feuerborn and Chinn (2012). Feuerborn and Chinn (2012) argued that the successful implementation of strategies such as SWPBS are dependent on teachers to “buy-in” to the approach (p. 219). In order to investigate ways to achieve this, Feuerborn and Chinn (2012) conducted a qualitative study which aimed at understanding how teachers perceive student needs and the practices by which they address those needs. A convenience sampling process was used to recruit participants from nine public school districts and three university teacher preparation programs with which at least one of the researchers had an established reputation or relationship (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012). It is unknown how many people may have received the recruitment letter. However, there were 81 responses initially received, of which 12 responses needed to be excluded from the study due to incomplete or otherwise inadequate responses that did not follow directions, resulting in 69 responses that were used for analysis (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012).

The resulting population of 69 participants included 40 experienced teachers who had with five or more years of experience, 12 less experienced teachers who had less than 5 years of experience, 16 preservice teachers enrolled in teacher preparation programs, and one teacher who
did not provide information regarding years of experience (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012). The majority of respondents were female (85.5%) while 14.5% were male (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012). Approximately half of the practicing teachers indicated that SWPBS was being implemented in their school (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012). Participants were asked to complete a writing prompt based on a fictitious scenario which presented with a scenario of a student who displayed a variety of behavioral and developmental needs (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012). Each participant was asked to read the scenario and then provide a written response describing how he or she would approach the situation (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 219). The researchers utilized a grounded theory approach to analyze the responses and identified types of assessment needed, topics of concern, and strategies that could be employed.

Validation strategies including the triangulation of data sources and an external audit were used to establish accuracy and credibility within the study’s findings (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 223). The results of the study indicated the following:

- 67% of participant responses included the background of the student (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012).
- 39% included the need to gather information regarding past negative behavior, particularly novice and secondary level teachers (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012).
- 20% of participants did not provide any strategies related to SEL or behavioral issues (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012).
- 100% mentioned the value of building relationships with students, particularly those who are considered to be at-risk (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012).

Findings suggested that the positive impact of SWPBS universal supports on positive school climate were apparent in participant responses (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012). The
researchers found a difference between the responses of participants from SWPBS schools and non-SWPBS schools, noting that those who were from SWPBS schools were more inclined to consider the possible effects of environmental variables on student behavior (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012). The responses provided by teachers also conveyed ideas for strategies to teach social, emotional, and behavioral skills to students through creative planning within the school day such as thoughtfully planned instructional groups and partnerships that could support SEL (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012). These participants suggested ideas for ways to naturally embed SEL opportunities into the course of the day, rather than ways to provide direct SEL instruction during specific times of the day (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012). The importance of developing positive student-teacher relationships as a primary method for supporting student SEL needs and reducing problematic behavior was also discussed by teacher participants (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012, p. 224). While these findings may provide insights regarding teacher perspectives towards providing social and emotional supports to students in school, this study is limited in that its findings are specific to the population involved and cannot be generalized to a larger or more diverse population.

Implications of this study include the lack of clarity regarding how prepared teachers may feel to address student social emotional needs in their classroom (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012). In light of this, Feuerborn and Chinn (2012) suggest that teachers should receive more training about how to address student behavior and support SEL through a proactive and collaborative approach. Through enhancing teacher training in these areas, it is possible that more teachers will feel more at ease with implementing social emotional supports, i.e., SWPBS, in their classrooms (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012).
Studies Including Student Perceptions of SEL Programs

Haymovitz, Houseal-Allport, Lee, and Svistova (2017) studied the views of students, faculty, and parents towards the perceived benefits and limitations of a school-based SEL program through a concept map evaluation. This study was used to assess the pilot implementation of the Social Harmony SEL program via a tiered approach in a small, independent school supporting children from birth through eighth-grade (Haymovitz et al., 2017). Implementation of the Social Harmony program includes training for stakeholders regarding ways to support student motivation, encourage communication, understand the underlying reasons for a child’s behavior and help the child develop their social problem-solving skills (Haymovitz et al., 2017). The program involves students, teachers, and parents and aims to help them learn SEL skills in ways that are engaging for students (Haymovitz, 2017). A “Social Harmony Committee” is formed within the school in order to help facilitate program implementation and sustaining the intervention efforts over time (Haymovitz, 2017, p. 47). This group receives training in how to help implement the program and the members of the group rotate so that knowledge is spread throughout the school community (Haymovitz, 2017). Social Harmony is mostly a school-wide SEL approach, while students who demonstrate need for additional social emotional support may receive additional support via Social Harmony’s Tier 2. The goal of Social Harmony is to build capacity within schools and among teachers to help students learn from behavioral incidents, reflect, and generate ideas for how to effectively cope with frustrations in the future (Haymovitz et al., 2017).

Haymovitz et al., (2017) aimed to explore the perceptions of students, faculty, and parents who had participated in Social Harmony towards the values and influences of this SEL program. Haymovitz et al., (2017) utilized a concept mapping evaluation approach which
invited participants to respond to a focus prompt that elicited their feedback about one specific result of implementing Social Harmony in their school. Although the prompt asked for just one specific result, participants were invited to share any additional thoughts they may have had in response (Haymovitz et al., 2017). Utilizing an online program, participants anonymously provided responses on the internet, then categorized each response into themes using a virtual card sort task, and then subsequently rated each idea on a Likert scale (Haymovitz et al., 2017).

This questionnaire was administered to 32 participants which included stakeholders (current students in grades 7 and 8, school alumni, faculty members, administrators, parents) who had been associated with the school for at least three years prior (Haymovitz et al., 2017). Faculty participants shared their perceived benefits of Social Harmony, with multiple participants emphasizing that the program enhanced faculty awareness of issues students may have experienced at school (Haymovitz et al., 2017). Participants also indicated that the implementation of this program had a positive effect on school climate, expressing their feeling that relationships between students and teachers had improved (Haymovitz et al., 2017). Eleven of the students who participated in this study reported their impressions that participation in the program improved their communication as well as conflict resolution skills (Haymovitz et al., 2017). Students also reported an increase in compassionate behavior between peers (Haymovitz et al., 2017). Student participant responses indicate that this program helped them to feel safe and more inspired to help each other in various ways (Haymovitz et al., 2017). Students also expressed that they were more comfortable with expressing their feelings and needs, and felt that they were more likely to seek out assistance from teachers (Haymovitz et al., 2017).

While many participants expressed their positive perceptions of the Social Harmony program, other participants expressed frustration that the program is difficult to implement, as
well as confusion surrounding the need for training and expectations for teachers with implementing the program (Haymovitz et al., 2017). Participants emphasized the need for clear and consistent leadership within the school towards implementing the program, including the presence of someone (who was not a full-time teacher or staff member) designated as the leader of the program’s initiatives in the school (Haymovitz et al., 2017). Based on these responses, Haymovitz et al., (2017), discussed the implications for these findings and ways to possibly improve implementation of SEL programs in the future. According to Haymovitz et al., (2017), in order for SEL program implementation efforts to be successful, school administrators need to appoint a full-time program director who can serve as the coordinator for the various aspects of the program and facilitate its implementation. Haymovitz et al., (2017), suggested the possibility that schools consider appointing school social workers with this responsibility because social workers address school and home relations for academic and non-academic student needs.

While the study participants expressed many perceived benefits of the Social Harmony Program, there are limitations to this study which warrant consideration (Haymovitz et al., 2017). The study was conducted with a small sample size of only 32 participants associated with only one school. Additionally, there were no pre or post-test quantitative data regarding possible results of the Social Harmony program as a school-wide intervention (Haymovitz et al., 2017). Recommendations for future research include additional quantitative and qualitative studies in other similar school settings (Haymovitz et al., 2017).

Similar to the aforementioned Haymovitz et al. (2017)’s study, DePaoli, Atwell, Bridgeland, and Shriver (2018) included the perspectives of students towards their participation in SEL programs using a nationally representative survey of current (age 14-19) and recent (age 16-22) high school students. DePaoli et al., (2018) argue that considering the perspectives of
students provides a compelling description of the role and value of SEL in schools throughout
the United States. This nationally representative survey was conducted via a mixed-methods,
multi-phase, research design conducted between February and June 2018. The first phase
consisted of qualitative interviews with youth and young adults in non-SEL schools which
included (at that time) 11 middle school students, 10 current high school students, 10 recent high
school graduates which asked participants to share about their experiences in high school
(DePaoli et al., 2018). The second phase also consisted of qualitative research, but conducted
with high school students who were (then) currently enrolled in schools that focus on social and
emotional learning. The third and final phase of the research was quantitative and involved a
total of 1,300 online surveys, administered to 800 (then) current high school students, and 500
young adults, post-high school.

DePaoli et al. (2018) emphasized that, “there is power in listening” and what was shared
by students presented in report “should serve as a wake-up call to improve our schools” (p. 1).
DePaoli et al. (2018) summarized the findings of a three phase multi-methods study on student
perceptions towards SEL which aimed to investigate student perspectives regarding their
experience in high school, as well as their perceptions and experience with SEL in school. The
findings of this research indicated the following: students acknowledged the long-term benefits
of SEL; students from strong SEL schools noted that their schools helped them to better learn
academically; students from strong SEL schools reported a positive social climate and learning
environment; schools that emphasized SEL were broadly appealing to students; students
(especially the most vulnerable) cited social and emotional problems as significant barriers to
learning, doing their best, and fulfilling their potential (DePaoli et al., 2018, p. 3). One student
shared:
I like it (my school) because the other school that I went to, they are more violent. That’s stereotypical, but I feel like it’s true. My school doesn’t really have that violence because, I think, of communication. Learning how to deal with it so that conflict doesn’t occur even if there are arguments. Learning how to deal with that is a good skill.

(DePaoli et al., 2018, p. 35)

Schools that emphasize SEL are broadly appealing to students while less than half of students surveyed believe their high schools are doing a good job of helping students develop SEL skills; students cite social and emotional problems as significant barriers to learning, doing their best, and fulfilling their potential (DePaoli et al., 2018).

Recommendations of this multi-phase study are for schools to integrate more opportunities for SEL, as well as to create and articulate a clear vision for student success and SEL. School personnel are encouraged to invite students to be part of the decision-making process, particularly around SEL programming and assessment, and establish related youth leadership opportunities. In addition to these recommendations, the importance of recognizing the need for more SEL research including the voices of young people is accentuated (DePaoli et al., 2012).

In addition to the findings of this study which underscore the value in student perspectives towards SEL programs, the studies discussed in this section also suggest that exploring the perceptions of educators towards school-based SEL programs is an important step in developing and adequately implementing evidence-based SEL programs. A summary of the studies including educator and student perspectives towards SEL programs is provided in Table 6.
Table 6

Studies on Educator and Student Perspectives Towards SEL Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>School psychologists’ knowledge and use of evidence-based SEL interventions;</td>
<td>$N = 331$ School Psychologists</td>
<td>Mixed-methods; survey evaluation of school psychologist awareness of evidence-based SEL programs</td>
<td>School psychologists have limited awareness of the majority of published, evidence-based SEL programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKevitt (2012)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher perceptions of student needs and implications for positive behavior</td>
<td>$N = 69$ teachers</td>
<td>Qualitative; open ended surveys which identified common themes that teachers</td>
<td>Teachers, particularly new teachers, would benefit from training in how to identify a student who may be experiencing feelings of internalized distress and implement effective intervention strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supports; Feuerborn and Chinn (2012)</td>
<td></td>
<td>indicated as sustainability features for School-wide Positive Behavior Supports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring the perceived benefits and limitations of a school-based social-</td>
<td>$N = 32$ students in grades 7 &amp; 8, educators, parents (N for each sub-group is unknown due to the anonymity of the process)</td>
<td>Mixed-methods; Community-based concept mapping procedure to understand perceived impact of the Social Harmony SEL Program</td>
<td>In order for SEL program implementation efforts to be successful, school administrators need to appoint a “full-time leader” who can serve as the coordinator for the various aspects of the program and facilitating its implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotional learning program: A concept map evaluation; Haymovitz, Houseal-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allport, Lee, and Svistova (2017)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respected: Perspectives of youth on high school &amp; social and emotional learning;</td>
<td>$N = 1,348$ students between middle school and high school and young adults (post-high school age 16-22)</td>
<td>Multi-methods; interviews and survey data obtained student perspectives regarding their experience in high school and perceptions and experience with social and emotional learning programs.</td>
<td>Students from strong SEL schools report a more positive social climate and learning environment, doing better academically, and being better prepared for life than those in weak SEL schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the literature supporting this study regarding how educators view their roles towards SEL programs in school, as well as how educators and students experience participating in school-based SEL programs. Systems and Motivation theories were reviewed and discussed in connection with the concept of school-based SEL. Out of all of the 22 studies reviewed, there was only one qualitative study that focused on teacher perspectives related to what they think of a program that has been implemented in a school for more than 2 years, and how it affects them. Only five of the 22 studies dealt with student perspectives, indicating that there is a gap in the literature regarding educator and student views towards participation in SEL programs. The literature reviewed in this chapter provides an overview of research supporting Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation and Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model, as well as the need for school-based SEL programs to support children with their individual development as well as their surrounding systems.

Based on this review of literature, the following research questions will guide this study:

1. How do educators (teachers, counselors, administrators) view their roles when participating in a structured SEL program (the Choose Love Enrichment Program)?

2. How do educators (teachers, counselors, administrators) and students experience a structured SEL program (Choose Love Enrichment Program)?
CHAPTER THREE:

METHODOLOGY

While there has been much research on the effectiveness of SEL programs, there still exists a gap in the literature regarding the perspectives of educators who participate in and support the implementation of SEL programs, as well as the perspectives of students who participate in SEL programs (Aidman & Price, 2018; Brackett et al., 2011; Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012). The need for this research is critical in order to advance the research base on how teachers and students experience SEL programs as this could help improve the effectiveness of school-based SEL programs (Brackett et al., 2015; DePaoli et al., 2018; Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012; Haymovitz et al., 2017; Hicks-Hoste, 2015). This study aims to address this issue by adding to the body of research related to educator and student perspectives towards their experiences with SEL programs. This chapter describes the methodology used to collect and analyze qualitative data through this multiple-case study in order to answer the following research questions:

1. How do educators (teachers, counselors, administrators) view their roles when participating in a structured SEL program (the Choose Love Enrichment Program)?

2. How do educators (teachers, counselors, administrators) and students experience a structured SEL program (Choose Love Enrichment Program)?

This chapter begins with an overview of the researcher’s biography and statement of ethics, followed by a description of the selection criteria for the two case studies, as well as the settings, participants and sampling procedures. The research design, methods used to collect and analyze data, and the study’s timeline are also discussed in this chapter.
Researcher Biography

The researcher’s personal and professional experiences working with children and adolescents were highly influential in the decision to pursue this research study. According to Creswell (2013), “Researchers ‘position themselves’ in a qualitative study” (p. 47). The researcher’s “background (e.g., work experiences, cultural experiences, history), how it informs their interpretation of the information in a study, and what they have to gain from the study” underlies a qualitative research study (Creswell, 2013, p. 47). Supporting this concept, the reflexive process was consistently ongoing throughout the course of this study.

During the time that data were collected and analyzed, the researcher was a Director of Pupil Personnel Services in a suburban school district in NY, and had over 10 years of professional experience in public school education, as well as more than 10 years prior experience working with children and adolescents in various other capacities (school psychology intern, substitute teacher within a private school, assistant to counselors supporting adolescents participating in a mandated therapeutic program, swim lesson instructor and competitive swimming coach for children ages 5-18). While pursuing certification as a school psychologist, the researcher participated in multiple fieldwork opportunities that provided experience working with students across grades K-12 who exhibited a wide array of academic as well as social and emotional ability levels.

Following the completion of her training and certification, the researcher served as a school psychologist for six years in a small city school district located in upstate NY, primarily supporting students in grades 6-8 as a counselor, consultant, and evaluator for students throughout the district across grades K-12. Subsequent to this professional experience as a school psychologist, the researcher transitioned into a leadership role as Committee on Special
Education and 504 Committee Chairperson at a suburban district located about 30 miles north of New York City. The researcher served in this role for three years prior to becoming the Director of Pupil Personnel Services in the same district.

Throughout these professional experiences, the researcher became familiar with multiple forms of therapeutic intervention as well as school-wide initiatives to support positive behavior in school, i.e., Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (Horner, Sugai, & Lewis, 2015) and minimize the occurrence of problematic behaviors such as bullying, i.e., the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Olweus & Limber, 2010). Although the researcher had experience with individual and school-wide interventions to support students in meeting behavioral expectations, the researcher had not been involved in the implementation of any structured SEL programs and thus did not have any direct experience with SEL programs at the time of this study. As a result of her involvement with various initiatives to support the social and emotional growth of students, the researcher sought to learn more about SEL programs, particularly the CLEP. Through this study, the researcher seeks to contribute information to advance the field of research in this area.

**Criteria and Procedures for Site Selection**

The researcher’s process of identifying cases and possible participants for this study began in August 2016 when she was introduced to Ms. Scarlett Lewis, the founder of the Choose Love Enrichment Program, at a Choose Love Conference for Educators, by her dissertation advisor, Dr. Delcourt, who is also a lead researcher for the Choose Love Enrichment Program. Through follow up correspondence with Ms. Lewis and Dr. Delcourt, the researcher learned of schools that had implemented the CLEP since the start of the prior school year and could potentially serve as research sites for this study. In order to recruit educators and students who
had participated in the CLEP, the researcher utilized a purposeful sampling process to recruit schools which had implemented the CLEP since the fall of 2015 via a classroom or school-wide approach. Purposeful sampling was conducted based on those educators and students who selected to participate in this curriculum, or those who changed the most based on their participation in the program.

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), “Purposeful sampling in qualitative research means that researchers intentionally select (or recruit) participants who have experienced the central phenomenon or the key concept being explored in the study” (p. 173). Since the schools which had implemented the Choose Love Program throughout the prior year within a classroom or school-wide approach would therefore have educators and students who had also participated in the program, the researcher began the sampling process by identifying schools which had implemented the program over the prior year. Through correspondence with Ms. Lewis and Dr. Delcourt, five schools which could potentially participate in this study were identified. Please refer to Table 7 for a description of the schools which were nominated for invitation to participate in this study.
Table 7

*Original Sample of Potential Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>School Name (Pseudonyms used)</th>
<th>School Population</th>
<th>Grade Levels</th>
<th>Public or Private</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South-Central US</td>
<td>Hamilton Elementary School</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>K – 4</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Parker School</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>PreK – 8</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Lincoln Middle School</td>
<td>713</td>
<td>6 – 8</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Roosevelt Elementary School</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>PreK – 5</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Southwest</td>
<td>John F. Kennedy School</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>K – 6</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The schools that the researcher sought participation from varied in structure and grade levels, two were public elementary schools serving students in grades K-4, and a third was a public elementary school serving students across grades K-5. Consent was also sought at a public middle school serving grades six, seven, eight, as well as a private school serving students in the Pre-Kindergarten through eighth-grades. The locations of these schools ranged from the Northeast, Pacific Southwest, and West South-Central regions of the United States. The researcher initially anticipated obtaining consent for all five schools to participate, however ultimately only received consent from two of these potential sites, as three of the schools could not participate for various reasons which will be further described.

Each school had a designated Choose Love site liaison who was known to Ms. Lewis and Dr. Delcourt. The process of seeking consent began with the researcher emailing each school’s Choose Love liaison a brief overview of her intentions and the overall purpose of the study. The opportunity to meet in person or discuss the project further via phone was offered to each liaison. The liaisons for each school responded via email and expressed willingness to discuss the study.
further with the researcher via phone which subsequently took place. Following these initial correspondences, the administrative leadership for each school were also contacted, to whom requests for consideration of study to be conducted at their respective schools were submitted.

Following a telephone conversation with the site liaison of the school located in the Pacific Southwest, the liaison and principal of this elementary school were both contacted via email. After consideration by both the liaison and building administrator, the principal declined participation in the study as a separate research project was already underway and there were concerns regarding the possibility of duplicating research. Information regarding the proposed study was exchanged with the superintendent and building principals for the remaining four schools districts. District level consent was declined for three school districts and accepted by two.

**Participating Schools**

After obtaining consent from the administrative leadership at the two schools, one in the northeast and one in the south-central regions of the US, the site liaisons were consulted regarding next steps for conducting the study. The liaisons at both sites assisted with distributing and collecting consent forms, as well as developing a schedule for interviews, prior to the researcher’s arrival at each school.

District and building level administrative consent was obtained for School A, Hamilton Elementary School, which is a public elementary school located in the South-Central Region of the US in August 2017. Interview and classroom observation data were collected over the course of two days during September 2017.

During the fall of 2017, the researcher corresponded with the principal of School B, Parker School, the participating PreK-8 private school, on multiple occasions. In accordance
with the school’s policy regarding visitors, the researcher participated in a mandatory training on identifying child maltreatment prior to planning visits to the school. Consent was subsequently obtained in February 2018.

**Description of the Settings**

This multiple-case study took place in Hamilton Elementary School (HES) and Parker School (PS). These pseudonyms will be used throughout the study. HES is a public elementary school serving students in Kindergarten through fourth grades, located in a city within the South-Central Region of the United States. According to July 1, 2017 census estimates, this city had a population of 85,257 and the median household income was $40,013 (https://www.census.gov). The district enrollment was 9,864 as of the 2016/2017 school year (HES State Data Center). According to HES State Data Center, the 2017-2018 enrollment for school A was 312 students (District 2017 Demographics report). The school’s mission statement posted on the school website states that this school “in cooperation with parents and the community will provide a safe and nurturing environment where meaningful learning experiences will afford all students the opportunity to become productive, lifelong learners with a vision for their future.” There are two to three classes per grade level in this school. According to the state department of education school performance report card, 55% of students in this school come from low-income backgrounds.

PS is a private school located within a city in the Northeast which serves approximately 500 students from grades pre-K through 8. According to 2017 Census Estimates, the population in this city was 89,005 and the median household income was 80,896. The school website states that there are two classrooms in each grade level. This school draws students from its city location as well as surrounding suburbs. This school emphasizes its philosophy of promoting
faith-based instruction and providing a curriculum that is centered around this faith. In order to preserve the confidentiality of PS and its participants, further information regarding socio-economic status is not available at this time.

**Description of the Participants**

**HES Educator Participants**

A total of 11 educators from HES volunteered to participate in this study, of which nine were female and two were male. The group of educator participants from HES consisted of 1 administrator, one school counselor, three Kindergarten Teachers, two second grade teachers, one third grade teacher, and three fourth grade teachers. At the time of the interviews, conducted in September 2017, participants ranged in age between 25 to 53 years ($M = 42$). The number of years of experience in their position ranged from less than one to 18 ($M = 6$). Two of the educator participants self-reported that they were parents of students attending HES who also participated in the CLEP, and shared information from both an educator and parent perspective in response to interview questions. Please refer to Table 8 for the summary of description of educator participants from HES.
Table 8

Hamilton Elementary School (HES) Educator Participants’ Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Years in Education</th>
<th>Years in Current Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonnie</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>School Administrator</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>10-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristen</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>10-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades K-2</td>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madeline</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades K-2</td>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td>21-29</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades K-2</td>
<td>&gt;5</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades K-2</td>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>6-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades K-2</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurie</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades 3-4</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades 3-4</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades 3-4</td>
<td>&lt; 5</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades 3-4</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>10-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PS Educator Participants

A total of three educators from PS volunteered to participate in this study, of which two were female and one was male. The group of educator participants from PS consisted of one content specialist teacher for grades PreK-8, a Humanities teacher for grades 3-8, and one elementary grade-level teacher who provided instruction across subject areas. At the time of the interview conducted in February 2018, participants ranged in age between 56 to 71 years (M = 62). The number of years of experience in their position ranged from 3 to 23 (M = 12). Please refer to Table 9 for the summary of description of educator participants from PS.
Table 9

Parker School (PS) Educator Participants’ Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Years in Education</th>
<th>Years in Current Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>&gt;60</td>
<td>Content Specialist, PreK – 8</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades 3-5</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selena</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Humanities, Grades 3-8</td>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>10-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HES Student Participants

A total of 17 students from HES agreed to participate in this study. This school’s liaison, who was also the school counselor, assisted with recruiting students who participated in the CLEP and were agreeable to being interviewed for the purpose of this study. Parental consent and student assent forms were obtained for these student participants in advance of the researcher’s visit.

During the researcher’s visit to this school, two of the 17 students were absent and therefore unable to participate in the interviews. Therefore, 15 students participated in interviews, of which 11 were female and four were male. At the time of the interview, conducted in September 2017, participants ranged in age between 5 to 9 years ($M = 7.5$). The group of student participants from HES consisted of two Kindergarten students, two first-grade students, four second-grade students, three third-grade students, and four fourth-grade students. Please refer to Table 10 for the summary of description of student participants from HES.
Table 10

Hamilton Elementary School (HES) Student Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannon</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jude</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PS Student Participants

Parental consent and student demographic surveys were obtained for seven students from PS. All of these students participated in group interviews, of which three were male and four were female. At the time of the interview conducted in February 2018, participants ranged between eight to 13 years of age ($M = 10.6$). The group of student participants from PS consisted of five fifth-grade students and two eighth-grade students. Please refer to Table 11 for the summary of description of student participants from PS.

Table 11

*Parker School (PS) Student Participant Profiles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doreen</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Design

This research study was conducted using a qualitative multiple-case study involving schools which have implemented the CLEP between the fall of 2015 to the fall of 2017. The researcher sought to gather information regarding how educators (teachers, counselors, administrators) perceived their role with participating in SEL programs, as well as how educators and students experienced a structured SEL program, specifically the CLEP. The two schools were identified as cases because of their participants’ willingness to be interviewed and observed, as well as their involvement with the CLEP over a period of two years utilizing a whole school approach.

One case, Hamilton Elementary School (HES), is a public elementary school serving students in grades Kindergarten through four, located in the South-Central Region of the United States. The second case is Parker School (PS), a private school serving students from Pre-K through eighth-grade, located in the Northeast region of the United States. The purpose of collecting data at both schools was not to compare one to the other, but to obtain information from each and subsequently integrate information and themes that emerge to help inform the study of SEL programs in the future. According to Merriam (2009), “These insights can be construed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research; hence, case study plays an important role in advancing a field’s knowledge base” (p. 51). A purposeful sampling process was utilized to recruit educator and student participants from these schools which have implemented the CLEP.

In order to gain further insight regarding the experience that educators and students have with this SEL instruction, individual and group interviews as well as two observations of the CLEP lessons were conducted at HES. Detailed field notes were taken during these classroom
observations. The findings of these observations were connected to the data gathered during interviews, as well as program artifacts and demographic survey forms collected from HES. Due to logistical factors related to the scheduling of the researcher’s visit, observations were unable to be conducted at PS.

Following the collection of data at HES, the researcher conducted group interviews with educator and student participants at PS as well as reviewed one program artifact (a student essay). This information, along with the data collected via the demographic surveys, assisted the researcher in developing inferences and identifying connections between multiple sets of data. Upon gathering data from both HES and PS, the researcher analyzed each case’s data set separately before conducting a cross-case analysis (Merriam, 2009). The validation strategy of triangulation was utilized to determine whether the multiple data sources (consisting of interview responses, demographic surveys, program artifacts, and classroom observations) yielded similar, or different, codes or themes (Creswell, 2013). According to Merriam (2009), “Triangulation using multiple sources of data means comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or in different places, or interview data collected from people with difference perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people” (p. 216). The triangulation of data methods for this study is depicted in Figure 7.
Figure 7. Triangulation of data sources.

Instrumentation

Administration of instruments. During both site visits, multiple sources of data were collected from educator and student participants. A total of seven educator interviews took place at both sites, six at HES, one at PS. At HES, three of the six educator interviews were conducted in a group format while the other three were conducted in an individual setting due to reasons that were schedule driven. At PS, the three educator participants were interviewed together in a group.

Also due to scheduling challenges, classroom observations were only conducted at HES. At both schools, the schedule for interviews were developed by the CLEP liaison prior to the researcher’s visit, with consideration given to when teachers and students were not in classes.
While the researcher only collected two program artifacts from participants in this study, other program artifacts (student artwork, bulletin boards) were also observed during the visits to each school.

**Educator demographic survey.** The researcher began the data collection process by administering a demographic survey to educator participants (see Appendix C) in order to gather basic information about each, including name, age, gender, ethnicity, current role (i.e., teacher, counselor, administrator), years in current position, years in education, and definition of social and emotional learning. The survey is brief and took no longer than 10 minutes for participants to complete.

**Educator interview.** Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with educators at HES and PS. The Educator Interview Form (see Appendix D) consists of 13 questions developed by the researcher, which yielded information pertaining to the overall research question of how educators perceived meeting the social and emotional needs of students. These questions sought to assess the respondents’ views on SEL programs, in general, and for the CLEP, in particular, with respect to meeting the social emotional needs of students. The questions also assessed the rationale behind why the CLEP was selected over other SEL programs and what the interviewees felt were the positive and negative aspects of the program. Due to scheduling availability, between one to three educators participated in each interview. Each interview was completed in less than one hour, was audio-recorded, and later transcribed.

**Classroom observation.** The researcher utilized a semi-structured classroom observation protocol (see Appendix E) to observe CLEP lessons in progress while also serving as the instrument in completing this observation in the role of an “nonparticipant-observer” (Creswell, 2013, p. 167). The researcher conducted two classroom observations as an educator.
(the school counselor) taught CLEP lessons at HES. According to Creswell (2013), a nonparticipant-observer is “an outsider of the group under study, watching and taking field notes from a distance. He or she can record data without direct involvement with activity or people” (p. 167). During the observations, the researcher sat in a location that was least intrusive to the class and took detailed and concrete field notes (Gall et. al, 2007). These field notes included descriptions of the physical setting (i.e., classroom and school) in which the lesson took place as well as the general structure of the class (i.e., the type of class, number of male and female students, grade level, etc.). The dialogue, activities and sequence of events that took place during the class, as well as any observable impact that the researcher’s presence in the class may have had on what was observed, was documented.

Following the observation, the researcher reflected on the observation experience and noted any ideas that came to mind regarding her perception of the class while staying conscious of any personal biases that might have influenced her interpretation of the classroom observation. The length of each observation varied according to the length of the lesson that was delivered as part of the CLEP. Lessons typically ranged from 15 to 30 minutes.

**Student demographic survey.** The purpose of the Student Demographic Survey was to gather basic information regarding each student participant’s background. This survey consists of five items relating to each student participant’s name, age, gender, ethnicity, and grade level (see Appendix F).

**Student interview.** The Student Interview protocol (see Appendix G) was used to conduct semi-structured interviews with groups of students. This form consists of 11 questions developed by the researcher, which yielded information pertaining to the overall research question of how students viewed their experience participating in the CLEP. This instrument’s
questions aimed at assessing how students felt about the CLEP, particularly whether they liked or disliked this program, as well as any possible changes or modifications they suggested regarding this program. Due to scheduling availability, between one to four students participated in each interview. Site visits were scheduled over a two- to three-day time span. Each student group interview was completed between 20 and 45 minutes, were audio-recorded and later professionally transcribed.

**Program artifacts.** Program artifacts which educator and student participants voluntarily provided for the purpose of this study were collected. These included a parent newsletter related to the CLEP, created by the HES school counselor (see Appendix H), as well as an essay written by an eighth-grade student at PS (see Appendix I). These artifacts provided a glimpse into how an educator communicates about the program with parents, as well as how a student has applied her learning regarding the CLEP to a learning activity such as essay writing.

The number and types of available artifacts was not known in advance since it was dependent upon the class activity at the time of the visit. Unfortunately, few artifacts were available when the researcher was available at each school.

**Reflexive Journal.** The researcher maintained a reflexive journal to monitor and record any particular emotions, thoughts, feelings of bias or other experiences that arose throughout the data collection and analysis process. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative researchers engage in reflexivity “in which the writer is conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study” (p. 216). The use of a reflexive journal also assisted with ensuring the credibility of this study’s findings.
Data Collection and Analysis

This study was conducted over a period of 10 months. Within this overall timeframe, data were collected during two visits to each school which were between 1 to 2 days each. Qualitative data were collected via demographic surveys, semi-structured interviews, program artifacts, and classroom observations. The researcher reviewed the findings in an effort to explore the phenomena of (a) how educators (teachers, counselors, administrators) view their roles with participating in a structured SEL program (the CLEP), and (b) how educators and students experience a structured SEL program (CLEP). Educator and student interviews were conducted during school day hours at times that coincided with breaks from classes in their respective daily schedules. During the interviews and afterwards, member checking strategies were used to ensure that the participants agreed that the researcher’s findings from the interviews were consistent with what they shared (Merriam, 2009). These interviews were audio-recorded and then professionally transcribed. Field notes were also taken regarding any subtle factors that may have influenced the interview process (Merriam, 2009). The researcher included thick and rich descriptions of the interview context and experience, as well as that of the classroom observations (Krefting, 1991; Merriam, 2009). During the classroom observations, detailed notes were taken of the setting, students, and instruction provided by the educator leading the lesson that was part of the CLEP. Program artifacts provided by study participants (i.e., a parent communication developed by an educator at HES, and an essay written by a student at PS) were collected. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout the data collection process, and later triangulated the data collected from multiple participants and sources (i.e., the classroom observations, student interviews, and educator interviews) in an effort to ensure trustworthiness (Krefting, 1990; Merriam, 2009).
After the interview data were transcribed, data were reviewed and an open coding process was utilized to identify common elements that emerged within the data (Merriam, 2009). Transcripts were studied and the researcher inputted notes and comments alongside these data. The researcher then identified common pieces of data to develop construct categories (Merriam, 2009). Through this process, the researcher identified possible themes and constructs that emerged, connecting information to the research questions. This qualitative data analysis process followed a multiple case-study design (Merriam, 2009). The findings of educators and students involved in the program at HES (public school serving grades K-4) and PS (private school serving grades preK-8) were analyzed separately. After analyzing the data from these two cases, the researcher sought to determine if common themes emerged across the cases.

According to Merriam (2009), coding is “This process of making notations next to bits of data that strike you as potentially relevant for answering your research questions…” (p. 178). The researcher develops codes and “attributes specific meaning to each individual datum for purposes of pattern detection, categorization, and other analytic processes” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 4). The data analysis for this study began with an open coding process (Merriam, 2009). Open coding (or initial coding) is the process by which the researcher “breaks down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examines them, and compares them for similarities and differences” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102). Upon reading the interview transcripts, the researcher took notes alongside the margins as ideas occurred about parts of the data that seemed to recur or were striking in some way. Ideas, words, and phrases that emerged from the data at the start of this analysis were noted as part of the open coding process (Merriam, 2009). Sometimes concepts were noted that emerged based on participant responses to interview questions, but were not directly stated by participants, such as “community building.” At other times during
the data analysis, codes were identified that were identical to words stated by participants, i.e., “safety.” According to Merriam (2009), “What you jot in the margins (or insert in the computer file) can be a repeat of the exact word(s) of the participant, your words, or a concept from the literature” (p. 178). The researcher made notations next to all data that seemed to bear some type of striking relevance to the research questions, whether this information was directly stated within the participants’ choice of words or if it was inferred based on an answer to interview questions. The open coding process was employed through the initial analysis of program artifacts and field notes taken during the classroom observations.

After reviewing the interview transcripts, classroom observation field notes, and program artifacts, as well as the codes generated from these data sources, the researcher proceeded to contemplate how various codes seemed to connect in a way that would allow for them to be grouped together. This process of “Axial Coding” helped further define codes which shared common threads and could comprise categories based on emerging patterns and similarities (Saldaña, 2016, p. 291). According to Merriam (2009), “Categories are conceptual elements that ‘cover’ or span many individual examples (or bits or units of the data you previously identified) of the category” (p. 181). The researcher utilized a computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) software program, HyperResearch (HyperResearch, 2015), to upload each transcript and assist with assigning codes and sorting data into categories.

This process was utilized to analyze the data gathered from HES and PS. The data and codes were kept separate as a within-case analysis for each school was conducted (Merriam, 2009, p. 204). After analyzing the data from each case, a “cross-case analysis” was then conducted in which the data, codes, and categories derived from each case were reviewed. According to Merriam (2009), “A qualitative, inductive, multi-case study seeks to build
abstractions across cases” (p. 204). As the within-case analysis of the data gathered from both schools was conducted, followed by a cross-case analysis, findings emerged which addressed the research questions.

**Data Collection Timeline**

Data were collected over a 10-month time period. The following description outlines the steps taken to initiate the research and complete the data collection process.

1. **Mid-April 2017:** Granted IRB approval to conduct this study.

2. **May 2017:** The researcher reached out to five schools which had implemented the CLEP since the fall of 2015 to discuss the purpose of this study as well as invite participation from educators (including administrators, teachers, counselors) and students. Verbal and written consent were sought from the school and district leaders at this time.

3. **June 2017:** The administrator at HES verbally agreed to participate in the study, at which time the site liaison was consulted on next steps for recruiting educator and student participants for the study. The need for written consent was discussed.

4. **August 2017:** Written consent received from HES. PS site liaison also expressed interest in the possibility of PS participating in study.

5. **Early September 2017:** Researcher and site contact at HES discussed how to recruit educator and student participants. Consent forms were distributed to educators and parents of students, who may wish to participate in this study, with the assistance of site contact coordinator.

6. **September 20th and 21st, 2017:** Data collected during two-day visit at HES via gathering demographic, interview, classroom observation data and program artifacts.
7. February 2018: Researcher obtained consent from and visited PS, gathered demographic and interview data as well as program artifacts.

8. April 2018: The researcher conferred with educator participants from both schools in April 2018 to complete the member checking process and ask follow-up questions.

Statement of Ethics

After IRB approval for this study was granted in April 2017, the researcher then sought permission from those who supervise the schools that participated in this study, which included the superintendent and building principal of Case A (Hamilton Elementary School) as well as the principal of Case Study B (Parker School). Consent was also requested and obtained from the educators and parents of students who participated in the study. Participants were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Student assent forms were also obtained from students ages 7 and above in an effort to ensure that these participants were fully knowledgeable of the purpose of the study and also understood that their participation was voluntary. The researcher made efforts to protect the confidentiality of all participants through using pseudonyms for the schools, students, and teachers on interview transcripts as well as other documents and information shared regarding the study and its findings.

To assure confidentiality, all participants and schools were assigned pseudonyms. All survey forms were assigned a number. The data were stored on a password protected electronic device and any data on paper have been locked in a filing cabinet by the researcher. Coded data have been made available to the researcher’s primary dissertation advisor for the purpose of data verification, coding, and analysis. The results will be made available to respective school administrators, if requested.
Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the methods used to gather the qualitative data comprising this research in order to address the research questions. Qualitative data were gathered through a variety of sources (demographic surveys, semi-structured interviews with educators and students, classroom observations, program artifacts, and a reflexive journal). The researcher analyzed data gathered from each participating school in a separate within-case analysis, followed by a cross-case analysis. Descriptions of the timeline of the study and the data analysis procedures, as well as a statement of ethics, were also provided.
CHAPTER FOUR:
ANALYSIS OF THE DATA AND EXPLANATION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of educators (defined as teachers, counselors, and administrators) and students towards structured SEL programs, particularly the CLEP. In order to accomplish this, data were collected through demographic surveys, viewing program artifacts, and conducting semi-structured interviews with participants as well as classroom observations of the program lessons in action. In order to ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms are used to refer to the participating schools, educators, and students. This study was guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do educators (teachers, counselors, administrators) view their roles when participating in a structured SEL program (the CLEP)?

Research Question 2: How do educators (teachers, counselors, administrators) and students experience a structured SEL program (the CLEP)?

Over the course of a 10-month period, data were collected from two schools in order to address these research questions. A qualitative multiple-case study design was used to explore the perspectives of educators towards their role with participating in structured SEL programs such as the CLEP, as well as how educators and students experience a structured SEL program (the CLEP). Each case was comprised of a school which has consistently implemented the CLEP since the fall of 2015 and included educators as well as students who agreed to participate in this study. Hamilton Elementary School is referred to as (HES) and Parker School is referred to as (PS).

At both schools, the researcher collected demographic surveys, conducted semi-structured interviews with educators and students, and viewed program artifacts. Demographic
surveys sought to obtain basic data regarding each participant’s name, age, gender, and ethnic background. In addition to this basic information, the Student Demographic Survey asked students to share their grade level. The Educator Demographic Survey asked educators to also report how many years they have been in educator, how many years they have been in their current position, and to provide their definition of SEL. Program artifacts which included a parent newsletter created by an educator at HES, and an essay written by a student at PS were collected (see Appendices H and I). In addition to collecting these demographic surveys and program artifacts, semi-structured interviews with educators and students were conducted. The purpose of these interviews was to gain insight regarding the views that educators have towards their roles with participating in the CLEP as well as how educators and students experience this structured SEL program.

Across both cases, a total of 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted in a single session each, of which seven were with educators and six were with students. These initial interviews were conducted with a total of 36 participants, of which 14 were educators and 22 were students. Interviews were scheduled according to the availability of participants during the school day and took place in both group as well as individual formats. Interviews took place in both formats due to reasons related to participant availability during the timeframe of the researcher’s visit to each school. All interviews were conducted during the participants’ non-instructional periods during their school day with consideration given to convenience with their schedules.

HES included six educator interviews and four student interviews. All of the HES student interviews, and three of the educator interviews, were conducted in a group format, with groups ranging between three to four participants in each. Three HES educator interviews were
conducted in an individual setting. The length of time for HES interviews ranged from approximately 20 to 45 minutes each.

PS included one educator interview and two student interviews. All of these interviews were conducted in a group format, consisting of two to five participants in each, and lasted approximately 30 minutes.

At both schools, educators and students were interviewed in person. Educators were later contacted via email and invited to answer follow up questions as well as check the accuracy of interview data. All interviews were audio-recorded then professionally transcribed, and follow up questions were asked via email correspondence.

Classroom observations of the CLEP in action were conducted at HES on two occasions, but not at PS due to limitations with the school schedule during data collection timeline. The researcher observed Ms. Kristen deliver the CLEP third-grade unit one (Courage), lesson three, to two separate third-grade classes. Both lessons lasted approximately 30 minutes each. Throughout the classroom observations at HES, detailed field notes were taken to ensure that there was rich, thick description of the participants and setting (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). Although classroom observations were only gathered at HES, the data collected from these observations were used to help identify emerging themes along with other data sources collected at both schools. Creswell (2013) emphasizes the importance of collecting multiple forms of qualitative data in order to present an in-depth understanding of the case. Through analyzing multiple and varied sources of data, the information gathered was triangulated in an effort to enhance the trustworthiness of this study, particularly its credibility (Creswell, 2013; Krefting, 1991). The ways in which each of these data sources supported the findings of other data sources will be discussed later in this chapter.
This chapter will provide descriptions of the cases and qualitative data, including the results of semi-structured interviews, which will lead to a discussion of emerging categories and themes. The descriptions of each case also contain further detail about each educator and student participant. The experiences that educators and students have had participating in SEL programs such as the CLEP, their views towards the importance of having SEL programs as part of the school day, and ways to improve the implementation of such programs in schools are also discussed.

**Description of the Choose Love Enrichment Program**

The Choose Love Enrichment Program (CLEP) is a structured SEL curriculum available for students across grades preK-12 (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2016). The program was founded in 2015 by Ms. Scarlett Lewis whose son, Jesse Lewis, was killed in the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012. Before leaving for school on that morning, Jesse had written three words on their kitchen chalkboard, “nurturing, healing, love” which inspired Ms. Lewis and the development of the CLEP (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019, p. 6).

According to the CLEP Educator’s Guide, “The Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization committed to reaching students, educators, and individuals, both nationally and internationally, with a simple, yet profound formula for choosing love. Our signature program uses “nurturing, healing, love” as a foundation for learning and for life” (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019, p. 7). The CLEP is further described as a comprehensive, evidence-based program which was “created by educators for educators” and is aligned with Common Core State Standards, American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Mindsets &
Behaviors for Student Success, and CASEL’s five core SEL competencies (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019, p. 5).

The curriculum consists of four major units that guide lessons across grade levels. Each unit focuses on the concepts of Courage, Gratitude, Forgiveness, and Compassion in Action, which together equal the “Choose Love Formula” promoted by the program (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019, p. 13). The definitions of each of these terms, as provided by the CLEP, are described in Table 12.

Table 12
*Definition of Choose Love Enrichment Program Unit Terms*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>Courage is the willingness and ability to work through obstacles despite feeling embarrassment, fear, reluctance, or uncertainty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>Gratitude is mindful thankfulness and the ability to be thankful even when things in life are challenging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>Forgiveness means to choose to let go of anger and resentment toward yourself or someone else, to surrender thoughts of revenge, and to move forward with your personal power intact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion in Action</td>
<td>Compassion is the understanding of a problem or the suffering of another and acting to solve the problem or alleviate the suffering. Students apply their empathy and communication skills to support one another through compassionate action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The CLEP’s curriculum includes lessons that focus on these concepts and can be implemented on a flexible schedule to facilitate integration into school routines despite the challenges and time constraints that may arise throughout a school year (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019). Program lessons at the elementary level are 20 to 45 minutes, middle-school lessons are 5-30 minutes, and high school lessons are 10-15 minutes in length (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019). The program can be implemented by teachers or other
educators (i.e., school counselors) in a classroom and through a school-wide approach (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019). Lessons are designed to be taught in sequence while educators are encouraged to continue with the lesson sequence even if there is an interruption to the schedule (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019). A summary of the lessons, the time allotted for each lesson, and the recommended duration of each unit and program are listed in Table 13.
Table 13

*Choose Love Enrichment Program, Recommendations for Lesson Delivery*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Number of Lessons in each of the Four Units</th>
<th>Total Number of Lessons</th>
<th>Number of Minutes per Lesson</th>
<th>Number of Weeks for Each Unit</th>
<th>Total Number of Weeks (at pace of 1 lesson per week)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Grade</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Grade</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Grade</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25-40</td>
<td>4-6 (1 lesson per week)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Grade</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30-45</td>
<td>4-6 (1 lesson per week)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Grade</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30-45</td>
<td>4-6 (1 lesson per week)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>15-30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Grades 6, 7, 8)</td>
<td>7 “Brain Blasts”</td>
<td>28 “Brain Blasts”</td>
<td>“Brain Blasts”</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 “Brain Blast” Lesson per week followed by “Power Surges” on the remaining days each week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28 “Power Surges”</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>“Power Surges”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>7 weeks (1 unit lesson per week)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Grades 9, 10, 11, 12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Educators can access and download the curriculum as well as related resources, including an educator’s guide, for free via the CLEP’s website (www.jesselewiscooselove.org, 2019). *The Educator’s Guide* for implementing the CLEP provides educators with a “description of the program, research, content, teaching strategies and best practices for teaching social and emotional learning (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019, p. 1). In addition to the strategies for teaching the program lessons, *The Educator’s Guide* also provides educators with suggestions for how to navigate difficult conversations with students including how to identify when it is appropriate to refer a student to their school counselor for further assistance. Although the CLEP can be taught by educators who are not counselors, educators are encouraged to collaborate closely with the school counselor in order to implement this curriculum (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019).

The CLEP promotes the development of social and emotional skills through a variety of approaches depending on student age and grade level. While the curriculum is differentiated according to grade level, there are central tenets to the program (i.e., the units focusing on courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion) and frequently used terms. One of the foundational teachings of the program is a simplified overview of brain functioning to help students of all ages develop insight with their emotions and decision-making processes. The basic composition of the human brain as it relates to impulse control and decision making is depicted in Table 14.
### Table 14

**Neuroscience Behind Choose Love Enrichment Program**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parts of Brain</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lizard Brain (Reptilian)</td>
<td>Brainstem and cerebellum; responsible for body’s vital functions, i.e., breathing, heart rate, body temperature; reactive (Kukk, 2018; MacLean, 1967)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbat Brain (Mammalian Brain)</td>
<td>Responsible for social and emotional behaviors, quick value judgements, influences initial behavior when experiencing something (Kukk, 2018; MacLean, 1967)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Brain (Prefrontal Cortex)</td>
<td>Responsible for imagination, thought, planning, and decision-making (Kukk, 2018; MacLean, 1967).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**

All three parts of brain influence behavior, knowledge of how this happens can inspire more self-awareness and better decision making. “The Jesse Lewis Choose Love Foundation wants to help everyone learn how to leave the lizard, and to nudge the numbat toward hugging the human” (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019, p. 30).

These concepts are central to the instruction of the CLEP. Another way in which the program strives to engage students of all grade levels and ages is through commonly used phrases. For example, “Brave Breaths” are taught to help students calm down in order to think about what to do next when faced with a challenge (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019, p. 26). The CALM acronym as described in Table 15 below. This term is used in reference to lessons on social problem solving (i.e., how to resolve a conflict with a friend) in various parts of the curriculum.
According to the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement (2019), the CLEG has been downloaded and is currently being implemented in schools throughout the United States. As of 2019, the program has been in existence for three years as it officially launched in 2016 (www.jesselewischoosealove.org, 2019). Both of the cases in this study, HES and PS, have implemented the CLEG utilizing a whole-school approach which will be further described throughout this chapter.

**Description of Cases and Participants**

Both of the cases comprising this study were chosen from a group of five schools throughout the nation which self-reported that they had consistently implemented the CLEG since the fall of 2015. This information was confirmed by the founder of the Choose Love Enrichment Program, Ms. Scarlett Lewis, and a lead researcher for the CLEG. A description of these five schools is provided in Table 7. In addition to meeting these criteria, the two cases (HES and PS) were chosen because of the willingness of school personnel to participate in this study and include educator as well as student participants.
The focus of the study was not to compare both cases, but to find common themes related to the two research questions at each school. Descriptions of key facts relative to each case, as well as the demographic information pertaining to the individual participants from each case, are provided via Tables 8, 9, 10, and 11. Further description regarding each case and the participants comprising each case is provided below.

**Hamilton Elementary School (HES)**

Hamilton Elementary School (HES) is a public elementary school serving children in grades K-4 located in a city of approximately 82,830 residents (2015 Census Estimate) within the Southwest Central Region of the United States. HES is one of 10 elementary schools in a district with approximately 10,039 students enrolled as of October 2017. According to the district’s 2016-2017 state report card data, 40% of students throughout the district were considered to be low-income. According to HES’ 2016-2017 state report card data, there were 333 students enrolled in the school, of which 55% were considered to be low-income. The average class size consists of about 21 students and there are three classes in each grade level. The district’s vision statement emphasizes the district’s goal to serve as a “trusted leader” in public education within its state and enable every student to achieve his or her full potential. The district’s mission emphasizes the importance of exceeding high expectations every day and providing students with an inclusive and safe environment. HES’ vision and mission statements emphasize working cooperatively with parents and the community to provide a safe and nurturing environment where meaningful learning experiences will afford all students the opportunity to become productive, lifelong learners with a vision for their future. A demographic summary report from the fall of 2017 posted on the district’s website states that the
student enrollment in the district has grown 9.4% in the five years between the 2011/12 and 2016/17 school years.

HES began implementing the CLEP in the fall of 2016. The school counselor, Ms. Kristen, has served as the lead facilitator of the program at HES since its inception. Ms. Kristen initially became familiar with the CLEP at HES after she was contacted by the school district Assistant Superintendent who heard about the program and reached out to discuss the possibility of piloting the program at HES. Ms. Kristen stated that she believes the assistant superintendent sought her out to pilot this program at HES because, in her words, “I’m usually open to ideas, and he also knew my real commitment to classroom guidance and school-wide initiatives.”

Following this conversation between the district assistant superintendent and Ms. Kristen, Ms. Kristen called Scarlett Lewis to learn more about the program. In speaking about her phone call with Scarlett Lewis, Ms. Kristen stated, “She’s so passionate, I thought after talking to her, well I’ve got to try it and so that’s what I did.” As the program was still very new at that time, the district supported its pilot implementation at HES instead of other schools in the district. According to Ms. Kristen, part of the reason for this is due to the concerns related to the stressors that students who attend HES experience in the lives as many come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds which prompts the need for more school-wide supports.

Starting in the fall of 2016, HES piloted the CLEP by Ms. Kristen going into classrooms every other week to teach the lessons that are part of the curriculum, with teachers observing and then informally reinforcing elements of the program through references to concepts, as situations arise during the day. The school principal led whole school assemblies in which students were awarded for making good choices in line with the CLEP. HES’ approach combined the CLEP with aspects of another SEL program which had been implemented at HES since 2012, Franklin
Covey’s *Leader in Me* Program (Covey, 2008). A commonly used phrase at HES that highlights the integration of both programs is, “Remember Leaders, Leaders Choose Love.” Ms. Kristen also shared that in the past she used the *Second Step* (Committee for Children, 2011) curriculum to inform her classroom guidance lessons. However, as time progressed she felt the need to change her approach, and so she began to develop her own curriculum which she used until she became introduced to the CLEP.

After obtaining consent from district and building administrators to conduct this research study at HES, initial interviews and classroom observations took place over the course of two days in September 2017. HES is housed within a rectangular-shaped brick building built in 1889, and located within a residential area of the city that is approximately one-mile walking distance to the downtown area. A green “Choose Love” sign was observed to be present in the window adjacent to the building’s main entrance.

At the start of the day, children were observed entering the HES building, some of whom were escorted by their parents, and immediately going into the gymnasium located next to the main entrance in order to meet their teachers and line up with their classmates. Kristen (school counselor) quickly introduced herself and invited the researcher into the gymnasium to wait until the school day officially began with their weekly meeting as a whole school. As students continued to come into the gym, all teachers and the school counselor were observed to be actively assisting students with getting settled into their class lines while waiting for the principal to address everyone for the school’s weekly meeting.

After students settled into their class lines over the next 10 minutes, the principal (Bonnie) addressed everyone and acknowledged students who demonstrated positive behavior towards others over the prior week. Bonnie referenced the CLEP and gave out rewards to certain
students who were observed to demonstrate behaviors promoted by the CLEP (i.e., courage), such as a “Choose Love Pillow,” a small pillow with a heart embroidered on it. As Bonnie acknowledged students for showing kindness to others, the importance of demonstrating leadership skills was also referenced as she made various announcements to the school such as, “Remember, leaders choose love.” The school counselor later shared that the principal conducts this school-wide morning meeting once each week.

**HES educator participants.** The participant pool available for this study at Hamilton Elementary School (HES), was comprised of 11 educators, including an administrator, a counselor, and teachers, of whom nine were female and two were male. Although parents were not originally intended to be part of the study, three HES educators (Stephanie, Laurie, Anne) stated during their interviews that they were also parents of students who participated in the CLEP at HES. These three educators openly shared information from both an educator and parent perspective in response to interview questions. Another educator participant, the school principal (Bonnie), shared her general perspective of the program as a parent during her interview. Bonnie acknowledged that her children did not participate in the CLEP (as they were older, ages 13 and 17, and had already exited HES when the program was implemented), but in reflecting on the program from a parent perspective, felt that this program would help students develop more resilience as they get older and face challenges of adolescence and young adulthood.

**School counselor (Ms. Kristen).** The interview with Kristen took place at 8:30am on the first day of the visit, September 20th, 2017, in an individual format. At the time of her interview in September 2017, Kristen reported having 18 years of experience in education, of which 15 years were in her current position at HES. At the time of the interview, Kristen was the only
counselor at HES, a position which required her to provide varying levels of social and emotional support to students across all grade levels (K-4) at HES. After having corresponded multiple times via phone and email to plan this visit, the researcher and Kristen had established a positive rapport in the months leading up to the interview. Kristen was instrumental in helping to secure permission from her building and district administration for this study. Kristen further assisted with recruiting educator and student participants as well as obtaining informed consent from the educator participants, parental consent from the parents of student participants, and student assent forms in advance of the visit. Kristen also developed the interview schedule with consideration given to the availability of educators and students during non-instructional periods.

Throughout the interview as well as all interactions with Kristen during this visit, the researcher observed that Kristen consistently exhibited a warm, optimistic, and thoughtful demeanor during her interactions with others. Kristen was eager to share ideas in response to interview questions and provided her definition of SEL as “teaching children/humans the skills necessary to make it through life.” Kristen reported that she provided classroom guidance through delivering the CLEP lessons to each classroom once every two weeks. In addition to her scheduled class lessons, Kristen provided counseling support to HES students on an individual and group basis throughout each school day. Kristen also provided counseling support at non-scheduled times if a student was in distress and demonstrated a need for this type of support by either coming to her office or being referred by a parent, teacher, or administrator.

During their interactions, Kristen also shared that she is an adjunct professor at a local university where she teaches undergraduate psychology courses. Kristen holds a master’s degree in counseling and is married to Frank, a second-grade teacher at HES, who also participated in
this study. On multiple occasions throughout the visit, during and outside of the structured interview, Kristen shared that she is enthusiastic about the CLEP and implementing it at HES.

**School principal (Bonnie).** The interview with Bonnie took place in the morning of the first day of the visit, following Kristen’s interview. Bonnie stated that she had more than 20 years of experience in education, 18 of which were in her current role as principal of HES as of the time of her interview. Bonnie also acknowledged being a single mother of two daughters.

Bonnie exhibited a calm, warm, and caring demeanor throughout the interview. She provided her definition of SEL as the “teaching and instruction of feelings, emotions, self-reflection, and necessary coping skills.” Bonnie spoke to the SEL related initiatives that have been implemented in the past, indicating that this may have helped HES receive and implement the CLEP. Bonnie discussed the importance of educators at HES addressing the needs of the whole-child throughout her interview. Bonnie particularly emphasized the importance of addressing the basic needs of children with helping them to feel “comfortable and feel like they’re safe” in order to facilitate academic progress.

**Kindergarten teacher group (Fiona, Madeline, Reagan).** This group of three educators arrived at their scheduled time. The range of years of experience in education for the members of this group was less than one to 11 (\(M = 6\)). The range in ages of members of this group was between 25 and 32 (\(M = 29\)). As a group they presented with an upbeat, relaxed interpersonal dynamic and quickly settled into the interview.

At the time of the interview, Fiona had over 10 years of experience in education. She provided her definition of SEL as “learning skills that allow you to manage your emotions for yourself and toward others.” Fiona exhibited a friendly and positive attitude throughout the interview.
Madeline shared that she had between five and 10 years of experience in education. She completed most of the demographic survey form but did not provide a definition for SEL. Due to time limitations, there was not an opportunity to follow up on this during or after the interview. Madeline exhibited an engaged and positive demeanor as she spoke about her work with students and the CLEP.

Reagan was a student-teacher in her first year in education and at HES, working with Fiona and Madeline as part of her training. She provided her definition of SEL as “teaching the whole child and promoting the development of healthy emotions, providing students with coping mechanisms.” Reagan exhibited a warm and calm presence throughout the group interview.

**Second-grade teacher group (Frank and Stephanie).** This group of two teachers arrived together on time for their scheduled meeting. The average years of experience in education between both Frank and Stephanie was 18 ($M = 18$) and the range in age between them was 45 to 48 ($M = 46.5$). Frank and Stephanie appeared very relaxed and happy to participate in the interview as they felt favorably towards their experiences with the CLEP. Both also offered to share more information for research purposes if needed at a later time.

At the time of the interview, Frank stated that he had over 10 years of experience in education, with 9 of those years being in the role of second-grade teacher. He provided his definition of SEL as “The skills and strategies that help us understand and manage our emotions and that help us function with others in everyday life.” Frank exhibited a calm and content disposition throughout this interview, smiling as he spoke about his views towards the CLEP and the ways in which he feels it supports students.

Stephanie stated that she had over 20 years of experience in education, while at the time of the interview, she was in her first year as a second-grade teacher. Stephanie shared her
definition of SEL as “the process through which people learn and apply the strategies necessary to understand and manage emotions.” In addition to sharing these aspects of herself and her definition of SEL, she also self-identified as a parent of a child at HES who is participating in the CLEP.

**Third-grade teacher (Laurie).** The interview with Laurie took place at about 11am on September 20th, 2017 in an individual format. Laurie demonstrated a kind demeanor and seemed slightly reserved initially but grew at ease as the interview progressed. She stated that she had over 20 years of experience in education with three of those years as a third-grade teacher at HES.

Laurie spoke in a heartfelt way about her views towards SEL programs in schools, and at one point became tearful as she discussed personal family experiences which have led her to reflect on the role of SEL programming in schools. Laurie provided her definition that SEL is:

Gaining education that all people have emotions and learning that we are responsible for how we use those emotions. We have the ability to choose how we act/react to different situations. We can choose to show empathy for others. We can choose goals to obtain using our knowledge.

Laurie also self-identified as a parent of a child participating the CLEP at HES and spoke to the ways in which she feels her son has benefitted from the program lessons.

**Fourth-grade teacher group (Anne, James, Michelle).** This group of three teachers arrived to the counselor’s office together and warmly greeted the researcher. The range of years of experience for members of this group was three to 21 ($M = 15$). The range in age for members of this group was 35 to 46 ($M = 42$). Following the researcher’s initial introduction
and explanation of the study, these teachers transitioned quickly into discussion regarding the interview questions.

Noting that she had 20 years of experience in education at the time of the interview, Anne shared that she was in her first year as a fourth-grade teacher at HES. Anne described her definition of SEL as “Learning about how to relate to others in healthy positive ways.” She also self-identified as a parent of a child participating in the CLEP at HES.

James acknowledged having less than five years of experience in education, with two of those years as a fourth-grade teacher at HES. He provided his definition of SEL as the “gaining of social and emotional skills that allow students to become successful members of society.”

Michelle shared that she had over 20 years of experience in education, with 10 of those years as a fourth-grade teacher at HES. She provided her definition of SEL as “teaching children to be proactive in how they deal with each other as well as their own emotions.”

**HES student participants.** A total of 15 HES students participated in this study, of which 11 were female and four were male. Parental consent and student demographic surveys were initially obtained for 17 students from HES. However, two of these 17 students were absent during the researcher’s visit, did not participate in interviews, and were therefore removed from the study. At the time of the interviews conducted in September 2017, student participants ranged between five to nine years of age ($M = 7.5$). The group of student participants from HES consisted of two Kindergarten students, two first-grade students, four second-grade students, three third-grade students, and four fourth-grade students. The student interviews took place in the Kristen’s office. Kristen remained present throughout the interviews to assist students with meeting the researcher as well as helping to manage time and keep to the planned schedule.
Kindergarten and first-grade group. This group consisted of four students including two Kindergarten students, Walter (age 6) and Jackie (age 5), as well as two first grade students, Susan (age 6) and Shannon (age 6). Walter and Jackie (Kindergarten) had been exposed to two Choose Love lessons since the start of the school year. Susan and Shannon (first-grade) had participated in Choose Love throughout the prior school year when they were in Kindergarten.

The students were escorted by Kristen to the office as a group where they transitioned easily to sit around a circular table with the researcher. Walter sat in a small rocking chair adjacent to the table while others sat around the table. Kristen sat off to the side near her desk but close enough to be present if needed. The researcher then explained the purpose of the interview to these students in simple terms to help them understand and help them engage (e.g., inviting the students to share their thoughts, reassuring them that there would be no right or wrong answers, and letting them know that they can ask questions at any time). The students were receptive to this and seemed relaxed throughout the group interview. On occasion, students needed mild redirection to help keep the conversation on topic, but they were easily transitioned back to the question or topic being discussed. At times when a student’s response was slightly unclear or did not directly answer the question, the researcher sought clarification by gently prompting the student to expand further. For example, when asked what does she think about the CLEP, Susan happily replied, “I got a Choose Love pillow!” The researcher responded “you did? does that mean you like it?” and Susan affirmed that yes, she does like the program.

Second-grade group. This group consisted of four students: Barbara (7), Faith (7), Patrick (8), and Sarah (7). Although they were in the same grade and received the Choose Love lessons on a similar schedule, not all students were in the same class. The students in this group were slightly quiet at first and Patrick was a bit reluctant, speaking in a low voice, but all
warmed up after a few minutes. The students shared their thoughts in response to the questions as part of the student interview and tended to elaborate without need for prompting.

Third-grade group. This group consisted of three students: Jennifer (9), Jude (8), and Nicole (8). The students were easily engaged and seemed happy to participate. At the beginning, after the researcher introduced herself and the reason for the meeting, Jennifer shared at the start “isn’t that an interview? Because my mom does interviews on the radio all the time.” The researcher affirmed that the purpose of the meeting was to conduct an interview and explained further as to why. Students spoke in a slightly quiet voice in the beginning but as the interview went on, seemed more comfortable sharing and independently provided supporting details with their responses.

Fourth-grade group. This group consisted of four students who were all nine years old: Anna, Mary, Patricia, and Paul. The students were quick to settle and engage in the interview with the researcher. Anna was particularly eager to speak and share her thoughts. Mary listened more and sometimes spoke in a slightly quiet voice while she appeared particularly reflective and thoughtful with her responses. Paul discussed his reflections on the community service activities that students have participated in as part of the CLEP at HES, and emphasized how the program has inspired students to want to help others. Altogether as a group, these students spoke enthusiastically regarding their insights with the program and the activities they enjoy participating in as part of the program, particularly those that involve helping others.

Parker School (PS)

Participants from the Parker School (PS) were comprised of three educators (all teachers) and seven students between grades five and eight. Parker School (PS) is a private school serving approximately 500 students from preschool through eighth-grade located within a city in the
Northeast. PS is situated within a residential area of this city approximately two miles driving distance from a major highway. PS draws students from the city it is in as well as the surrounding suburbs. According to PS’ website, PS promotes faith-based instruction and provides its students with a curriculum that is centered around this faith. PS also emphasizes the importance of providing students with an education that is faith-based and intellectually stimulating so that students may reach their full potential (PS website, November 1, 2018). In order for students to attend this school, parents are required to pay tuition costs which range from $4,000 to $8,000.

PS has implemented the CLEP since the fall of 2016 via a whole-school approach in which teachers teach the CLEP in their classrooms, and the school leadership integrates elements of the program in larger school settings such as assemblies. After email correspondence with the PS principal throughout the fall of 2017, the researcher planned to visit PS on Monday February 12, 2018. However, the visit was rescheduled as students from PS were invited to attend a CLEP conference at a local university also scheduled for February 12, 2018. In order to avoid this conflict, the researcher’s visit was rescheduled to Tuesday February 20, 2018. The researcher visited PS on this rescheduled date and conducted the educator and student interviews in person.

A few days prior to the rescheduled visit, a mass shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, occurred on February 14, 2018. This event gained national media attention. References to this tragic event were made during the interviews conducted at PS on February 20th, 2018 by both educators and students.

Upon entering the school building on this date, the researcher checked in with the school monitor and personnel in the main office prior to being escorted to a conference room where the interviews were scheduled to take place. Following this visit, the researcher inquired with the
school principal about the possibility of interviewing more groups at PS and possibly completing classroom observations. The principal informed the researcher that this would not be possible due to schedule limitations and recent weather-related interruptions to the school’s schedule that impacted the availability of teachers and students. Although additional visits and interviews were not possible to arrange, the researcher later followed up with educator participants via email to confirm the accuracy of interview data.

**PS educator participants.** A total of three educators from PS participated in this study, of which two were female and one was male. At the time of the interview conducted in February 2018, these educator participants ranged between 56 to 71 years of age \((M = 62)\). The range of years of experience in education for members of this group was 11 to 49 \((M = 28)\). Two of these participating educators from PS, one content area specialist and another who was an elementary teacher, assisted the researcher by serving as liaisons between the researcher and other participants prior to the researcher’s arrival. These two educators developed a schedule for interviews to take place throughout the course of the researcher’s one-day visit. Both of these teachers assisted with recruiting a third educator, Selena, who was available at the time of the teacher group interview and was interested in participating. The three participating educators (all teachers) chose to meet with the researcher together and be interviewed as a group. This group interview was conducted at the start of the day and was held within a conference room setting.

**PS educator group (David, Donna, Selena).** This group arrived together and met the researcher at the scheduled time of 8:15am on Tuesday morning February 20, 2018. They quickly settled into meeting with the researcher and were eager to share their views about the CLEP in response to interview questions. Together as a group, these teachers exhibited a
collaborative dynamic, reflectively listening and responding to each other’s comments, while also answering the interview questions.

David acknowledged having more than 20 years of experience in education, three of which were in his position as content area specialist for grades PreK-8. He provided the following definition of SEL: “SEL can be described by an equation of choosing love, courage, gratitude, forgiveness, compassion in action; skills of self-management, self-awareness, social interactions, decision making are integrated in teaching SEL.”

Donna indicated that she also had more than 20 years of experience in education of which 23 were in her current position as an elementary teacher of all subjects. She provided her definition of SEL as “the process of helping students be mindful of how they treat others and how to have the courage to care, forgive and love others.”

Selena stated that she had over 10 years of experience in education, all of which were in her current position as a Humanities teacher for students in grades three through eight at PS. Selena provided the following definition of SEL: “SEL provides students (and adults too) the ‘scientific’ basis/reasons our brains react to situations and how we can train ourselves to be self-aware and perhaps to see things and react in a different way or perspective.”

**PS student participants.** The PS principal, as well as two of the educator participants, David and Donna, served as liaisons between the researcher and parents of student participants, distributing and collecting parent consent as well as student assent and demographic survey forms prior to the researcher’s visit. David and Donna assisted with obtaining parental consent and Student Demographic Surveys for seven students, of which four were female and three were male. All of these students participated in group interviews. The researcher met with one group consisting of five fifth-grade students and then a group of two eighth-grade students. At the time
of the interview conducted in February 2018, student participants ranged between 8 to 13 years of age \((M = 10.6)\). These student interviews took place within a conference room.

**Fifth-grade group.** This group consisted of five fifth-grade students who ranged between ages 10 and 11: Anthony (11), Daniel (10), Doreen (10), Gabriel (11), and Joseph (11). The students arrived together accompanied by their teacher, Donna, to meet the researcher. The students came prepared with their CLEP journals to reference as needed during the discussion. The students were respectful, listened to the examiner as well as each other, and overall positively engaged throughout the interview.

**Eighth-grade group.** This group consisted of two eighth-grade students, Jenny and Kelly, who were both 13 years old. They arrived to the conference room together to meet the researcher and exhibited calm, kind, and thoughtful demeanors throughout the interview. Together they shared their own thoughts and also spoke to experiences that they, along with their classmates, have had with the CLEP in general. Jenny also shared with the researcher an essay she wrote and presented at the Choose Love conference she attended during the week prior which is included in this study as a program artifact (see Appendix I).

**Coding and Data Analysis Procedures**

**Initial Coding Procedures**

Interviews were audio-recorded by the researcher and then professionally transcribed. After receiving the transcripts, the researcher listened to the interviews while reading the transcripts and made minor edits wherever necessary to ensure the accuracy of the data. The researcher engaged in member checking by sharing the updated transcripts with educator participants and inviting their feedback to ensure that the data appeared accurate from their view (Creswell, 2013). The researcher also asked follow up questions of participants in order to
ensure the researcher’s interpretation of certain statements was accurate from participant perspectives. After the transcripts were finalized, the researcher began the process of open coding by writing ideas that emerged in the margins of each transcript (Merriam 2009). The researcher also reviewed field notes taken during classroom observations, the definitions of SEL provided by educator participants on their demographic surveys, and program artifacts (including a parent newsletter from HES and a student essay from PS).

**Coding Methods**

The researcher entered the updated transcripts into the HyperResearch (HyperResearch, 2015) program. The researcher then developed a code book on HyperResearch and completed the coding process using this software. The transcripts, field notes, classroom observation notes, and program artifacts from HES were reviewed and coded first followed by the transcripts, field notes, and program artifacts of PS. Open coding was used throughout the process of initially reading both sets of data (Creswell, 2013). The researcher then reviewed all of the coded transcripts on at least two more occasions to ensure that all data were thoroughly considered throughout the coding process and that the codes offered accurate representations of the selected content. The researcher then engaged in Axial coding to identify relationships between codes and develop categories (Merriam, 2009). Upon developing categories and identifying which categories connected to others, themes emerged which contributed to the researcher’s findings.

In order to determine how to sort codes into appropriate categories, the researcher wrote the codes on note paper and then placed these on a large piece of paper. After looking over the codes from this visual perspective, the researcher was able to develop ideas about which codes related to each other or had a common element. This helped the researcher to group codes into categories. Using the HyperResearch (HyperResearch, 2015) software, the researcher then
generated frequency reports of each code as well as reports of the codes assigned to each case. Upon further review of this information, the researcher drew inferences from the categories of data which yielded themes and the subsequent development of findings statements. Throughout this process, the researcher conferred with her dissertation advisor who also served as the auditor for this study. Through in-depth discussions which took place throughout the process of analyzing and drawing inferences from the data, the researcher’s advisor and auditor helped to clarify the coding process and adjustments were made to all codes and categories along the way.

**Development of Themes**

Data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Merriam, 2009). After reading the transcripts and beginning to conceptualize the data through the process of open coding, the researcher engaged in axial coding which helped define the categories, and the codes comprising each category. Interview data were coded first for both cases, followed by analysis of the two program artifacts which were assigned codes as well. The program artifacts included a parent newsletter created by the school counselor at HES, as well as a student essay written by a student at PS (see Appendices H and I).

Upon developing and refining categories, the researcher engaged in selective coding through closely reviewing the data comprising each category, which then led to the identification of emerging themes (Merriam, 2009). The researcher constantly compared the data and presenting concepts in order to identify codes, then categories, and then the themes which emerged throughout this analysis. The researcher discussed the emerging themes with her advisor and made necessary adjustments based on in-depth discussions. The four themes that emerged from the data were:
1. The Perceived Role of SEL in Schools emerged as a theme which consisted of perspectives shared by educators (administrators, counselors, teachers), including some who self-identified as also being parents of children participating in the CLEP.

2. The Purpose of SEL Instruction emerged as a theme which consisted of addressing SEL needs, teaching strategies for coping with challenges, as well as teaching values and skills.

3. Implementation Requirements for SEL Programs included views regarding the format and structural elements of SEL programs such as the CLEP, implementation challenges to overcome, instructional approaches, and recommendations for implementing SEL programs.

4. The Benefits of SEL emerged as a theme related to school climate, prevention and intervention, SEL outcomes of the CLEP curriculum, and student participant perspectives regarding differences between schools which have the CLEP and those that do not, as well as the overall importance of SEL instruction.

**Confirmability Audit**

The researcher sought the assistance of a highly qualified researcher, who was not directly involved with collecting or initially analyzing data to serve as an auditor for the data analysis process. The researcher’s dissertation advisor, Dr. Marcia Delcourt, also served as the auditor for this study. Dr. Delcourt has over 35 years of experience as a researcher with publications in journals such as *Educational and Psychological Measurement, Gifted Child Quarterly, The Journal for the Education of the Gifted, International Journal of Creativity and Problem Solving* and *Journal of Research and Development in Education*. Dr. Delcourt is currently the Coordinator of the Doctoral Program in Instructional Leadership at Western
Connecticut State University and has also served as a Professor at McGill University and the University of Virginia as well as principal investigator for the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.

As the auditor for this study, Dr. Delcourt reviewed the redacted data, analysis products, the researcher’s de-identified process notes, the researcher’s de-identified reflexive journal and information on how the instruments used in the study were developed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through this confirmability audit, the auditor confirmed that the findings of this study “are grounded in the data” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This approach enhances the trustworthiness of the study.

**Discussion of Themes**

The four themes that emerged from the data will be discussed as they relate to each research question. The findings associated with Theme 1 address Research Question 1. The findings associated with themes 2, 3, and 4 address Research Question 2. The researcher will define each theme and then discuss the evidence, organized by categories and codes, that supports each theme. This chapter will conclude with an overall summary of how the data addresses both research questions 1 and 2, including a statement of findings.

**Theme 1: Perceived Role of SEL in Schools**

The perceptions educators have toward their roles with participating in a structured SEL program, such as the CLEP, are multifaceted as well as influenced by their individual professional and personal experiences. This theme is explained in two categories, (a) educator participants’ perspectives, and (b) educator and parent perspectives.

The frequency of coded data which support the development of this theme and the related categories and codes is indicated on Table 16.
### Theme 1: Perceived Role of SEL in Schools, Categories and Frequencies of Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories and Codes</th>
<th>HES Educators</th>
<th>PS Educators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category 1: Educator Participant Perspectives</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Observations of Student Participation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Sense of Responsibility with Implementing SEL</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Sense of Competency</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) School Obligation</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) SEL as Foundation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) SEL as Priority</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>61</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category 2: Educator and Parent Perspective</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Enhancing Resilience</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Home-School Connection</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>76</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* This theme did not include any student responses.
Theme 1, category 1: educator participant perspectives. Throughout the educator interviews across cases, participants shared their perspectives regarding the role of SEL programs in schools. This included an overview of their observations of student participation in the CLEP and their holistic view of the role SEL programs play in schools related to the following concepts: (a) observations of student participation in the CLEP (b) educator sense of responsibility towards implementing SEL, (c) educator sense of competency with implementing SEL, (d) school obligation to implement SEL, (e) SEL as a foundation for other learning, and (f) SEL as a priority for schools.

Theme 1, category 1, code a: observations of student participation. Throughout the interviews, educators at both HES and PS discussed their observations of student participation in the CLEP.

HES. HES educators discussed how they observed students participate in structured CLEP lessons and related activities at other times during the school day. Kristen (school counselor) shared her observation of how students enjoyed activities that are part of the CLEP, particularly the diaphragmatic breathing exercises. Kristen noted that students have enthusiastically asked her to guide them through “Brave Breaths” during her visits to their classrooms (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019, p. 26). Teaching students to take “Brave Breaths” is a diaphragmatic breathing activity that helps students develop focused awareness of their emotions, regulate their emotions, and calmly approach what they may perceive as a challenging task (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019, p. 26).

HES teachers described how student participation in the CLEP extended beyond the structured lessons. For example, kindergarten teachers discussed their impressions of how students were “really making an effort to use what we talk about” and described how in a class
arts and crafts activity, kindergarten students chose to draw heart signs in reference to the CLEP. These kindergarten teachers also shared that they have observed students making heart sign gestures during their social interactions with others in the classroom, which appeared to be inspired by student participation in the CLEP.

Stephanie and Frank, second-grade teachers, discussed their views of how student participation in the program during non-lesson times occurred as a result of the ways in which teachers integrated follow up activities into their classrooms. They noted their observations of ways in which HES faculty members provided students with opportunities to take part in activities that supported the program’s overall implementation. For example, the school established a “Random Acts of Kindness” group which helped students engage in community service activities, such as a fundraiser in which students created hand painted “Choose Love” yard sticks that they then sold to raise money for charity. Stephanie also described how she observed students engage in class discussions about topics such as courage during the CLEP lessons, and strive to apply related concepts learned through the lessons at other times as well. For example, when they appeared to be experiencing academic frustrations, Stephanie reminded her students to “show me some courage and try to work through it.” Stephanie noted that students then tried to persevere and that she has found that messages like this serve as “another reinforcer, a positive reinforcer, that again they need to hear all the time.”

Similar observations were acknowledged in a separate interview with Laurie, third-grade teacher, who discussed her impressions that, as a result of their experience with the CLEP lessons on courage, students appeared more willing to complete challenging academic tasks. Laurie shared she observed students “persevere a little bit more when they’re struggling.” HES fourth-grade teachers also shared that following a CLEP lesson on courage, students appeared to
reflect on tasks they found challenging in the past, and seemed more willing to take academic risks than they did previously.

Laurie, as well as HES fourth-grade teachers Michelle and Anne, also reported that they observed students refer to visuals, such as posters that depict concepts of the CLEP curriculum, outside of the program lessons. Laurie shared that she referred back to a “Choose Courage” poster on the wall at times to help students who were struggling learners persevere through academic frustrations. Anne and Michelle also shared that they have four posters reflecting the CLEP objectives (i.e., “Choose Courage”) and that they “refer back to them a lot” with students throughout the school day. Overall, HES educators collectively reported that they observed students demonstrate their participation in the program during both the structured lessons and also at other points throughout the school day.

PS. PS educators discussed the ways in which students responded favorably to activities that are part of the CLEP curriculum such as journal writing. Donna, fifth-grade teacher, highlighted an example of one particular student who voluntarily began writing in her Choose Love journal, outside of structured CLEP lessons. Selena, Humanities teacher, discussed her observations of how students seemed to especially enjoy a guided reflection activity in which they listened to music and wrote in journals at the end of a CLEP lesson.

PS educators also discussed their observations of student participation at the middle school (grades six through eight) as well as their observations of student participation at the elementary (kindergarten through grade five) level. In grades six through eight at PS, males were placed into separate groups from female for their CLEP lessons because the educators noted that at times, it appeared that separating the groups according to gender at these grade levels facilitated better participation and more productive group discussions. PS teachers shared
their observations that separating groups in this way particularly helped eighth-grade girls participate more readily in the program, as they were more open to deep discussion about their emotional experiences related to the lesson. David, content specialist, discussed his impression that boys actively participated in the program while it “takes a little longer” for them to engage in group discussions as compared to their female peers.

PS teachers also discussed their observations of ways in which students referred to program language outside of the structured CLEP lessons, such as encouraging each other to “Choose Love,” during unstructured peer interactions in the hallways. Selena, Humanities teacher, shared her view that aspects of the program’s teachings helped students to think through ways to handle a situation differently, as prompted by a teacher in the classroom, and also on their own during unstructured times, “I heard kids in the hallway, you have to choose love, and there’s no sarcasm about it…” These teachers also reported that at a CLEP Conference held at a Local University on February 2, 2018, students spoke publicly about their experiences with the program in ways that demonstrated a high level of reflection as well as interest and engagement in the program. In particular, Jenny, an eighth-grade student at PS read an essay she wrote (see Appendix I) which detailed her experience with the CLEP, and the ways in which she as well as other students participated this program. Other students from PS and their parents attended this conference as well. This conference was also attended by student groups from two other schools which have implemented the CLEP, as well as Scarlett Lewis, university college professors, and a state senator.

**Theme 1, category 1, code b: sense of responsibility with implementing SEL.** Educators across cases discussed the sense of responsibility that they felt towards implementing SEL instruction such as the CLEP. Educators shared their perspectives that SEL programs are
important to have in schools, while their views as to who should be responsible for leading SEL program implementation varied. HES educators shared that the school counselor is viewed as the point person and lead facilitator for implementing the program at HES. This included delivering lessons to students while teachers were present for lessons and having the lesson concepts reinforced throughout the school day. PS educators demonstrated a shared sense of responsibility for implementing the program throughout the school with teachers serving as the lesson facilitator for their classes.

HES. Throughout the school counselor, Kristen’s, interview and the classroom observations, Kristen seemed to embrace her role and responsibilities as a school counselor with providing classroom guidance lessons to students throughout HES. When asked how she views her role and responsibility with meeting the SEL needs of all students in the school, Kristen (HES school counselor) shared that she felt this is “100%” of her job. Kristen acknowledged that she served as the lead facilitator for CLEP lessons in each classroom while teachers were present in class during the lessons. While Kristen delivers the structured CLEP lessons, she collaborates closely with Bonnie (school principal) who supports the CLEP implementation through her role as building leader. Bonnie shared that she viewed herself as responsible for establishing a culture that supports growth and “supporting others to allow students to feel safe and secure.” Bonnie also discussed how she felt it was part of her role as school principal to model behavior for others that aligns with these ideals, and that who she is and what she does is essential to promoting a supportive atmosphere within the school.

While all HES educators interviewed acknowledged feeling a sense of responsibility towards meeting the SEL needs of their students, kindergarten teachers seemed to express a greater sense of this responsibility as compared to their teacher colleagues at higher grade levels.
Their responses suggested that this is in part due to the young age of their students, as well as the nature of kindergarten being less academically intensive and more socially focused than the upper grade levels. Fiona and Madeline discussed how they felt it was their responsibility to address the SEL needs of students, and that this teaching is inherent to a kindergarten classroom. Madeline commented that “especially in kindergarten I feel like there’s a lot of… just social emotional learning in Kindergarten.” Reagan agreed with this, stating her view that “it’s a very big part of our job.” With respect to how she views her responsibility with meeting the SEL needs of students in school, Fiona also stated “I feel that it’s the first need that I’m serving as the teacher even though in theory we’re teaching standards, I feel like starting out that’s our first role.” Throughout the interview, Fiona reiterated her belief that it was her responsibility as an educator to provide students with SEL support, and to help students understand how their actions can impact the emotions of others. Fiona also stated “I think it’s our responsibility to help them understand what they’re feeling and helping them have the language to express themselves…”.

Second-grade teachers, Frank and Stephanie, discussed how they viewed it as their responsibility to carry over what students learned in the CLEP lessons taught by Kristen (school counselor). Stephanie shared her view that while the school counselor was the “Queen Bee” of the program’s implementation, “everybody plays a part in keeping it going.” Frank discussed how the concepts taught in the program are “something that you want your students to hear over and over again, so you’re going to thread it throughout the day” and that elementary school teachers, due to the amount of time spent with their students each day, play an important role in helping students to buy into the ideas presented in the program. In Frank’s view, if students see their teachers supporting the program and modeling strategies taught by the program, then students are going to be more receptive to the program.
Laurie, third-grade teacher, expressed that in her role, she felt a “large responsibility in helping [her students] social emotional needs.” Laurie elaborated on her view that academics should be balanced with SEL instruction, emphasizing that teachers must address SEL needs first in order to achieve other instructional goals. Laurie shared her observations that when students struggle to cope with stressful circumstances in their lives, their ability to sustain motivation towards academics is hindered as a result. Laurie also expressed her belief that while teachers are not the lead facilitators of the CLEP at HES, teachers still need to be present in the classroom as the lesson is delivered by the school counselor. Through being present in this way, teachers learn from the lesson. This helps teachers to be more prepared and willing to integrate, as well as reinforce ideas from the program, into their academic lessons on a daily basis. Similar to Laurie’s sense of responsibility with addressing the SEL needs of students, HES fourth-grade teacher, Michelle, expressed her belief that she views this as one her “top responsibilities,” to which James, another fourth-grade teacher, agreed. Both teachers indicated feeling responsible for meeting the SEL needs of their students in order to help students access classroom instruction.

PS. At PS, educators shared their views that they felt responsible for meeting the SEL needs of students in school, particularly in light of how some students may not receive guidance in this area at home. David, content specialist, commented that he felt SEL has always been “at the height of any classroom teaching,” while the ways in which teachers are expected to meet the SEL needs of students have changed over time. David discussed state initiatives to support SEL, i.e., state guidance to integrate SEL related practices such as restorative justice. David also referenced CASEL and the American Psychological Association, expressing that SEL has evolved over time in part because of the SEL research conducted by these organizations.
Furthermore, David expressed his view that teachers should embrace the CLEP curriculum and resources within their classroom just as they would with any other subject. Donna shared her view that embracing the program’s ideals, and modeling the skills when appropriate, is important because “teachers have to mirror what they teach to students.”

**Theme 1, category 1, code c: educator sense of competency with SEL.** Educators at both schools discussed their perceived level of competence with delivering SEL programs to students. Educator self-perceptions towards their levels of competency with implementing SEL varied between both cases. This seemed due in part to the different responsibilities associated with the role of teachers in their respective schools.

_HES._ At HES, teachers expressed that while they infused tenets of the CLEP into their daily interactions with students, they did not feel equipped to fully implement the program on their own, and therefore deferred to the school counselor (Kristen) for the delivery of program lessons. Kristen discussed how teachers were present in the classroom as she delivered lessons, and then reinforced elements of the program on their own, but that teachers did not feel comfortable teaching these lessons. Kristen speculated that teachers were concerned about a lack of training in the area of SEL as well as a lack of time in their schedules to teach this in addition to the other subjects for which they were already responsible.

This view was also expressed by HES kindergarten teachers who shared their views that while teachers may be somewhat prepared to roll out SEL instruction, they do not know how to direct an SEL initiative, and would need additional guidance in order to feel competent enough to do this. Laurie, third-grade teacher, expressed similar views and summarized her sentiments on this by stating:

> As a teacher that’s not in my curriculum… that’s what the classroom guidance counselor
is trained to do, she understands it more than I do… so to hear her language and to hear her explain it and all of her background knowledge come into play, it helps me teach it, it helps her teach the children and it helps me to reiterate it, but I don’t think I would do a very good job if it was left up to me.

Laurie confirmed that she was present when Kristen taught the lessons in her classroom, and felt equipped to informally reinforce elements of the program at other points during each day, but did not feel comfortable delivering the program lessons. At the fourth-grade level, teachers acknowledged taking a similar approach, with Anne stating, “Ms. Kristen teaches it but we’re there in the room so we are able to carry over what she’s gone over with them.” While HES educators seemed to embrace their role with “carrying over” information presented by school counselor during CLEP lessons, they also expressed a general sense of reluctance to directly facilitate lessons as they viewed this to be part of the school counselor’s role.

*PS.* The responses shared by PS teachers during their interview suggest a higher level of confidence with their ability to implement SEL instruction and deliver CLEP lessons to students in the classroom. PS teachers discussed their approach to teaching these lessons, including ways in which they have expanded upon what is outlined in the CLEP curriculum. Donna (fifth-grade) discussed how she and other teachers took a creative and individualized approach to implementing the lessons based on information present within the CLEP curriculum. Donna stated, “You kind of pick and choose and then you use [the CLEP curriculum] almost as a springboard,” for developing lesson plans, noting that “there’s plenty in there but you can tailor it to your teaching style or your level.” David (content specialist) agreed, adding with respect to the prescribed lessons, “I found that you have to individualize that also… everything is there.”
PS teachers easily discussed the ways in which they planned for CLEP lessons and informally referenced elements of the CLEP curriculum during various subjects. These teachers discussed creative ways in which they expand upon the scripted program lessons and take a unique approach to engaging students in the lessons, depending on the needs and preferences of the students. Donna elaborated on how she taught each CLEP module by stating:

The way we did it … quarter one is courage, quarter two is gratitude, quarter three is forgiveness, that’s where we are now, and quarter four is compassion and then I’m going to wrap it at the end. I think I’m going to do a project at the end like a poster project, that’s how we’re going to end the program. But it just gave me parameters if I just divided it into four pieces, but I think you’re correct you have to do it in the order, I don’t know, I do it in the [order of the CLEP] equation order, it makes more sense.

This approach and general timeline aligned with what is recommended for implementing the CLEP fifth-grade curriculum. Overall, PS educators seemed at ease discussing how they lead program lessons, refer to the program throughout the course of the instructional day, and also devise their own unique strategies for supporting program implementation.

**Theme 1, category 1, code d: school obligation.** While the views of educators towards their competency with delivering SEL instruction to students varied, educators in both schools maintained that schools are obligated, for multiple reasons, to provide students with SEL instruction. Educators across cases shared their concerns about the unknown factor of what students experience outside of school that may impact their social, emotional, and behavioral functioning in school. Educators across cases also questioned what, if any, guidance students receive outside of school that cultivates their social and emotional development. These
educators conveyed their view that the only way to ensure students receive SEL instruction is to provide it to them when they are in school.

_HES._ At HES, school principal Bonnie emphasized the importance of providing SEL programs in school and discussed how SEL programs are:

A critical part of the school day, school talk, and school culture. When I think about students … they come [to school] with a different variety of backgrounds and capacities to work through problems and coping with issues. I feel like it has to be part of, embedded, into the school day where it’s tied in…

Other HES educators expressed their view that schools need to provide SEL instruction in order to promote the development of positive social skills and relationships. HES kindergarten teacher, Fiona, stressed that SEL instruction is important to have in school because children do not always have opportunities to learn these skills in their homes and so it is therefore important for them to receive this support in school. Kindergarten teachers collectively expressed that through being exposed to an SEL program in school, students are given the opportunity to develop the communication skills necessary to cope with various emotions, to be emotionally sensitive, and positively relate to each other at school. Madeline, another kindergarten teacher, further acknowledged that schools are obligated to provide SEL programs to students as school may be “the only place that they learn to deal with their emotions and deal with people that they don’t necessarily get along with.” This sentiment was echoed by other educators across grade levels at HES throughout interviews as well.

Stephanie, second-grade teacher, expressed her view that schools are obligated to provide SEL instruction because students may not be receiving this guidance at home.
I feel if the children aren’t exposed to that kind of language, and it is taught to them specifically, I think they’re more mindful to practice those… the courage and the love, you know, I think they’re more prone to practice it if they hear it because I think a lot of our kids… it’s not an automatic thing in their home.

Frank, second-grade teacher, agreed and shared his view that children are not born with the ability to cope with adverse experiences, and through providing this education in school, educators help children to develop coping skills they can rely upon in the future. During a group interview with HES fourth-grade teachers, Michelle shared her view that schools should provide SEL instruction because many students do not have role models demonstrating “how to handle conflicts with others or how to handle their upset feelings.” Other fourth-grade teachers participating in this group interview agreed that it is important to offer SEL programs during the school day because it is a way to reach all students, including those who “need it the most.” One teacher noted that having these programs during the day also allows educators to intervene during teachable moments in ways that support the development of these skills.

PS. The importance of supporting the social and emotional development of students so they can access the learning environment was discussed by PS educators. David (content specialist) discussed state and federal regulations that mandate schools to address student SEL needs. In speaking about the SEL needs of students across grade levels, Donna spoke about how adverse experiences can significantly impact students at the elementary level, despite their young age, by stating:

It’s here [elementary school] too, you don’t know what crosses they’re bearing, what they’re coming in with and if they can come here and learn [SEL skills] here, at least they have it here, because some of them don’t have that in their home environment … it [SEL
programming] has to be part of the curriculum, at this point it has to be like Social Studies or math. It’s got to be an actual course and it has to be part of the day, and it has to start when they’re in preschool and go all the way through… it’s got to become part of the flow of being a student in this day and age and learning to live with what’s outside.

PS agreed that the only way to guarantee students receive support coping with the personal challenges that students encounter outside of school is to offer SEL programs during the school day. PS teachers noted this in relation to their expressed view that it is important to provide students with SEL instruction during the school day in order to ensure that students receive guidance in the area of SEL.

**Theme 1, category 1, code e: SEL as foundation.** Educators across both cases discussed their impressions of how the implementation of SEL instruction serves as a foundation upon which other instruction can be provided and student learning can take place.

*HES.* HES school counselor Kristen shared that based on her experience, she feels that the CLEP serves as a good foundation upon which to approach other interventions. Kristen discussed how she views her role in providing SEL instruction to students, and that she tells students in the beginning of their work together that she feels her “most important job in this school is to come to the classroom and teach you the things you need to know to make it through this world.” Kristen expressed her view that “children are desperate for help,” and want to learn the basic skills needed in order to cope with challenging situations that arise, similar to the way that they learn basic skills like addition during mathematics class. Kristen reported that students have made comments about remembering lessons and skills they were taught during the previous year in the CLEP, i.e., mindfulness related activities such as “rest and relax.” Kristen highlighted how she has observed students absorb more of the program’s teachings after
participating in it for a year and moving into new grade levels. Kristen shared her view that exposure to this program is beneficial year after year because,

Their little brains are growing, growing and growing, so over time if you… you’ll say “remember last year when I taught you…,” and then like the second time… [referencing how students comprehend the information more] that’s how the brain works, it’s like they get it faster and they can go a little deeper. So, I think over time it’s very helpful if you continue to teach these lessons every year to kids.

In addition to Kristen noting her observation that students recall information they learned in CLEP lessons during the prior year, the researcher also observed students indicate this during the classroom observations. During the first classroom observation which the researcher conducted of Ms. Kristen delivering third-grade unit one (Courage), lesson three, students actively participated and commented about information they learned through CLEP lessons during the prior year. As Ms. Kristen introduced the objective of the lesson to students, she reminded students of the prior lesson’s activities related to talking about courage, as well as information they learned the prior year about courage with reference to “Brave Breaths.” After Ms. Kristen stated to the class, “the first thing you do when you practice courage is take a brave breath. We learned lots of breaths last year. Anyone want to tell me the one you want to do?” Multiple students raised their hand and enthusiastically said “oh yeah I remember.” Students expressed interest in practicing the brave breath. The class then became silent and followed along as Kristen modeled the technique for this particular deep breathing exercise.

Following the brave breaths, Kristen proceeded to discuss “affirmations” with the students and engaged them in a creative activity where they created their own affirmation cards to place on their desks and use a visual reference throughout the school day. Kristen introduced
this activity and mentioned that towards the end of the prior year, she had started to teach the students about affirmations and that this was the focus of the current lesson. Throughout the observed lesson, Kristen helped students recall topics and information previously presented in CLEP lessons, such as “wise choices” and also referencing the lizard, numbat, and human brain profile (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019, p. 30). As they received new information and were refreshed on previously taught information, students appeared to be upbeat, enthusiastic, and engaged throughout these observed activities.

The importance of teaching children basic social and emotional skills similar to teaching basic academic skills was also emphasized by Fiona, kindergarten teacher who stated, “It’s one of those things that needs to be instilled in them daily, as much as we’re teaching them the ABC’s we should also be teaching them how to handle a certain emotion.” Fiona further elaborated on her view that SEL instruction gives “students a foundation on how to cope with their social emotional skills,” adding that SEL instruction “opens the door” with talking about emotions, understanding what emotions are, and the different ways for dealing with them. Madeline, another kindergarten teacher, also stated that the CLEP helps kindergarten students learn how to identify and process emotions, as well as learn language to verbalize what they are feeling, noting that this “is a huge stepping stone for this age group at age five."

Other HES teachers discussed their impressions of how children benefit from being given learning opportunities that help them to identify various emotions and coping strategies. HES second-grade teachers noted that providing this instruction helps to validate the experiences of children as they realize that it is okay to have emotions and there are positive ways to channel their energy. Frank shared his view that SEL programs in school support students because “…as they get older, they’re going to have these resources that they’re going to be able to call upon,”
when they face challenges that will require them to cope with feelings of distress. Stephanie discussed the ways in which this type of instruction facilitates the development of social and emotional skills over time. Speaking about how SEL helps students, Stephanie stated,

SEL helps students to be more responsible for their actions, their self, their thinking and I think that that carries over into junior high and high school… so if they learn it at a young age, if they learned all the things that CLEP teaches, it’s going to carry over.

The responses provided by HES teachers emphasized the importance of teaching positive social and emotional skills to students at a young age in order to support their ability to independently and effectively handle challenging situations that may arise in their future.

*PS.* PS teachers also conveyed their views that SEL instruction serves as a foundation upon which students are able to learn the social and emotional skills necessary to navigate life experiences. Donna stated that participating in SEL instruction needs to “become part of the flow of being a student in this day and age and learning to live with what’s outside,” referring to experiences that students may encounter outside of school. Both David and Donna shared their impressions that the program should be provided across grades pre-K through grade 12 in order for students to gain the foundational skills necessary in order to “self-manage” their emotions and situations they encounter throughout life. While speaking in reference to how issues such as violence, drugs, or mental health issues such as depression, may occur more frequently at the older grade levels level, David discussed practical benefit of offering SEL programming across grade levels so as to reach students of all ages. David argued that this assures that any students who did not receive it one year (i.e., those who are new to the school) will at least receive it during the following year.
Theme 1, category 1, code f: SEL as priority. Educators across cases shared their opinions that schools should treat SEL programs, such as the CLEP as a priority with planning and programming, similar to the way that academic subjects such as English or math are prioritized.

HES. Madeline, kindergarten teacher, emphasized that she sees addressing the SEL needs of students as the “first need” that she serves as a teacher, and that it should be taught in schools on a daily basis because of how important it is for students to be successful in the future. HES second-grade teachers agreed that it is important for schools to offer structured SEL programs during the school day in order to ensure that students learn the skills needed in order to independently cope and manage feelings of distress. HES fourth-grade teachers agreed that addressing the SEL needs of their students by setting up an emotionally safe and supportive environment in the classroom is also “top priority.”

PS. David, content specialist, shared his view that the delivery of SEL instruction in schools is “definitely a priority,” considering the adverse experiences that children may experience and struggle to cope with that also impact their ability to learn. As this group spoke about a recent trip that PS students and staff took to a CLEP Conference at a Local University, Donna relayed a story of a student who publicly read an essay he wrote about his experience being bullied, and how participating in the CLEP helped him to forgive those who mistreated him. As a collective group, PS educator participants expressed their views that schools should prioritize SEL instruction in order to ensure all students receive this type of guidance.

Theme 1, category 2: educator and parent perspectives of CLEP. Throughout the interviews conducted at HES and PS, the perspectives of educators who also voluntarily shared their views as parents regarding the CLEP, were discussed. This category is comprised of
educator and parent perspectives towards ways in which the CLEP (a) enhances resilience in children and, (b) facilitates connections between home and school that support students.

**Theme 1, category 2, code a: enhancing resilience.** HES educators shared their views on how participation in the CLEP builds resilience in children, while PS participant responses did not address this. Bonnie (HES school principal) spoke about her impressions from an educator and parent perspective of how SEL instruction, as provided by the CLEP, promotes the development of resilience in children and adolescents. Referring to her own experience as a parent, Bonnie stated, “I have two children of my own, ages 13 and 17, and I think about how they handle stress and anxiety, and friendship problems,” suggesting that children and adolescents currently struggle to cope with challenges, more than children and adolescents did previously, due to societal influences, particularly social media. Bonnie shared her view that participation in the CLEP helps children and young adults to develop skills and character traits, such as grit, needed in order to successfully navigate life’s challenges. Bonnie expressed her viewpoint that, “I see it lacking in our society, having grit and personal accountability, and I think the Choose Love message helps support that and being proactive and accountable for yourself so you can help others.”

During interviews conducted at HES, three teachers (Anne, Laurie, Stephanie) self-identified as parents of students who participate in the CLEP at HES. Each of these three educators discussed their observations of how their children utilized language from the CLEP and applied strategies learned from the program to situations they encountered. In particular, Laurie (third-grade), discussed her observations of how she noticed a difference in the social and emotional development of her youngest son who participated in the CLEP at HES, as compared to her older children who previously attended HES and did not participate in the program.
When asked if she felt that students needed to experience SEL programs in general, and if so why, Laurie spoke about her observations of how her youngest son’s social and emotional development seemed more advanced than that of her older children. Laurie’s son was in the second-grade at the time of this interview and was the youngest of Laurie’s five children, with the oldest being an adult who lives independently with his own family. Laurie discussed how her older children did not receive SEL instruction in school and noted that she “did not know to teach it to them.” Laurie discussed another instance in which her son used specific language from the program as he described a social situation he encountered on the playground in which he decided to “show courage by just walking away.” Laurie expressed her view that her son independently used the CLEP language and that he was “bringing it home,” but not because Laurie was a teacher at HES. Laurie acknowledged that she has not brought the language home, and therefore felt that this was an indication of her son’s receiving the program language at school and independently using it outside of school, without prompting.

After Laurie shared her perspective as a mother of her son who participated in the CLEP Laurie spoke with emotion about other family members who she thought could have benefitted greatly from the CLEP if they had had the opportunity. Laurie discussed two of her nephews who committed suicide in recent years, and how she wondered if participation in a program like CLEP could have led to a different outcome for them. Laurie discussed her reflections on the lessons she observed Kristen give to her class, and stated, “When I listen to her, I think ‘oh my gosh’ what if [nephew] knew about this, you know, what if he… it just makes me question.” Laurie shared that she has wondered if participation in the CLEP may lead students to remember, when faced with distressing situations, that they “have a choice” in how to respond, and to not
despair. Laurie further shared that she has wondered if students may recall what they learned from the CLEP when faced with challenging experiences that cause them to feel overwhelmed.

**Theme 1, category 2, code b: home-school connection.** Educators at HES and one teacher at PS shared their perspectives that SEL programs, such as the CLEP, facilitated connections between a child’s home and school settings.

**HES.** HES educators discussed how the school-wide implementation of the CLEP involved parents, and included parent communications such as school newsletters. HES school counselor, Kristen, coordinated “family nights” where she integrated aspects of the CLEP curriculum into her presentations. There were also Parent Teacher Organization meetings which focused on the CLEP as the topic. Ms. Kristen shared her experience that parents expressed a lot of support and enthusiasm for the CLEP at these events by expressing their gratitude and sharing positive feedback about the program with Ms. Kristen.

Ms. Kristen shared that she developed presentations for these occasions based on the ideas she gained from the CLEP. Ms. Kristen discussed how she and her colleagues “infused” the program’s language into activities and events happening throughout the school community, which yielded positive results with gaining parent support for the program. Ms. Kristen shared her view that since implementing the program, parents exhibited a newfound appreciation for her role as school counselor, indicating that they did not realize the extent of her role previously. As she spoke about the CLEP, Ms. Kristen stated that it “really struck parents” in a good way. As part of her efforts to communicate with parents and involve them in their child’s experience with the CLEP, Ms. Kristen sent letters home to parents including an update about what she was teaching in the CLEP that week. Ms. Kristen stated, “every time I have a lesson, I send home a
letter about what I’m teaching and how you can reinforce it at home.” An example of this is depicted in Figure 8 below.

![Figure 8. HES parent newsletter communication including update regarding CLEP lessons sent by school counselor. Printed with participant permission.]

Bonnie, HES, principal, also spoke about the efforts on behalf of herself, Ms. Kristen, and others at HES to communicate with parents regarding the CLEP. Bonnie shared that she regularly took pictures at the weekly CLEP school assembly of students who were recognized for actions related program, and then included these in monthly newsletters that were sent home to parents. In addition to sharing highlights, these newsletters also included short messages related to the CLEP. Bonnie also spoke about how in early September 2017, a community informational meeting took place at HES in which Scarlett Lewis spoke to a group of over 50 people including community members, parents, district administrators, a board of education member, and parents from other schools, as well as school counselors from local school districts, about the CLEP.
Bonnie described this event as very powerful and noted that it reached many people at the start of the school year.

The ways in which the CLEP facilitates connections between home and school were also acknowledged by three HES teachers who self-identified as parents of students who participated in the CLEP. In particular, these teachers described instances in which their children were overheard using the curriculum’s language outside of school. For example, Stephanie (second-grade) spoke about how her son, a kindergartener at HES, was picking up on “that kind of language,” referring to commonly used words in the CLEP such as courage and compassion, after just a few lessons so far that year. Stephanie shared that her son’s kindergarten teacher praised him for showing compassion to others, and Stephanie felt that this may have been the positive result of his participating in the CLEP.

Laurie (third-grade) also discussed her observation of how her son, who was in the second-grade at HES at the time of this interview, was independently using language from the CLEP as observed at home such as referring to the aforementioned instance in which he “showed courage and just walked away” from a situation on the playground. Laurie further shared that as a result of sitting in her class’ CLEP lessons taught by Kristen, she felt that she learned “along with the kids.” She also discussed how she tries “to use that language at the end of the day and it helps me with my kids at home,” speaking in reference to her interactions with her children. Laurie shared an example of how her youngest son’s learning from this program has facilitated dialogue between them at times when home, stating:

I feel that my youngest child has a much better grasp on me, knowing how to use the language back at home, he’ll say how are you feeling? or he’ll say, are you upset with me? What are you feeling about me right now? He’ll ask me about that. He’s only in
second-grade, but he’ll ask those questions, and it’s got to be because he’s getting this language at school.

In Laurie’s opinion, the CLEP surpassed other classroom guidance lessons that were utilized in the past at HES, in part because she saw the positive influence that the CLEP had on students both in school and at home. The perspective of an educator and parent of an HES student who participated in the CLEP was also shared by Anne, fourth-grade teacher, who stated:

… the kids talk about it, my daughter goes here, and my husband said a couple weeks ago she was telling me about this program that Ms. Kristen is doing it’s the CLEP and he said it’s really interesting, she told him all about the different aspects of it and so they had a discussion about it and I had nothing to do with it.

Anne noted how her daughter told her husband “all about it and she brought [the CLEP] up” as an example of how she feels students are going home and talking about the program as a reflection of their genuine interest in the program. Michelle, another fourth-grade teacher, commented in reference to students talking about the program at home, “I was thinking if they’re bringing it home and talking to their family that could benefit the whole family… So, I could see that as a benefit of the program, taking it home.”

PS. Educators at PS discussed how parents were included in the recent field trip that students took to the Local University CLEP Conference, where students read essays aloud and openly discussed their experiences with the CLEP. PS educators described this conference as a meaningful experience for all who attended.
Theme 2: Purpose of SEL Instruction

This theme is defined as the perceived purpose of SEL instruction according to the views of educator and student participants, particularly with respect to how SEL instruction addresses the basic needs of children, facilitates the development of coping strategies, and the learning of values as well as skills. Throughout interviews both educator and student participants discussed how their experiences with the CLEP have led them to develop these views on the purpose of SEL instruction. The categories and frequencies of codes comprising this theme are indicated in Table 17.
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<th>Categories and Codes</th>
<th>HES Educators</th>
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<td>(a) Addressing Basic Needs</td>
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Theme 2, category 1: addressing SEL needs. This category is defined as the perceived ways in which SEL instruction addresses an individual’s basic needs, promotes a sense of emotional safety, and facilitates personal growth as well as development.

Theme 2, category 1, code a: addressing basic needs. HES educators and students, as well as one educator at PS, discussed how providing students with a school-based SEL program helps to address their basic needs.

HES. Addressing the basic needs of students and staff to be part of a safe and supportive school-wide culture was discussed by Bonnie (HES Principal). Bonnie emphasized the importance of developing this type of school-wide culture as part of the successful implementation of SEL programs such as the CLEP. Bonnie also embraced her responsibility as the building leader in setting the tone for a safe and supportive environment, as well as striving to be a good role model for others, by stating:

I feel that my role as school principal is probably the most important role in the sense of establishing that culture of supporting that growth, and then supporting others to allow them to feel safe and secure. I know that people watch me and how I handle things and model things, and so I feel who I am and what I do is critical, and I am aware of that.

The ways in which supporting student SEL addresses their basic needs was also discussed by HES kindergarten teachers. These educators shared their perspectives towards the need for educators to help children learn about what emotions are, how to identify them, realize that emotions are OK to have, and help students develop the language needed to self-advocate. Madeline expressed her view that participation in an SEL program helps students to “function at school, interact with peers and… be teachable to some extent,” referring to how students are better able to engage in the learning process when their emotions are regulated. Madeline
acknowledged SEL programs such as the CLEP help children to manage difficult feelings such as anger so that they can “express themselves in an appropriate manner.” Fiona expressed similar sentiments about the role of the school with helping students to learn these foundational skills, stating that,

There are different personalities that clash in any environment and the school environment allows children to come in contact with different personalities, different worlds. I think overall it promotes the goal to treat everybody with kindness, and those value words like courage … I feel like teaching values like courage or kindness or love, begin to permeate throughout the school. I think that’s a positive in itself which is turning the building into a more positive place.

HES teachers asserted that it is incumbent upon schools to address the basic needs of children on both an individual as well as a school-wide level. Frank, second-grade teacher, expressed his views on how the CLEP addresses an individual’s basic need for love, by stating:

The whole idea is based on love and everybody wants to feel love and give love, and I think that makes it easier for elementary kids to understand that because they know what love is and what they want to get out of it.

Frank and other HES educators recognized that feeling safe and loved is a basic, essential need for children in school that educators must strive to address.

Other HES educators also expressed their views that the SEL needs of students must be addressed first in order for students to successfully access their education. Laurie, third-grade, teacher discussed her perspective of how addressing the SEL needs of her students falls within her role and responsibilities as a teacher, stating, “I see it as part of my job as a teacher to also meet those needs, the social emotional needs as well as the academic, because they’re not going
to learn if they don’t have those needs met.” Laurie also discussed the ways in which she has referenced the CLEP language during individual encounters with students in order to provide them with emotional reassurance at times when struggling with feelings of academic frustration, i.e., encouraging them to use courage and persevere when confronted with a challenging task. Laurie spoke about posters depicting the four units of the CLEP she had on her classroom wall to provide visual references for students when they need encouragement and apply what they learned in the program. The definition of courage as provided by the CLEP, “the willingness and ability to work through obstacles despite feeling embarrassment, fear, reluctance, or uncertainty,” (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019, p. 13) was provided on these visuals to assist students all throughout each day. For example, Laurie and other teachers discussed how they often implored students to use courage when they felt overwhelmed and tempted to give up, by referencing CLEP lessons (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2016).

The importance of addressing an individual’s basic physical and emotional needs was acknowledged by fourth-grade educators and also students at HES as they spoke about various community service activities. James, fourth-grade teacher, acknowledged that he saw it as part of his “job as a teacher to also meet those needs, the social emotional needs as well as the academic, because they’re not going to learn if they don’t have those needs met.” Fourth-grade students also shared their views regarding the importance of people having their basic needs, such as safety, met in order to thrive. One fourth-grade student, Paul, acknowledged the importance of SEL programs in schools, stating that:

The more you help [through participating in CLEP related activities], the more people will have and the more they’ll feel safe. Like if you were a homeless person and you
didn’t have much and you just slept around different places at night, you wouldn’t always feel safe, and I want everybody to feel safe.

Other fourth-grade students retold their experiences with community service activities in which they helped people. For example, students engaged in a community service activity called “Sock-tober” in which they collected socks for people in need. Mary shared that the community service activities that she and her classmates engaged in helped her to:

realize that there were so many people who were homeless and didn’t have many things. Sometimes they would say facts about those kind of things on the intercom, and it reminded me that there’s so many people that needed a place to live, and have clothes that are warm and a shelter to keep them safe.

Through these statements and others, HES fourth-grade students expressed that as a result of their participation in the CLEP, they developed a keen awareness of the need for all people to have their basic safety needs met.

PS. The importance of addressing the basic needs of students in order to help them access the learning environment was also acknowledged by educators at PS. During the PS Educator interview, David stated in reference to the experiences that students may encounter outside of school:

You don’t know where they come from, you don’t know all the things that are in their lives and you walk in trying to get them to pay attention to the academic part of it and yet if they’re not well socially and emotionally, you are not going to get them to go anyplace.

David elaborated on this point by suggesting that when students encounter mental health challenges such as addiction, depression, or suicidality, and these issues are not addressed, it is impossible to accomplish goals such as learning in school. David’s responses indicated that he
views SEL as a way of supporting the development of coping skills which individuals need in order to successfully navigate the challenges they encounter throughout life.

**Theme 2, category 1, code b: emotional safety.** Emotional safety was another emerging code within the overall category of Addressing Basic SEL needs. Educators at both schools commented on how the CLEP promotes a supportive atmosphere within the school community. It was also noted across cases that students encourage each other to participate in discussions about concepts taught in the program and feel more at ease doing so within the structure of the CLEP than they might in other circumstances.

**HES.** Educators at HES emphasized the importance of establishing a sense of emotional safety within school. Bonnie (school principal) discussed how SEL programs assist students with developing the positive relationships and coping skills necessary in order for them to engage in the learning process, noting, “you could teach until you’re blue in the face but nothing else will matter until kids are feeling comfortable and feel like they’re safe.” Bonnie also discussed her views towards her role and responsibilities as HES school principal, including but limited to how she supports HES educators in order to help students feel safe and secure. Michelle (fourth-grade teacher) shared her view that, regarding students, “if they don’t come to school and feel safe, like safe to make mistakes, safe to talk to someone, safe with their friends, they’re not going to be able to learn.” Efforts to support students with feeling safe in their learning environment were apparent during the classroom observations conducted as part of this study, particularly when students discussed strategies they felt were helpful to use when stressed, and then created affirmation cards which they could refer back to at times when they needed reassurance. During their interviews, HES students also spoke about affirmation activities they engaged in that helped them throughout each day.
PS. PS teachers agreed that various aspects of the CLEP promotes a sense of emotional safety, including a respite from stressful experiences, for students who participate in it. In particular, Donna (fifth-grade), described the journal writing activities which are part of the CLEP lessons and, in her view, serve as a “safety net” for the children who may be emotionally overwhelmed:

Well, all that stress and those depressing thoughts, they wear you down, they wear you out and the kid too … this is what we do in our class, we create little journals and we create them because I want them to have ownership of this. They’re happy, they’re happy to write in their journals, they’re happy to share their thoughts because it’s okay, it’s a 45-minute period where you can do that, there’s that safety there too. It’s like a safety net.

Without indicating whether or not anyone (other than the student who maintains the journal) reads these, Donna expressed her view that students appreciated journal writing opportunities because it offered a private, non-judgmental medium in which students could release feelings of stress. Selena also recounted her experience, stating that teachers are flexible with how lessons are implemented and discussion evolves between students during CLEP lessons. While teachers have a plan for the lesson, they will also be flexible and allow for discussions to move in other directions “because it’s obvious that’s something that they need,” referencing discussions about particular topics that are important to the students.

PS students spoke and wrote about the need for students to feel emotionally safe in their environment in order to thrive. Students at PS shared their impressions that the implementation of the CLEP encourages children to feel safe “being themselves” without threat of criticism. Jenny, an eighth-grade student, shared her view that she has enjoyed all of the CLEP lessons
because she likes “the feeling that we can talk about anything and you get to know the other girls, that’s the big part that I love.” Jenny also wrote an essay about her experience with the CLEP, expressing that, “Choose Love showed me that I can be my true self and people will like me and want to be around me for who I am, as long as I’m always kind.” Jenny also wrote about how her CLEP group welcomed a younger student with social difficulties, as well as another student who was struggling to figure out where she fit in socially. Jenny described how both of these girls, as well as the girls who were originally in the group, have all become friends and that “we are all happy that we got the chance to get to know them.” Related to these comments during her interview, Jenny stated the following in her essay:

One of the most important things we do in our group is help people who have nowhere else to go find a place; for example, one of my friends had been left out and cast aside by her old friend group, and when she asked to be included, we let her in and helped her.

It’s nice to see her finding real friends in this group.

Additionally, Jenny stated with respect to the “Choose Love Creators Group,” a student leadership group that supports implementation of the CLEP throughout PS, that “it is not only a group where we just make posters, but also a safe place for all the girls.” The posters are placed on a “Choose Love Bulletin Board” and other areas throughout the school. Jenny also stated with respect to this group, “Choose Love is a place for all of the girls to feel safe and comfortable.”

**Theme 2, category 1, code c: personal growth and development.** Another emerging code within the overall category of Addressing Basic SEL needs was that of personal growth and development. This code was comprised of responses shared by educators and students at HES as well as PS.
At HES, educators discussed the ways in which they felt that participation in the CLEP facilitated social and emotional development over time for students. Bonnie (principal) expressed her view that participation in the program promotes a sense of personal accountability. In reference to a recent meeting with Scarlett Lewis, Bonnie stated,

I loved Scarlett’s definition of the research that she pointed out, that most adults in our country only name the three emotions angry, sad, and happy, and to really understand instead of just going to social media and trying to solve problems there, you’ve got to start with yourself again, being proactive, I think taking time to really concentrate on the four pieces of Choose Love helps kids be proactive and be in charge of themselves and solve their problems- have grit, you know.

Bonnie speculated that the possibility of participation in the program facilitating personal growth and change over time could be further investigated through student disciplinary referrals, or following up on how students transition into the middle school after participating in the CLEP. Other HES educators shared their views on how the program may influence personal development and growth over time in its participants. Frank (second-grade teacher) discussed how the skills learned in this program can benefit students at later stages in their lives, stating, “it’s something they can use for the rest of their life … you put that little seed in there and the next thing it can grow and they can think about it and use it and when they get older can use it with their own children.” HES fourth-grade teachers agreed that participating in this type of program could help students learn at an early age learn how to deal with their emotions. Anne shared her view that participation in the program helps to create, “better relationships all the way around, and there’s less standing in the way of their learning and their growth… they’re open to more growth…”
In addition to these educator perspectives, one HES third-grade student, Jennifer, expressed that she felt she became more resilient when faced with challenging social situations as a result of learning “a lot about Choosing Love.” Jennifer moved and transferred into HES during the beginning of the prior year, when she started second-grade. Revealing how she was overwhelmed in the beginning of this adjustment because she was bullied at her old school, and was feeling vulnerable as a new student, Jennifer stated that she realized in the middle of her second-grade year that she felt like she “really changed” as a result of her participation in the CLEP. Jennifer stated that once Ms. Kristen came and started teaching the CLEP lessons, “it was a lot happier in the classroom,” expressing that she and other students in her class seemed happier as well.

PS. PS educators also discussed how they felt that the SEL curriculum promoted personal growth within students. Donna (fifth-grade) remarked that the program stresses, The importance on the emotional growth of children and how we have to address it when there are so many outside influences that are taking them in different directions, it’s very confusing to kids, but this [the CLEP] makes them mindful. That’s something important for them not only in their personal growth but as their growth as a student, trying to get along with other people.

Donna emphasized the benefits of the CLEP journal writing activities and elaborated upon the benefits of these, as well as other aspects of the CLEP, by stating that the CLEP is “done in a way where it’s a growth experience, they grow with it, just like they grow with math or they grow with science, they kind of use what they’ve learned last year to propel them into next year.” The ways in which students who participate in the CLEP experience personal growth with developing increased levels of self-awareness were discussed by Selena (Humanities
teacher). David (content specialist) also discussed how providing the program across grade levels helps students to “become aware of themselves, their social emotional skills or attributes, they’re learning how to self-manage those things…” Additionally, David commented on how assisting with the program implementation has inspired him to reflect on ways in which he himself has demonstrated skills taught in the program, i.e., courage. “I think that mirroring the skills with examples of your life with kids builds that relationship with kids too.” Donna also shared about how she feels it is important for students to see how teachers reflect on their own personal growth and development while teaching in the program, “if you let them know that you are taking the journey with them …, it makes all the difference in the world.” Throughout their group interview, PS educators collectively discussed the ways in which participating in the CLEP facilitates personal growth for students, and growth within the adults who assist with implementing the program.

PS students in both fifth and eighth-grade groups expressed that they felt the CLEP activities helped them become better people through a variety of ways including developing the ability to self-reflect, forgive, be grateful, and feel more at ease with themselves. Doreen (fifth-grade student) described how students may be impacted through seeing other students engaged in the program and performing good deeds, and that through this “people will learn that hate is never the answer and that you should always strive to be the best person you can.” Jenny (eighth-grade) also discussed the ways in which she felt that participating in the CLEP helped her to develop a more positive mindset. Jenny further shared how participating in the CLEP and becoming involved in the Choose Love Creators Group led her to feel more comfortable with herself and in social situations. Jenny wrote the following statements about her experience with the CLEP in an essay she wrote and read at the Local University CLEP Conference:
Personally, it has impacted me greatly. It took me out of a situation where I felt uncomfortable and had little self-esteem. This Choose Love program helped me to know who my true friends are and the friends that I can rely on. Choose Love showed me that I can be my true self and people will like me and want to be around me for who I am, as long as I’m always kind. This program allowed me to meet new people and see the people I knew in a way that I had not seen the before. It allowed me to make friends in new places. Choose Love also taught me to be a positive person. It taught me how to find positivity in all negativity and to always look on the bright side of life. … This Choose Love program taught me, personally, how to be a leader, and how to make appropriate decisions as the head of a group of my peers. Now I know how to accept responsibility, but at the same time not abuse power. … At high school, because of these experiences, I will know how to include people and recognize when people feel left out or upset. … Choose Love taught us the real meaning of how to be strong, to be courageous, to have gratitude, and forgiveness. This entire experience is going to stay with me for the rest of my life, and I know that it’s had a strong impact on the rest of the group as well.

In addition to these sentiments shared by Jenny, another eighth-grade student (Kelly) also discussed her observations of how she and other students have changed, particularly with being more comfortable in social situations, as a result of participation in the CLEP. Kelly discussed how she used to feel nervous in school with other students who were not her close friends, but that she became more socially comfortable over time while participating in the CLEP. Both of these students expressed that they felt the CLEP has helped them to change in these ways and taught them a lot, including how to be thankful, compassionate, and more empathic.
Theme 2, category 2: strategies for coping with challenges. This category is defined as the perceived ways in which SEL instruction helps students to develop strategies for coping with challenges, specifically including calming strategies, reflection, and self-empowerment.

Theme 2, category 2, code a: calming strategies. Educators and students at HES, as well as teachers at PS, discussed the ways in which the CLEP taught students coping strategies with learning how to calm themselves and relax. These participants also shared their views on how the CLEP promotes awareness of mindfulness that supports students.

HES. Kristen, school counselor, discussed the perceived benefits of the mindfulness component that the CLEP emphasizes. Kristen shared how she felt that the diaphragmatic breathing techniques taught as part of the CLEP help students to calm down when stressed, and that they consistently responded well to guidance with this. Kristen stated that students, “really loved the breathing and the rest and relax” activities within the program which encouraged students to engage in deep breathing exercises as a relaxation strategy. The positive response students have had to the breathing activities that are part of the program were also noted by Kindergarten teachers Reagan, Fiona, and Madeline, who specifically recalled these activities and their connection to lessons on courage. Stephanie (second-grade) discussed her view that the program helps students to understand and manage their emotions through the calming techniques taught within the program, stating:

Learning those calming techniques and teaching them how to manage their emotions, it’s a fabulous tool… I carry it over to my class when they start getting rowdy and someone starts getting upset I say take a deep breath in… it really has a calming effect and I think it helps them get a grip on noticing their emotions is what I think.
HES second-grade teacher, Frank, also shared his view that these strategies help students to remain calm when they may otherwise be tempted to react impulsively, stating that the overall CLEP, “makes you very mindful of it [the program’s teachings], very mindful of it. Just the language that they use, the techniques that they use.” Frank also stated his observation that “each thing she [Kristen] teaches each time has a body movement so the kids know the body movements, the language they can use … I think it’s been a great program for these kids and for our school.” Fourth-grade teacher, Anne, also praised the breathing techniques as an effective strategy for teaching students to manage impulses, relax, and cope by “stopping before reacting,” and, “making a conscious decision before they act to actually choose being brave.”

HES students also discussed how some of the breathing techniques learned in the program, particularly “Brave Breaths,” were amongst their favorite activities. There are four diaphragmatic breathing techniques taught within the program: “Brave Breaths,” “Gratitude breaths,” “Forgiveness Breaths,” and “Compassion Breaths” (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019). According to the CLEP (2019) Educator’s Guide, “Anyone can use this technique as an immediate stress buster to reduce tension and increase focus” (p. 26). HES third-grade student, Jude, mentioned the breathing activities one of his preferred activities, stating that he likes the breathing activities the most and “I do the brave breaths so you do this [demonstrated deep breaths] and it makes me feel good.”

Second-grade student, Patrick, acknowledged that strategies learned in the program helped him to stay calm and focused. Another second-grade student, Barbara, expressed her feeling that the lessons could make others “more calm with other people being mad at them.” One fourth-grade student from HES, Anna, stated “It also helps me realize how, it also helps me find ways where if you’re upset you can calm yourself down easily without making anybody else
upset.” Another fourth-grade student, Patricia, referenced an activity they did involving arts and crafts that was integrated with a lesson on taking deep breaths to help calm down, “I think that really helps kids to take a really deep breath and calm down.”

PS. At PS, Donna (fifth-grade teacher) mentioned that this program has helped structure their teaching of subjects such as religion by providing a framework upon which students can reflect, noting that the program’s instruction “makes them mindful… you stop and pause and think.” David (content specialist) and Selena (Humanities) also expressed their appreciation for mindfulness strategies promoted by the program as well as other opportunities the CLEP creates to exercise calming strategies, such as mindfulness and reflection.

Theme 2, category 2, code b: reflection. The ways in which the program encourages students to reflect on their emotions and experiences were discussed by an educator as well as students at PS. Selena, Humanities teacher, discussed how at the end of their CLEP lessons, she and another teacher guided students in a quiet reflection about what was discussed during the lesson and students wrote in their journals while listening to a song. Selena shared her observation that students enjoyed this activity and that it had a relaxing effect on them.

PS students also shared their perspectives on how the program promotes reflection as a strategy for improving one’s outlook, relationships, and ability to cope with challenges. For example, PS eighth-grade students discussed how upon participating in the program and hearing stories from other students, they became more “aware that we should cherish our time together” since students in their grade would be separating and attending different high schools for the following year. These students also shared how they felt that participating in the program prompted them to think about “what’s going on in the school” and how the program “teaches you how to have compassion and gratitude and how you should be thankful for the people that are
around you.” Acknowledging how hearing other CLEP participants share their personal experiences at the Local University CLEP Conference, Jenny and Kelly shared that this inspired them to contemplate the difficult experiences others have had, such as being bullied. This experience prompted these students to think about how they could be nicer to others, as one student stated, “I thought if I could be nicer it would just make everything better because it would just bring people happiness to their life.” In her essay, Jenny also reflected on how aspects of the CLEP and the Choose Love Creators Group helped foster social connections between peers at PS, particularly amongst students who were previously socially isolated.

**Theme 2, category 2, code c: self-empowerment.** Educators and students at both HES and PS discussed ways in which the CLEP empowers students to become more independent and resourceful in their thought processes when coping with novel and, at times, challenging situations.

**HES.** At HES, Bonnie (principal) discussed her impression that by providing the CLEP in school and embedding its ideals into the fabric of the school day and culture, students received the support they needed in order to develop a sense of personal accountability as well as positive relationships and coping skills to help them to persevere through challenges. Kristen (school counselor) spoke about how she felt the CLEP offered practical benefits with helping students to understand how to practice independently practice courage when needed.

Fiona, kindergarten teacher, discussed her view of how the CLEP helps students to learn “the language to express themselves,” to self-advocate at times when needed, and to figure out how to better relate to others. Fiona shared her opinion that participating in the CLEP helps students to realize “how they can actually navigate through these problems that they’re having,” including the ability to independently think of what to say and do in various situations. Through
supporting these areas, Fiona felt that the program teaches “the whole child” and gives children “a toolbox of coping mechanisms that they can use later in life.” Another kindergarten teacher, Madeline, shared her view that, the program particularly helps kindergarteners to identify, interpret, and process their emotions.

Frank (second-grade teacher) discussed how the program helped promote independence and overall had an empowering effect on students who participate in it. Frank remarked,

It’s amazing to see what it’s done for a lot of the kids who didn’t have those strategies or those techniques to help deal with situations that may come up in their lives, at home or at school, and be able to solve them on their own and also in a thoughtful way.

Another second-grade teacher, Stephanie, remarked about the ways in which reinforcing concepts learned in the program (i.e., courage), empowers students to cope with frustration and be more willing to confront challenges. Stephanie described her experience observing students persevering through tasks, particularly noting that “you can almost kind of see them trying to work through something that before they might not have tried to work through…” suggesting that what they have learned from the CLEP has inspired them to work hard and persevere.

Laurie (third-grade) discussed the ways in which participation in this program helped her students to learn more about their emotions, and that as a result of this, her students became more self-aware. In addition to learning vocabulary that helped students label their emotions and learn coping skills through the program, participation in the CLEP taught students that they always have a choice with how they respond to a situation. Through learning about their emotions and becoming increasingly self-aware, children become more equipped to make positive choices (i.e., choosing courage to persevere through challenging tasks instead of giving up). HES fourth-grade teachers also commented on the benefits students receive from participating in the CLEP,
particularly with helping students to realize that they have a choice in how to respond to various situations.

Michelle (fourth-grade teacher) elaborated on this further, sharing her view that these lessons taught students that “it does take courage to do the right thing and it’s not just easy to do the right thing.” Michelle expressed her observation that participation in the CLEP helped students realize how to be cognizant of their emotions when presented with challenges in order to effectively cope and problem solve. Highlighting lessons on brave breaths and courage as examples, Michelle discussed how the CLEP lessons taught students “certain tools like breathing… stopping before reacting, just making a conscious decision before they act to actually choose being brave.” Michelle described the ways in which she feels these messages have helped students to develop a more positive mindset and think thoughts such as “so now that I know it’s supposed to be hard, now I can overcome it.”

HES students also shared their views about how the CLEP has encouraged them to use positive affirmations and self-talk when faced with challenges. Barbara and Sarah, second-grade students, discussed how they felt that participating in the CLEP helped students to figure out how to respond to challenging social situations in particular. Sarah shared,

I used to be a lot more sensitive, I still am, but it’s helped me when I get angry as well what Ms. Kristen taught us, it helps me to not get into anything sensitive, it helps me not to yell at my friends when I’m kind of mad at them, it’s helped me a lot to change.

These students discussed how the program encourages people to not be mean, and may deter students from bullying others. Jude shared his feelings, stating, “Well I love this program because it helps us and it helps stop bullying and stop bullies.”
Jennifer, third-grade, shared that she will use the phrase “I can do it in my head” when trying to motivate herself to persevere through academic tasks, and has also remembered what was taught during CLEP lessons at times when she felt sad (i.e., positive affirmations). Jude (third-grade) stated that he does brave breaths in order to feel better at times when upset. Another student, Nicole, stated that she has “a chart of Choose Love and it shows what I’ve done today, I mark it every day after school…” which may have been a strategy developed by Nicole’s teacher, particular to Nicole, but was connected to the CLEP. Jennifer (third-grade student) shared her view that at times when she gets angry, she uses the breathing strategies taught by the school counselor as part of program, and that this helps her to not get as angry or be as sensitive. Anna (fourth-grade student) discussed how she feels the program helped her to change a lot, and that as a result of participating in the program, she feels that it has helped her to “find ways where if you’re upset you can calm yourself down easily without making anybody else upset.” Anna and Jennifer also discussed how at times it was necessary to seek the support of an adult with a situation, while overall, they felt more self-reliant than they had in the past.

PS. PS teachers agreed that the program facilitates a higher level of self-awareness which allows students to redirect their thinking in a way that yields positive outcomes. David discussed how the program helps develop “super highways to positive things… you’ve got control of your mind, of your brain, the better you are, you’ve created a super highway to your emotional learning and happier and they say healthier too.” PS students also acknowledged the ways in which they have learned to redirect their own thought processes as a result of learning strategies from the CLEP. Daniel (fifth-grade student) discussed how at times when he realized he misbehaved, he tried to self-correct by reminding himself to “strive to do the best you can.” Another fifth-grade student, Anthony, discussed how participation in the program and its
connection to the book Wonder (Palacio, 2012) has inspired him to “always believe in yourself,” and that “everyone is different, we’re all wonders.” Kelly (eighth-grade student), expressed that her experiences with the CLEP lessons prompted self-reflection and “that you should really think about what you do because it could affect someone else and that you should kind of step out of your comfort zone sometimes and that kind of taught me, because this past month I’ve been doing a lot of things I wouldn’t usually do, so I feel like that had the most effect on me.”

Theme 2, category 3: values and skills learned. This category is defined as the perceived ways in which SEL instruction teaches students values and skills such as civic responsibility, empathy, responsible decision-making, self-regulation, self-awareness, and social skills.

  Theme 2, category 3, code a: civic responsibility. HES educators, as well as HES and PS students, shared views about the CLEP which indicated their feelings that the CLEP inspires students to realize the importance of being a responsible citizen and helping others in order to contribute positively to one’s community and the world around them.

    HES. At HES, educators discussed the ways in which the CLEP teaches students skills and ideas which promote the importance of advocating for others in need of support. Bonnie (principal) discussed how HES promotes the importance of the students being leaders and supporting others. Anna (fourth-grade) expressed her view that,

I think teaching the skills of looking out for others is something I’ve noticed that Ms. Kristen has been pushing and I think that’s a really important skill that’s being taught, to be able to look out for others and see when someone else is upset and how to intervene.

Fourth-grade student, Patricia, shared that providing SEL instruction such as the CLEP in schools “helps people understand that you don’t just want to care about yourself and not worry
about other people. You still need to be sure that other people are safe and have enough things to keep themselves alive.” Patricia further elaborated on her point that through providing SEL instruction to other schools, students will realize how “helping people makes you feel great, makes you feel good and makes the people you’re helping feel good” and also shared that she felt it would be beneficial for others to participate in this program “because I really do think it will help people around the world and I think it will help our country.” Paul stated,

It’s true we get awards for bringing the most things in sometimes and it will motivate them to be able to want to do it more. Like getting an award is something that people would want to do because people like getting awards for doing things. I think they would have to know that everything doesn’t come with an award and they need to know that they need to help anyway even if there’s not a reward.

Paul and his fourth-grade classmates shared their perspectives that, as a result of the community service activities they participated in through the CLEP they view helping others as a shared responsibility. These students expressed their opinions that people should help others because of how it makes the helper and those being helped to feel good, but not because of external rewards or incentives.

PS. At PS, students in both fifth and eighth-grade groups shared their impressions of how participation in this program has inspired them and others to realize the importance of standing up for other people. Doreen (fifth-grade) stated,

I think it’s a great program and it like teaches kids that you should always choose right over wrong and you should stand up for those kids that are getting bullied and tell the bullies to stop when they’re being mean to other people, it’s like a great program that teaches kids violence isn’t the answer.
Another fifth-grade student, Gabriel, commented on how the lesson involving reading *Wonder* (Palacio, 2012) in relation to the CLEP taught him that “people get bullied and we should always stand up for them.” Anthony stated, “it’s helping the children choose love so when somebody teases somebody you can stand up for somebody so they won’t have that much hate in their life.” Another student stated, “we should have courage and stand up for him,” regarding the character in the book *Wonder* (Palacio, 2012). The positive impact that helping others can have on society and the world in general was also acknowledged by a fifth-grade student at PS who stated, “if we can prevent people from being bullied then there will be less people killing people and it will be just a more happy world.” The importance of standing up for others who may be victims of bullying behavior was also acknowledged by Jenny who discussed how she felt that hearing the perspectives of others who have endured bullying inspired her to take action to support others who are victims of such behavior. In referencing her recent experience at the Local University CLEP Conference, Jenny stated that “one of the kids spoke about how he got bullied a lot and brought me to another side, like I should really step up for the people that got bullied because they got so affected by this and this could just bring their day to a whole other standard.”

**Theme 2, category 3, code b: empathy.** Educators and students at HES and PS shared views that the CLEP promotes the development of empathy in students.

**HES.** At HES, Madeline (kindergarten teacher) expressed her view that it is part of a teacher’s responsibility to help students to understand the impact of their actions on others, read the emotions of others, and figure out what could be said to help someone feel better if they are upset. Another kindergarten teacher, Fiona, commented on how they perceive it as their responsibility to teach empathy to students, “I think it’s our responsibility to help them
understand what they’re feeling and helping them have the language to express themselves and put that picture in their head that oh you just did this to them and do you see how their emotion, like they look sad, they’re upset so what could we do to help them feel better, what could we say to help them feel better.”

Stephanie (second-grade teacher) commented, “we’re talking about empathy and compassion for others” and further shared her view that the CLEP,

Teaches them empathy and compassion for others, not just our school, not with each other but the whole world needs that, that’s like a life thing you need to have that and I think that it teaches them and it makes them more mindful to build positive relationships and show empathy and you know just compassion just come on let’s all have it and it teaches them that.

Stephanie also recounted how at the end of daily announcements, Bonnie (principal) “always says choose love or courage, empathy” to students. Michelle (fourth-grade) discussed teaching students to notice when someone else is upset and how to extend support.

HES fourth-grade students discussed favorite activities of theirs that demonstrated a high level of empathy for those they helped. These students discussed how they especially enjoyed the “Sock-tober” activity that the school engaged in to help ensure that homeless people had socks to wear. Sock-tober was a fundraising activity in which students got together and invited others to either donate money, or else donate socks, during the month of October. The socks were then brought to a local homeless center. One student, Paul, shared that this particular activity was his favorite because he remembered what it was like to walk without shoes once, noting that after walking barefoot through the street, “when I came back my feet were red as a raspberry, and so I’m thinking of people walking 200 miles barefoot.” Students shared that this
activity was meaningful for them because it helped them to realize that many people are without basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter.

Another fourth-grade student, Mary, discussed how much she enjoyed helping veterans who were sick and in a local hospital as part of a “Valentine’s for Veteran’s” activity. Students created Valentine’s Day cards and then brought them to the veteran’s hospital where students gave them the cards and expressed well wishes. Overall, in describing these community service activities, HES students expressed empathy for others in need which they acknowledged realizing as a result of their participation in the CLEP and related activities.

PS. PS fifth-grade student, Joseph, referred to a book that the class read, Wonder, and how he felt sad for the main character who was getting left out (Palacio, 2012). This student later stated, “If you be kind to someone it makes a big difference and impact on their life.” Other PS fifth-grade students discussed their emotional reaction to the main character in this book and tied the character’s emotional experiences to lessons learned through the CLEP. One student, Gabriel, shared that he learned that bullying another child “could impact a kid’s life” in a big way as a result of reading and discussing this book in connection to CLEP lessons. Jenny and Kelly, PS eighth-grade students, discussed their reflections listening to students speak about their experiences being bullied at the Local University CLEP Conference. After hearing other students tell their experience of how the CLEP helped them to hear from such difficult experiences, both students shared that they became more empathic towards others.

Theme 2, category 3, code c: responsible decision-making. Educators and students at both HES and PS commented on how participation in SEL programs such as CLEP helps to foster the development of responsible, including pro-social, decision-making in children.
At HES, Bonnie (principal) discussed her impressions that participation in this SEL program helped support the development of “grit and personal accountability” in children as well as “being proactive and accountable for yourself so you can help others.” Stephanie (second-grade teacher) shared her impression of how the program instills a sense of responsibility in students for their thoughts and actions. Another second-grade teacher, Frank, discussed his observation that participation in the CLEP helps students to learn to think, utilize coping strategies when needed, and that when Kristen (school counselor) delivers program lessons, “she gives them a strategy to deal with something like that that could happen in their lives.” Laurie (third-grade teacher), discussed how participation in this program helps students to realize that they have a choice in how to respond to difficult situations.

HES second-grade student, Barbara, discussed how learning lessons about courage through the CLEP has helped her at times “when we have courage to not be mean to each other and do what’s right” even when doing so seems difficult. Jude (third-grade) discussed how the program “teaches you to be kind and to not hurt others and to do things that are right.” Through their participation in the CLEP, HES students also engaged in creative activities such as drawing colorful pictures of the CALM (cooperate, ask questions, listen, make your move) strategy for resolving conflict.

Students also discussed the ways in which they have learned to resolve conflicts and appropriately assert themselves without causing tense interpersonal situations to escalate. Mary, fourth-grade, shared how she has learned the importance of not making difficult situations worse, sharing the example of, “if somebody was mean to you and then you be mean to them, it wouldn’t help them feel better, and it wouldn’t help you feel better either.” Another fourth-grade student, Anna, commented that if someone does something that causes anger, “you don’t need to
do it back to them and make everything worse, you need to try to fix things and get rid of the problems.” Other HES students shared the strategies they have learned for responding to conflict situations such as “you need to find an adult and tell them” as well as saying, “I forgive you,” when someone apologizes for doing something hurtful.

PS. At PS, educators and students also shared their perceptions of how the program teaches students to make responsible decisions that benefit themselves, others, and their relationships. Selena (Humanities teacher) shared her view that when situations arose in the classroom, students seem more open to considering how they can approach a situation differently than they might otherwise, without having this instruction. Selena also shared that she has heard students comment in the hallway, “you have to choose love,” referring to their efforts to work through something that is emotionally challenging.

PS fifth-grade students shared their collective view that the program teaches students “right over wrong,” to not follow the behavior of others who behave in mean or otherwise inappropriate manners, and to stand up for others when needed. Students also shared that they felt they have learned that “violence isn’t the answer.” Gabriel connected his view on this to how Ms. Lewis strives to help prevent hatred and violence through the CLEP to recently occurring events such as the Parkland School Shooting. This student commented that he enjoys the CLEP helps students learn how to make better choices than to turning to violence in response to experiencing difficult emotions. Gabriel also acknowledged Scarlett Lewis’ mission with the CLEP to help “prevent all the hate” from spreading in society. Gabriel also shared that he wished the program could spread throughout the world. The ways in which the program promotes advocacy for others and good decision-making (i.e., choosing right over wrong) was also highlighted.
PS eighth-grade students discussed how they felt that their participation in the CLEP has positively influenced the ways in which they make decisions, particularly with considering the needs of others. Kelly shared that one activity she felt taught her the most was a lesson that focused on learning about the brain and “how it taught us that you should think about other people before you do your actions” and that “you should really think about what you do because it could affect someone else.” Throughout her essay, Jenny shared her views on how the program has taught her and other students to “find peaceful and positive solutions to the more difficult situations we’re faced with, and treat everyone with the respect they deserve.” Jenny further discussed the ways in which the program has taught her to be a leader and balance decision making responsibilities, stating “The CLEP taught me, personally, how to be a leader, and how to make appropriate decisions as the head of a group of my peers. Now I know how to accept responsibility, but at the same time not abuse power.”

**Theme 2, category 3, code d: self-regulation.** Educators as well as students at HES and PS discussed the ways in which they feel that participation in the Choose Love program enhances one’s ability to regulate their emotions, particularly when presented with challenging situations.

**HES.** At HES, Kindergarten teachers discussed their impressions of how participating in the program helps students to develop coping skills and to learn strategies they can rely upon when experiencing a challenging situation. Madeline expressed her view that SEL instruction “promotes self-regulation for navigation of those emotions that they’re experiencing internally.” This was echoed by Fiona who expressed that SEL instruction helps students to gain “coping mechanisms” and “helps them with their self-regulation,” noting that she has observed students actively trying to apply strategies learned from CLEP lessons. Reagan shared, “from what I’ve
observed, I’ve had a couple of students already who I’ve noticed are really making an effort to use it,” referring to the CLEP’s teachings, but did not provide specific examples.

Stephanie (second-grade teacher) shared her view that the more students are exposed to SEL instruction “the more they’re going to be able to manage their feelings, their behavior, talking about responsibility.” Stephanie further discussed her impression that participating in this type of instruction in school helps students to “understand their emotions and manage their emotions” through the use of strategies learned (i.e., breathing techniques to calm oneself) via CLEP lessons. The use of breathing strategies taught through the program as a way to help students self-regulate was also discussed by fourth-grade teachers Anne and James. James also shared how the instruction has encouraged students to utilize strategies such as “stopping before reacting, just making a conscious decision before they act to actually choose being brave.”

HES students relayed their perspectives on how the CLEP teaches self-regulation strategies, particularly with managing impulsivity, through SEL instruction. As Jennifer shared, “if you didn’t have all of these lessons you would just get mad and you wouldn’t stop yourself and think about what’s happening.” Jude shared his perspective that these lessons are important because it helps students to manage feelings of anger, “it helps people not get mad at their friends and say mean things and it helps keep the school in control.” Jude also stated that without learning these skills, students “would just stomp off” after encountering a disagreement or difficult situation. Jennifer also noted that the CLEP instruction is good for students so that they can figure out alternative strategies for communicating feelings of frustration to others so that “when people get mad they don’t just yell at their friends.”

PS. At PS, David commented that the program helps students to figure out ways to think positively which helps people to gain “control of your mind, of your brain.” Selena shared her
view that the SEL instruction teaches students to “self-manage” and that by offering it across grade levels, it allows students who might not have received the instruction during a previous year to receive it the next, as well as students who did receive it to build upon what they already learned. PS fifth-grade students collectively discussed the ways in which they use strategies learned in the program to regulate their emotions and behaviors. One student, Daniel, shared,

It helped me to be nice to others… and when I’m doing something wrong to stop immediately… it helps me to like not get mad at others when they’re being mean to me and just help people when somebody is being mean to them.

**Theme 2, category 3, code e: self-awareness.** Educators at HES, as well as educators and students at PS, discussed ways in which they perceive the CLEP as enhancing self-awareness in the students who participate in it. Based on participant responses, self-awareness can be defined as recognizing in the moment how one is feeling and then considering how to problem solve accordingly.

**HES.** At HES, Fiona (kindergarten teacher) shared that she felt SEL instruction “definitely makes students more aware… I think it makes everybody more aware, even adults…” and this helps students to identify how they are feeling about a situation which can equip them with the skills necessary to figure out how to appropriately respond. Another kindergarten teacher, Madeline, remarked that the language of the CLEP helps to foster self-awareness in students. The ways in which self-awareness assists students with figuring out how to respond appropriately during social interactions were discussed by Laurie (third-grade), who shared her view that the CLEP addresses student SEL needs

By awareness, they’re more aware that they have those needs, they’re more aware that they have, those emotions that they’re feeling, because sometimes they’re feeling
something and they don’t really know what they’re feeling, you know. They’re angry or they’re sad and they really don’t understand why, but now they’re learning okay I have this and now, “What am I going to do with it?”

PS. Selena (humanities teacher) shared her view on how the CLEP promotes the development of self-awareness in students, as well as the educators involved with delivering the program.

It makes you definitely much more self-aware and to be able to, I think the students take that scientific approach into what’s actually happening in their brain and how they can kind of rewire that or at least be self-aware of that so that they can redirect possibly if they need to.

This sentiment was also shared by David (content specialist) who stated that the program teaches students to become aware of themselves as well as gain insight to “their social emotional skills or attributes.”

PS eighth-grade students discussed activities they engaged in during CLEP lessons which they felt increased their self-awareness as well as sensitivity to the experience of others in the school community. Both students described one particularly memorable activity during which students had to describe themselves, which helped them to get to know themselves as they got to know others. Jenny also acknowledged that the experience of speaking publicly about the CLEP, and hearing from other students who spoke, raised her level of self-awareness with respect to understanding the experiences of others around her and what she could do to help others. Kelly also shared that she felt the program “makes you definitely much more self-aware,” and described how learning a scientific approach to what’s happening in the brain can help students
to “rewire” their thinking, “or at least be self-aware of that so that they can redirect possibly if
they need to.”

**Theme 2, category 3, code f: social skills.** Educators at HES as well as students at PS
how they felt that participation in the CLEP supported the development of social skills in student
participants.

*HES.* At HES, Madeline discussed the importance of learning to be “in an environment
with so many different personalities and learning how to treat every different personality type
with respect,” which is supported by SEL instruction. Stephanie (second-grade teacher) shared
her view that the CLEP supports the development of social skills in students, stating that she
“can’t imagine anything else teaching any more social emotional skill strategies and life lessons
than this.”

*PS.* At PS, Jenny (eighth-grade student), wrote an essay about how her participation in
the CLEP has helped her to grow in many ways, including with her social skills and confidence
in social situations. As a result of her experience with the program, Jenny acknowledged that she
became comfortable speaking more at school and sharing about herself with others. During her
student group interview, Kelly revealed that she typically does not “like to talk that much in
school.” She noted, however, that participating in the CLEP has helped her to become more
comfortable with herself and socially connecting with others as well. These students indicated
that part of the reason for this is due to their involvement in the “Choose Love Creators Group”
at PS. The Choose Love Creators Group consisted of PS students who worked to incorporate the
CLEP into the school environment, i.e., creating and updating a bulletin boards, making Choose
Love posters, reaching out to other students to ensure they are socially included. This bulletin
board including visual references to the CLEP and other positive messages for students to see as
they navigated the halls. Members of this group also represented PS at the Local University CLEP Conference and spoke publicly about their experiences with the CLEP.

Jenny was a student leader of the Choose Love Creators Group and described how the group is inclusive of those who struggle socially in her essay (see Appendix I):

One of the most important things we do in our group is help people who have nowhere else to go find a place; for example, one of my friends had been left out and cast aside by her old friend group, and when she asked to be included, we let her in and helped her. It’s nice to see her finding her real friends in this group … this it is not only a group where we just make posters, but also a safe place for all the girls. This group brought all the girls together, and helped us find each other.

Together, Jenny and Kelly discussed the experience that the Choose Love Creators group had with welcoming other students who were shy and initially reserved, but later became close friends with others in the group.

**Theme 3: Implementation Requirements**

This theme is defined as the perceived requirements necessary for successfully implementing an SEL program, as described by educator and student participants. The format and structural elements, implementation challenges to overcome, instructional approach, as well as recommendations for implementation are discussed within this theme. Table 18 depicts the categories and frequencies for the codes comprising this theme.
Table 18

*Theme 3: Implementation Requirements, Categories and Frequencies of Codes*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1: Format &amp; Structural Elements</th>
<th>HES Educators</th>
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<th>PS Educators</th>
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(Continued)
Table 18  
*Theme 3: Implementation Requirements, Categories and Frequencies of Codes*

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<th>Category 4: Recommendations for Implementation</th>
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**Total Codes for Theme 3:** 190  88  49  64

*Theme 3, category 1: format and structural elements.* This category is defined as the ways in which the CLEP is delivered to students at HES and PS. This includes descriptions of how educators facilitate the program and apply aspects of the curriculum to daily instruction. This category also includes feedback from educator and student participants at both HES and PS regarding the ways in which the lessons are built into each school’s schedule, how time is allotted for the program, and how time is a factor in facilitating the overall delivery of the program lessons. Educators and students at both schools also discussed their perceptions of the duration, frequency, and overall daily application of the CLEP.

*Theme 3, category 1, code a: CLEP facilitators.* Educators and students at both HES and PS acknowledged that certain people at each school play key leadership roles with facilitating the implementation of the CLEP. These individuals also expressed that a sense of trust with those who lead the implementation of the program is an essential component in gaining educator buy in and participation in the program.
At HES, based on both educator and student responses, there was consensus that Kristen (school counselor) is the lead facilitator for the program throughout the school. Kristen discussed how she goes to classrooms and teaches a CLEP lesson to each class every other week with the teacher present so that the teacher can later reinforce aspects of the lesson when appropriate. Kristen discussed other informal ways in which program topics may be discussed with students, i.e., morning meetings, with the disclaimer that these are not formal implementations of the program.

Bonnie (principal) discussed her perspective regarding her leadership role as school building principal with promoting the program, emphasizing how she defers to the counselor and her expertise with leading the program’s implementation. For example, Bonnie discussed that she consults the school counselor for guidance on how to communicate messages pertaining to the program with the school community. When discussing how the CLEP was initially considered for implementation at HES, Bonnie stated,

I don’t take credit for many of the great programs that go on in this building. I work with great people, I trust them and after hearing what it’s about and Kristen brought it to my attention and said “I really want to do this” and I said okay let’s do it.

HES educator participants shared views indicating that there was an overall positive response to learning about the CLEP and being willing to engage in it throughout HES. When asked to discuss her own view towards who should take the lead with implementing the CLEP or other SEL programs like it, Kristen discussed her belief that it would be necessary for school counselors to lead the program implementation in order to facilitate its success. When asked if there needs to be a specific point person for implementing the program, Kristen also shared her impression that “if a school wants a Choose Love culture, they’re going to have to have a person
who is going to be willing to do more than just teach the lessons,” suggesting that there needs to be someone designated to champion the program and thoroughly support its implementation.

This positive response to initially learning about the CLEP was also noted by the Kindergarten teachers. Fiona stated, “when we were given information about it, of course, we stepped behind and supported it.” Another teacher, Madeline, expressed her thoughts on the evolving implementation of the program as well as the school counselor’s role in serving as a lead facilitator for HES,

    I think it’s early and I think Kristen has the knowledge and the know-how and I think as it rolls out it will probably be more shared knowledge, through collaboration, it’s pretty early, but I think it’s a great initiative and I can’t wait to see where it goes.

HES Kindergarten and second-grade teachers shared that the CLEP lessons are delivered by the school counselor while the classroom teacher is also present so they can receive the information as well and subsequently reinforce concepts throughout the rest of the week. When asked if teachers had any thoughts on better ways to improve the program’s implementation, one responded, “Clone Ms. Kristen, or maybe she could be assigned an intern or that could double up the schedule so the frequency maybe would be just more.” The school counselor’s consistently visible and active presence throughout the school building was acknowledged by educators and students throughout the interviews conducted at HES. This was also observed by the researcher throughout the two day visit in which the researcher saw how the school counselor interacted with other educator colleagues, taught the program in various classrooms, and engaged with students and staff at the school-wide meeting held on the first day of the researcher’s visit.

The key role that school counselor plays in the implementation of this program at HES was also highlighted by Laurie (third-grade teacher) who stated that Kristen comes in once every
two weeks and teaches a 30-minute lesson and “it’s up to the teacher in the classroom how they choose to further it, so that’s different among the classrooms.” Fourth-grade teacher, Anne, shared her perspective that Kristen has been able to successfully facilitate the implementation of the program through her presentation and effort to work with the teachers so that time spent with the program did not interfere with other instructional requirements or goals.

I think the way she presented it to us and the way she’s implementing it was, you know, it didn’t take away from what we needed to do in our classrooms and I think she’s the right person to bring it to the kids first cause they’re used to her helping with those types of things and I think it was done well.

Students at HES also shared their views indicating that the school counselor plays a critical role in the CLEP’s implementation. When asked for ideas as to how the program could improve, third-grade student Nicole stated that the program could improve “If there were a thousand Ms. Kristens.” The instrumental role of Ms. Kristen with facilitating the successful implementation of this program was acknowledged throughout HES educator and student interviews.

PS. At PS, CLEP lessons were delivered by classroom teachers during various times that are partially influenced by the school’s master schedule. Teachers discussed how in sixth and seventh-grade the lessons were delivered during religion classes, which David (content specialist) viewed as a “good opportunity” because of the parallels that they felt existed between the elements of the CLEP and the school’s faith-based instruction. Eighth-grade students Jenny and Kelly discussed how PS began implementing the CLEP curriculum in all classrooms at the start of the year. Each classroom teacher at PS was involved with the implementation of the CLEP via class lessons and related whole-school initiatives. Jenny also discussed the student led
“Choose Love Creators” group which promotes the CLEP and incorporates elements of the program throughout the school under the guidance of teachers. Jenny shared examples of ways in which students in the Choose Love Creators group help facilitate the program throughout PS, such as creating a Choose Love Bulletin Board and updating it on a monthly basis.

Theme 3, category 1, code b: schedule. Educators and students at both HES and PS discussed the ways in which CLEP is factored into their respective school’s schedule.

HES. Bonnie (principal) stated that they have built time into the school master schedule for CLEP lessons so that it does not fall by the wayside due to other demands. Kristen (school counselor) discussed how her schedule is built into teacher schedules so that the Choose Love lesson dates and times are set in advance. Kristen acknowledged that “classroom guidance” has always been in teacher schedules at HES while the implementation of CLEP during the time allotted for classroom guidance sessions started in the fall of 2016. The implementation of the CLEP at that time replaced a holistic approach that Kristen was implementing based on past experiences with SEL programs which replaced Second Step. Since she began delivering the CLEP in fall 2016, Kristen has maintained a schedule of visiting each HES classroom twice monthly to deliver 30-minute lessons.

HES students discussed how the lessons were part of their class schedule at school. HES students shared the days of the week that they recall Kristin coming to their classes to teach the CLEP lessons on a regular basis. HES fourth-grade students recalled that they participate in the CLEP on Mondays or Fridays and that the lessons usually last between 20-30 minutes. One student shared that the lessons are “about a half hour, sometimes longer depending on if we have more stuff to talk about.”
PS. At PS, fifth-grade students also discussed that they participate in Choose Love lessons every other week but felt that they “use it all the time” in reference to skills taught by the program. At PS, teachers noted that sixth and seventh-grade students receive CLEP lessons during their religion classes. PS eighth-grade students shared that they receive program lessons once monthly for about 45 minutes each session. For students in eighth-grade there is a scheduled time, “B Block” in which students participate in the CLEP so that they are not pulled from the same classes on a regular basis. Students miss the same class each month. Jenny missed religion while Kelly missed science. Information about how teachers feel towards students missing classes was not gathered due to time limitations. PS teachers discussed the challenge of building regular time for the lessons into the middle school schedule as compared to the elementary school schedule. They acknowledged having implemented the program and referred to it consistently as part of the flow of each day. PS eighth-grade students Kelly and Jenny noted that they participate in the program during their B Block along with other girls while eighth-grade boys have it at the same time.

Theme 3, category 1, code c: time. Educators and students at both HES and PS discussed their perceptions of how time plays a role in the implementation of the CLEP as well as the amount of time currently dedicated towards the CLEP in their respective schools.

HES. HES educators concurred that finding time to dedicate to the implementation of SEL programs such as CLEP can pose a challenge in light of other demands placed on teachers and schools to meet various requirements for core academic subjects. HES has also utilized the Leader in Me Program since 2012. Both Bonnie and Kristen shared their views that HES has been successful at integrating both programs. HES Kindergarten teachers discussed the benefit of having a specific block of time set aside for classroom SEL lessons so that students have the
opportunity to “just talk about your emotions and Choose Love.” HES fourth-grade teachers discussed how “time is always an issue, just having the time and fortunately the leaders in our school feel that it’s an important program and so Ms. Kristen is given that time and we all take the time to talk about it. So time is factor.” HES fourth-grade teachers also expressed that they would like to have more time in their schedules for Ms. Kristen to come to their classes on a weekly basis, but that they feel that this change would not be feasible due to time constraints.

HES students also echoed frustrations related to the amount of time available to engage in SEL lessons and activities. One student in the second-grade student group, Patrick, shared, “I wish we could have a longer time and she could read more books to us.” An HES fourth-grade student (Anna) remarked, “we only do it for like 30 minutes, maybe sometimes more, sometimes less and I think we should have more time and I think we do need to add more activities to help people more.” Anna also shared her view that time can be a challenging factor, stating that “Time is probably our biggest thing because we don’t get very much time to do stuff but we wish we did so we could get more things done and help more people.”

PS. David shared his view that educators need to figure out a way to find time for the CLEP in the school schedule, which can be more challenging at the secondary level than at the elementary level. PS teachers discussed the importance of educators being creative in finding ways to implement the program despite time constraints. PS eighth-grade students shared their opinion that 45 minutes is good amount of time for a CLEP lesson while they feel that the frequency at which CLEP lessons and activities take place could be increased.

Theme 3, category 1, code d: duration. Educators and students at HES along with students at PS discussed their perception of how long the program is in duration. At HES, Reagan, Kindergarten teacher, shared that the duration of a program lesson is approximately 30
minutes in length. HES fourth-grade students also acknowledged that the program lessons last about 30 minutes in length. Anna discussed how sometimes lessons may last longer if there is “more stuff to talk about” referencing a discussion which took place about how to help people after a hurricane. HES second-grade student, Barbara, and fourth-grade student, Anna, expressed their views that they think the program lessons should be longer in duration, with Anna stating her view that “we only do it for like 30 minutes, maybe sometimes more, sometimes less and I think we should have more time.” At PS, fifth and eighth-grade students discussed that the lessons last approximately 45 minutes to an hour, which they felt is a good length of time for the structured lessons and activities to take place on a regular basis.

**Theme 3, category 1, code e: frequency.** Educators and students at both HES and PS discussed their perception of how frequently CLEP lessons and activities take place within their respective schools.

**HES.** At HES, Kristen (school counselor) acknowledged that she delivers lessons to each classroom once every two weeks and expressed her opinion that it would be ideal for the program to be implemented as frequently as every day. Madeline (Kindergarten) shared that the students receive lessons twice per month, while she feels that the lessons should occur more frequently. Frank and Stephanie (second-grade) as well as Laurie (third-grade) noted that the lessons take place every other week. Laurie also shared her view that she thinks it would be ideal if lessons could be provided more frequently, so students “could get a lesson every single week.” HES student Anna (fourth-grade) also acknowledged that the program lessons take place once every other week, and fourth-grade student Paul expressed his view that he thinks students should receive more lessons.
PS. Students at PS also expressed that they think it would be ideal for Choose Love lessons to take place more frequently. At PS, fifth and eighth-grade students interviewed expressed varied perceptions of the frequency in which lessons are delivered, with responses ranging from once weekly to once per month. Eighth-grade students Jenny and Kelly expressed that they think the ideal frequency for program lessons would be once or twice per week.

Theme 3, category 1, code f: daily application. Educators at HES as well as educators and students at PS discussed their perceptions of how elements of the CLEP are applied during school each day.

HES. HES principal, Bonnie, expressed her appreciation of the program and her view that aspects of it need to be “embedded” into the school day, providing an example of how the program is referenced during daily announcements. Bonnie discussed how she has developed a “catch phrase” on the daily announcement to reinforce the importance of students acting as leaders and choosing love. Bonnie stated, I’ve consistently been saying ‘remember leaders, leaders choose love,’ in choosing love you’re a leader and that just kind of goes hand in hand.” Bonnie shared that aspects of the program are naturally embedded into the course of the school day, which helps overall implementation (particularly at busy times of the school year). Bonnie described the multiple benefits that the program offers in this way, stating that:

It’s frequent, I think it’s tangible and again with that common understanding, again adults can talk to it easily, and so when kids are having problems or sadness or emotional needs it can be used easily in those conversations as well. It’s kind of the glue, I would say it’s been the glue to a lot of great things going on in our building. For instance, the buddy bench, we’ve had that out there for five years or so and it was an idea from across the country, it’s a park bench out there it’s got “buddy bench” on it and the idea is if a
student goes to the playground and doesn’t have a friend to play with and feels a little lonely and sad you can go sit on that and then if you see somebody sitting on that you can go up and say hey what’s going on, you want to come play with us. So again, that just ties into what Choose Love is talking about and so we have a lot of great things already, but Choose Love has been the glue to bring it all together.

Kristen, school counselor, discussed how the CLEP concepts, particularly the four words comprising the Choose Love Formula (Courage, Gratitude, Forgiveness, Compassion), are applied during daily activities such as announcements, assemblies, and bulletin boards throughout the school. Kristen developed posters to serve as visual references in classrooms for teachers so that they could reinforce concepts taught during the program whenever necessary. Kristen has also presented about the CLEP to parents during evening events, including Parent Teacher Organization meetings.

Fiona (kindergarten teacher) discussed how elements of the program are applied to the classroom on a daily basis, stating, “I feel like I use it when the need arises, if I ever see like a good example of ‘oh wow she did this, she showed courage by doing this,’ then I’ll do it [referring to opportunities to praise students for behaviors that are consistent with the teachers of the CLEP] as the need arises.” Madeline and Reagan, other kindergarten teachers, also discussed how they referenced aspects of the program as opportunities arose during the school day, and also acknowledged that the principal references the program in the daily announcements.

Stephanie (second-grade teacher) discussed how aspects of the program can be carried over and reinforced with students throughout the school day, and her observation that students respond positively to the language for redirection, “all I have to say is like hey dude choose love and they’re like oh yeah okay cool.” Stephanie and Frank (second-grade teachers) also discussed
how elements of the program are woven into each school day. According to Stephanie and Frank, this occurred through CLEP school-wide assemblies, the principal’s reference to the program during each morning’s announcements (i.e., “remember leaders, leaders choose love), arts and crafts activities that connect to the CLEP, and other ways to informally reference the program on a frequent basis. Both Stephanie and Frank agreed that the program is “weaved throughout the school all the time, throughout the day, and even after school.” Frank also emphasized that the teachings of the program are “something that you want your students to hear over and over again so you’re going to thread it throughout the day.”

Laurie (third-grade teacher) discussed the schedule and her impression that teachers need to be “right there and involved in the lesson, because it needs to carry over through every day. Just one lesson isn’t enough…” Laurie also discussed how Kristen comes to the class every other week, but that Laurie refers to it consistently at other times each day through her general approach to and conversations with her students. It was not confirmed whether or not all HES teachers utilize the same approach. During instruction, Laurie will refer to aspects of the CLEP, i.e., drawing connections between social studies lessons and content of the CLEP. Laurie also discussed how she tries to apply aspects of the program at home with her own children.

The ways in which teachers reinforce CLEP concepts throughout each week was discussed by HES fourth-grade teachers. These educators discussed how Kristen teaches the initial lesson, during which teachers are present in the classroom. The teachers then carry over topics and strategies that Kristen reviewed as part of the CLEP lessons.

PS. PS teachers shared that the CLEP lessons are delivered to students at scheduled times while elements of the program are also referenced at unstructured times throughout each week as well. David elaborated on how he and his fellow teachers integrate aspects of CLEP
into their classroom instruction. PS teachers noted that they appreciate the CLEP’s flexibility with respect to lesson delivery and overall program implementation. These teachers also agreed that integrating elements of the program is “part of the flow of the day” at PS and is referenced during scheduled CLEP lessons as well as at other points throughout the day.

Selena spoke about how aspects of CLEP tend to emerge in class discussion at unexpected times, stating that

Sometimes, like he [David] said, it comes up in other areas so we’ll sometimes talk about it and pull out our journals and … if something in particular is going on in the classroom, even in light of what happened last week [referring to the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas HS shooting], it will come up, you know, so that you take and apply this.

Journals were used as part of the scripted CLEP curriculum which suggests journaling exercises along with CLEP lessons. Some PS students acknowledged that they used their journals to complete the related writing activities and also for their own emotional release. PS fifth-grade student Doreen also shared her interpretation of how elements of the program are applied on a daily basis,

I feel we participate like once every other week like everybody else is saying but we have to use the CLEP throughout our lives like every day… we learn about it once a week but we use it all the time.

Doreen and other students described how formal and informal references to the program take place throughout the day on a frequent basis at PS.

Theme 3, category 2: implementation challenges to overcome. This category includes the perceived obstacles to implementing the CLEP, as well as possible reasons why students would not want to participate in the CLEP, as defined by educator and student participants.
**Theme 3, category 2, code a: general obstacles.** Educators and students discussed their thoughts on what obstacles exist or could exist regarding a school’s effort to implement the CLEP.

**HES.** Bonnie (principal) expressed that she did not see any negative aspects of the program while she acknowledged “barriers” to overcome with finding the time to coordinate community outreach and certain activities that she would like to implement with the program. Bonnie reflected that she was trying to figure out how to continue to share information about the program including, why and how it was created, with parents as time goes on.

Kristen (school counselor) discussed that adapting to change with implementing an unfamiliar program can be difficult for some due to the natural challenges associated with the change process and trying something new. Referring back to her experience with initially implementing the program, Kristen reflected,

It’s different from what I had been doing. At first, I felt like I was an actor with a new script and that was very difficult for me because I was doing it so long my way. I had my awesome little lessons, I knew how to say it [referring to the topics she was teaching students] and it just got better every time, and I had to put that aside and start fresh. I still am in that stage because this is year two… I’m still fine tuning how I teach everything, but it’s hard to change, change is so hard.

While she was open to adopting the program in her work as a school counselor, Kristen was also mindful of the ways in which change can trigger emotions about adapting to something new, especially when someone is used to doing things a certain way. Kristen discussed how she navigated the process of changing her instructional practice with providing classroom guidance lessons, stating that she “figured out how to infuse that stuff [referring to aspects of lessons she
previously gave students that she found helpful, like certain books or certain activities that I felt were really powerful for kids, I didn’t want to lose that.” As a result of her openness to try the program, as well as her ability to be creative and persevere, Kristen initiated the program and continued to use it. Kristen also revealed her thoughts on potential obstacles to teachers implementing the program, and emphasized that the inherent demands of a teacher’s role with teaching academic subject matter could make it difficult to expect that teachers implement also teach the CLEP.

HES teachers also shared their views towards what obstacles might exist with CLEP implementation. One fourth-grade teacher, James, commented on time being a challenge to overcome and that in order for a school to schedule the time needed to properly implement the program, there needs to be buy in from the building leadership and administrators. Michelle (fourth-grade) commented that at HES, “fortunately the leaders in our school feel that it’s an important program….” and another teacher remarked, “right, I think the leadership definitely has to have the buy-in or it’s not really going to be implemented well.” While HES educators expressed similar perspectives suggesting that their building administration as supportive of the CLEP and its implementation at HES, these educators also speculated that lack of administrative buy-in or support could potentially hinder efforts to implement the program at other schools.

Consistent with these viewpoints, HES teachers also noted the importance of teacher and other staff buy-in as a critical factor with program implementation. Fourth-grade teachers noted that while they themselves would promote the implementation of the program, it is possible that other teachers might not. James questioned if financial funding for the program could be a challenge for schools to overcome, indicating that this could be a potential obstacle to implementation. James and other HES educators interviewed in this group were unaware that
the CLEP lessons are free to download from the program website (www.jesselewischoosealove.org). The only costs that a district could incur would be with purchasing the basic materials (i.e., paper or electronic devices) to provide teachers so they could reference the program.

HES fourth-grade students discussed the perceived limitations of their school schedule with implementing SEL programs as potential obstacles to overcome. Students referenced how they felt the school calendar was restricting at times, noting that they had been out of school on certain days for field trips thus far that year, which impacted the CLEP lesson schedule. Across group interviews, HES students consistently noted that some barriers to program implementation were time, schedule complications, and a possible lack of awareness that others have regarding the benefits of implementing the CLEP (i.e., students hastily assuming that participating in the program might not make much difference for them). However, also across interviews, HES students collectively expressed that the positive outcomes related to implementing the CLEP prevail over any perceived difficulties associated with program implementation.

PS. At PS, teachers identified schedule demands as a challenge to overcome, particularly at the middle-school level where scheduling involves more movement throughout the day. David expressed,

In middle school, it’s not a negative thing, you’ve just got to figure out how to do it…. In the middle school where the subject times are a little bit tighter, we had to figure it out with the middle school, and we give it three times a month and we split it up so we have the four units that we’ll do. Now we were splitting it up actually two times a week or something like that and we found that it might be better if we did it in a row but you have
to have the principal saying that you could do that you know. So, it’s not a negative thing but it’s something, it’s an obstacle that you have to overcome.

Other PS educators stressed the importance of taking a thoughtful, and at times creative, approach to implementing the program lessons so as to overcome these types of challenges in and elicit student participation. The need to carefully plan CLEP instruction in order to facilitate student engagement was also discussed by PS educators. Donna (fifth-grade teacher) commented on the importance of delivering the program lessons in ways that are appealing to students, and allotting adequate time for the program, by stating, “you have to present it right, they [referring to students] have to accept it and you have to make time for it, but we’ve done that here.”

**Theme 3, category 2, code b: reasons why students would not participate.** Educators and students at HES, as well as students at PS, discussed possible reasons as to why students might not be inclined to participate in the CLEP.

**HES.** At HES, Kristen (school counselor) shared that sometimes, particularly as students get older, they might not find some of the strategies that the program promotes (i.e., breathing exercises) as appealing as they did when they were younger. HES second-grade student, Faith, shared her view that sometimes students might experience their own emotional obstacles to participation. Faith gave an example of how she herself at times felt it was harder to participate in the program when she was already feeling sad that day, noting that at times when sad, she was also tired and “just can’t do as much stuff.” Fourth-grade student, Paul, shared that he did not think there were any negative aspects of the program, while some elements of the program seemed a “little bit harder” than others. Paul explained this further by stating that sometimes students might struggle to engage in the program due to shyness or simply not wanting to do
something they perceive as difficult in some way. Another fourth-grade student, Mary, shared her opinion that some students might be overwhelmed with meeting basic demands of core academic subjects, and therefore might feel stressed by feeling compelled to participate more activities as part of an SEL program.

PS. At PS, fifth-grade students discussed possible reasons why some students might feel reluctant, or shy, about participating in CLEP. These students guessed that while program activities yield beneficial outcomes for students, some aspects of the program may also overwhelm students in ways that hinder full participation. Students shared that in particular, when presented with instructional activities that prompt students to write about their feelings, some students might find it difficult to convey their feelings and do so in writing. Joseph disclosed that he found it difficult to complete certain writing activities related to the CLEP, stating that he found them to be,

Emotionally hard because … sometimes you’re writing about a topic that was tragic or it was like really sad … it’s like you want to talk about it but sometimes you can’t find the willpower to talk about it, but you want to talk about it … at that time it can be difficult but once you’re done you feel like you needed to do it.

Another fifth-grade student, Daniel, acknowledged the possibility that some students may shy away from sharing personal information during CLEP discussions. Anthony echoed this as a perceived reason why some might find it difficult to engage in the program, because some students may feel overwhelmed at sharing personal information with others. Students within this group acknowledged how some students may feel “self-conscious” and reluctant to engage. Other PS fifth-grade students discussed how they felt the therapeutic benefits of this process outweigh the challenges involved with facing the emotions that one may be prompted to write in
a journal about or learn about during CLEP lessons. Gabriel, remarked that students might hastily assume the program is not going to be effective due to time length of lessons. Gabriel speculated that some might underestimate the program’s potential until they give the program a chance, stating:

One of the obstacles would be getting kids to do it because a lot of the kids would say, “that’s not going to help.” It’s only like probably an hour and they’re like, “that’s not going to help it’s only like an hour a day, it’s not going to do anything,” but it’s actually going to make a big difference. After like a week or a month, it will make a huge impact on their lives because they’ll learn to forgive, they learn that hate is like a very strong thing and that if people are being bullied, it’s a very serious thing and it could cause like a lot of things to happen to that kid.

Gabriel suggested that some might not anticipate benefits from the program due to the duration or frequency of lessons seeming insufficient to make a meaningful difference. Overall, PS students collectively indicated that students might at times be reluctant to participate in the program for the aforementioned reasons related to students possible feeling shy, or otherwise inhibited from sharing their emotional experiences.

Another fifth-grade student, Doreen, stated that some of the possible “obstacles” could be that, while some students are at ease with participating, “then there’s a majority of people that are like self-conscious or don’t really want to join clubs and say they have better things to do… there’s always going to be those kids that don’t want to do it and just want to stay at home and just do other things but like she [referring to Scarlett Lewis] was able to persevere and start a whole program and everyone in [referring to state PS is in] is enjoying it and getting a lot out of it.” The researcher asked Doreen if she felt that people would like the program upon giving it a
chance, to which Doreen confirmed, “Yeah, if people would give it a chance.” PS students spoke in-depth regarding the ways in which they perceive student reluctance to participate as an obstacle to program implementation overall.

**Theme 3, category 3: instructional approach.** This category includes the perspectives of educators and students towards aspects of the overall instructional approach used within their schools to implement the CLEP. Educators and students across cases shared ideas on activities that they preferred and found particularly useful, as well as ideas for new activities that could be included in the program. These participants further shared their views on how program facilitators employed various instructional strategies to engage individual students in lessons and CLEP school activities. The ways in which participation in the program promotes the use of common language throughout the school, as well as how both HES and PS implement the CLEP via a whole-school approach, were also discussed by participants.

**Theme 3, category 3, code a: preferred activities.** Educators and students at HES and PS discussed the activities they preferred to complete as part of the program, including those which they recalled as their favorites.

**HES.** At HES, kindergarten teacher Reagan discussed how one of her favorite lessons in the program were those that focused on teaching forgiveness, encouraging “the aspiration to forgive and be kind and love.” Stephanie (second-grade) shared that her favorite aspect of the curriculum were the lessons that focused on empathy and compassion, stating her overall view that the lessons “go along with everything” and are “child relatable.”

Jackie, kindergarten student, talked about how she liked class activities involving coloring as well as the weekly whole school CLEP assemblies in which students are recognized for behaviors aligned with choosing love. Jackie also shared that she really liked a game that
was part of a CLEP lesson called the “Popcorn Game.” At the start of the year, when Kristen introduced herself to the students in the class, she engaged them in an activity where they would stand up or sit down, or “pop up and then pop back down,” upon hearing certain feeling words that they had experienced.

HES second-grade group students reported that they especially enjoyed the creative activities that involve drawing (i.e., the affirmation cards), lessons in which they listened to Ms. Kristen read stories aloud to the class such as the book *How Grinner Became a Winner* (Bowman, 2009), and learning from a particular lesson in which Ms. Kristen asked students the question, “What are life’s choices to other people?” Third-grade students shared about lessons and activities which helped them to reflect on their interactions with others, such as the “Listening Game.” This activity was observed during the classroom observation in which Kristen discussed the importance of listening to others, noting that it is not possible to speak and listen at the same time. One student said “but I can!” to which Kristen shared “you can hear but you’re not really *listening*.” The CLEP curriculum highlights the importance of developing good listening skills and describes a way to play the listening game as follows:

In order to be Courageous, we need to be good listeners. Who can tell me a way to show that you’re a good listener?” (Examples include making eye contact, facing the speaker, listening not speaking, etc.)

Let’s practice those listening skills with a quick game. Listen to the clapping pattern I use, and then try to repeat it.” (Make 4 to 5 different clapping patterns, going from simple to complex. If students find one difficult, repeat it. Diversify this activity by stomping your feet or making funny sounds.)
Being a good listener helps us to show Courage, be successful, and make friends. When someone listens to me, I feel happy, because I know they care about hearing my story, idea, or question. Today we’ll share stories about Courage, and it’s important that we show each other we care by demonstrating good listening skills.

While Kristen did not lead the “listening game” in the same exact way as outlined in the program curriculum, Kristen used similar strategies to capture student attention. As Kristen prepared to transition the students from a whole class to small group activities, Kristen asked them if they would like to do the listening game. Students enthusiastically say “yes” and began telling each other to be quiet and listen to Kristen. Kristen then said the following:

“I’m going to remind you of what the rules are. The rules are that we try to have such self-control that we go from here to here to our seats without making a sound.” While many students in the class became immediately quiet and attentive, some were still a bit talkative with students next to them. At that point, Kristen engaged the students by asking if they wanted to hear her tell a story about a local university basketball team that all the students knew about.

Did I tell you about the [referenced local university team mascot], say you’re playing for the [mascots], you’re a basketball player, and coach saw that you were doing everything possible for your team to win. Would that make you feel good? Would that make your team feel good?

If you were on that team and you did something to make the team lose, would you be happy with yourself? Would coach be happy? No…

This is a team game, we all need to beat it [referring to working together as a group to listen closely while playing the listening game].

A few moments later Kristen had everyone be silent and invited groups of students to
quietly retrieve the materials they needed for the affirmation card activity they would be completing next.

The game has begun if you have your hair in some type of pony tail or in a clip. Don’t say a word.

If you have a shirt with a word on it come on up. We’re almost there don’t say a word.

If you have a shirt with an animal on it come up.

If you are in third-grade come up.

Don’t make a sound. Back in your seats. As fast as possible.

The students were quiet and quickly transitioned to their seats alongside their peers as they all created their affirmation cards.

HES third-grade students discussed their appreciation of books they read as part of the program, including one, *Sticks and Stones* (Ferry & Litchfield, 2015), which student Jennifer noted also had a DVD they watched. Third-grade student Nicole shared that she enjoyed an activity on affirmations, the “I can do it” activity, the most. Other third-grade students shared that they enjoyed the breathing activities as well as lessons in which they were able to draw or color.

The researcher viewed student art work which depicted their participation in an activity on self-affirmations to help inspire courage at times when they felt challenged. HES students also shared how they perceived learning multisensory strategies to help them relax and cope with feelings of distress as a result of their participation in the CLEP. Second grade student Sarah shared “yes I used to be a lot more sensitive but I still am and it’s helped me when I get angry, the breaths, what Ms. Kristen taught us, it helps me to not get as angry and not as sensitive.” Students in the third-grade also shared about the “brave breaths” strategy they learned,
referencing deep breathing techniques taught by Ms. Kristen in connection with CLEP lessons on courage. These students agreed that they learned a lot from this, and that these strategies help make them feel better. One fourth-grade student, Anna, discussed an arts and crafts activity involving putting glitter into a bottle, shaking it and taking “deep breaths, big deep breaths, until all the glitter comes down to the bottom…” noting that she feels this activity really helps students to “take a really deep breath and calm down.”

*PS.* PS teachers agreed that students enjoy the journal writing activities that are part of the program as well, as this serves as a positive outlet for working through their emotions, and appeared to help them become more mindful and insightful. Donna discussed how students in her class engage in journal writing and respond positively to opportunities to do this, sharing an example of one particular student who approached her outside of a CLEP lesson time and asked if she could write in her journal. It appeared to Donna that the student had internalized the desire to write as an outlet. In reference to activities encouraged by the program such as journal writing, Donna stated, “you want them to own that so it’s a piece of them.” The positive response that students have to writing activities were also echoed by Selena. Donna and Selena also discussed how students enjoyed listening to music when participating in lessons and activities involved with the CLEP.

PS fifth-grade students discussed their experience with journal writing, noting how they enjoyed writing essays that they brought with them to the Local University CLEP Conference. The ways in which students engage in journal writing on a regular basis was also discussed, with Doreen (fifth-grade student) describing how their teacher read them books related to choosing love and prompted students to write a journal entry based on this. Doreen acknowledged they were prompted to write about how they demonstrate actions promoted by the program, such as
choosing love, using courage etc. Doreen and other fifth-grade students presented their journals to the researcher during the interview.

PS students also shared their thoughts on lessons that they felt were memorable and taught them the most. Fifth-grade students discussed their experience reading the book *Wonder* (Palacio, 2012) and as well as the book *Each Kindness* (Woodson, 2012) in relation to CLEP lessons. PS eighth-grade students, Jenny and Kelly, discussed how they enjoyed lessons the most when they were able to break up into groups of less than 10 students and ask each other questions to get to know each other better. According to Jenny, “I feel like I got to know people better and it showed you a different side of people and how they like come out of their comfort zone.” Kelly also stated that her favorite activity was, “one of the first ones where we all just sat together in a group and just talked and got to know each other and got to trust each other before we got to tell each other like the deep things.”

**Theme 3, category 3, code b: new activity ideas.** Throughout their responses to other interview questions, students at both HES and PS shared ideas about activities that could be integrated as part of the CLEP. Educators at HES and PS discussed their views towards activities related to the program but did not specifically suggest additional activities.

**HES.** At HES, multiple second-grade students shared their idea that students could write down CLEP messages, “place it in a pot and mix it up,” and then read the messages aloud to the class. One student also suggested that students’ role play ways to “choose love” during classes. Another second-grade student, Barbara, remarked that the weekly assemblies could be enhanced so “the grades and all the classes should come in the gymnasium and get in a group and there would be different people choosing love on their choose love lesson and on the next day they will do and talk and the girls will get together and talk about what the next lesson will be.”
Fourth-grade student, Anna, discussed having more students engage in various initiatives (i.e., Pennies for Patients, Socktober…) each year, suggesting that “every year make up a different one and do that the next year and then we keep adding on to make even more improvements to the world.”

PS. At PS, eighth-grade students Jenny and Kelly discussed that students enjoy creative activities involving writing and artwork, and that adding more activities like this as well as games could help elicit more student participation. These eighth-grade students also shared how much they enjoyed their recent trip to the Local University Choose Love conference, stating that they would like to take more trips in order to have opportunities to meet students from other schools who have engaged in the CLEP. These students enjoyed hearing students from other schools speak and read their essays, and felt that future opportunities like this would be fun and engaging for students.

**Theme 3, category 3, code c: instructional strategies.** Educators at HES, as well as educators and students at PS, discussed their views on the overall instructional strategies utilized to implement the CLEP at each school, from both a school-wide as well as an individual classroom perspective. These participants also shared their ideas on what components they felt are essential in order to ensure that instruction is effective.

**HES.** Kristen (school counselor) discussed her appreciation of how the guidelines in the CLEP curriculum encourage the use of hand signals while delivering lessons as well as the breathing activities that instructors guide students in, stating, “the kids really loved the breathing and the rest and relax.” The CLEP curriculum suggests diaphragmatic breathing activities aligned with each unit, i.e., “brave breaths,” “gratitude breaths,” “forgiveness breaths,” and “compassion breaths,” to help students gain a sense of calm as well as focus. This helps students
to reflect on the information taught within these unit lessons. During the observed classroom lessons, Kristen was observed to teach students how to engage in these breathing exercises with phrases such as “smell the flower, blow out the birthday candles” in ways that they understood. The rest and relax included them becoming still and quiet so they could hear their heart.

In her experience delivering classroom guidance lessons, Kristen previously used the Second Step curriculum, as well as her own designed approach to SEL lessons, prior to starting the CLEP. Upon reflecting on her experience at HES, Kristen discussed the importance of having a point person in the school for implementation, and taking a creative approach to program implementation. Kristen discussed that it is necessary to have someone who is an advocate for the program’s implementation and can dedicate the time towards planning the classroom lessons and related activities. In addition to delivering the structured program lessons, Kristen shared,

"I also feel it has to be everywhere, it needs to be in the announcements, it needs to be in our assemblies, it needs to be on our bulletin boards, it needs to be teachers talking about it. So, we have family nights, we do all this stuff and I think that there will be other school counselors, other schools who do it and it won’t seem as powerful because they’ve got to take that extra step, it’s like a culture. I feel like it needs to be like a school culture for it to catch on so those kids start thinking about it more. I’m not saying anything is going to make a kid be a kind of person but like it gets more, like it becomes more part of who they are and we are.

Madeline (kindergarten teacher) shared how she and others refer to the program during classroom instruction, stating that she refers back to skills and lessons taught by Kristen during formal CLEP lessons when the need arises to support students and prompt them to recall
strategies taught in the program, i.e., “do you remember the breath that she taught you…” or referencing “Choose Love” in general. While hesitant to make suggestions for instructional strategies considering the early point in the program’s roll out, other kindergarten teachers raised ideas about ways that teachers could reinforce concepts from the CLEP lessons delivered by Kristen, such as “maybe there’s a set of books that we could all kind of team up and have in our rooms to kind of revisit those things that she reads from, like a shared reading list… to kind of open up those beginning weeks of routines and set the tone so we can migrate it into the [referring to the CLEP]… so it doesn’t just seem that it’s just linked to like the counselor …”

Frank (second-grade teacher) shared his view that it is important for teachers to also model the strategies taught as part of the CLEP in order to inspire students to learn from the program. Frank stated, “they spend so much time with us and if they see us doing what we’re telling them they need to be doing and they see us practicing it… they’re going to buy into it more.” Frank noted that if students, “see us using the breathing techniques or calming ourselves down, and not reacting…” that students will learn from the behaviors that their teachers model.

At HES, second-grade teachers Stephanie and Frank spoke about how each individual educator may utilize and apply elements of the program in his or her own unique way. Stephanie stated, “everybody has adaptations, I mean we follow the main point of the lesson or the main point being taught, but I think everybody, as a person, would make adaptations too.” Frank discussed how they reference the “Choose Love” message at points throughout each day, noting that “it’s something that you want your students to hear over and over again so you’re going to thread it throughout the day.”

Laurie (third-grade teacher) shared that she feels the educators at HES have embraced the program overall which has supported its overall implementation throughout the school. Laurie
acknowledged that Kristen delivers the SEL instruction that is part of the CLEP, while teachers can reinforce the concepts learned, which can be unique to each class. Laurie noted that with respect to reinforcing aspects of the program in their daily routines, “it’s up to the teacher in the classroom how they choose to further it, so that’s different among the classrooms.” The degree to which teachers reinforce aspects of the lessons by carrying this over into their own instruction depends on the individual teacher and their approach to this. Laurie discussed the ways in which she used visuals (i.e., posters referring to Choose Love messages such as Courage) and referred back to the program regularly to promote student SEL related to the Choose Love concepts. Laurie also shared her view that she expands upon many opportunities to connect aspects of Choose Love to the Social Studies curriculum when delivering Social Studies lessons in particular. Laurie also shared how she may use language that is similar to what Kristen uses during her CLEP lessons in order to help students reflect on instructional material for other subjects. For example, when conversing with a student about a character in a book, Laurie may ask questions of the students such as “How could he have reacted?” and tie this to elements of the CLEP.

There’s when we do read aloud and stuff we’ll talk about the characters in the book and we’ll refer back to the different things with the CLEP and how did this character, how could he have reacted, but what did he react and what did he choose, what emotion was he feeling.

PS. At PS, David (content specialist) discussed his view of how SEL has evolved over the years and that teachers must individualize their approach to implementing SEL in schools, which includes figuring out ways to individualize lessons to meet the needs of their students. David also shared that teachers should use the resources available within the program to develop
lessons accordingly when he stated, “You’ve got resources there and that’s where we are today in education anyways, it’s not just a textbook, it’s resources we can draw to teach what we want.” David spoke in reference to the scripted program lessons that are provided as part of the curriculum across grade levels K-12 which can be downloaded for free from the program website. Educators at PS discussed how aspects of the CLEP which utilize a multisensory and differentiated approach to instruction is of particular benefit to students. Educators from PS also discussed how each individual educator might deliver the lesson in a different way depending on the unique needs of their students, in order to facilitate successful program implementation.

David (content specialist) discussed his opinion that while educators should deliver the CLEP lessons in ways that are aligned with the goals outlined in the curriculum, educators also need to individualize their approach according to student need. David commented,

You still have the same goal, you still have the same skills and things like that, but you’ve got to take the resources out of choose love which I believe is the ultimate remedy… Everything is there, but you’ve also got to, just like you do use the resource in the textbook, or you use other things, you really have to get them to adapt the teaching of it to their own style. It’s not strategic, you know … it tells you what to do but you have lots of different strategies.

Donna (fifth-grade teacher) stated, “you kind of pick and choose and then you use it almost as a springboard… there’s plenty in there but you can tailor it to your teaching style or your level.” Donna also discussed how the program has been implemented through activities involving sixth-grade students and their “kindergarten buddies” in which Donna along with teachers from the earlier grades meet and have these students of different ages complete activities together. Donna expressed that this portrays the program’s flexibility and capacity for
differentiation, “it shows you the scope of the program because it starts so simple, but those sixth-graders like it just as much.” Donna gave examples of how at times, depending on the needs of the students or a current event, classes will change course. For example, during the prior week, the topic of the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas shooting came up and teachers spent time discussing this issue and the students’ reactions to it during time that was planned for Choose Love.

The ways in which visuals are used in the classroom to provide reminders to students about the program’s focus throughout the day (i.e., a Choose Love bulletin board and other posters) were discussed. Donna spoke about bulletin boards that depict CLEP artwork and messages within the school hallways. Donna also stated,

We did our outside bulletin board, you turn the corner and there’s a picture. You come over here and there’s a poster, you come in the classroom and there’s their journals, you just put pieces of it and disperse it so they’re always thinking about it.

The ways in which the teachings of the program can be supported through cross-curricular connections were also discussed by PS teachers. Donna shared, “I normally do it as part of my religion curriculum because if you look at this, it’s not that different…” speaking in reference to aspects of the faith-based curriculum used at PS that she felt connect with elements of the CLEP. Additional opportunities for cross-curricular connections was also noted by Selena who stated “I can find [that] even [when] teaching [content specific area], when I get to the cultural aspect of things, or whether it’s religious holidays, or maybe traditions, there’s always some way that you can kind of weave that into your teaching and bring it up which is nice.”

Donna also shared her view that collaborating with other teachers helps with the development of lesson ideas and implementing lesson plans. The importance of a teacher
mirroring skills taught in the program was also emphasized by David. Donna shared that this is essential so that students know that the teachers are “taking this journey” with them. All three PS teachers agreed that the program can be integrated within classroom instruction as well as the school’s overall functioning throughout each day, which Donna felt was a strength of the program, noting that it could be “part of the flow of the day.”

Teachers discussed how their eighth-grade students are separated into groups for CLEP lessons according to gender, which they feel is conducive to generating discussions within each group at this grade level. Teachers discussed that they allow the discussions in groups of students to naturally evolve in order to meet the emotional needs of the students. PS teachers acknowledged how the program builds on itself year after year as the program is delivered to students across grades levels at PS.

PS students shared their views of how they receive CLEP instruction both through formal lessons as well as through school-wide initiatives and informal interactions with educators. The structure in which the school organizes the CLEP lessons was also discussed by HES eighth-grade students who shared that they participate in the lessons approximately one-time each month for 45 minutes. Noting that the structure varies depending on grade at PS, Jenny stated that at the eighth-grade level, each month focuses on a different aspect of the program (i.e., courage, gratitude, forgiveness, compassion) and discussed how the lessons they participate in each month were based on these concepts.

**Theme 3, category 3, code d: common language.** Educators and students at both HES and PS discussed the ways in which the implementation of the CLEP curriculum has promoted a common language throughout the school community related to concepts taught as part of the program.
**HES.** Bonnie (principal) discussed her belief that the implementation of the CLEP promoted the use of common language that supported SEL throughout HES. Bonnie expressed her view that that, “Choose Love has been a natural blend of what we’re trying to do here at HES” and described how the language that is inherent to the CLEP (particularly the Choose Love Formula of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion) complemented other SEL initiatives that were already in place at HES. Bonnie discussed how HES educators have always aimed to promote the development of leadership skills in their students, and noted that the CLEP supported these efforts. Bonnie further shared that the CLEP helped HES educators deliver SEL instruction in ways that were authentic and relatable for students, noting that the program provided:

A common understanding and definition. You know it’s one thing just to say love one another but what does that really mean, what does that look like, how do you express it, and I think the Choose Love message and philosophy allows everyone to again have a common understanding and connection.

Bonnie described how she found ways to reference language from the program on a daily basis during morning announcements, and that she consistently stated to students on the announcements, “remember leaders, leaders choose love.” Speaking in reference to the school’s collective emphasis on promoting SEL in HES students, Bonnie shared her appreciation of how she felt that the CLEP supported the development of positive character traits such as accountability and compassion for others. Bonnie retold a story she heard which offered a specific example of the program language being used by students during an unstructured time, sharing that she heard “of a child not playing with someone and one of the other kids was like ‘well come and play with us, ‘I’m going to Choose Love.’”
Kristen (school counselor) shared that through implementing the CLEP, the consistent use of the four words most associated with the Choose Love Program (Courage, Gratitude, Forgiveness, Compassion) provided students with a practical reminder of these values on a regular basis that was “kid friendly.” Kristen expressed her view that “the word ‘love’ is so powerful.” She also voiced her personal belief that frequent reference to the program language served as a natural deterrent to rude behavior, as it is difficult for someone to be “horribly rude when that language is everywhere. It’s harder to do those things that hurt people when the language is loving language. I think that’s one super important component.”

Kristen’s use of the program vocabulary within her interactions and SEL instructional practice was apparent during the two classroom observations conducted as part of this study. With both classes, Kristen began by recapping what they had discussed in prior lessons that year about courage (unit one). Kristen relayed this information to the students using program language by making statements such as, “last time we talked about courage, small acts of courage and big acts of courage,” and that “the first thing you need to do when practicing courage is take a brave breath.” Kristen also referenced the basic neuroscience terms that are part of the program and aimed to help young children understand their brains by making statements such as, “we want the lizard and the numbat to be helped by the human, so we can have the courage to get your brain ready.” Kristen reviewed the “brave breath” diaphragmatic breathing exercise as well as the “rest and relax” exercise that are part of the CLEP curriculum. The “rest and relax” activity is led by the lesson instructor and guides students on how to calm their bodies in order to help them become focused and relaxed. According to the CLEP curriculum, the “brave breath” and “rest and relax” activities “help our bodies, minds, and hearts prepare to learn and practice courage.” These activities support the development of SEL skills in
the areas of self-awareness and self-management. These concepts were visually reinforced as, at the start of the lesson, Kristen wrote “Courage, brave breath, rest and relax” on the board in the front of the classroom for students to see as she moved through the lesson.

Students also learned what affirmations were from Kristen during the observed lesson. Kristen succinctly combined all of this information with her students in an easy to understand manner by saying, “you need to take a brave breath, rest and relax, and do an affirmation.”

During her interview with this researcher, Kristen also discussed how she made posters for each classroom that included the program language for teachers to re-teach as opportunities arose during the day, so that teachers could use the posters as visual references to redirect and help motivate students by stating “you might need some courage to get this done, go look at the poster…” With respect to the overall program language and her thoughts on the program, Kristen shared,

What I like about the Choose Love Program is yes there’s those four words but that’s just a way to like do announcements because it’s really talking to kids about courage, within gratitude, how do you get your brain ready to do it and when these things are happening what do you do … get students to think, “I’m ready to practice courage.”

The possible influence that the language associated with the CLEP has on decisions that students make and their behavior was also discussed by HES teachers. Reagan shared her view that through exposure to the program, students (particularly those who might not receive as much social and emotional guidance outside of school) learn language that helps them in the development of positive coping skills. Fiona stated that through participation in the program, students will gain the vocabulary and language that they need to use in order to label and cope with various emotions. Fiona elaborated further, stating that
It gives them like she said the language to… if you’re feeling upset and need courage to work through that situation. So, I feel it paints a picture for them and it gives them the language on how they can actually navigate through these problems that they’re having, that they probably didn’t know that they were having and they didn’t know they could actually work through it in an appropriate manner.

For example, the ways in which the use of common language (particularly the phrase “choose love”) promotes these ideals and fosters independence in children coping with their own emotions, rather than dependence on adult support was also discussed. Madeline (kindergarten) stated,

I think it eventually gives them that language to be able to handle those social emotional needs on their own versus us having to hold their hand throughout it and give them constantly the words to say and they’ll be able to come up with it on their own.

Madeline suggested that as students learn about how to identify their emotions and the strategies that are taught through the program (i.e., rest and relax), they grow in their ability to think through their emotions and reflect in ways that help them to make good decisions.

HES second-grade teachers Stephanie and Frank also discussed their perspectives of how the CLEP language supports the development of SEL skills in children. Stephanie also shared her belief that through exposure to the program’s language (i.e., choosing love), children are more likely to be mindful and to apply what they have learned to practical situations they encounter. Stephanie remarked, “they’re more prone to practice it if they hear it” and shared examples of insightful comments her son has made related to what he has learned from the program.
The ways in which referencing the program language, particularly courage, provides positive reinforcement to students during academic activities was also described by Stephanie. She noted having observed the program language to be especially valuable for struggling students to receive a reminder to “show some courage” when overwhelmed with challenging academic tasks, which seemed to effectively refocus and motivate them to persevere. Stephanie also mentioned how it is easy to reference the language as needed to redirect students with decision making related to their social behavior, i.e. stating something as simple as “choose love… I love the title, I love the words choose love.”

As was also stated by other HES educators, Stephanie remarked that the program language is “kid friendly.” Stephanie discussed that repeated exposure to this language would yield benefits for the students with their SEL development. In reference to her students that year, Stephanie stated that students who were participating in the program for the second-year in a row were easily redirected with verbal references to the program, i.e., “hey dude choose love” to help prompt students to pause and think before they act.

Frank spoke to how he feels the language of the program, particularly its reference to love, is appealing to children and universally understood by people in general. Frank expressed his view that the language of the program can be infused into instruction throughout the day as “it’s something that you want your students to hear over and over again so you’re going to thread it throughout the day.” The connection between program language and mindfulness strategies including movement breaks that are taught within the program was also identified by Frank as a way of instilling the ideas into students at HES.

Laurie (third-grade) discussed how she has observed her son who is in the second-grade at HES use the program’s language at home as a result of learning it in school. In addition to
using words specifically emphasized in the CLEP (i.e., courage), Laurie discussed how her son speaks in ways that seem emotionally aware and insightful for a child of his age. Laurie discussed her impression that this occurs as a result of her son’s experience receiving SEL instruction through the CLEP at school. Laurie shared her impression that HES’ practice of including classroom guidance lessons during the school day has always been effective, while the language of the CLEP makes it stand out over other programs and approaches tried in the past. In discussing her thoughts on the CLEP language, Laurie stated, “Our classroom guidance lessons have always been so good, but I just feel like this particular program, the language it uses, I mean I just think it naturally flows into the kids’ lives.” Laurie shared that in the past the school used an approach that focused on character traits to promote SEL, but she felt that this initiative did not sustain itself over time, and that the CLEP SEL instruction is more applicable for students. Laurie shared her hope that as students go through life and encounter challenging situations, that their experiences with the program and hearing the phrase “Choose Love” may prompt them to pause and think about the choice they have in how to respond. Laurie also discussed how the program’s content can be connected to other subjects on a regular basis, particularly Social Studies lessons.

Well I’m just thinking there’s different aspects in social studies…. I mean I’m thinking about when we study the different tribes in [state HES is in] to know how they treated each other and to look at that… Okay, so what if these people knew about this emotion, do you think they would have acted in the same way? How could they possibly have reacted differently?

Laurie also discussed how she references visuals throughout the classroom that include language from the CLEP throughout the instructional day. “I have these four posters on my wall
and we’ll refer back to them a lot, my favorite is choose courage... I use ‘choose courage’ more” to encourage struggling learners to persevere through difficult tasks.” In addition to Laurie, other teachers at HES spoke about referring to courage at times when they needed to encourage students to persevere through feelings of frustration with academic tasks.

The ease with which educators can reference the program language during daily routines was also acknowledged by HES fourth-grade teachers, who spoke about how Bonnie (school principal) references the CLEP during her daily announcements. In addition to encouraging students to remember that “leaders choose love,” fourth-grade teachers also discussed how Kristen (school counselor) reinforces the language in her school-wide communications as well. Anne noted that Kristen writes “a little ‘Choose Love’ piece once a week that Bonnie [principal] reads in the announcements that’s more specific, like talking about courage this week… and then in our moment of silence on Wednesday in our big meeting, [referencing the weekly Choose Love school assemblies] she asks everybody to think about it and give examples.” HES teachers also described how Kristen posts student artwork related to the CLEP lessons throughout the school, such as the courage affirmations, “so they knew what each other had done.” HES educators also observed that students have shown interest in learning about what other students did and learned through the program as “they were looking forward to seeing what other classes had to say too.”

In addition to HES teachers noting the ways in which the common language of the CLEP helps students label and cope with emotions, HES students also expressed their impression about how the program language is easy to use on a regular basis as well. One third-grade student, Nicole, stated that the program, “lets us learn what love is and help us learn how to be calm, help others and whenever my classmates get a little upset or do something that isn’t choosing love,
our teacher reminds us to choose love…” This student also shared her view that one way to improve the program would be to talk about love more, and that this would help students to feel more at ease with their social relationships, stating, “I think we should talk more about love so we don’t feel so left out.”

PS. At PS, Donna (fifth-grade teacher) discussed her view that the language of the program, particularly the four words it is based on (courage, gratitude, forgiveness, compassion), make it easy for teachers to develop their CLEP lessons, “these four words right here, you can do an entire year on that.” Donna elaborated on her view that each of the four main units within the CLEP are rich with possibility for expansion by teachers who implement the program. The ways in which the program language is referenced and articulated was also discussed by Anthony who shared how the essays they have written focus on “how we choose love and how we choose courage.” Overall, educators and students at both schools acknowledged the program language as a highlight and discussed the ways in which they expand upon this as well as integrate it into their daily life at school.

Theme 3, category 3, code e: whole-school approach. Educators at both HES and PS discussed the ways in which their schools have adopted the CLEP and have utilized a whole school approach to its implementation. In both schools there were visual reminders (i.e., posters, bulletin boards, student artwork placed on desks) related to the CLEP to help reinforce student learning about CLEP topics. For example, educators at both schools discussed the ways in which school administration and other educators throughout each school facilitated the implementation of the program on a regular basis.

HES. At HES, Bonnie (principal) discussed her view that it is essential for the whole school to integrate elements of the program throughout each school day in order to facilitate
Bonnie (principal) shared her belief that in order for any SEL to be successful and sustain itself within the school system, the program needs to be implemented in a way that is “authentic and part of the culture” within a school. Bonnie discussed the importance of embedding the basic tenets of the program into daily interactions as well as school-wide initiatives, and taking a creative approach when figuring out how to implement the program. In reflecting on her role as school principal with implementing the program, Bonnie shared, “I am open to ideas and I am just kind of like an artist, as it occurs to me I go with it.” Bonnie further added, “I think it’s so sincere and authentic that it’s easy to absorb into what you’re doing.” Bonnie discussed the ways in which the program has been adapted for the whole school, and shared her impression that “people pick up” on the ways in which a program is implemented naturally as well as authentically. The ways in which aspects of the program are communicated to the school community, such as the school newsletter which highlights pictures of the program in action as well as Choose Love messages, were also discussed. Students are also praised in these newsletters for actions that are aligned with the CLEP. Bonnie further described their use of incentives such as small rewards for students who demonstrate Choose Love actions (i.e., recognition at the weekly Choose Love school assembly), and her ongoing collaboration with Kristen (school counselor) regarding the program’s school-wide implementation.

Bonnie discussed how she collaborated regularly with Kristen (school counselor) on how to plan, develop, and implement the program throughout HES. Bonnie discussed how she relied on trusted colleagues, such as Kristen, who are enthusiastic and were willing to support this initiative throughout the school. Kristen also spoke about her collaboration with teachers throughout the school about how to reinforce concepts taught within the program in their classroom outside of the structured CLEP lesson times. Kristen spoke about how teachers
needed some guidance with integrating the CLEP alongside Leader in Me and Kristen assisted with this. Kristen provided outreach to teachers in person and also via email communications to help share ideas as to how the programs can work hand in hand.

Kristen discussed the multi-tiered system of supports within HES, noting that the implementation of the CLEP is a Tier 1 universal intervention approach. Kristen discussed her practice of visiting classrooms every other week to deliver a lesson that is part of the program, while the teacher is present in the classroom to observe so that teachers can reinforce concepts taught in the lesson throughout their interactions with students in between lessons. Kristen also mentioned that teachers have “morning meetings” in which topics related to Choose Love may come up for discussion, but that structured time is not set aside for SEL instruction on a regular daily basis. Kristen expressed that this, however, is her “dream” and she feels it would be ideal if teachers spent time every day (i.e., 15 minutes) to teach SEL in addition to classroom lessons. Kristen further discussed how she collaborated with teachers regarding ways in which the CLEP can be integrated with other school programs and initiatives. As HES had been using the Leader in Me program for five years prior to the implementation of the CLEP, Kristen and other HES educators worked to integrate elements of both programs to best meet the needs of HES students, i.e., emphasizing the development of leadership in students alongside encouraging students to use the Choose Love Formula.

The role that Bonnie and Kristen play in the school-wide implementation of the program was also discussed by HES teachers. Fiona and Madeline described how Bonnie (principal) references teachings from the CLEP during weekly school meetings as well as the daily morning announcements. In discussing her views about the principal’s support of the program, Kristen expressed that she felt very supported by the building administration with respect to her work
implementing the program. Bonnie, in her role as building principal, was very willing to try new things and work with Kristen to devise learning opportunities (i.e., the CLEP assemblies) that aligned with the program. HES teachers, particularly Laurie (third-grade), also praised the role that Kristen has had in the school-wide implementation of the program, describing how Kristen visits each classroom to teach the program lessons.

PS. At PS, teachers discussed their views of how their school has provided an opportunity for the CLEP to be implemented through setting aside time within the school schedule for lessons to take place, as well as supporting school-wide initiatives and activities (i.e., the trip to Local University CLEP Conference, connecting elements of the program to other academic subjects, maintaining a bulletin board that presents student artwork related to CLEP). The ways in which visuals and other references during instructional time throughout the day provide frequent reminders were discussed by PS teachers as well. The importance of setting aside time and treating the program as a priority was noted as a key factor in the effective implementation of the program throughout the whole school.

**Theme 3, category 4: recommendations for implementation.** This category is defined as ideas for improvement and trust in program facilitators.

**Theme 3, category 4, code a: ideas for improvement.** Educators and students at both HES and PS discussed their ideas for ways to improve the program’s implementation, including suggestions for professional development opportunities, as well as how to continuously inspire student participation. This code emerged from participant responses to interview questions about what changes they might suggest to make the CLEP better, as well as how others might be motivated to use this program. As participants addressed the question about how others might be motivated to use this program, educators tended to speak globally regarding other schools
adopting the program. Students tended to speak about how students who are new to the CLEP may be inspired to participate in it, as well as how students already receiving program at HES may become motivated to participate in the lessons and overall program more than they already do.

**HES.** Educators and students at HES suggested the following ideas for improving the implementation of the CLEP at HES while also continuously inspiring student participation:

1. Educators and students advocated for having more school counselors similar to Ms. Kristen to support the program's implementation throughout schools.
2. Educators and students suggested restructuring or revising the delivery of the program in the following ways:
   a. Laurie (third-grade) recommended that the program be adopted as a district-wide initiative, not just a building level initiative, and that the middle and high school levels in HES’ district should implement the program as well, considering the increased social and emotional difficulties students have as they get older.
   b. Educators and students across grade levels suggested that more time be dedicated towards the CLEP by increasing the frequency of when structured lessons take place, as they felt that more frequent lessons would bolster the program’s implementation overall. Third-grade students advocated for having lessons every day, and the opportunity to talk about love more during CLEP lessons.
   c. Kristen expressed her feeling that it would be ideal if teachers could have time set aside in the daily schedule for them to teach SEL to their classes (i.e.,

248
advisory periods), with school counselors serving as consultants for other educators to support the program’s school-wide implementation.

3. Educators and students suggested the following for professional development opportunities which could help improve program implementation:

   d. Bonnie (principal) discussed how she felt that a professional development component specifically geared towards building leaders would support administrative efforts to implement the program. Bonnie stated, “if there were some real direct things for building administrators about how we could support the program, that would be helpful, whether it be announcements or ideas.”

   e. Kristen (school counselor) shared her view on how providing professional development to teachers would help all faculty members to collaborate on how to roll the program out together as a collective unit.

   f. Kindergarten teachers suggested having a “Choose Love Retreat,” or another structured professional development experience at the start of each year, for teachers to receive guidance and instruction on how to implement the program in their classrooms. As one kindergarten teacher stated, this could provide teachers with an opportunity to learn “about the language, the curriculum, ideas, brainstorming, and collaboration.”

   g. HES students suggested “having all the counselors meet somewhere to talk about what they’re all going to do.” Students were referring to Ms. Kristen (the only counselor at HES) as well as counselors from other schools.
4. Educators suggested the development of centralized resources where they could access the following information:

h. HES Kindergarten teachers suggested maintaining an internally shared library of CLEP related books and resources to help teachers have resources that would enable them to revisit concepts taught in the CLEP lessons with students.

i. HES educators suggested developing a website that depicts what other schools, teachers, and administrators, are doing with the CLEP so that they could gather ideas from others for supporting and implementing the program. HES teachers also advocated for having access to a website that could provide ideas for how to connect certain concepts of the program during classroom instruction. Fourth-grade teachers expressed an interest in additional “resources for teachers to have more information on what we could bring into the classroom.” Although the CLEP website (www.jesselewischooselove.org) offers these types of resources for educators to download for free, these participants did not indicate that they were familiar with this.

5. HES educators and students shared the following ideas to help others learn about the CLEP, which will support program implementation, while also continuing to promote student participation.

j. Multiple educators across grade levels discussed their views that “getting the word out” to others (educators, families, community members) regarding the CLEP would help to improve the program overall implementation. Bonnie expressed her desire to share the program with the community and local
businesses, in order to establish connections between the community and HES with respect to the CLEP. Kristen stated that the program “needs to be everywhere.” Frank, second-grade teacher, expressed his opinion that upon basic exposure to the program, more people will see that it is kid friendly, easy to understand, and use in schools.

k. HES fourth-grade students shared their view that upon experiencing the program and helping others, then more students would realize how they could make a positive difference, and become even more motivated to participate in the CLEP as a result.

l. Class activities and incentives for CLEP participation such as pizza parties were also suggested by HES students.

m. Bonnie (principal) discussed how students were praised on a weekly and on a monthly basis for exhibiting behaviors consistent with the CLEP’s teachings, and that she felt it was important to continue this practice.

n. Kristen (counselor) shared her view that adapting one’s instructional approach according to student grade level is important with eliciting participation and engaging students in the CLEP activities. As part of one’s instructional approach, Kristen also emphasized the importance of educators developing rapport with students prior to going into classes to teach the CLEP lessons.

o. HES educators advocated for continuing to provide visual references to CLEP on school bulletin boards.
PS. PS teachers and students shared their ideas about ways to improve the program while continuously inspiring student participation via the following strategies:

1. PS students expressed their view that the CLEP should be in all schools, suggesting that this would help improve program implementation overall.

2. Teachers suggested adding a professional development component to the program that would help build teacher capacity with delivering program lessons. PS teachers discussed that this could “give teachers some structure in that area [referencing the instructional aspects of delivering program lessons] and would probably lead to more people using it on a more regular basis.”
   a. PS teachers also emphasized the importance of collaboration and “creative borrowing” between teachers with ideas on how to implement the program.
   b. PS teachers discussed the idea of curriculum mapping to continuously support program implementation throughout the future.

3. PS educators and students shared the following instructional ideas that could enhance the CLEP’s implementation while also promoting student participation.
   c. Teachers indicated that having more CLEP instructional materials available to them could support their efforts to implement the program. Donna, fifth-grade teacher, recommended developing a “Choose Love Book” to serve as “a consumable.” The book would serve as a resource in which students could follow the program lessons and also enter journal entries.
   d. Fifth-grade students discussed how activities that involve helping others might inspire students to feel good about themselves with choosing love and that
“other students might be motivated when they see you doing it,” referring to behavior and actions that are consistent with the CLEP.

e. Students discussed that continuing the structured lessons including activities such as drawing, writing, and more field trips (similar to the one they took for the Local University CLEP conference) may inspire students to participate.

f. Eighth-grade student, Kelly, also expressed her view that meeting more frequently for CLEP activities, as well as keeping student groups small (i.e., groups of no more than 10) would help facilitate student discussions.

g. Eighth-grade student, Jenny, shared her view that increasing opportunities for creative learning activities such as art, writing, games, as well as meeting more often to get to know more people would help improve overall program implementation.

Theme 3, category 4, code b: trust in program facilitators. Educators and students at HES as well as students at PS discussed the critical role that having trust in program facilitators plays in the initiation and successful implementation of the program.

HES. At HES, Bonnie (principal) discussed how she became inspired to give the program a try as a result of Kristen (school counselor) promoting the program. Kristen shared that the positive rapport she has built with HES students prior to the program’s implementation inspired their openness to trying it as well. Stephanie, second-grade, noted that (regarding her willingness to try the program when it was new), “if the school counselor buys into it, just because I personally know the school counselor, then I know it’s going to be good.” Laurie, third-grade, echoed this sentiment by stating, “we have so much faith in Kristen that everybody embraces it because Kristen embraces it… she’s like top notch.” HES fourth-grade teachers
also spoke to their high level of trust in Kristen, agreeing with one teacher’s statement, “We trust her implicitly.” HES teachers also discussed that they feel it is important for the school administration to support the program in order for it to be successful.

The need for students to trust the educators involved with facilitating the program was also discussed by HES students. Similar to views shared by kindergarten teachers, second-grade students acknowledged the key role that the school counselor plays in the CLEP implementation, stating that having more school counselors like her would help improve the program. Third-grade students also expressed this view and students across grade levels spoke to the positive experiences they had had with Ms. Kristen to date. These positive relationships seemed to enhance student interest in the program overall.

PS. At PS, eighth-grade students commented that their teachers “are very supportive of everything you do” and that this assists with the successful implementation of the CLEP.

**Theme 4: The Benefits of SEL**

Educator and student participants shared views that some of the benefits of SEL include positive effects on school climate, SEL as a method of prevention and intervention supports, SEL outcomes of the CLEP curriculum, and student participant perspectives that speak positively of SEL programs such as the CLEP. The frequency of coded data which support the development of this theme and the related categories and codes is indicated in Table 19.
Table 19

**Theme 4: Benefits of SEL, Categories, and Frequencies of Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1: School Climate</th>
<th>HES Educators</th>
<th>HES Students</th>
<th>PS Educators</th>
<th>PS Students</th>
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<td>(e) Benefits for Educators</td>
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</tr>
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<th>Category 3: SEL Outcomes of Choose Love Curriculum</th>
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<th>PS Educators</th>
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<td>(c) Forgiveness</td>
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<td>(e) Choose Love Formula</td>
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(Continued)
Table 19

**Theme 4: Benefits of SEL, Categories, and Frequencies of Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 4: Student Participant Perspectives</th>
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**Total Codes for Theme 4:** 46 | 53 | 19 | 62

**Theme 4, category 1: school climate.** The responses provided by participants at both schools revealed thoughts on ways in which implementation of SEL programs such as the CLEP reap benefits including community building, promoting equity, positively impacting school and classroom management, improving relationships, positive benefits for educator participants, and a general “ripple effect” of good behavior that results from the program.

**Theme 4, category 1, code a: community building.** HES educators as well as PS educators and students shared their views that the implementation of the CLEP had a community building effect on their respective schools.

**HES.** At HES, the effect that the program has had on the overall school community were also shared by educator participants. Fiona, kindergarten teacher, shared her perspective that the presence of the CLEP and the use of the language it incorporates (referring to words such as courage, kindness, love) is, “a positive in itself which is turning the building into a more positive place and environment.” Fourth-grade teachers, particularly Michelle, discussed the school-wide communications about the program from the building administrators and the school counselor.
Michelle particularly described how students get excited to look at the CLEP bulletin board that is maintained at HES, as students enjoy learning from others and viewing their artwork related to the program.

PS. At PS, educators discussed how the implementation of the program has yielded community building effects for the school community. David (content specialist) discussed his view of how the program has helped build connections between teachers and students, stating “If you let them know that you are taking the journey with them through this it makes all the difference in the world, instead of preaching you’re a part of it, you’re part of that circle.” As a result of teachers discussing the ways in which they relate to or try to apply elements of the program to their own lives, David and other PS educators have observed this to have a positive impact on the teacher/student relationship.

The responses provided by PS students demonstrated how reflecting on the lessons learned through the CLEP has influenced their thoughts and decision making in ways that help build relationships that also enhance a sense of community at PS. In discussing his reflections on a book read as part of their experience with the CLEP, fifth-grade student Gabriel shared his views on a character in the book who experienced bullying, stating, “I would make friends with him and help him fit in. We should have courage and stand up for him.” The benefits that the program has on helping students to get along with each other was noted by another fifth-grade student who stated “…if more schools had it then everyone would be getting along.”

PS eighth-grade students, Jenny and Kelly, shared their views on how they feel that participation in the program has had a community building effect throughout PS. Jenny stated, “I feel like if everyone did it, it would just make a better community, not just in our school but other like schools, it would just teach you how to be a better person.” In the essay which she
read at the Local University CLEP conference, Kelly discussed the ways in which participation in the CLEP has promoted an inclusive school community, sharing that “One of the most important things we do in our group is help people who have nowhere else to go find a place,” referring to peer groups and social circles. Kelly discussed how she will keep this experience in mind for the future. She stated, “At high school, because of these experiences, I will know how to include people and recognize when people feel left out or upset.”

**Theme 4, category 1, code b: equity.** Educators from HES and PS commented that the implementation of SEL programs such as the CLEP provide equitable opportunities for students who might not be receiving SEL guidance at home.

*HES.* At HES, Bonnie (principal) noted “Hamilton Elementary School is a diverse group economically and so, because of that, kids come to us with all different capacities, various levels of capacities in dealing with day to day life and I think it levels the playing field in that sense.” Stephanie (second-grade) expressed “I think these programs are very important for a lot of the kids that don’t get that at home.” Fourth-grade teacher, Anne, stated, “some come with those skills, you know, they’re taught at home but a lot of them are not taught at home and they don’t have the role models on how to handle conflicts with others or how to handle their upset feelings, so yes, I think it’s very much needed.” Other teachers in the fourth-grade group expressed agreement with Anne.

*PS.* At PS, David (content specialist) discussed his views of how delivering SEL instruction helps students who are experiencing emotional distress to become more available to the learning process. David commented “I think, forever, we knew that SEL was important because the kids that you face on your first day of teaching, you don’t know where they come from, you don’t know all the things that are in their lives and you walk in trying to get them to
pay attention to the academic part of it and yet if they’re not well socially and emotionally you’re not going to get them to go anyplace and in the high school we had students like that that were addicted to drugs and depressed or suicidal and you didn’t go anyplace and it’s not just high school.” Other PS educators also acknowledged their view that delivering SEL instruction helps students with varied backgrounds and experiences to access their learning environment.

Theme 4, category 1, code c: school/classroom management. Educators and students from both HES and PS discussed their views that the CLEP has had a positive impact on school and classroom management.

HES. At HES, Kindergarten teachers described their views of how implementation of the CLEP positively influences student behavior throughout the day. HES Kindergarten teacher, Madeline, discussed her view that the implementation of the CLEP is conducive to her efforts to manage their classroom and promote the development of pro-social behavior in students. “I was going to say kind of the same thing that I think it will help your classroom management, how the whole classroom runs, if you kind of instill those sorts of values and learning how to interact with peers, and I think it will help the classroom management aspect and help your day go better.”

Stephanie (second-grade teacher) discussed how she has sought to support the social and emotional development of students in her classes throughout time, and that the implementation of the CLEP has helped her to do this by providing additional strategies that she can reinforce throughout the day which have a positive impact on classroom management. “I mean I’ve always done it, just take a deep breath in and then I carry it over from (school counselor’s) lessons, I carry it over to my class when they start getting rowdy and someone starts getting upset I say take a deep breath in … and take a deep breath out, so I carry it over and it really has
a calming effect and I think it helps them get a grip on noticing their emotions is what I think.” Stephanie also expressed that the strategies taught within the program help to redirect students to pause and make better choices with their behavior. The positive influence that the program’s implementation has had on classroom and school management was also acknowledged by Patrick (HES second-grade student) who stated that implementation of this program “helps people not get mad at their friends and say mean things and it helps keep the school in control.”

PS. PS educators agreed that the program promotes respectful behavior between students and teachers. PS teachers noted how the program is helpful to fostering a positive bond between teachers and students which lends itself to the learning process. David noted that “as you move along with that too it [referring to program implementation in classrooms] increases your bond with that student.” PS eighth-grade students shared their views that the implementation of the CLEP has had a positive impact with helping students who have been bullied as well as helping to reduce bullying in the school.

**Theme 4, category 1, code d: improved relationships.** Educators and students from both HES and PS expressed views that implementation of the CLEP has led to improved relationships throughout their respective schools.

**HES.** HES educators discussed their perspectives on the positive influence that the CLEP has had on the relationships that students have with each other as well as with their teachers. These educators commented that exposure to SEL instruction helps students to learn the basic skills necessary in order to interact appropriately with peers in their classroom. One HES Kindergarten teacher stated that experiencing programs like CLEP helps students to “function at school, interact with their peers and to, I don’t know I guess be teachable to some extent, help them to function in a general ed classroom for the most part.” Fiona (Kindergarten) commented
on how the language of the CLEP promotes behavior that is conducive to developing relationships, stating “I feel like the phrase Choose Love or the promotion of it is going to build some good vibes for sure, cooperation and friendliness.” This sentiment was echoed by Stephanie (second-grade teacher) who stated about the CLEP,

> It helps them build positive relationships with other kids … it teaches them empathy and compassion for others, not just our school not with each other but the whole world needs that, that’s like a life thing you need to have that and I think that it teaches them and it makes them more mindful to build positive relationships and show empathy and you know just compassion just come on let’s all have it and it teaches them that. So, I love that.

Anne, a fourth-grade teacher, discussed the importance of students learning these social skills early in their development, noting, “I think if they learn early how to deal with their own emotions as well as their peers it creates better relationships all the way around and there’s less standing in the way of their learning, referring to the stress that children may experience when internalizing emotions. Another fourth-grade teacher, James, expressed agreement with this view.

HES students also expressed their perspectives on how the program supports the development of coping skills when faced with interpersonal challenges. A HES second-grade student commented that students are likely to make better choices when experiencing stress within their friendships, by commenting, “I think it’s good to have this program because some people can be mean when they don’t know the Choose Love action. I think it’s good to have it and over time … when people get mad they don’t just yell at their friends.”
PS. Educators at PS shared their views of how the program particularly supports the development of positive relationships between students and teachers. David (content specialist) stated that “I think that mirroring the skills with examples of your life with kids builds that relationship with kids too.”

Selena: As you move along with that too it increases your bond with that student

David: Oh yeah, relationship, if you don’t have a good relationship with kids you can’t teach them and this provides it.

Donna: Oh it does.

A PS eighth-grade student, Kelly, stated that other students discussed how the program “helped them to make more friends and be out there more, just to have better relationships with their friends and make more friends.” Another eighth-grade student, Jenny, responded “yeah I feel much closer with others now.” And in reference to another student in her essay, Jenny stated, “At first, she was reluctant to join us for lunch, so it was really amazing when she joined us for lunch one day all by herself. Both of them have truly become our friends, and I think we are all happy that we got the chance to get to know them.” In another interview, Jenny stated “it kind of just got us a little more aware that we should cherish our time together because there’s not going to be a next year” (referencing students going to different high schools after completing eighth-grade). Jenny also shared that this experience would allow these personal connections to continue into the future.

**Theme 4, category 1, code e: benefits for educators.** HES and PS educators shared their views that the implementation of the CLEP had a positive effect on teachers, as well as the overall climate and culture of their schools.
HES. HES Kindergarten teacher, Madeline, shared her views on how teaching lessons taught within the program can help one to reflect on daily experiences that can be emotionally challenging on various levels. Fiona shared that she feels the program helps foster self-awareness in all those who experience it, stating that the program “makes everybody more aware, even adults. I think it just makes everyone more aware of just practicing it.” The ways in which the values taught within the program influenced thoughts of those teaching it were also discussed by Ms. Kristen, HES school counselor. When asked about how the program has had benefits for those teaching it, Kristen shared that in her own experience she feels that this has helped and also stated “… when I talk about forgiveness I saw teachers go hmmm, like they could use some of that.” Kristen left these experiences with the impression that the teachers were learning from the program alongside the students.

Stephanie, HES second-grade teacher, discussed how the program is “good for our students and I know it’s going to be helpful for everybody.” Stephanie also spoke about her view that adults who experience teaching the lessons comprising the CLEP can benefit from it as well, stating, “it’s just all positive and it’s all good and it teaches them techniques and strategies that they need to know and they need to, that we all… not just the kids, that we all need to practice and stuff, so I can’t imagine anybody not wanting to. I think that it’s great.” Stephanie also shared, “just learning those calming techniques and teaching them how to manage their emotions, it’s a fabulous tool, that I see myself doing, just from listening, I mean I’ve always done it, just take a deep breath in and then I carry it over from Kristen’s lessons, I carry it over to my class.”

PS. At PS, educators interviewed agreed that the program also influences the thought processes of those who teach it. Donna (fifth-grade) shared, “…you know what it does, teachers
have to mirror what they teach to students, and to actually have it affect you, which it has to me.” Anne further elaborated that the experience of teaching the Choose Love Program is “… a learning experience for us as well. I feel like we have grown as a faculty through this program or just seeing Scarlet as the person she is.” PS educators concurred that teaching the program facilitated their own personal and professional growth. David (content specialist) shared his view of how teaching the CLEP affected his teaching practice, how he shares information about himself with his students, and how this has impacted him as well as his relationships with his students. David elaborated by stating, “I think that mirroring the skills with examples of your life with kids builds that relationship with kids too.” David also shared that he feels the program is great for teachers as well as students because he feels that it makes teachers such as himself “much more self-aware.”

**Theme 4, category 1, code f: ripple effect.** HES and PS students between grades four and eight discussed the ways in which participation in this program has inspired them to be kind to others.

**HES.** HES fourth-grade students in particular identified numerous connections between lessons learned in the Choose Love program and ways in which they have become inspired to contribute to their community as a result. These students highlighted the motivational effect that participation in the CLEP has had on them, including a desire to help others. As a result of their learning experience with the Choose Love Program, HES fourth-grade student, Paul, discussed that various community service activities they participated in were “really fun” and inspired them to “do more and more and more and so you help more and more and more people.”

These students also described how their experiences with activities connected to the CLEP changed their outlook and fostered feelings of empathy towards others. For example, Paul
stated, “once I started learning about it I realized how we needed to help so many people and that there were struggles around the world.” These students also shared their views that they felt their experience with the CLEP in their school opened up new ways of thinking about the importance of helping others. Comments included,

Before I came to this school I didn’t know about all the people who were out there who need help and a lot of times I thought I’m not helping enough, but I learned that every little thing counts and every little thing helps a little bit more.

I agree… when I started, I helped one person and then I was like huh that felt good, so I started helping other people and other people.

The positive impact that these experiences have on each student’s self-concept was also acknowledged. Anna stated,

When you help people, well at least for me, it makes me feel good, it makes me feel like I’m proud of myself when I’m a good person. I bet a lot of people would like to be in the program.

Regarding the activities associated with the program, another student stated, “…it helps other people get well and it helps other people feel better and it helps other people, it just helps other people, and maybe like homeless people, or people that don’t have food enough or can’t afford stuff.”

The ways in which these positive experiences and emotions inspire one to want to do more to help others were also presented by fourth-grade students in their group interview. Patricia expressed her favorable view of the program by stating,

I think some people would love it and love to do this because I think helping people makes you feel great, makes you feel good and makes the people you’re helping feel
good. It spreads around kind of like a domino effect, it’s the same thing with love, you want to show kindness and spread it around to the entire world and I think if more schools can do this and if they have the money to do this and not be able to participate, but if they can I really do think they should because I really do think it will help people around the world and I think it will help our country.

Another student also commented on the “domino effect” that their experiences have, when stating,

I agree with Patricia too, it’s like a domino effect because … it started out with Ms. Kristen then she kept going and then it’s going to probably start with other people, other people, other people if we keep telling people about this program they will want to do it. So like the more, I saw in this movie the phrase, the more the people the more the power. So the more the power the more the help.

These students also shared the sense of reward that they felt after engaging in these helpful activities. Mary shared her view that “for me the award and prize is helping people and making you feel good.” Paul agreed with this comment, stating,

The prize for all of us would be like helping people and making people feel better about like helping other people so that when they feel better they’re like, gee, if they helped me then “why don’t I help the other people,” and it’s like a chain reaction.

PS. PS fifth and eighth-grade students also shared their views of the ripple effect that occurs when individuals are inspired by the teachings of and activities associated with the CLEP. PS fifth-grade students described their views of the transformational effect that one person’s choosing to be kind can have on others. Joseph gave a specific example of this he stated, “well like if one person does a little bit of this little small thing for another person it will like continue
on like and that person will do something for someone else like help someone carry groceries.”

The ways in which the teachings of the CLEP inspire students were discussed by Gabriel, who stated, in reference to Scarlett Lewis, “she made this program so everyone could do it just not because a couple people, and since her son saved a couple lives they should be like grateful that that kid saved lives and so it gives them like motivation because the kid did something good for like to help some kids, so we should be able to help her continue the program.”

Similar to the views expressed by HES students, PS fifth-grade students acknowledged the positive impact that helping others has on their self-concept and motivation to continue to act in ways that are consistent with the teaching of the CLEP. Joseph, fifth-grade, said, “I feel like other kids should be motivated to do the CLEP because when I choose love in a random situation, I don’t know about other people, but it makes me feel like a good person and so that motivation could be used for other schools because feeling like a good person makes you feel like you want to do more good deeds and then it just spreads around.” The impact that behavior such as forgiveness and gratitude can have as a result of social interactions was also discussed by other fifth-grade students.

**Theme 4, category 2, prevention & intervention.** SEL programs serve an important role in schools through both prevention and intervention to support students as individuals and also as part of a whole-school community.

**Theme 4, category 2, code a: prevention.** Educators and students at both HES and PS shared views indicating that they feel the implementation of SEL programs such as Choose Love are a proactive step that schools can take in preventing instances of unkind or aggressive behavior among students.
HES. At HES, Principal (Bonnie) shared her concerns about how the prevalence of social media usage in youth now, as compared to the past, has generated unprecedented challenges for the social and emotional development of children and adolescents. After discussing how she feels that the rapidly increasing presence of social media has impacted the brain and the development of coping skills, Bonnie shared her thoughts on how children and adolescents struggle more now than they may have in the past when faced with emotionally charged situations. Bonnie also discussed how she was moved after hearing Scarlett speak about how most people only refer to three emotions (angry, sad, happy). Bonnie went onto share how the Choose Love lessons are integrated throughout the school and school culture to promote positive and prosocial behaviors. As the school had already been implementing the Leader in Me Program (Covey, 2008) for five years prior to the implementation of the CLEP, elements of Leader in Me and the CLEP were combined to best support the students. Bonnie stated,

I have found that Choose Love has been a natural blend of what we’re trying to do here at HES but also it ties into other things that we’re doing as well, such as the Leader in Me, we’re part of the Franklin Covey Leader in Me where we teach the students the seven habits of highly effective people and that language again and philosophy in leadership falls right in line with Choose Love directives.

Bonnie discussed how she promotes integration of ideals from both programs through her “remember leaders, leaders choose love” daily message as well as her efforts to support her staff who directly implement SEL initiatives with HES students.

Kristen, school counselor, shared her view that the implementation of SEL programs such as Choose Love are a proactive measure which prevents the incidence of problematic behaviors. In a follow up interview, Kristen confirmed her views on this, stating,
I agree that implementing a SEL program/using a SEL curriculum is a way to help students learn to manage their emotions and give the tools/skills they need to manage difficult situations and uncomfortable feelings. Problematic behaviors should decrease if the students know what to do to get through these situations without hurting someone or themselves (physically or emotionally).

HES fourth-grade teachers discussed the ways in which they reinforce the lessons taught as part of the program and the long-term benefits that this has for preventing problematic behaviors which can make classroom management challenging and interfere with instruction. In discussing with others how teachers reinforce the topics taught by the school counselor during lessons, Anne shared her view that, “the more tools they [students] have, the more skills they have of using them and the less likely they are to do things that take away from instructional time later,” James agreed and commented that this is a proactive measure by stating that, “in the long run it saves instructional time” by preventing problematic behaviors from possibly occurring, which can interfere with student learning. This view was also shared by an HES second-grade student who shared that he feels the program is important to have in school “because it helps people not get mad at their friends and say mean things and it helps keep the school in control.”

*PS.* At PS, fifth-grade students shared their views that they felt the program proactively helps students learn to make good decisions as well as avoid violence and hateful thoughts towards others. Another student discussed his view of how the program inspires students to be nicer to each other, and that sometimes when people are inclined to fight this can turn into a larger issue and “with the Choose Love program it helps prevent that from happening.”

A PS fifth-grade student, Joseph, discussed the positive effect that this can have on a person’s development starting in childhood, when he stated, “it teaches people… how to prevent
bad things from happening. So, if you learn from a young age then it will continue and go on” referring to the foundational knowledge that SEL provides students as they develop into adults. Students also expressed their views that the program is important to have in other schools because then bullying may occur less often in schools that implement the Choose Love program, and

In different parts of the country they would be choosing love. If more schools had it then everyone would be getting along and everyone would learn to forgive and everyone would just like have way better relations with everyone because everyone would be forgiving each other and everyone wouldn’t hate each other and getting in fights and there wouldn’t be bullies.

Students also discussed the cyclical effect of behavior throughout a school system, noting that being kind to someone can have a preventative effect on negative behavior occurring in the future,

It’s kind of like a cycle, if you’re being mean to someone then they’ll be mean to someone and it will just go around, and so like if you prevent that one person from being harmful or mean to others then it will like stop automatically and if everyone finds a way to choose love then there won’t be any more, like there will be less, you can’t really get rid of it but like there will be less hate in the world.

Lastly, PS students recognized the impact that getting bullied can have on people’s mental health, noting that the program is very important to have in schools so as to ensure safe school environments that do not cause people to react negatively or develop problematic behavior.
Theme 4, category 2, code b: intervention. In addition to the sentiments of educators and students at both HES and PS regarding the ways in which Choose Love offers a preventative approach, study participants also alluded to the ways in which the CLEP serves as an intervention in schools.

HES. At HES, one educator and one student directly commented on the ways in which the program serves as a foundation for other intervention supports as well as directly intervening with problematic behaviors when needed. Kristen (school counselor) shared her view that she feels the program is important for all students, and that the Choose Love program falls within Tier 1 of HES’ multi-tiered system approach to supports throughout the school. As part of a Tier 1 approach, the program reached all students while it may have simultaneously had the effect of further supporting students with greater emotional needs. Kristen also described how the program can serve as a foundation for other interventions throughout the school as elements of the program could be utilized during more intensive counseling sessions and direct therapeutic interventions with individuals and groups of students. One HES third-grade student, Jude, who participates in a counseling group that operates within the Choose Love framework, expressed his view when he said, “I love this program because it helps us and it helps stop bullying.”

PS. At PS, fifth and eighth-grade students spoke about how they have learned to advocate for others who may have been bullied and struggled to advocate for themselves. When asked to describe how they felt the program stops bullying, both fifth and eighth-grade students shared how they felt that learning about courage and compassion inspired them to advocate for others. One fifth-grade student stated, “It’s helping the children choose love so when somebody teases somebody you can stand up for somebody so they won’t have that much hate in their life.” Another direct example was given by an eighth-grade student, Jenny, of how students chose to
embrace a peer who struggled socially, thereby reducing vulnerability and helping her to have a greater sense of belonging and resilience within the school setting.

**Theme 4, category 3: SEL outcomes of CLEP curriculum.** Educators and student participants across cases shared their views that the CLEP curriculum effectively teaches the values of courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion in action as well as the Choose Love Formula.

**Theme 4, category 3, code a: courage.** Educators and students at both HES and PS discussed their views of how the program fosters the development of courage in children.

**HES.** At HES, educators across grades kindergarten through four discussed how courage is emphasized in the school-wide delivery of the program at HES, and also how teachers have internalized the teachings of this element of the program in their own emotional experience. Kindergarten teacher, Reagan, shared that when the school principal “does the school announcements every morning she usually says something about choosing love or courage.” Another Kindergarten teacher, Fiona shared that she feels that teaching “value words” such as courage, and teaching “values like courage or kindness or love, begin to be more permeated throughout the school and I think that’s a positive in itself which is turning the building into a more positive place, environment.” Fiona also shared her view that she felt the teachings of the program “makes students more aware” and that “it makes everybody more aware, even adults,” regarding instances in which courage was practiced on a daily basis.

HES second-grade teacher Stephanie shared in depth how discussions of courage occur during lessons specifically about courage as well as during other opportunities to discuss courage in the classroom. Stephanie shared,
I think those lessons help them know that it’s okay to fail, but you need to have courage to try to push through it. So it’s just another reminder, a positive reinforcer, that again they need to hear all the time.

Stephanie elaborated further on this, stating “I love how it teaches courage so they’re more apt to try things that they wouldn’t have been able to try before.” Students who might not participate directly in the program lessons by speaking can also benefit from aspects of the program. For example, the courage affirmation cards that students made with Kristen’s assistance can be silently referenced throughout the day for encouragement.

HES fourth-grade teachers also discussed how they felt that the teachings on courage helped students to utilize positive coping strategies to handle challenges by “making a conscious decision before they act by actually choosing to be brave…” Anne (fourth-grade) shared that students are learning that “it does take courage to do the right thing and it’s not just easy to do the right thing, just the fact that you know that makes it oh this is supposed to be hard so now that I know it’s supposed to be hard now I can overcome it.”

HES students in grades two through four discussed the ways in which they have learned about courage and also begun to apply courage to their own decision making and approach to solving problems. One second-grade student, Faith, shared that the most meaningful lesson she had in the program was when Ms. Kristen taught the class about courage, stating, “it’s kind of helped me with when we have courage to not be mean to each other and to do what’s right.”

Third grade student, Jennifer, acknowledged that she has learned a lot about gratitude and courage through the program. She also shared that participating in the program “makes me think of love and…I think that we’ll learn how to do more courage, be brave, help others and you can be strong. It’s just motivating you for the road ahead, the harder world, like I feel like it’s
Fourth-grade student Anna shared that her favorite learning experience for the program was learning about courage, after recalling that there are four steps in the program and that “one of them is courage.”

*PS.* PS teachers discussed their views of how they have worked to implement the skills taught in the Choose Love program within their daily professional practice and upon personal reflection. David (content specialist) shared about a student who challenged him in class last year and that he relied on his own sense of courage to approach the student with a sense of vulnerability which required courage on his part and resulted in a meaningful connection that developed between him and the student. Also, with respect to helping to launch the program after faculty at PS had tried multiple SEL programs that did not stick in the past, David said, “I had the courage to stand up and say look maybe we could try this as a pilot…” Donna also shared her view of how she has seen courage evolve in the students participating in the program, and gave a particular example of what she observed of students speaking at the Local University CLEP Conference. She spoke about how students got up in front of others and spoke of how participating in this program,

> Gave them the courage to stand up for themselves and try to forgive the person… it was really unbelievable that a 10-year-old could express that in front of strangers… there were professors and deans there and everything, and they had no problem getting up and saying that, none… very powerful.

PS students also shared their views of how the program has impacted them with their perspective on courage. One fifth-grade student discussed how he felt that he “gets the most out of” the lessons and writing activities in the program that prompt students to write about “how we choose love and how we use courage… I feel like talking about our difficulties and our
troubles, even though it’s hard, how we choose love, I feel like that’s what I find most important.” Another student provided an example of how he views courage, remarking, “courage is like if you made a mistake you have to have the courage to admit what you did.” Students also discussed their views of courage as it relates to what they learned while reading the book *Wonder* (Palacio, 2012) in conjunction with the lessons comprising the CLEP. In speaking about how he connected what he learned from reading this book and participating in the CLEP, he said, “we should have courage and stand up for [book main character].” Another student discussed how the main character, despite being made fun of, “had the courage to go to school every single day” which made him happy as he read the book.

A PS eighth grade student, Jenny, discussed in her essay how the CLEP “taught us the real meaning of how to be strong, to be courageous, to have gratitude, and forgiveness. This entire experience is going to stay with me for the rest of my life, and I know that it’s had a strong impact on the rest of the group as well.”

**Theme 4, category 3, code b: gratitude.** Students at both HES and PS discussed how they felt the program has taught them about the concept of gratitude.

**HES.** At HES, third-grade student, Nicole, shared that she felt she learned a lot about gratitude through her experience in the program. HES fourth-grade student, Anna, shared that the activities involved with the program, particularly the Valentine’s to the veterans, taught her about how veterans fought for us in the past and said, “once I went there I realized that they’ve done a lot for us and we should really thank them for that.”

**PS.** At PS, fifth-grade students shared their views of how the program has taught them about gratitude. Fifth-grade student, Doreen, shared that as a result of learning about Scarlett Lewis’ personal experience, she reflects more on her experience with her family and, even when
irritated, stated that she tries to “think about how fortunate I am to have my mom and my whole family and how Scarlett Lewis persevered through all this situation and it’s taught me to be grateful for what I have.” Another fifth-grade student referenced how learning about Scarlett’s personal experience has taught him that people should be grateful for what she and also Jesse Lewis have done.

**Theme 4, category 3, code c: forgiveness.** Educators and students at both HES and PS discussed their views of how the program has inspired students to understand what it means to forgive and how to apply this to their daily life experiences.

**HES.** At HES, Reagan (kindergarten teacher) shared that one of her favorite parts of a lesson taught was about forgiveness, “I thought that was a really good part of it. The aspiration to forgive and be kind and love.” Students also identified learning about forgiveness as one of their favorite aspects of the program. Barbara, second-grade student, shared about how they have learned about how forgiveness relates to coping with bullies. Mary, a fourth-grade student, also shared her view of how forgiving someone who is being a bully can help to disengage from the power struggle that could otherwise ensue. Mary indicated that she felt she learned what to say and what not to say when faced with challenging social situations, particularly those that involve forgiving another student or asking a friend for forgiveness. Mary further shared that she felt she learned the most from lessons on forgiveness.

**PS.** At PS, fifth-grade teacher Anne discussed how she was moved by the experience of watching students speak in front of a large audience about painful life experiences they have had (i.e., being bullied) and how the program “gave them the courage to stand up for themselves and try to forgive the person.” PS fifth-grade students also shared their views of what they felt they have learned about forgiveness as a result of their participation in the CLEP. Students spoke
about how they are inspired to forgive as a result of learning about Scarlett Lewis and her personal experience which inspired the program. Other students spoke about the ways in which forgiveness reduces the negative feelings people may experience after something bad happens. Gabriel shared his view, remarking that the CLEP is a “great program, it’s helped me and everybody in my class a lot, like we’ve learned that if you forgive it can make your life way better.”

PS eighth-grade students also discussed their impressions of how utilizing forgiveness in one’s life can make it better. Eighth-grade student Jenny shared about her experience in the program, explaining, “I really enjoy it, it teaches me about compassion and forgiveness and how I can use it in my everyday life and … it teaches you how to be a better person.” In her essay, Jenny shared that she felt the program has taught her the real meaning of how to be strong, to be courageous, to have gratitude, and forgiveness.” These students also shared how they are inspired based on Scarlett’s personal experience. As one student stated, “I admire Scarlett Lewis for turning a tragic and horrific incident into love. All of the Choose Love creators at PS all know how hard it is to find forgiveness in other people’s actions. We have so much admiration for her” referring to Scarlett Lewis.

**Theme 4, category 3, code d: compassion in action.** Educators and students at HES shared views on how students experience “Compassion in Action” which is a central tenet of the CLEP.

**HES.** HES second-grade teachers, Frank and Stephanie, discussed how they thought the program developed compassion in children. Stephanie shared her impression that the program teaches empathy and compassion as part of lessons that can be applied to every-day life, commenting “I really love that it’s child relatable.” Stephanie also shared her view that she
appreciates the CLEP, stating, “I love how it teaches courage so they’re more apt to try things that they wouldn’t have been able to try before. My favorite part of it is the empathy and compassion and I just, that’s so huge.” Frank expressed agreement with Stephanie’s viewpoints throughout their group interview.

HES third and fourth-grade students discussed their experiences with the CLEP and described thoughts on the program which relate to the idea of Compassion in Action. One third-grade student, Jennifer, shared her view that the program helps people to “learn more about love” and that “it’s getting you ready to know how to help.” HES fourth-grade students also discussed how they are more motivated to use the Buddy Bench in particular as a result of their experiences in the CLEP. Paul (fourth-grade student) shared that participating in the program “gets you working on choose love and kindness to other people. Like every time I go outside, I check to see if anybody is on the buddy bench,” and confirmed that this is one act of compassion that he does as a result of being in the program. Students also described their work with their school’s “Random Act of Kindness Team” which is also tied to the CLEP at HES. Mary shared that they meet for this team weekly, on Fridays, to discuss charitable causes for which they can facilitate fundraisers as part of the CLEP. Anna shared that she enjoys the CLEP because it helps students to “find ways to help other people, we find ways that we can choose love.” Patricia shared that she feels the program is “really cool because it gives a way for students to show how you can help people and choose love.” Patricia added, “also it’s just like a way to say even if someone is not choosing love for you, doesn’t mean you can’t choose love for them.”

Anna (fourth-grade student) shared her view that “there’s not really much that I don’t think is not great about the CLEP because I think it’s really cool how people can do this kind of stuff to help other people who need help.” Another student, Paul, commented that by engaging
in all of these activities, they got to “help people and got to learn about helping people.” Mary stated, “it helps people understand that you don’t just want to care about yourself and not worry about other people. You still need to be sure that other people are safe and have enough things to keep themselves alive.” These fourth-grade students discussed ways that they are now inspired to help others, such as those who are homeless, by giving them “some of your money, some water and some food.” The positive impact that participation in these activities has had on the self-concepts of these students was also noted when a student made this comment, “I was thinking in my head, man we’ve helped a lot of people.”

Patricia shared that she has learned that instead of asking for birthday presents, one can ask for donations to go to charitable causes. Patricia expressed this by stating, “for my birthday which is in a couple weeks I’m going to ask for things for the homeless, either water, food, or money.” Anna shared that she feels every school should have this program because then “that will give everyone an opportunity to help someone.” Students expressed a sense of responsibility for the well-being of others, with Paul sharing, “the more you help like the more people will have and the more they’ll feel safe.”

These students also shared that they felt that the program helps people to be nicer to others.

PS. At PS, eighth-grade students Jenny and Kelly discussed how they apply aspects of the program to their thought processes and daily life in various ways. Jenny shared about the program, “I really enjoy it, it teaches me about compassion and forgiveness and how I can use it in my everyday life and it just kind of makes sense, it teaches you how to be a better person.” Kelly stating that her experience at a Choose Love Conference in which she got to listen to other students share about their experiences with being bullied led her to become more self-aware and
compassionate towards others who have had these types of difficult experiences. She said that hearing these stories inspired her to “step up for the people that got bullied because they got so affected by this and this could just bring their day to a whole other standard.” Kelly also shared her view that the presence of the CLEP in their school motivates students to strive to improve the school community as it “teaches you how to have compassion and gratitude, and how you should be thankful for the people that are around you.”

**Theme 4, category 3, code e: Choose Love Formula.** Educators and students at both HES and PS shared thoughts on the program then commented directly on the concept of Love, particularly as it relates to the “Choose Love Formula” that is promoted as part of the Choose Love program.

**HES.** When discussing her views on the program, Kristen (school counselor) commented that she felt like “our world has got a lot of opposite of choosing love going on…,” speaking in reference to the amount of violence and incivility that occurs throughout the world. Kristen further commented that she felt this program can help people to feel better on a “human level.” Kristen also discussed how the program “takes those four ingredients… there’s those four words… it’s really talking to kids about courage, gratitude… how do you practice courage and how do you get your brain ready to do it… I think it is more practical” referring to the four major tenets of courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion, as well as how Choose Love compares to other SEL programs.

HES teachers also expressed their opinions that the CLEP is unique and appeals to children and adults universally as a result of the “Choose Love” message. Fiona (kindergarten) discussed her belief that, “the promotion of love as a value, the idea that kindness is something important” are some of the benefits of using the CLEP. Kindergarten teachers discussed how
they observed some of their students making heart gestures with their hands to others in class, seemingly to reference “Choose Love” in their interactions with peers. These teachers also shared that the HES principal references aspects of the CLEP every day during the daily announcements, particularly when she states, “Remember leaders, leaders choose love.”

Second-grade teacher Stephanie also spoke to the power of the CLEP language in redirecting students, particularly the phrase “Choose Love.” Frank also remarked, “It’s simple enough and everybody gets it.” Regarding the CLEP language, including this particular phrase, both of these teachers agreed “you can’t misinterpret that.” HES fourth-grade teacher, Michelle, shared her viewpoint that the program is unique in that it “breaks down things differently than most.” Michelle discussed how the references to courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion make the program unique, by stating, “so it’s not just your average, the words they hear, all the time, it’s placing your emotions in different places I guess that make sense in real life.”

HES students also commented on the concept of choosing love with society as a whole. HES second-grade student, Walter, shared his view that using the skills and lessons learned in an SEL program, such as the CLEP, is important because it helps more students. He said, “there would be more choosing love and less bullying.” Sarah, another second-grade student shared her view that a way to improve the program would be to “travel around and spread the program so there would be more kids choosing love.” Another second-grade student, Barbara, shared a book she recalled Ms. Kristen (school counselor) read a book called How Grinner Became a Winner (Bowman, 2009) and referenced how this helped reinforce concepts of love along with the Awesome Book of Love (Clayton, 2012). Barbara also shared that she thinks “it’s good to have
this program because some people can be mean when they don’t know the choose love action,” referencing the Choose Love Formula.

When speaking about making choices about jobs to pursue, Jennifer shared that learning how to be loving has prompted her to reflect on how her father is a teacher, who helps people learn and her mother reaches people through her role as a radio broadcaster and, “you have to have love to do that.” Jennifer expressed her view that love is a driving force for her parents with respect to their careers. Jennifer elaborated, “you have to love something and you need to learn how to love or you’re going to end up mean and grouchy, and you might be lonely when you get older. A lot of bad stuff can happen if you don’t love.”

One student stated, “I love it because it teaches kids how to choose love to other people.”

Students in the fourth-grade spoke about their reflections on the concept of love as well as the four steps comprising the Choose Love formula taught within the program. Fourth-grade student, Mary, shared that they participate in the CLEP on Fridays and that during these lessons, Kristen tells students “about the four steps which is courage, compassion in action, kindness, forgiveness…” Another fourth-grade student, Patricia, shared that she thinks the program is good because it helps to find ways to choose love. She stated, “we learn things about choosing love, what to do in hard times, that’s what I think.” Another student, Anna shared that she thinks the “program is really cool because it gives a way for students to show how you can help people and choose love. Also, it’s just like a way to say even if someone is not choosing love for you, doesn’t mean you can’t choose love for them.” Paul shared that he thinks the program is “really fun because it gets you working on choose love and kindness to other people.”

*PS.* At PS, Donna (fifth-grade teacher) shared how she felt that Scarlett Lewis’s example and leadership role within the program is invaluable and that “her love of these children” pushes
the program forward. Donna also shared that “these four words right here you can do an entire year on that,” referencing the program material that can be used to develop lesson plans. Donna discussed how she reviews the 4 major components in sequences throughout the year, stating, “I do it in the equation order.” David (content specialist) also shared his view on the formula, noting “I believe that Choose Love is in its equation of courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion, the ultimate remedy.”

PS fifth-grade students shared their views that the program has inspired them to choose love and that “it helps the kids choose love and be like kinder to others” as well as figure out “how we choose love.” Students also identified reasons for schools to have the program. Kelly (fifth-grade), stated “it’s important for you to choose love because…” Joseph noted that the program “has always … encouraged people to choose love…,” and that their teachers generate instruction aligned with the core aspects of the program. Gabriel remarked, “In our class our teacher reads us a book about choosing love.”

**Theme 4, category 4: student participant perspectives.** Students at HES and PS discussed the perceived differences between schools with the CLEP and schools that do not have this program, the perceived importance of SEL instruction, and student views towards the CLEP overall.

*Theme 4, category 4, code a: differences between schools with CLEP and non-CLEP schools.* HES and PS students expressed views that both directly and indirectly alluded to how they perceived differences between schools that provide SEL programs such as the CLEP and schools that do not.

*HES.* In speaking about whether or not schools should implement this program, when referencing other schools, third-grade student Patricia stated, “I really do think they should. I
think some people would love it and love to do this because I think helping people makes you feel great, makes you feel good and makes the people you’re helping feel good.” Another third-grade student, Jude, described his views on the comparison between his prior school and HES. Jude shared that he wished his former school had this program, and that while attending his old school he “wanted to run away,” but no longer wanted to do this after attending school at HES. He discussed how he loves reading and learning during the CLEP and that “if every single school in the whole world” had the CLEP then “the world would be cleaner, prettier and more people would be smiling…” This student also emphasized the need for schools to have programs like CLEP, stating that he perceives there being a “super need” for programs such as this, and that students who attend school-based counseling would enjoy it.

PS. PS fifth and eighth-grade students discussed their views on how they perceived differences between their school and others which do not implement CLEP. PS fifth-grade students discussed their views that bullying can take place at schools and that the implementation of the CLEP can prevent bullying as well as help others to stand up for those who are bullied in school. One student also compared her experience attending PS to another school she previously attended, and shared that she feels the program encourages students at PS to be nice and to “Choose Love” whereas far fewer students exhibited this type of behavior in her prior school. This student described her views that at her prior school others would “tease people about their clothes, about the color of their skin” whereas her perception is that this does not happen at PS.

These sentiments were also shared by PS eighth-grade students Jenny and Kelly who mentioned that the CLEP helps to reinforce a sense of “family” within their school community in which certain behaviors such as bullying do not occur. With respect to schools that do not have the CLEP, “…they probably should have this program so not a lot of bullying can happen.” This
student also shared her view that the CLEP “teaches you how to be nice and respectful and have gratitude towards other people.” These students also discussed how they have reached out to others who were struggling socially to belong to a group in which they created a safe space for socialization. Jenny and Kelly also discussed that the program “teaches you to be yourself.”

**Theme 4, category 4, code b: importance of SEL instruction.** Students at both HES and PS discussed their perspectives on the importance of SEL instruction in schools.

**HES.** At HES, second-grade students agreed that the program is important to have in school for various reasons, including that “it teaches you to be kind and to not hurt others and to do things that are right.” HES second-grade student responses indicated that they felt the lessons in the program helped students to manage impulses when faced with emotionally charged situations so that they do not engage in reactive or otherwise mean behavior. Another second-grade student stated, “I think it’s good to have this program because some people can be mean when they don’t know the Choose Love action…,” with another student adding that the program may deter students from engaging in bullying behavior.

The importance of the program being implemented in school was also acknowledged by HES third-grade students, one of whom stated that he feels this way “because it teaches you to be kind and to not hurt others and to do things that are right.” HES third-grade students also stated that they really liked the program in general, with two students stating that they “love” it. Students in this third-grade group remarked that the program made them and others feel happier in class. One third-grade student, Jennifer, shared that she felt that the program helped students to understand “how it feels to have counseling in the real world and if they’re going through a rough time like I am… the counselor helps you out.” When interviewed, fourth-grade students at HES concurred that the program is “the most important thing in school,” with one student
confirming, “it’s very important to us in this school how we act and are polite to each other and how this is helping us so much.”

PS. At PS, the fifth-grade students interviewed unanimously agreed that the program is important to have in school. Gabriel discussed his view about the program being important because of the origin of the program and its creator Scarlett Lewis, stating, “I like the CLEP because I think it prepares kids at an early age like what not to do in the future” referring to violent acts such as the shooting which occurred in Florida a few days prior. Daniel discussed how the way you treat another person can change how that person feels about themselves, stressing, “it’s important to always be nice” and emphasizing that the CLEP encourages people to be nice to each other. PS fifth-grade students discussed how they felt that other children would also enjoy the program, stating, “because it’s different and it makes a high impact on your life.” PS eighth-grade students Jenny and Kelly shared their views that SEL programs such as the CLEP are important to have in school because they help students to reflect on the emotional experiences of others as well as inspire students to treat each other with more kindness and compassion as well as advocate for those in need.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand how educators view their roles with participating in the CLEP, as well as how educators and students experience this program. Transcripts of individual and focus group interviews were transcribed and subsequently coded. Four themes emerged from these codes which were: the perceived role of SEL in schools, the purpose of SEL instruction, SEL implementation requirements, and the benefits of SEL. The themes emerging from the data address the research questions. Research question 1 is addressed by theme 1 which suggests that the perceptions educators have towards their roles with meeting
the SEL needs of students vary while they view SEL as important in schools. Research question 2 is addressed by themes 2, 3, and 4 which suggest the following: educators and students view SEL instruction as having a multi-faceted purpose with supporting students; educators and students feel that schools must meet various implementation requirements in order for SEL programs to be successful; educators and students perceive SEL programs as offering a vast array of benefits for educators and students who participate in them. The data collected from program artifacts and classroom observations supported the viewpoints expressed by educators and students during their interviews. A summary of the CLEP’s strengths and opportunities for growth is provided in Table 26.
CHAPTER FIVE:
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the research process, findings, and implications as well as recommendations for future research. This chapter has been divided into the following sections: (a) overview of the study, (b) discussion of findings, (c) implications of the research, (d) trustworthiness of the research, and (e) recommendations for future research.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate how educators perceive their role with meeting the social and emotional needs of students, as well as how educators and students experienced a school-based SEL program. In light of the increasing prevalence of mental health struggles in youth as indicated by the 2017 and 2018 Children’s Mental Health Reports published by the Child Mind Institute, and research suggesting that SEL programs offer significant benefits to students (Child Mind, 2017; Child Mind, 2018; Mahoney, Durlak, Weissberg, 2018), the researcher sought to gather the perspectives of educators and students who participated in an SEL program. The views of educator and student participants were gathered through individual and group semi-structured interviews, in addition to demographic surveys, program artifacts, and classroom observation data. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do educators (teachers, counselors, administrators) view their roles with participating in a structured SEL program (the Choose Love Enrichment Program)?
2. How do educators (teachers, counselors, administrators) and students experience a structured SEL program (Choose Love Enrichment Program)?
A qualitative multiple case-study design was utilized to explore the perspectives of educators and students who were involved with the implementation of, or participated in, the CLEP (Merriam, 2009). This study consisted of two cases, representing two schools that had implemented the CLEP via a whole school approach. Each case consisted of educators and students who participated in this program at one of these schools. Demographic surveys were collected from educator and student participants to obtain basic information. Educators were asked to provide their definition of SEL on the demographic surveys they completed. Participants engaged in individual and small group interviews which were conducted in person at each participant’s school, during the school day. The researcher followed up with educator participants via email to share with them the interview transcripts and confirm the accuracy of data. The researcher engaged in follow up email dialogue with two educator participants (one from HES and one from PS). The researcher also collected program artifacts (consisting of student drawings from HES and a student writing sample from PS), conducted classroom observations of program lessons in action at HES, and maintained a reflexive journal throughout the research process.

Participants were selected using a purposeful sampling process (Merriam, 2009). Personnel and students at five schools were recruited and those from two schools, which had implemented the CLEP since the fall of 2015, agreed to participate in this study. A total of 14 educators and 22 students from both schools were study participants. Educators and students across cases represented kindergarten through eighth-grade. Educators consisted of one building administrator, one school counselor, subject area teachers and special area teachers.

Participants were interviewed at their respective schools during school day hours, but at non-instructional time periods. Educator interviews were conducted in both individual and small
group formats, while all student interviews were conducted in small groups (i.e., less than five students in each). Interviews were audio-recorded, then transcribed, and checked for accuracy. Open and axial coding processes were then utilized which revealed a total of 51 codes, which were then collapsed into 13 categories. After reviewing the categories, four themes emerged. These four themes were:

1. Perceived Role of SEL in Schools
2. Purpose of SEL Instruction
3. Implementation Requirements
4. Benefits of SEL

The codes and categories leading into these four themes are located in Tables 16, 17, 18, and 19. The relation between these four themes and the research questions, as well as a summary of findings, will be described throughout the remainder of this chapter.

Discussion of Findings

This study focused on understanding how educators perceived their role with meeting the social and emotional needs of students, as well as how educators and students experienced participation in a school-based SEL program, the CLEP. The data gathered yielded findings which address both research questions. These findings and their relation to each research question, as well as recommendations indicated by study participants, are summarized in the sections below. Research question one is addressed by the findings associated with Theme 1: The Perceived Role of SEL in Schools. Research question two is addressed by the findings associated with Theme Two (Purpose of SEL Instruction), Theme Three (Implementation Requirements), and Theme Four (Benefits of SEL). The ways in which findings relate to literature and other studies on SEL in schools, as well as aspects of Bronfenbrenner’s
Bioecological Model and Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation, are also discussed throughout this chapter.

**Emerging Themes in Relation to Literature**

**Theme 1: Perceived role of SEL in schools.** Educator participants conveyed how they perceived the role of SEL in schools and how they perceived their roles as educators with participating in a structured SEL program such as the CLEP. This theme was developed from the following two categories: (a) educator participant perspectives, and (b) educator and parent perspectives. The responses shared by educator participants which led to the development of this theme address research question one. Educator views towards their roles with participating in a structured SEL program such as the CLEP were multi-faceted and influenced by their individual experiences.

**Category 1: Educator participant perspectives.** Educators across cases discussed their observations of student participation in the CLEP, as well as their own sense of responsibility and competency with implementing SEL programs in schools. Educators also shared their views regarding school obligations to implement SEL, in addition to SEL as a foundation for other learning, and SEL as a priority for schools.

Across cases, educators described their observations of students participating in the CLEP lessons and applying aspects of the program’s instruction outside of the structured lessons. Educators reported having observed students positively respond to mindfulness and coping strategies taught within the program, such as diaphragmatic breathing techniques (as observed by the HES school counselor) and journal writing (as observed by PS fifth-grade teacher). Occasions in which students chose to independently utilize strategies taught within the CLEP, as
well as reference language from the CLEP, outside of the program lessons, were discussed by educators in both cases.

A shared sense of responsibility with ensuring that schools provide SEL instruction to support student development in this area was evident across cases. While the importance of SEL was a view commonly shared by all, educators in both cases expressed differing perspectives as to who should be responsible for directly delivering SEL Program instruction. At HES, these participants expressed great confidence in the school counselor who teaches the CLEP lessons to students on a bi-monthly basis, while classroom teachers are present for the lesson but do not lead the instruction. HES classroom teachers discussed how they informally referenced aspects of the lessons taught by the school counselor outside of the structured lessons (i.e., encouraging students to have “courage” and not give up when frustrated with a challenging academic task). However, HES teachers were not directly responsible for formally providing SEL instruction and were reluctant to assume the responsibility of formally delivering SEL program lessons.

PS educators discussed the various ways in which they reference aspects of the CLEP with students at times outside of the structured lessons and support SEL instruction. However, unlike HES, teachers at PS spoke with ease about their experiences directly implementing CLEP lessons. PS teachers did not express the concerns HES teachers had about possibly not being equipped to teach the lessons, and generally expressed confidence with their approach to delivering the lessons per the CLEP curriculum. They readily shared their ideas about ways to integrate the CLEP curriculum into other subjects and aspects of the school day at PS. Based on HES educator responses during interviews, it seems possible that the faith-based structure of instruction at PS may have influenced educator perceptions towards their role with directly implementing the CLEP lessons. PS teachers discussed how sixth and seventh-grade CLEP
lessons are delivered during religious instruction, which David (content specialist) viewed as a “good opportunity” because of the parallels he felt existed between elements of the CLEP and their school’s faith-based instruction. Donna (fifth-grade teacher) also shared, “I normally do it as part of my religion curriculum because if you look at this, it’s not that different, right…,” speaking in reference to how she implements CLEP lessons alongside aspects of the faith-based curriculum used at PS.

These findings connect to studies such as the meta-analysis conducted by Durlak et al. (2011), which found that SEL “interventions can be incorporated into routine educational practices and do not require outside personnel for their effective delivery” (p. 417). The results of Durlak et al. (2011) meta-analysis found that classroom teachers and other school staff effectively conducted the SEL programs included in this study (Durlak et al., 2011). Based on this information, it seems possible that educators at HES might underestimate their potential skill at implementing the CLEP lessons. However, their sense of self-competence in this area is important to consider when deciding who should deliver these lessons, as educator perceptions towards their roles with participating in SEL initiatives can influence the degree to which such initiatives are ultimately effective when implemented (Hicks-Hoste, 2015). If educators are concerned about their degree of competence with implementing SEL and are therefore reluctant to deliver lessons, then this may negatively impact the effectiveness of the intervention once it is implemented.

The ways in which other SEL programs are delivered by school personnel vary depending on the program and how it is used. Some programs (i.e., Responsive Classroom) are implemented directly by classroom teachers, while others (i.e., Second Step) are often implemented by school counselors, social workers, or psychologists. According to CASEL’s
School-wide Guide to SEL, it is important to give teachers the responsibility to teach SEL for the following reasons as stated by CASEL (2019):

It is important that teachers, rather than counselors or support staff, take the lead on delivering explicit SEL instruction. This approach allows teachers to form strong relationships with their students and integrate SEL concepts throughout all instruction so students can practice and apply SEL in multiple contexts. By taking ownership of teaching SEL, teachers also enhance their own social and emotional learning. Counselors and other support staff are great sources of knowledge on SEL and may support teachers by co-facilitating, coaching, or leading professional learning on SEL instruction.

(Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2019; https://schoolguide.casel.org/focus-area-3/classroom/explicit-sel-instruction/)

The role of school counselors with implementing SEL programs is addressed by the American School Counseling Association (ASCA), which promotes a set of standards that counselors should strive to meet in order to best support their students. The ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College and Career Readiness for Every Student includes standards that are consistent with the SEL competencies promoted by CASEL. These include mindset standards related to the “beliefs students have about themselves in relation to academic work,” and behavior standards including learning strategies, self-management skills, and social skills (ASCA, 2014, p. 1). ASCA recommends that school counselors focus on specific standards to develop “the foundation for classroom lessons, small groups and activities addressing student developmental needs” (ASCA, 2014, p. 1).

Educators across both cases also indicated that they felt SEL can serve as a foundation for other instruction (i.e., Social Studies or faith-based instruction) and that SEL is a priority for
schools. These educators expressed their support for programs which facilitate the development of social and emotional skills in students across grade levels. Educators across cases commented that schools should provide students with SEL instruction because it is the only way to ensure that students receive guidance in this area, since educators cannot control what happens in a student’s home. The ways in which SEL instruction also provide support to students who struggle with feelings of distress were also noted by educators across cases. Educators consistently commented on the need to provide this support to students when they are in school, as there is no guarantee that they will receive the SEL support they need outside of school.

**Category 2: Educator and parent perspectives.** Educators across cases shared views from both an educator and also a parent perspective towards SEL initiatives such as the CLEP. At HES, three teachers voluntarily shared that they are parents of students who attended HES and participated in the CLEP. Each of these three teachers discussed her observation of her child’s development in relation to his or her experience participating in the CLEP. Examples of students bringing language from the CLEP home (i.e., Laurie’s son retelling a story about “choosing courage”) were provided by these participants. These educator-parent perspectives were shared independently as each educator-parent participant happened to be interviewed separately.

In addition to these three HES educators, the HES principal, Bonnie, shared her views towards the program from her perspective as a parent of two older children who had previously attended HES (prior to the implementation of the CLEP). Bonnie discussed her impression that SEL programs may help build resilience in children during a time when they are faced with unprecedented stressors, such as social media. A fifth-grade teacher from PS also shared her perspective as a parent of two grown children who did not experience SEL programs during their
schooling. Collectively, educators across both cases, who self-identified as parents, shared views indicating that they felt the CLEP can enhance the connection between homes and schools in ways that benefit students.

This finding connects with Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model which posits that the interaction of the school and home microsystems form a school-home mesosystem which can influence a child’s development. According to Bronfenbrenner, the processes occurring within these two microsystems (home and school) “are not independent of each other” as events occurring in one’s “home can affect the child’s progress in school, and vice versa” (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 723). Research has shown that school-based SEL programs can effectively provide a layer of support to help children and adolescents develop coping skills that will prevent, or alleviate, symptoms of emotional distress including (but not limited) to anxiety (Desrochers, 2015; Rossen & Cowan, 2015). Benefits of school-based SEL programs include helping schools to promote connections between students and a sense of belonging amongst members of the school community. Hartnett (2007) emphasized the positive role that these factors play in the development of resilience in children and adolescents, “When students feel cared for, included, and can connect to the purpose of schools, they can challenge the values of the peer group, such as whether or not to attend school, and they may attach to people in the school setting such as teachers, administrators, and staff, who will help them carry the vision for their lives” (Hartnett, 2007, p. 43).

**Theme 2: Purpose of SEL instruction.** Educators and students in both cases shared experiences participating in the CLEP which led to the following categories that comprise this theme: (a) addressing SEL needs, (b) strategies for coping with challenges, and (c) values and skills learned.
Category 1, addressing SEL needs. Educators and students across cases shared opinions regarding how the CLEP addresses the basic SEL needs of students. Educators discussed how they felt that providing SEL programs such as the CLEP helped to address the basic SEL needs of children, particularly in cases where the child might not be receiving guidance in this area at home. The ways in which participating in an SEL program such as the CLEP promotes a sense of emotional safety was acknowledged by educators at both schools as well as PS students. Educators and students across both cases shared views indicating that they perceived participation in the CLEP as conducive to the personal growth and social emotional development of students.

These findings are consistent with the views espoused by Abraham Maslow (Maslow, 1943) and other researchers who have studied his Theory of Human Motivation (Farmer, 1984; Prince & Howard, 2002). Maslow theorized that a person must have their primary needs (i.e., safety) basically met enough in order for an individual to effectively pursue higher level goals (Maslow, 1943). In their article, *Children and their Basic Needs*, Prince and Howard (2002) asserted that, “In order for children to thrive and develop properly, they must feel a sense of safety…” (Prince & Howard, 2002, p. 29). Prince and Howard (2002) further expand upon Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation to discuss how a child’s sense of love and belonging relates to a child’s social and emotional experience in school. Prince and Howard (2002) argue that Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation can help generate ideas as part of a solution in order to develop and allocate more resources “to ensure that all American children have their basic needs met” (p. 31). This may include, but is not limited to, looking at the structure and organization of the school in order to create conditions that support students and foster feelings of connectedness (Prince & Howard, 2002).
**Category 2: Strategies for coping with challenges.** Educators and students across cases discussed how their experiences with the CLEP led them to feel that participation in this program helps students learn coping strategies. Educators and students at HES discussed coping strategies learned through the CLEP, such as deep breathing exercises, and one educator at PS discussed how journal writing exercises also appeared to have a calming and relaxing effect on students. Students at PS discussed ways in which participation in the program helped them to reflect on personal thoughts and experiences. HES students were also observed learning strategies such as self-affirmations during the classroom observations conducted by the researcher.

These findings are consistent with those of the Haymovitz et al., (2017) case study which found that the implementation of the *Social Harmony* SEL program was beneficial to students with improving various coping strategies. The findings of this study revealed that students felt that participation in this SEL program improved their communication as well as conflict resolution skills (Haymovitz et al., 2017). Student participants also expressed that they were more comfortable with expressing their feelings and needs, and felt that they were more likely to seek out assistance from teachers (Haymovitz et al., 2017).

**Category 3: values and skills learned.** Educators and students in both cases shared views suggesting that participation in the CLEP facilitates the development of personal values and skills in students. Participants across cases discussed their impressions that participation in this SEL program teaches the importance of advocating for others, civic responsibility, and empathy. The responses provided by participants also generated findings that are consistent with the five CASEL SEL core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness.
Participant responses across cases suggested that their experiences with the CLEP supported the development of the five core SEL competencies outlined by CASEL. This finding is consistent with Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Brackett et al.’s (2015) assertion that the social emotional experiences and developmental outcomes of children are influenced by elements of the contexts, or immediate environments, in which they spend their time. This finding also holds promise for the possible positive impact that these experiences may have had on the academic achievement of student participants. According to Durlak et al. (2011), SEL programs that address students’ levels of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making increase student academic performance by 11 percentile points as compared to students who do not participate in such programs.

The SEL competencies that are central to SEL and were also apparent in the findings of this study are depicted in Figure 1. Table 20 includes a list of the theme two subcategories which align with these competencies.
Table 20

Support for CASEL SEL Competencies in Data Analysis and Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASEL SEL Competency</th>
<th>Theme, Category, Code</th>
</tr>
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| Self-Awareness       | Theme 2, Category 3, Code 6
                      | Purpose of SEL instruction, Values and skills learned, Self-awareness                |
| Self-Management      | Theme 2, Category 3, Code 5
                      | Purpose of SEL instruction, Values and skills learned, Self-regulation               |
| Social Awareness     | Theme 2, Category 3, Codes 1 & 2
                      | Purpose of SEL instruction, Values and skills learned, Advocating for others, and Civic responsibility |
| Relationship Skills  | Theme 2, Category 3, Code 7
                      | Purpose of SEL instruction, Values and skills learned, social skills                 |
| Responsible Decision-Making | Theme 2, Category 3, Code 4                                          |
                      | Purpose of SEL instruction, Values and skills learned, responsible decision making   |

**Theme 3: Implementation Requirements.** Based on their experiences participating in the CLEP, educators and students in both cases shared their insights regarding requirements that must be met in order to successfully implement SEL programs such as the CLEP. Participants described their thoughts about the format and structure needed as well as implementation challenges to overcome. The methods by which educators can provide SEL instruction as part of this program, and recommendations for overall program implementation are also discussed.

**Category 1: format and structural elements.** Participants across cases identified educators and students who served as leaders with facilitating the CLEP’s implementation in each school. At HES, the school counselor was the lead facilitator of the program and she
delivered the program lessons in classrooms on a regular basis. At PS, classroom teachers delivered the program lessons and a group of eighth grade students promoted the program’s messages through creating and maintaining a “Choose Love Bulletin Board” for all those in the school to see. Participants across cases acknowledged that in addition to the structured program lessons, each school aimed to provide opportunities for students to apply what they learn from the program during their daily experience at school. At HES, and for elementary aged students in PS, lessons were delivered to whole classes, while students in grades eight received instruction within small groups separated by gender. Both schools discussed how the program lessons were delivered according to the recommendations of the CLEP curriculum, with each school adding other activities as opportunities arose within the schedule (i.e., weekly CLEP assemblies at HES, students from HES participating in a CLEP conference).

The differences in approach between HES and PS highlight a dilemma that often emerges when schools consider implementing SEL programs. Although the PS educators interviewed seemed at ease and expressed confidence in their approach to teaching SEL via the CLEP lessons, this is not the case with many educators (Soutter, 2019). Some are reluctant to take on what they may perceive as another responsibility beyond what their role already requires, and may also feel that they lack the skills necessary to provide SEL instruction due to concerns that this is outside of their realm of expertise. These concerns were evident in HES third-grade teacher Laurie’s interviews and are also acknowledged in recent literature on SEL implementation in schools (Soutter, 2019). As expressed in other HES interviews, many educators may feel that SEL programming is the responsibility of school counselors or other support staff (i.e., school psychologists or social workers), and have concern that they would not be able to deliver an SEL program effectively. While research shows that providing research-
based SEL programs in schools yields effective results when integrated into daily educational practice and taught by teachers as well as support staff (Durlak et al., 2011), the perception of many educators regarding their capacity to implement such programs can influence the degree to which these programs are ultimately effective when implemented (Hicks-Hoste, 2015).

Both HES and PS implemented the CLEP using the prescribed curriculum for classroom lessons in addition to their own individualized whole-school approach. This finding is similar to that of the Aidman and Price (2018) case study analysis of Clear Stream Middle School’s implementation of the Second Step SEL Program. Aidman and Price (2018) found that Clear Stream educators followed the Second Step curriculum while also creatively integrating SEL opportunities into other aspects of the school day. Clear Stream students expressed that they especially valued lessons that teachers creatively developed on their own by expanding upon the outline and ideas provided by the SEL curriculum. Aidman and price noted this as a strength of Clear Stream’s implementation of the Second Step program and emphasized the importance of schools valuing SEL and embracing “a culture that emphasizes the whole child” (p. 34). These sentiments were echoed by HES principal Bonnie who stated that at HES, the CLEP is “a critical part of our school day, school talk, and school culture.” Recent articles such as Unintended Lessons of SEL Programs (Soutter, 2019) emphasize the need for schools to consider multiple factors when approaching the implementation of SEL programs, such as identifying the intent for providing an SEL program, student perspectives towards SEL, and preparing for potential “roadblocks” to implementation (Soutter, 2019, p. 3).

Category 2: implementation challenges to overcome. Educators and student participants discussed how their schools navigated obstacles to implementing the CLEP, as well as perceived reasons why students might refrain from participating in the program. Educator and
students across cases identified the challenge to find time for the program as a potential obstacle to its successful implementation. The need for schools to allot time for the program and include this in schedule planning was discussed by HES and PS educators. This finding was also echoed by Aidman and Price (2018) who emphasized the need for schools to have an advisory period in which they could implement SEL programs.

Students across both cases also shared that another implementation challenge could be student reluctance to participate in the program. Students shared their opinion that others might at times feel emotionally overwhelmed and wish to refrain from participating in the program as a result. Studies conducted by Brackett et al., (2011) and Yang et al. (2018) suggest that supportive classroom environments and positive teacher-student relationships can positively influence student conduct and engagement in SEL programs.

**Category 3: instructional approach.** Educators and students across cases shared their views on the instructional strategies utilized to implement the CLEP at their schools. Perspectives on the CLEP lessons, the multisensory approach that is integrated into the curriculum, the activities students prefer, the use of journal writing, and the ways in which a whole school approach is used for program implementation were discussed by participants.

The influence of the program’s common language (i.e., the Choose Love Formula) was noted as a program strength by educators and students across cases. Students across grade levels in both cases discussed their appreciation for the creative activities that were part of CLEP lessons. These included affirmation cards, journal writing, and designing visual references to the program such as bulletin boards that were placed throughout the school to help reinforce student learning about CLEP topics.
Participants expressed common views that SEL programs have a place in the daily school routine, which is consistent with the efforts many schools are currently taking to implement structured SEL programs into their daily routine (Brackett & Rivers, 2014). However, despite research which suggests that SEL programs have a positive impact on academic achievement, many schools have either not identified social and emotional learning initiatives as a priority or they have not implemented SEL initiatives in ways that are productive to achieving desired goals (Brackett & Rivers, 2014). The individual context and needs of schools should be considered when developing plans for whole-school SEL implementation. The need to continuously monitor and follow up on program implementation is important as all programs require ongoing assessment to promote their successful implementation (Brackett & Rivers, 2014).

**Category 4: recommendations for implementation.** Based on their experiences with the CLEP in their schools, educators and students discussed ideas for improving the implementation of the program and inspiring more students to participate. The need for professional development opportunities to build educator capacity with implementing the program was mentioned by educators at both schools as well as two HES students.

Educators across cases, and students at HES, discussed their ideas for professional development opportunities that could facilitate collaboration and build the capacity of educators who implement the CLEP. Although the CLEP curriculum is free to download from its website, and there are other resources available (including an Educator’s Guide to help provide tips), educators still expressed interest in additional professional development to support their growth in this area. It seems possible that some educators may underestimate their ability and skills with implementing an SEL program like the CLEP. However, this area should be addressed in order
to help educators develop the skills needed and the sense of competence needed in order to implement the program with fidelity.

Researchers suggest that the successful implementation of interventions such as SEL programs depends on multiple influences, including the perceptions of educators towards the implementation of such programs (Hicks-Hoste, 2015). In order to ensure that educators are equipped with the skills and confidence necessary to implement the program, educators may benefit from structured collaboration and professional development sessions related to their experiences with the CLEP. Aidman and Price (2018) reported that Clear Stream teachers were provided support from campus facilitators of the Second Step Program as well as SEL coaches from the district office who could support “the program by providing professional development, periodically observing classrooms, and giving feedback to the instructors” (p. 31). Aidman & Price (2018) also emphasized the need for teamwork between school district faculty and administration in order to facilitate effective program implementation. The need for continuous reflection and professional development towards practices in the area of SEL was also identified as a recommendation of this case study analysis (Aidman & Price, 2018).

**Theme 4: Benefits of SEL.** Educators and students in both cases shared views indicating that, as a result of their experiences participating in the CLEP, they feel that there are multiple benefits of school-based SEL programs such as the CLEP. This theme was comprised of four categories, (a) community building and school climate, (b) prevention and intervention, (c) SEL outcomes of the CLEP curriculum, and (d) student participant perspectives.

**Category 1: school climate.** Educator and student participants across cases shared their thoughts on ways in which the implementation the CLEP reaped benefits such as community building, promoting equity, positively impacting school and classroom management, improving
relationships, positively affecting educator participants, and a general “ripple effect” of good behavior that results from participation in the CLEP.

According to DePaoli et al. (2018), students from schools with SEL programs reported a more positive social climate and learning environment, doing better academically, and being better prepared for life than those in schools without such structured SEL programs. Jones, Bailey, and Jacob (2014) also discussed how SEL as a universal approach supports the classroom management practices of teachers. Jones et al. (2014) elaborate upon how the provision of SEL instruction can help teachers establish “high quality, trusting relationships” with their students which are conducive to classroom management practices and maintaining a supportive classroom environment (p. 20).

**Category 2: prevention and intervention.** Educator and student responses in both cases shared their views that the CLEP offers benefits by serving as both a prevention and intervention support in schools. The increasing mental health struggles in youth as indicated by the 2017 and 2018 Children’s Mental Health Reports published by the Child Mind Institute, demonstrate the imminent need for schools to take proactive steps in addressing the SEL of children and adolescents. In light of the research suggesting that SEL programs offer significant benefits to students (Child Mind, 2017; Child Mind, 2018; Mahoney, Durlak, Weissberg, 2018), schools can employ a multi-tiered system of supports which includes social and emotional learning programs in an effort to address this need (Desrochers, 2015; Rossen & Cowan, 2015).

**Category 3: SEL outcomes of CLEP curriculum.** Participants shared consistently positive views towards the outcomes of the CLEP curriculum, and their belief that this curriculum is used to effectively teach the values of courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion in action. Participants also expressed a common understanding of how these values
comprise the “Choose Love Formula.” The ways in which the program promotes mindfulness in both educators and students was also highlighted by participants. The efficacy of interventions such as mindfulness meditation has been identified as one way to prevent the onset, or mitigate the extent, of anxiety in youth is also discussed (Child Mind, 2018, p. 13).

**Category 4: student participant perspectives.** DePaoli et al. (2018) argued that student voices are a critical part of understanding how to best implement SEL programs. Student participants in both cases discussed ways in which they perceive there to be differences in schools that offer SEL programs such as the CLEP and schools that do not. Students in both cases discussed that they perceive SEL instruction as being important in schools and expressed common viewpoints that they enjoy participating in the CLEP in addition to feeling that other students would enjoy and benefit from the CLEP as well.

Table 21 summarizes quotes that represent the viewpoints of educator and student participants regarding the four major themes which emerged from this study (see page 397).

**Theory and Related Literature**

The scope and complexity of SEL programming for school-aged children necessitates the consideration of multiple theories that support the development of approaches to SEL, as well as inform current SEL practices and future SEL strategy development (Brackett et al., 2015). This section will focus on Systems and Motivation theories which relate to this study’s findings, specifically Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Human Development (previously Ecological Systems Theory) and Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Maslow, 1943).

**Bioecological Model and Ecological Systems Theory:** The social emotional experiences and developmental outcomes of children are influenced by elements of the contexts,
or immediate environments, in which they spend their time (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Brackett et al., 2015). Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model defines these immediate environments, which can include a child’s home or school, as “microsystems” (Ashiabi & O’Neal, 2015). According to Bronfenbrenner, the processes occurring within these two microsystems (home and school) “are not independent of each other” as events occurring in one’s “home can affect the child’s progress in school, and vice versa” (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 723). The interrelationship between microsystems comprises the “mesosystem” according to Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (Ashiabi & O’Neal, 2015). Bronfenbrenner argued that the mesosystem of a child’s school and home environments influence a child’s psychological, including social and emotional, development. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory evolved into his Bioecological Model and identifies five systems influencing human development: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Figure 4 depicts these systems and their interrelationships with one another.

Aspects of the four themes that emerged from the research relate to each of these five systems. The Microsystem is represented across all four themes as the responses of the educator and student participants regarding their experience within their respective school setting (a microsystem) comprise the data which led to the emergence of these themes. The Mesosystem is represented in themes 1 and 4 because participant responses leading to the development of these themes discussed connections being home and school microsystems, as well as home and surrounding community microsystems. The Exosystem is represented in Theme 4 as participant responses discussed issues of equity and community building in particular. The Macrosystem is also represented in Theme 4 includes their perspectives on issues related to community building.
and school climate, the prevention and intervention services provided to the whole school community through SEL programs, as well as student perceptions towards major events and the broader impact of SEL instruction such as Choose Love on society as a whole. The Chronosystem is represented in Theme 4 in light of the responses provided about ways in which SEL serves as prevention and intervention supports on multiple levels, as well as the perspectives of students towards societal matters and their own personal life experiences. Figure 4 depicts Bronfenbrenner’s concentric circles and Table 22 provides a description of the themes which connect to each system.

Table 22
*Findings Related to Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Microsystem</td>
<td>Theme 1, Perceived Role of SEL in Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2, Purpose of SEL Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 3, Implementation Requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 4, Benefits of SEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesosystem</td>
<td>Theme 1, Perceived Role of SEL in Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 4, Benefits of SEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exosystem</td>
<td>Theme 4, Benefits of SEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macrosystem</td>
<td>Theme 4, Benefits of SEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronosystem</td>
<td>Theme 4, Benefits of SEL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theory of Human Motivation. Maslow’s (1943) Theory of Human Motivation posits that an individual’s motivations and personal development over time are influenced by the degree to which their basic needs are met. Maslow argued that an individual’s physiological and security needs must be basically met enough in order for the individual to progress towards attaining higher level needs, or reaching their individual potential and eventually achieving self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). For example, a child who grows up in poverty with a lack of food and shelter may be more driven and focused towards having their basic physical and safety needs met (obtaining food and shelter), rather than focusing on academics to earn high grades. The stressors that individuals may face in their environment (i.e., poverty) can also interfere with a child’s ability to socialize effectively with peers and develop relationships with others that would foster a positive sense of belonging within one’s school environment (Maslow, 1943; Prince & Howard, 2002).

Aspects of the four themes that emerged from the research relate to each of the five hierarchies defined in Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation. The responses of educator and student participants which led to the development of Theme 2, Purpose of SEL Instruction, category 1 (addressing Basic SEL needs) relate to the physical/physiological and safety/security tiers of the needs hierarchy. Both students and educators commented on the need for individuals to feel physically and emotionally safe within their environments in order to thrive. Theme 2, Purpose of SEL Instruction, categories 2 and 3 (strategies for coping with challenges as well as values and skills learned) relate to the Social Needs tier as participant responses discussed how people need to feel a sense of safety within their social environment. Theme 4, benefits of SEL, relates to the last two tiers, ego and self-actualization, because of the SEL outcomes of the CLEP curriculum described by students and educators. Educators and students discussed how
participation in the CLEP inspires students to engage in more compassionate behaviors as well as to display the characteristics of courage, forgiveness, gratitude which are emphasized within the program. The program also inspires students to be more mindful which are traits that could propel them towards self-actualization. Figure 5 depicts the levels of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Table 23 provides a description of the findings which relate to Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation (Maslow, 1943).

Table 23

*Findings Related to Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs Hierarchy</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical/Physiological</td>
<td>Theme 2, Category 1 Purpose of SEL Instruction; Addressing Basic SEL Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety/Security</td>
<td>Theme 2, Category 1 Purpose of SEL Instruction; Addressing Basic SEL Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Theme 2, Categories 2 &amp; 3 Purpose of SEL Instruction; Strategies for Coping with Challenges, Values and Skills Learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ego</td>
<td>Theme 4, Category 3 The Benefits of SEL; SEL Outcomes of CLEP Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Actualization</td>
<td>Theme 4, Category 3 The Benefits of SEL; SEL Outcomes of CLEP Curriculum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendations for Students and Educators**

Both student and educator participants shared ideas regarding how to improve the implementation of SEL programs in schools, including ways to improve the implementation of the CLEP in particular. These recommendations have been organized according to two different categories: (a) students, and (b) educators.
**Students.** Students from both cases shared the following recommendations for the CLEP based on their experience participating in it:

- Students recommended spreading the word about the program. Students expressed their anticipation that the program would grow and that more students would want to participate in it just upon hearing about it.

- Some students might tend to refrain from participating in the program and discussions, so encouraging students to feel safe with each other could help inspire more participation. Students expressed that others can be reassured that participation in the program will make a difference if they give it a chance.

- Students suggested that the frequency of program lessons increase and that the duration of lessons increase in time as well. Students at HES shared a common view that they would like to see the program increase to one time daily.

- Students suggested that specific activities increase in frequency, i.e., read alouds as suggested by HES second-grade students.

- HES fourth-grade students suggested that having more school volunteer initiatives and service activities like the fundraisers at HES would facilitate more student participation.

- HES students also recommended more creative arts and crafts activities, more role-playing activities, and talking about love more.

- PS fifth and eighth-grade students discussed how they feel more opportunities similar to the Local University CLEP Conference they attended in which students shared their stories about their experience with the CLEP, would also be beneficial to encouraging student participation.
• PS eighth-grade students expressed preference for smaller groups (less than 10) to engage in the lessons and discussions together.

**Educators (Teachers, Counselors, Administrators).** Educator participants across cases shared the following recommendations for future implementation of the CLEP:

• One recommendation that was deemed to be of utmost importance by educator participants is for the development of trusting relationships between educators and students in order to facilitate meaningful social and emotional learning in the school environment. HES educators in particular spoke of the deep trust that they have in their school counselor, Ms. Kristen, and how this has been instrumental in launching this program with her leading the implementation initiative. PS educators discussed the need for trusting relationships to exist between teachers and students in order for meaningful teaching and learning to take place, while also noting that participation in the CLEP helps to foster trusting bonds between teachers and students.

• HES educators, particularly the principal and school counselor, discussed their views that the program should have a coordinator for program initiatives and implementation. Kristen (school counselor) shared her view that designating a point person to facilitate program implementation and take care of program coordination is necessary in order to successfully develop a “Choose Love” culture throughout the school.

• HES teachers also suggested ways for support to be provided to the school counselor, such as providing her with an intern, so that she could have more time available to dedicate to the CLEP.
• Educators across cases suggested developing a schedule that supports program implementation through offering CLEP lessons on a regular basis as part of the school master schedule (i.e., a block schedule format). Educators emphasized the need to ensure that there is a regularly scheduled block of time for program implementation, especially at the secondary level where scheduling can be more challenging than it is at the elementary level.

• Educators expressed an interest in planning time to collaborate in order to plan lessons together and in particular share ideas as well as experiences with the program. Teachers across cases also expressed an interest in having more structured time and opportunities to collaborate with others, both within and outside of their respective schools, to gather ideas regarding ways in which they can support the program implementation.

• Educators across cases also discussed how they view the ideal frequency of CLEP lessons as increasing to once weekly or more. HES school counselor, Kristen, shared her view that she feels it would be ideal for lessons to be delivered once daily.

• The need for SEL instruction to be naturally embedded throughout the course of the school day was discussed by educators across cases, and the need for it to be prioritized alongside subjects like math or social studies was distinctly mentioned by PS educators.

• Cross-curricular opportunities for engaging students in SEL instruction, such as intertwining lessons with common themes in subjects such as Social Studies or Foreign Language were discussed in particular.
• The possibility of providing educators with more reference materials, i.e., a CLEP book or implementation guide, was also raised as an idea. Educators encouraged continuing whole-school activities such as assemblies and integrating aspects of the CLEP into these whole school meetings.

• Educators across both cases shared views suggesting that the multisensory approach which the CLEP promotes, such as the use of hand signals, breathing activities, and visuals throughout classrooms are effective and should continue.

• PS teachers emphasized the benefit of expanding upon “teachable moments” that may arise unexpectedly yet present as opportunities to reinforce concept taught within the CLEP with students.

• Educators across cases, particularly PS teachers, discussed the need for some level of creativity with CLEP lesson planning and implementation, particularly as students get older in order to elicit and sustain student participation.

• Educators suggested that resources to support the efforts of other educators in this area, i.e. a professional development component regarding ways to individualize or differentiate the lessons according to one’s class and teaching style, could be effective with supporting educator delivery of the program.

• Educators across cases encouraged the continued use of common language and daily application of aspects of the program, both formal (i.e., planned during daily announcements) and informal (as needed when events arise).

• Educators also shared views suggesting that they feel that engaging in parent and community outreach opportunities, i.e., communicating about the program through
school newsletters highlighting aspects of the program, would be beneficial to continuing to support the program’s implementation.

- The need for building leadership and administration to take an active role with strongly supporting the program’s implementation in order for it to be successful was also noted across interviews.

**Implications of the Research**

The purpose of this study was to understand how educators perceive their role with participating in a school-based SEL program, as well as how educators and students experience participation in a school-based SEL program (particularly the CLEP). Research indicates that child and adolescent mental health issues have increased over recent years which have a debilitating impact on the social and emotional development of children and adolescents (Child Mind, 2016; Child Mind, 2018). Over recent years, SEL programs implemented in schools have shown to be successful with promoting the development of SEL competencies as defined by CASEL (Durlak et al., 2011, CASEL, 2016). However, the perspectives of educators who experience SEL programs is not well researched and the perspectives of students who participate in SEL programs is even more lacking (DePaoli et al., 2018). This study aimed to gather this information to help inform the research base surrounding SEL programs and the perspectives of educators and students which may help to support the successful implementation of SEL programs in the future.

Based on the information and an in-depth analysis of all data gathered, recommendations for students, educators, and school districts were developed and then grouped by category. The following Table 24 includes the recommendations as well as the relevant recommendation category and implications for stakeholders.
Table 24

Recommendations and Implications for Stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder / Theme</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Recommendation Category</th>
<th>Implication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students / Theme 4</td>
<td>Model the Choose Love Formula (Courage, Gratitude, Forgiveness, Compassion), especially during social interactions</td>
<td>Support Peers</td>
<td>If students model the Choose Love Formula during social interactions, then their relationships with peers will improve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students / Theme 3</td>
<td>Tell other students what you like about the program</td>
<td></td>
<td>If students tell others what they like about the CLEP, more students will want to participate in the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students / Themes 3 and 4</td>
<td>Respect others and their participation in program (be a good listener)</td>
<td></td>
<td>If students respect others and their participation in the program, students will benefit from the CLEP lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators / Theme 3</td>
<td>Collaborate with colleagues and others involved with promoting SEL initiatives</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>If educators collaborate with each other about ways to promote SEL initiatives, educators will feel more competent in their ability to deliver SEL instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify SEL Coordinator(s)</td>
<td>Build Capacity</td>
<td>If school personnel designate educator(s) to lead SEL initiatives, then these educators can coordinate efforts to facilitate successful program implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop SEL Committee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Involve cross section of staff to invite along with students and parents to participate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
Table 24  
**Recommendations and Implications for Stakeholders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Recommendation Category</th>
<th>Implication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educators / Theme 3</td>
<td>Communicate with parents&lt;br&gt;- Provide strategies and guidance for ways parents can reinforce learning at home (newsletters, weekly reports, host presentations…)</td>
<td>Home-School Partnerships</td>
<td>If school personnel communicate with parents about SEL initiatives in school, then this will foster better home-school partnerships and help parents to support SEL in their children at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design building schedules so SEL lessons can be implemented on a regular basis.</td>
<td>Implementation Planning</td>
<td>If building master schedules are designed with consideration of SEL as a priority, then schools will be better equipped to implement SEL programs with fidelity on a regular basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make SEL data regarding programs implemented available to those who implement so there can be shared ownership and ongoing “regeneration” of practices as needed.</td>
<td>Shared Ownership</td>
<td>If educators are regularly informed of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of SEL initiatives, then they can modify programs as needed to support successful program implementation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Continued)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Recommendation Category</th>
<th>Implication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educators / Themes</td>
<td>Survey educators to assess confidence level with implementing SEL initiatives</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>If school leaders understand the needs of educators related to SEL implementation, and provide support to administrators and staff as needed, then the district will demonstrate its commitment to SEL as well as reduce any feelings of frustration people may experience with implementation efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 and 3</td>
<td>• Design professional development to close gaps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide support to building administrator and SEL coordinators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Schedule professional development sessions into school district calendar to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>allow for common planning time and collaboration, or SEL Professional Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Host conferences to facilitate collaboration and offer opportunities for</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
<td>If schools take the initiative to host conferences and invite others to come share their experiences, then they will help build connections between educators that may support effective implementation practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>students as well as faculty/staff to meet each other and present on their</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>experiences with SEL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendations and Implications for Students

**Peer support.** Students should encourage each other to participate in the CLEP and its related activities to help others feel comfortable contributing to discussions and engaging in this SEL Program. The data collected through this study, which captured the views of students towards their experience with the CLEP, all indicate that peer support plays a vital role with helping students to feel comfortable participating in SEL programs. The data collected which yielded Themes 2, 3, and 4 reflected the perspectives of students towards their experience participating in the CLEP. These perspectives included insights regarding reasons why students like to participate in the program, their preferred activities, and reasons student participants expressed as to why they think others might not be inclined to participate in the program. Students shared perspectives indicating that if students participating in the CLEP model the Choose Love Formula and encourage other students to feel safe with participating, then they will benefit from learning the SEL skills as well as help others benefit as well.

Recommendations and Implications for Educators

**Professional Development.** Educators should initiate as well as participate in professional development opportunities to continuously enhance their skillset with delivering SEL instruction through collaboration. Educators across both cases, as well as one student, discussed ideas for ways in which the CLEP could be improved to include more professional development resources and opportunities for participating schools and educators. If educators collaborate with colleagues and others involved with SEL initiatives, they will learn about the experiences of others and strategies to implement in their own practice. This may help educators to feel more comfortable in their role with delivering SEL instruction.
School leaders should utilize data driven decision making to identify and create professional development opportunities to build capacity within the district with SEL program implementation. School leaders could start by assessing educator perceptions of competence and confidence implementing SEL initiatives, and then upon reviewing this data design professional development opportunities geared towards closing the gaps. This information would also help upper level district administration to provide their leadership support to building administrators involved with building level implementation of SEL programs, as well as SEL coordinators. School leaders could also schedule professional development sessions into school district calendar to allow for common planning time and collaboration, or facilitate SEL Professional Learning Communities. If administrators understand the needs of educators related to SEL implementation, and provide support to administrators and staff as needed, then the district will demonstrate its commitment to SEL as well as reduce any feelings of frustration people may experience with implementation efforts.

**Build Capacity.** In order to effectively implement SEL programs and sustain implementation efforts over time, schools should seek to build internal capacity with delivering SEL by identifying SEL coordinator(s) and developing an SEL committee to lead implementation. The committee could be led by coordinator(s) and building administrative leadership, and could also include a cross section of staff to invite to participate in addition to students and parents. Through doing this, the school would instill a sense of shared ownership and leadership with SEL implementation that will help sustain implementation efforts over time.

**Home-School Partnerships.** Educators should communicate with parents regarding school-based SEL initiatives as this will foster better home-school partnerships and help parents to support SEL in their children at home. Participants at HES and PS discussed the ways in
which communications about the CLEP are sent home (i.e., newsletters). Educators across cases also discussed concerns for how some students might not receive SEL instruction at home, mentioning this as one of multiple reasons why SEL instruction should be offered in school. Through informing parents of the school’s SEL instruction and related developments, parents may be more equipped to reinforce SEL concepts taught at school within the student’s home.

**Implementation Planning.** Educators should design building schedules to prioritize SEL and ensure that adequate time is allotted on a regular basis for program implementation. This will help schools to implement the programs with fidelity also on a regular basis and prevent interruptions that could decrease the effectiveness of the program.

**Shared Ownership.** School leaders should ensure that SEL related data regarding program implementations in progress are continuously made available to stakeholders within the school community. Through having this information, educators involved with program implementation can modify plans as necessary to ensure that SEL programs are meeting the needs of students.

**Community Building.** Schools should host conferences to facilitate discussion and collaboration between students, faculty, staff, and administration regarding SEL program implementation. As described by educator and student participants, students greatly enjoyed the experience of attending a “Choose Love” conference at a local university and having the opportunity to meet same aged peers who were also participating in the program. If schools take the initiative to host conferences and invite others to come share their experiences, then they will help build connections between educators that may support effective implementation practices.
Establishment of Trustworthiness

In an effort to establish trustworthiness throughout the research design as well as the data collection and analysis process of this study, the researcher integrated the use of multiple data collection and analysis strategies to ensure that the following dimensions were addressed: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Merriam, 2009). These evaluative criteria were considered through multiple strategies employed by the researcher throughout this study.

Credibility

The credibility of the study can be defined as the degree to which the findings are congruent with reality and that the researcher measures what they intend to measure (Merriam, 2009, p. 213). In order to ensure credibility within the interpretation of information gathered, and prevent bias based on the researcher’s past personal or professional experiences from interfering with the research process, the researcher consistently sought to maintain a high level of self-awareness and objectivity throughout the data collection and analysis processes. The researcher facilitated each interview and observation in a consistent manner that focused on the research questions through utilizing the same semi-structured interview and observation forms. The interview and observation instruments were designed by the researcher to gather specific data related to the research questions, while also allowing opportunity for new information to emerge in each individual interview and observation according to what participants were willing to share.

Following the advice of Merriam (2009), who stated “Investigators need to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken,” the researcher maintained a reflexive journal. This was utilized to help the researcher reflect and stay attune to
the perceptions and emotions that arose throughout the data collection and analysis process. Through writing about her thoughts and reactions to the research process, the researcher was able to maintain a high level of neutrality and objectivity while conducting the data collection and analysis process.

The researcher also conducted “member checking” with student and educator participants during and after interviews to ensure that the researcher’s interpretations of the information were consistent with the views of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 236). During interviews, the researcher asked follow-up questions, developed during the interview and based on the answers provided by participants, to confirm if the researcher was correctly interpreting the information shared. The following quote provides an example of member checking during a student interview:

Q … So, am I correct in gathering that you feel that the program is important to have in school because it can help someone change how they respond to something?

Resp A: Yes, you are correct. It’s very important to us in this school, how we act and are polite to each other and how this is helping us so much.

The researcher aimed to “member-check” with students during interviews by asking follow up and clarifying questions to obtain confirmation that the researcher’s interpretation of student responses was consistent with what the student participants intended to express. Due to challenges associated with school schedules, some resulting from inclement weather, the researcher was unable to arrange formal follow-up interviews with students prior to analyzing the data. Therefore, the researcher closely reviewed the follow up questions asked of students during interviews that sought to ensure the researcher’s interpretation of the student’s response was accurate from the student’s point of view.
In addition to asking follow-up questions of participants during interviews to ensure accurate interpretation of the information shared, the researcher also provided educator participants with transcripts of their interviews. According to Merriam (2009), “The process involved in member checks is to take your preliminary analysis back to some of the participants and ask whether your interpretation ‘rings true’” (p. 217). The researcher emailed educator participants the transcripts of their interviews and invited feedback as to whether or not these participants agreed or disagreed, or had any questions or concerns regarding the data. These study participants did not express any disagreement with the data.

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings of the study can be generalized or applied to other settings (Merriam, 2009, p. 224). Since this study was qualitative and focused on the perspectives of educators and students in two cases, the findings are unique to this study and therefore may not transferable to other populations. However, in order to address this area so that readers can determine whether or not the findings of this study may apply to similar populations, the researcher approached the data collection process in a way that would yield descriptive information for the reader. First, the researcher conducted demographic surveys of participants and provided descriptions of the cases in chapter three. The researcher also took detailed field notes during site visits and meetings with participants in order to provide rich and thick description about the setting, participants, and procedures within the study (Merriam, 2009). While conducting observations and interviews, the researcher took detailed field notes on an ongoing basis in an effort to ensure that the overall data collection process was thoroughly recorded. Finally, in addition to using rich and thick description regarding the setting, participants and procedure of the study, the researcher utilized the support of an auditor who was
the researcher’s dissertation advisor to review the data and decisions made by the researcher throughout the data collection process (Krefting, 1991).

**Dependability**

According to Krefting (1991), the dependability of a qualitative research study refers to the degree to which “the findings would be consistent if the inquiry were replicated with the same subjects or in a similar context” (p. 175). In order to address the issue of trustworthiness in this area, the researcher collected data from various sources and provided detailed information on the data collection and analysis process. The perspectives of educators and students who participated in the CLEP were gathered through interviews. The researcher also collected program artifacts (a parent newsletter from HES and a student journal writing sample from PS) and conducted classroom observations of the program in progress. The researcher utilized the method of triangulation of data (demographic surveys, program artifacts, classroom observation notes, interview transcripts) to further ensure that the findings were consistent between data sources.

The researcher constantly compared data sources and looked for common threads that emerged in the data to develop codes (Merriam, 2009, p. 199). Once codes were established the, the researcher engaged in axial coding which helped define the categories, and the codes comprising each category (Merriam, 2009). The researcher coded the interview data first for both cases and then proceeded to analyze the program artifacts, assigning codes to these sources as well.

**Confirmability**

The researcher took multiple steps to address this area of trustworthiness within the study. According to Krefting (1991), in order to address this area, researchers must remain
objective and not be influenced by, or influence, the study (p. 175). The researcher consistently made a conscious effort to approach the interviews and overall data collection and analysis process maintaining a high level of objectivity. The researcher demonstrated a neutral and objective disposition during interviews by asking open-ended questions and refraining from sharing personal opinions or information during meetings with study participants. Additionally, the researcher audio-recorded interviews with participants and then had these recordings professionally transcribed. After receiving the completed transcripts, the researcher reviewed each transcript at least one time while listening to the audio recording, to ensure complete accuracy of the interview transcripts, and made edits wherever necessary.

Following the advice of Merriam (2009), who stated “Investigators need to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken,” the researcher maintained a reflexive journal. This was utilized to help the researcher reflect and stay attuned to the perceptions and emotions that arose throughout the data collect and analysis processes. Through writing about her thoughts and reactions to the research process, the researcher was able to maintain a high level of neutrality and objectivity while conducting the data collection and analysis process. The use of an external auditor to review the decisions made by the researcher and the data collected also helped ensure the confirmability of the study (Krefting, 1991). Through this confirmability audit, the auditor confirmed that the findings of this study were “grounded in the data” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which enhances the overall trustworthiness of the study.
Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, recommendations for future research are provided below.

Student

Student participants in this study discussed their views of the ways in which their peer interactions and relationships have improved as a result of their experience with the CLEP, while they also discussed the reasons for why some students might wish to refrain from participation. Students expressed their opinions that upon receiving encouragement from peers, other students would be more likely to participate in the CLEP. In light of these findings, a future qualitative study could include more classroom observations to explore how students participate in the CLEP in order to find additional ways to promote participation.

Educator

Educator participants in this study shared views indicating that they were eager to receive and share ideas with other educators who participated in the CLEP. The HES principal, Bonnie, in particular, shared how she would be interested in learning more from other building administrators to receive more practical strategies for supporting the program through her role as building leader. Other than the school counselor, HES educators expressed that they were not inclined to take on the responsibility of delivering SEL instruction to their classes because they were concerned that they are not equipped with the instructional skills necessary to do this with respect to SEL. In order to investigate this further, a future qualitative study could explore how collaboration between educator colleagues regarding SEL initiatives might influence feelings of competence towards delivering SEL Program Instruction.
As HES, educators shared their views that the school counselor is the lead implementer of the CLEP, and while they all expressed the utmost faith in her ability to succeed at this, the amount of pressure that this can put onto one person was acknowledged by HES principal and others. Educator perspectives towards who should be responsible for delivering SEL instruction differed between participants across cases in this study. The possibility of developing an SEL committee was not directly mentioned, however a student group was referenced in discussion about the “Choose Love Creator” group at PS. In light of these findings, a future qualitative study could investigate how a school-based SEL program committee supports the implementation of an SEL program and sustains implementation over time.

Educator participants across cases discussed their views as parents, some of whom had children who also participated in the CLEP at HES. Educators who self-identified as parents of students who participated in the CLEP at HES discussed how they felt their children have utilized the language associated with the program independently at home. Educators across both cases also expressed concerns for how some students may not receive SEL related guidance at home as a reason for why it is necessary to implement SEL programming in schools. Bronfenbrenner (1979) noted concerns that the home-school mesosystem was becoming increasingly disconnected over time. In light of this research and the findings of this study, a future mixed-methods study could investigate whether or not school-based communication with parents regarding SEL initiatives fosters home-school partnerships, and also whether or not these communications help parents to support SEL with their children at home.

Educator participants across cases in this study discussed their views of how SEL should be treated as a priority in schools and how SEL can serve as a foundation for other learning. The challenges of time and scheduling were also acknowledged throughout interviews. In light of
this, a future qualitative study could investigate how does SEL programs fit into the process of developing a school building master schedules in comprehensive public schools.

A summary of recommendations for future research, based on the student and educator perspectives shared throughout this study, is provided in Table 25.
### Table 25

**Suggestions for Future Research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder / Theme</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Recommendation Category</th>
<th>Areas of Future Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students / Themes 2, 3, 4</td>
<td>Model the Choose Love Formula (Courage, Gratitude, Forgiveness, Compassion), especially during social interactions</td>
<td>Support Peers</td>
<td>How do students perceive the Choose Love Formula (Courage, Gratitude, Forgiveness, Compassion) as part of their daily interactions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students / Theme 3</td>
<td>Respect others and their participation in program (be a good listener)</td>
<td></td>
<td>How does the behavior of students who participate in the CLEP influence the participation of others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators / Themes 1 and 3</td>
<td>Collaborate with colleagues and others involved with promoting SEL initiatives</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>What are the perceptions of educators towards collaborating with colleagues regarding SEL initiatives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators / Themes 1 and 3</td>
<td>Identify SEL Coordinator(s) • Develop SEL Committee; Involve cross section of staff to invite along with students and parents to participate</td>
<td>Build Capacity</td>
<td>How does the presence of an SEL coordinator support efforts to implement the CLEP in schools?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators / Themes 1, 3, 4</td>
<td>Communicate with parents • Provide strategies and guidance for ways parents can reinforce learning at home (newsletters, weekly reports, host presentations…)</td>
<td>Home-School Partnerships</td>
<td>How does school-home communication about school-based SEL initiatives support home-school partnerships?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
Table 25  
*Suggestions for Future Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder / Theme</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Recommendation Category</th>
<th>Areas of Future Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educators / Theme 3</td>
<td>Design building schedules so SEL lessons can be implemented on a regular basis.</td>
<td>Implementation Planning</td>
<td>How does the building master scheduling process account for student SEL programmatic needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators / Themes 1, 2, 3</td>
<td>Make SEL data regarding programs implemented available to those who implement so there can be shared ownership and ongoing “regeneration” of practices as needed.</td>
<td>Shared Ownership</td>
<td>How does communication about SEL data influence educator practices with supporting SEL initiatives?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Educators / Themes 1 and 3 | Survey educators to assess confidence level with implementing SEL initiatives  
- Design PD to close gaps  
- Provide support to building administrator and SEL coordinators  
- Schedule professional development sessions into school district calendar to allow for common planning time and collaboration, or SEL Professional Learning Communities | Professional Development | How do the confidence levels of educators implementing SEL initiatives influence the creation of professional development opportunities? |
| Educators / Themes 1, 2, 3 | Host conferences to facilitate collaboration and offer opportunities for students as well as faculty/staff to meet each other and present on their experiences with SEL. | Community building | How does collaboration between schools and educators influence the motivation of educators to implement the CLEP? |
Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a summary of the research and findings associated with this study. The four themes that emerged from the data collected through this study were:

1. Perceived Role of SEL in Schools
2. Purpose of SEL Instruction
3. Implementation Requirements
4. Benefits of SEL

This chapter further summarized the findings, recommendations, and implications for educators as well as students. Educators viewed SEL as playing an important role in schools, while educator opinions regarding who should directly deliver SEL instruction vary. Educators and students alike viewed SEL instruction as having a multi-faceted purpose that is critical to supporting students. Educators and students felt that schools must meet various implementation requirements in order for an SEL program to be successful. Educator and students perceived SEL programming to offer a vast array of benefits for both educator and student participants. The ways in which this study addresses the trustworthiness of the research were discussed, and suggestions for future research were provided.

Study Summary

This study was designed to provide educators and students who participated in an SEL program, specifically the CLEP an opportunity to share their views towards school-based SEL programs based on their experiences with this program. The study consisted of a qualitative multiple case-study design in which demographic surveys, program artifacts, as well as information shared by educators and students during interviews contributed to the data for each case. Classroom observation data were also collected in one of the cases. The views of
educators towards their roles with participating in structured SEL programs, as well as the perspectives of educators and students towards their experience with a structured SEL program, lead to the emergence of four themes from the data.

Thank you to the educator and student participants for sharing your views and experiences as part of this research.
REFERENCES


Appendices
Appendix A:

Permission to Reprint CASEL Wheel

CASEL frequently receives requests to use and reproduce resources and graphics. We are pleased so many find value in our work and seek to incorporate our learnings and research into their own efforts. Permission is not required to link to any graphic, handout, article, or page on our website. We just ask that you credit CASEL, include our copyright, and link to www.casel.org when appropriate.

Permission must be requested to alter or translate any CASEL material. To request permission, please select the appropriate option below and send us a message with the specific request.

I am requesting permission to:
- [ ] Alter CASEL material
- [ ] Translate CASEL material

Message
What can we help you with?
Appendix B:

Permission to Reprint Choose Love Formula Image

---

Permission to Reprint Image in Dissertation
Scarlett Lewis <scarlett@jesselewischooselove.org>  Tue, Apr 7, 2020 at 9:12 AM
To: Liz Kennedy <lizkennedy5925@gmail.com>

Liz!!

So great to hear from you. I hope you and your family are well in this brave New World. Absolutely you have my permission to use any image associated with Choose Love. I can’t wait to see the final product! Be well.

Choosing love, Scarlett

> On Apr 7, 2020, at 9:02 AM, Liz Kennedy <lizkennedy5925@gmail.com> wrote:
> 
> > Dear Scarlett,
> > 
> > I hope this message finds you well.
> > 
> > I am writing to ask if I may please have your permission to reprint the below image in my doctoral dissertation which focuses on the Choose Love Enrichment Program. If this may be possible, I will note your approval in the dissertation as well. Please know that all references to the Choose Love Enrichment Program will be fully cited for the reader so that they may find the relevant information via the Choose Love website and other publications regarding the program.
> > 
> > ![image.png](attachment:image.png)
> > 
> > If any further information may be helpful related to this request, please let me know and I will be happy to provide it.
> > 
> > Sincerely,
> > 
> > Elizabeth Kennedy

---
Appendix C:

Educator Demographic Survey

Please complete this survey and answer all questions honestly.

Please complete the questions below. All information will be kept confidential.

1. Name____________________________________________________________________

2. Gender (check one): ☐ female ☐ male

3. Age: ___________ years old.

4. Number of Years in Education: ________

5. Please circle your role: Teacher   Counselor   Administrator

6. Subject Area: ____________________________________________________________

7. Years in Current Position:__________.

8. Ethnicity (optional):

 ☐ Caucasian (Non-Hispanic) ☐ Hispanic ☐ African-American ☐ Native American
 ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander ☐ Alaskan Native ☐ Hawaiian ☐ Mixed Race/Ethnicity

 ☐ Other (Please indicate) ____________________

9. Please provide your definition of Social Emotional Learning:
Appendix D:

Educator Interview

1. Based on your definition of SEL needs of students that you provided in the Demographic Survey, I would like you to explain your views on SEL programs in schools. For example, how do you view SEL programs in meeting the social emotional needs of students in school? Do you feel students need to experience SEL programs in general and if so, why?

2. How do you view your responsibilities with meeting the social and emotional needs of students in school?

3. As an educator, have you used any other type of SEL program?

4. What prompted you to decide to use the Choose Love Enrichment Program?

5. How do you think the Choose Love Enrichment Program addresses students’ SEL needs?

6. When you teach the lessons, do you change them in any way? Explain.

7. Since starting this program, what are your thoughts on it?
   a. What were some of the positive aspects of using this curriculum?
   b. What were some of the negative aspects of using this type of program?
   c. What changes or modifications would you suggest to make this better?
   d. How might others be motivated to use this program?

8. How does this type of program fit into the school day or week? Can you suggest a better schedule?

9. How do you think having an SEL program in school helps students change over time?

10. Are there any other benefits of using this program?

11. Why should people use this particular SEL program instead of others?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add about SEL programs in general or the Choose Love program, in particular?
Appendix E:

Classroom Observation Form

**Classroom Observation Form**
Obtain Lesson from online repository.

Date of observation:

Name of school:

Name of educator leading lesson:

Time of day:

Total number of students present:
Number of female students present:
Number of male students present:
Grade level:

Type of class (i.e., subject level):

What are the objectives of the lesson?

What materials are used to promote understanding?

Does the educator leading the lesson follow the prescribed directions for the lesson?  
Yes/No
Explain:

Explain how and why any part of the lesson has been changed.

How does the educator leading the lesson invite student questions and/or discussion?  
Explain:

How does the educator leading the lesson invite students to make personal connections to the content discussed as part of the lesson?  
Explain:
Appendix F:

Student Demographic Survey

Student Demographic Survey

Please complete this survey and answer all questions honestly.

Please complete the questions below. All information will be kept confidential.

1. Name____________________________________________________________________

2. Gender (check one): □ female □ male

3. Age: ___________ years old.

4. Grade Level: (circle one) K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

5. Ethnicity (optional):
   □ Caucasian (Non-Hispanic) □ Hispanic □ African-American □ Native American
   □ Asian/Pacific Islander □ Alaskan Native □ Hawaiian □ Mixed Race/Ethnicity
   □ Other (Please indicate) __________________________
Appendix G:

Student Interview

1. I understand that your school has offered the Jesse Lewis Choose Love program. I would like to learn more about your experience with this program. When is the program scheduled (which days during the week, how long each time)?

2. What do you think about the program? Please explain.

3. What was your favorite activity/lesson in the program? Please describe one activity that you enjoyed doing as part of this program.

4. Was there anything you did not like about this program, or something that was your least favorite?

5. Please also describe one activity where you learned the most or changed the most.

6. Has anything been difficult to do? Explain.

7. Do you think that participating in this program in school has helped you to change in any ways? Explain.

8. Do you think this type of program is important to have in school?

9. What changes would you suggest to make this program better?

10. Do you think other children would also like this program?

   Yes/No

   Please explain:

11. How might others be motivated to participate more in this program?

12. Do you think other schools should use this program? Please explain why or why not.
Appendix H:

Program Artifact (HES)

What’s Happening in Classroom Guidance!
2nd grade

This week we will focus on friendship skills. Choosing love means having the courage to use positive friendship skills when we have a conflict with a friend. We will learn the CALM way to deal with friendship problems. C-cooperate, A-ask questions, L-listen, M-make your move.
Appendix I

Program Artifact (PS)

Good morning,

My name is Jenny, and I am the leader of the Choose Love Creators. We are a group of PS Students that work to incorporate Choose Love into the school environment. This past year, PS has added Choose Love to the curriculum for the entire school. As part of that addition, I was asked to use one of the bulletin boards to make Choose Love Posters on a monthly basis to remind kids to choose love over hate, and I was privileged enough to experience firsthand how Choose Love took form, grew, and changed throughout our Choose Love Creators experience. This program has impacted my group and I in many ways and everyone had different takeaways. We have interviewed the girls from the Choose Love Creators group, and we received a variety of answers that reflected the robustness of the program. Some of the questions we asked were: How has the Choose Love Creators group impacted and helped you? How do you think this group incorporates Choose Love? How will you take the things you have learned in Choose Love to high school and beyond? And what do you value most about your experience with Choose Love?

The first question that we were asked was “How has the Choose Love Creators group impacted and helped you?” Personally, it has impacted me greatly. It took me out of a situation where I felt uncomfortable and had little self-esteem. This Choose Love program helped me to know who my true friends are and the friends that I can rely on. Choose Love showed me that I can be my true self and people will like me and want to be around me for who I am, as long as I’m always kind. This program allowed me to meet new people and see the people I knew in a way that I had not seen the before. It allowed me to make friends in new places. Choose Love also taught me to be a positive person. It taught me how to find positivity in all negativity and to always look on the bright side of life. Likewise, we took a student with social issues from the lower grades and welcomed her into our group. We watched as she blossomed from an initially reserved girl to a laughing, smiling friend, and, most importantly, began to trust us. It was really, really incredible when she stopped staring at the floor and started lifting her head up high and interacting with other people. And we took another girl, who didn’t know where she fit in and felt unwanted, into the group. At first, she was reluctant to join us for lunch, so it was really amazing when she joined us for lunch one day all by herself. Both of them have truly become our friends, and I think we are all happy that we got the chance to get to know them. So overall, from my point of view, this program has impacted me in a positive and great way.

The second question asked was: “How do you think this group incorporates Choose Love?” One of the Choose Love Creators commented that we are spreading kindness and love throughout the school. This group also enables all of us to love ourselves and others. We come together as a group to create something extraordinary that helps us develop as friends and help the school see that choosing love is the best choice to make in any difficult situation. We find peaceful and positive solutions to the more difficult situations we’re faced with, and treat everyone with the respect they deserve. One of the most important things we do in our group is help people who have nowhere else to go find a place; for example, one of my friends had been
left out and cast aside by her old friend group, and when she asked to be included, we let her in and helped her. It’s nice to see her finding her real friends in this group.

The third question asked was: How will you take the things you have learned in Choose Love to high school and beyond? This Choose Love program taught me, personally, how to be a leader, and how to make appropriate decisions as the head of a group of my peers. Now I know how to accept responsibility, but at the same time not abuse power. And according to the responses we’ve received, this it is not only a group where we just make posters, but also a safe place for all the girls. This group brought all the girls together, and helped us find each other. At high school, because of these experiences, I will know how to include people and recognize when people feel left out or upset. From all the original girls’ experience from the Choose Love program, it taught us that it’s a good thing to include more people from out of our group, and that change and growth are positive things. When the group initially split up, some people were confused and upset. When we were eventually told by our guidance counselor what the whole plan was, things became clear. The conclusion taught us lessons in flexibility that I can take on to high school and beyond. That we can take on to high school and beyond.

The last question we were asked was: What do you value most about your experience with Choose Love? Overall choose love has taught all of us to be better members of a community. Even though our group has been through some ups and some downs, we were able to stay united as one big group. We’ve had each other for support and help when we need anything, and we know that in the group, there is always someone to talk to. Choose Love is a place for all of the girls to feel safe and comfortable. This is important to members of the Choose Love Creators. This is a place for people that don’t have a place in the social structures of our grade to come and be welcomed. Because although it’s just middle school, sometimes it can be hard to find the right thing to say, or keep up with trends, or buy the new clothes, and so it can be hard to fit in. This is a place where we all have a purpose, and more than that, friends. Choose Love taught us the real meaning of how to be strong, to be courageous, to have gratitude, and forgiveness. This entire experience is going to stay with me for the rest of my life, and I know that it’s had a strong impact on the rest of the group as well.

I am so delighted that I am part of a group that brings our little corner of happiness to our school community, and changes it for the better a little at a time. Choose Love is a huge and exciting part of my life that I will cherish forever. I admire Scarlett Lewis for turning a tragic and horrific incident into love. All of the Choose Love creators at PS. all know how hard it is to find forgiveness in other people’s actions. We have so much admiration for her. Overall I could not be more excited to see where this group goes into the future, and I’m so grateful to be a part of it.

Thank you!
Appendix J:

Permission to Reprint Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Triangle

Dear Dr. Neuberg,

I hope this message finds you well.

I am currently finishing my dissertation on a topic related to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and was wondering if I could have permission to reuse the image of the triangle used in your 2010 article?

If this may be possible I would greatly appreciate it.

Thank you,

Elizabeth Kennedy
(917) 753-5900

---

Hi. Yes, that would be fine. Just please cite the paper when you present the figure.

Congrats on your dissertation.

Best,

Steve
Appendix K:
Letter and Consent Form for School or District Administrators

Letter and Consent Form (Administrator)

Department of Education and Educational Psychology
181 White Street, Danbury, CT 06810

Dear (Superintendent/Principal):

My name is Elizabeth Kennedy and I am a doctoral candidate at Western Connecticut State University. I am also the Director of Pupil Personnel Services in the Brewster Central School District in Brewster, NY as well as a Nationally Certified School Psychologist. I am seeking district permission to carry out a study in your (school/district).

This study is designed to examine the impact of the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment program on educators and students who participate in this program. This study is also designed to explore the perceptions of educators towards meeting the social-emotional needs of students through providing structured social-emotional learning programs in schools, and to understand the views of students who have participated in a social-emotional learning program. In particular, I am focusing on the experiences that students, teachers and administrators have had with participating in the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program. In order to learn more about the experiences that students, teachers and administrators have had with this program, I would like to (a) conduct 30-minute interviews with administrators as well as teachers and/or counselors who have been consistently involved with the direct delivery and implementation of this program over the past year; (b) conduct classroom observations of the program in action; (c) collect program artifacts (specifically student work samples from learning activities that are part of this program); (d) conduct 30-minute focus group interviews with groups of students, consisting of up to five students in each group.

I will also ask parents for consent to assess the pre-survey and post-survey data from the Choose Love Enrichment Program in order to understand changes over time in student responses.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by Western Connecticut State University's Institutional Review Board (Protocol # XXXX). It is the goal of this study to obtain information regarding how educators perceive their roles with meeting the social-emotional needs of students, with particular attention given to the experiences that educators and students have had with the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. The collected data will be coded to ensure that identifying information for participating schools, educators, and students are confidential.
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via e-mail at ekenney@brewsterschools.org or via cell phone at (917) 753-5900. I also welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person to discuss this research request.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth A. Kennedy

I _______________________ agree that the study described above can be conducted in

Print Name

___________________________ School District.

___________________________ Signature _______________ Date
Appendix L:  
Letter and Consent Form (Educator)  

Department of Education and Educational Psychology  
181 White Street, Danbury, CT  06810  

Dear (Educator):  

My name is Elizabeth Kennedy and I am a doctoral candidate at Western Connecticut State University. I am also the Director of Pupil Personnel Services in the Brewster Central School District in Brewster, NY as well as a Nationally Certified School Psychologist. I am seeking your consent to participate in a study about the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program.  

This study is designed to examine the impact of this program on educators and students who participate in the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program. This study is also designed to explore the perceptions of educators towards meeting the social-emotional needs of students, and to understand the views of students who have benefited from their participation in a social-emotional learning program. In particular, I am focusing on the experiences that students, teachers and administrators have had with participating in the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program. In order to learn more about the experiences that students, teachers and administrators have had with this program, I would like to (a) conduct a 30-minute individual interview with you, and possibly conduct 2-3 classroom observations of the program in action; and (b) conduct 30-minute focus group interviews with groups of students, consisting of no more than five students in each group. I would like to ask you to recommend students who you feel have benefited the most from participating in the Choose Love Enrichment Program.  

This research study has been reviewed and approved by Western Connecticut State University's Institutional Review Board (Protocol # XXXX). It is the goal of this study to obtain information regarding the impact of the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program on educators and students who participate in it. It is also the goal of this study to explore how educators perceive their roles with meeting the social-emotional needs of students, with particular attention given to the experiences that educators and students have had with the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program.  

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. The collected data will be coded to ensure that identifying information for participating schools, educators, and students are confidential. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at ekennedy@brewsterschools.org or at (917) 753-5900. I also welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person to discuss this research request.  

362
Sincerely,

Elizabeth A. Kennedy
I agree that I will participate in study described above.

________________________  ______________________
Print Name __________________________ in __________

________________________  ______________________
Print Name __________________________ School District.

_____________  ________________
Signature                                           Date
Appendix M:
Letter and Consent Form (Parents and Guardians)

Department of Education and Educational Psychology
181 White Street, Danbury, CT 06810

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Elizabeth Kennedy and I am a doctoral candidate at Western Connecticut State University. I am also a Director of Pupil Personnel Services in the Brewster Central School District in Brewster, New York. I am seeking your consent for your son or daughter to participate in a project about the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program.

This study is designed to examine the impact that the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program may have on the educators and students who participate in it. It is designed to understand the views of students regarding their participation in a structured social-emotional learning program such as Choose Love. In order to learn more about the experiences that students have had with this program, I would like to conduct interviews with groups of students and obtain the results of the pre-survey and post-survey responses from your son or daughter. These interviews are anticipated to take approximately 20-30 minutes and would take place at a non-instructional time during the school day or immediately after the end of the school day. I would collaborate with the administration at your child’s school to either meet with the students in person, or else set up Skype or Facetime technology that would allow us to speak and conduct these interviews. A teacher and/or administrator would be present with your child’s group as I conduct the interview.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by Western Connecticut State University's Institutional Review Board (Protocol # XXXX). It is the goal of this study to obtain information regarding how students engage with the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. The collected data will be coded to ensure that your child’s participation is kept confidential.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. If you consent to your child participating in this study, please sign and return this form. If you have any questions, please contact me via email at ekennedy@brewsterschools.org or via cell phone at (917) 753-5900

If you agree to have your child participate in this study, please sign the attached statement and return it in the enclosed envelope by XXX, 2017.
Sincerely,

Elizabeth Kennedy

I, ____________________________, the parent/legal guardian of ____________________________ in the ____________________________ school district

(Printed name of parent or guardian) (Print Student Name)

acknowledge that the researcher has explained to me the purpose of this research study, identified any risks involved, and offered to answer any questions I may have about the nature of my child’s participation. I voluntarily consent to my child’s participation. I understand all information gathered during this project will be completely confidential.

Signature of Parent or Guardian: ____________________________

Date ____________
Appendix N:
Letter and Assent Form (Student)

Student Information Form to Participate in a Research Study

Dear Student:

My name is Elizabeth Kennedy and I am student at Western Connecticut State University where I am pursuing my doctoral degree.

As part of my doctoral program, I would like to complete a study that helps me to understand more about the experience students have in the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program. In order to do this, I would like to meet with you in a small group to ask you questions about what the program has meant to you.

As I collect information as part of this study, please know that I will not use your name. Your participation in this project will be confidential. When I collect information, I will use numbers instead of names so that your participation is kept private.

You will be a volunteer for this study and you may withdraw your participation at any time, if you wish to do so. If you have questions, please contact me via email at e kennedy@brewsterschools.org.

If you would like to be in my study, please print and sign your name below and print the name of your school and today’s date.

________________________________________
Print student name

________________________________________
Student signature

________________________________________
School Name

________________________________________
Date

Thank you,

Elizabeth Kennedy
Tables
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maslow (1943)</td>
<td>A Theory of Human Motivation</td>
<td>Discusses how an individual’s physiological and emotional needs exist and interrelate on a hierarchy. The ways in which an individual’s needs are met or unmet influences his or her behavior.</td>
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<td>Bronfenbrenner (1979)</td>
<td>Contexts of Child Rearing: Problems and Prospects</td>
<td>Seeks to address a gap in research regarding how the environment in which a child lives influences his or her development. An individual’s development is influenced by the settings and contexts in which he or she lives.</td>
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Table 2

*Studies Related to Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model and Maslow’s Theory*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/Author</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Method/Purpose</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What Schools Need to Know About Fostering School Belonging: A Meta-analysis; Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, Hattie, and Waters (2018)</td>
<td>N = 67,378 students (ages 12 to 18) from 51 studies</td>
<td>Quantitative meta-analysis; study and provide guidance on the factors schools should recognize and emphasize to best support students.</td>
<td>Out of all of the factors studied as predictors of school belonging, teacher support and positive personal characteristics were the strongest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Social Development in Context: An Examination of Some propositions in Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory; Ashiabi and O’Neal (2015)</td>
<td>N = 28,064 children (ages 6-11) whose information was retrieved from the National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH) 2007</td>
<td>Quantitative survey analysis; determine the effects of contextual influences and proximal processes on child development</td>
<td>A person’s development is influenced by contextual and proximal factors. Proximal processes may be more influential than contextual factors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying Organizational Theories to Action Research in Community Settings: A Case Study in Urban Schools; Bryan, Klein and Elias (2007)</td>
<td>N = 1 school district</td>
<td>Qualitative case study; applying organizational theories to action research in community settings in three areas: the ecological context, collaboration and consensus, and sustainability.</td>
<td>It is important to gain thorough knowledge of an organization’s system and structure in order to properly initiate and execute action research in community settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory to Understand Community Partnerships: An Historical Case Study of One Urban High School; Leonard (2011)</td>
<td>N = 1 school district</td>
<td>Qualitative, historical case study analysis; understand the how a school district evolved over time within an ecological context.</td>
<td>Findings affirmed Bronfenbrenner’s theory and need for relationships between systems to support student development outcomes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*CASEL’s Three Part Program Review of SEL Programs (2008)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review</th>
<th>Universal Review</th>
<th>Indicated Review</th>
<th>After-School Review</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>N =</strong></td>
<td>277,977</td>
<td>11,337</td>
<td>34,989</td>
<td>324,303</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| # of studies             | 180              | 80               | 57                  | 317        |

| Additional Criteria (if any) | Included students who showed signs of social, emotional, or behavioral problems, but had not been diagnosed with a mental disorder or need for special education (Payton et al., 2008). | Implemented outside of school hours during at least part of a school year Supervised or monitored by adults Had goal of developing one or more personal and social skills (Payton et al., 2008). |

| Key Findings | SEL Programs were effective when conducted by school staff, suggesting that these interventions can be incorporated into routine educational practice (Payton et al., 2008). | SEL Programs were effective when conducted by school staff, suggesting that these interventions can be incorporated into routine educational practice (Payton et al., 2008). | SEL interventions were effective in both the school and after-school setting and for students with and without presenting problems (Payton et al., 2008). |

370
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/Author</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Method/Purpose</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social and emotional learning at the middle level: one school’s journey;</td>
<td>$N = 1$ middle school consisting of 900 students</td>
<td>Qualitative case study; Analysis of perceptions towards whole school implementation of Second Step program.</td>
<td>Lessons that teachers creatively developed on their own by expanding upon scripted SEL curriculum were well received. SEL is an essential part of supporting the whole-child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aidman and Price (2018)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom emotional climate, teacher affiliation, and student conduct;</td>
<td>$N = 2000$ students from 90 fifth- and sixth-grade classrooms</td>
<td>Multi-methods analysis to examine factors related to classroom emotional climate and student conduct.</td>
<td>Supportive classroom environments can have a positive effect on student conduct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, and Salovey (2011)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The impact of enhancing students’ social and emotional learning: a meta-</td>
<td>$N = 270,034$ K High School Students who participated in 213 School-based SEL programs</td>
<td>Quantitative Meta-Analysis</td>
<td>Academic achievement improved for students who participated in school-based SEL programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>analysis of school-based universal interventions; Durlak et al., (2011)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early social-emotional functioning and public health: the relationship</td>
<td>$N = 753$ (high-risk control group, n = 367; non-high-risk, normative group, n = 386)</td>
<td>Quantitative, Longitudinal and nonintervention study of associations between prosocial skills in Kindergarten and outcomes in young adulthood</td>
<td>Levels of social competence measured in Kindergarten students were found to be predictive indicators of future outcomes as young adults with regards to social adjustment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between kindergarten social competence and future wellness; Jones, Greenberg, Crowley (2015)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4

**Studies Supporting the Efficacy of SEL Programs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/Author</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Method/Purpose</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Two-year impact of a universal social-emotional learning curriculum: group differences from developmentally sensitive trends over time; Low et al. (2019) | $N = 9,262$<br>Teacher n = 321<br>Student n = 8,941 | Mixed methods; assess student outcomes following 2 years of Second Step program implementation. | Students in *Second Step* schools showed more improvement than students in non-*Second Step* schools.

<p>| Multilevel associations between school-wide social-emotional learning approach and student engagement across elementary, middle, and high schools; Yang, et al., (2018). | $N = 25,896$&lt;br&gt;Students from elementary, middle, and high school | Quantitative; examine the student and school level main effects of student relationships in school. | Student engagement is a multilevel construct that is influenced by ongoing and reciprocal interactions between multilevel systems across individuals and school context. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/Author</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Method/Purpose</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contextual influences on the implementation of a school-wide intervention to promote students’ social, emotional, and academic learning; Anyon, Nicotera, and Veeh (2016)</td>
<td>$N = 30$ (24 teachers, 3 administrators, 3 social work interns)</td>
<td>Mixed Methods convergent analysis of focus group, observation, and survey data to examine contextual influences on the whole-school implementation of the Responsive Classroom model</td>
<td>Three contextual factors influence implementation fidelity: (1) staff members’ beliefs about behavior change and management, (2) organizational capacity such as principal and teacher buy-in, and (3) intervention support system such as training and technical assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sustainability of school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports; Coffey and Horner (2012)</td>
<td>$N = 117$ schools</td>
<td>Quantitative logistic regression analysis to determine sustainability features of SWPBIS implementation</td>
<td>Schools that attempt to use EBIs for students with intensive behaviors are more likely to be successful when there's already a universal approach in place;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a tiered response model for social-emotional learning through interdisciplinary collaboration; Maras et al. (2015)</td>
<td>Teacher $N = 9$ Student $N = 138$</td>
<td>Mixed methods study including Rating scales (administered to assess the social-emotional skills of students between grades K-2) and other data (office disciplinary referrals, academic skills)</td>
<td>A tiered response model for SEL is needed to address the mental health needs of youth. School psychologists are well positioned to utilize their consultation skills and training to help promote systems change with integrating, continuously assessing, and enhancing SEL approaches in school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/Author</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Method/Purpose</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School psychologists’ knowledge and use of evidence-based SEL interventions; McKevitt (2012)</td>
<td>N = 331 School Psychologists</td>
<td>Mixed-methods; survey evaluation of school psychologist awareness of evidence-based SEL programs</td>
<td>School psychologists have limited awareness of the majority of published, evidence-based SEL programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher perceptions of student needs and implications for positive behavior supports; Feuerborn and Chinn (2012)</td>
<td>N = 69 teachers</td>
<td>Qualitative; open ended surveys which identified common themes that teachers indicated as sustainability features for School-wide Positive Behavior Supports</td>
<td>Teachers, particularly new teachers, would benefit from training in how to identify a student who may be experiencing feelings of internalized distress and implement effective intervention strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring the perceived benefits and limitations of a school-based social-emotional learning program: A concept map evaluation; Haymovitz, Houseal-Allport, Lee, and Svistova (2017)</td>
<td>N = 32 students in grades 7 &amp; 8, educators, parents (N for each sub-group is unknown due to the anonymity of the process)</td>
<td>Mixed-methods; Community-based concept mapping procedure to understand perceived impact of the Social Harmony SEL Program</td>
<td>In order for SEL program implementation efforts to be successful, school administrators need to appoint a “full-time leader” who can serve as the coordinator for the various aspects of the program and facilitating its implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respected: Perspectives of youth on high school &amp; social and emotional learning; DePaoli, et al. (2018)</td>
<td>N = 1,348 students between middle school and high school and young adults (post-high school age 16-22)</td>
<td>Multi-methods; interviews and survey data obtained student perspectives regarding their experience in high school and perceptions and experience with social and emotional learning programs.</td>
<td>Students from strong SEL schools report a more positive social climate and learning environment, doing better academically, and being better prepared for life than those in weak SEL schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

*Original Sample of Potential Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>School Name (Pseudonyms used)</th>
<th>School Population</th>
<th>Grade Levels</th>
<th>Public or Private</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South-Central US</td>
<td>Hamilton Elementary School</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>K – 4</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Parker School</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>PreK – 8</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Lincoln Middle School</td>
<td>713</td>
<td>6 – 8</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Roosevelt Elementary School</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>PreK – 5</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Southwest</td>
<td>John F. Kennedy School</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>K – 6</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8
*Hamilton Elementary School (HES) Educator Participants’ Profiles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Years in Education</th>
<th>Years in Current Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonnie</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>School Administrator</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>10-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristen</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>10-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades K-2</td>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madeline</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades K-2</td>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reagan</td>
<td>21-29</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades K-2</td>
<td>&gt;5</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades K-2</td>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>6-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades K-2</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurie</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades 3-4</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades 3-4</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades 3-4</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades 3-4</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>10-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Pseudonyms</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Years in Education</td>
<td>Years in Current Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>&gt;60</td>
<td>Content Specialist, PreK – 8</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Teacher, Grades 3-5</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selena</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Humanities, Grades 3-8</td>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>10-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10
Hamilton Elementary School (HES) Student Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannon</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jude</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11

*Parker School (PS) Student Participant Profiles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doreen</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12  
*Definition of Choose Love Enrichment Program Unit Terms*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>Courage is the willingness and ability to work through obstacles despite feeling embarrassment, fear, reluctance, or uncertainty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>Gratitude is mindful thankfulness and the ability to be thankful even when things in life are challenging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>Forgiveness means to choose to let go of anger and resentment toward yourself or someone else, to surrender thoughts of revenge, and to move forward with your personal power intact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion in Action</td>
<td>Compassion is the understanding of a problem or the suffering of another and acting to solve the problem or alleviate the suffering. Students apply their empathy and communication skills to support one another through compassionate action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 13

*Choose Love Enrichment Program Recommendations for Lesson Delivery*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Number of Lessons in each of the Four Units</th>
<th>Total Number of Lessons</th>
<th>Number of Minutes per Lesson</th>
<th>Number of Weeks for Each Unit</th>
<th>Total Number of Weeks (at pace of 1 lesson per week)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Grade</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Grade</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Grade</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25-40</td>
<td>4-6 (1 lesson per week)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Grade</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30-45</td>
<td>4-6 (1 lesson per week)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Grade</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30-45</td>
<td>4-6 (1 lesson per week)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>15-30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School (Grades 6, 7, 8)</td>
<td>7 “Brain Blasts”</td>
<td>28 “Brain Blasts”</td>
<td>“Brain Blasts”</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 “Brain Blast” Lesson per week followed by “Power Surges” on the remaining days each week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>7 weeks (1 unit lesson per week)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School (Grades 9, 10, 11, 12)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14  
**Neuroscience Behind Choose Love Enrichment Program**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parts of Brain</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lizard Brain (Reptilian)</td>
<td>Brainstem and cerebellum; responsible for body’s vital functions, i.e., breathing, heart rate, body temperature; reactive (Kukk, 2018; MacLean, 1967)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbat Brain (Mammalian Brain)</td>
<td>Responsible for social and emotional behaviors, quick value judgements, influences initial behavior when experiencing something (Kukk, 2018; MacLean, 1967)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Brain (Prefrontal Cortex)</td>
<td>Responsible for imagination, thought, planning, and decision-making (Kukk, 2018; MacLean, 1967).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**  
All three parts of brain influence behavior, knowledge of how this happens can inspire more self-awareness and better decision making. “The Jesse Lewis Choose Love Foundation wants to help everyone learn how to leave the lizard, and to nudge the numbat toward hugging the human” (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019, p. 30).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym Initial</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Calm Problem-Solving Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Collaborate</td>
<td>Students consciously choose to collaborate to solve a problem. They decide working together (with one another or with an adult) is important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Ask Questions</td>
<td>How do I feel? How do you feel? What do I see happening? What do I hear happening?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Listen</td>
<td>Practice listening skills. Notice what parts of stories are similar or different.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Make Your Move</td>
<td>Decide what to do next and come up with solutions together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categories and Codes</td>
<td>HES Educators</td>
<td>PS Educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category 1: Educator Participant Perspectives</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Observations of Student Participation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Sense of Responsibility with Implementing SEL</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Sense of Competency</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) School Obligation</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) SEL as Foundation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) SEL as Priority</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>61</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category 2: Educator and Parent Perspective</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Enhancing Resilience</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Home-School Connection</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td>76</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* This theme did not include any student responses.
Table 17

*Theme 2: Purpose of SEL Instruction, Categories and Frequencies of Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories and Codes</th>
<th>HES Educators</th>
<th>HES Students</th>
<th>PS Educators</th>
<th>PS Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category 1: Addressing SEL Needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Addressing Basic Needs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Emotional Safety</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Personal Growth and Development</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 2: Strategies for Coping with Challenges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Calming Strategies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Reflection</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Self-empowerment</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 3: Values/Skills Learned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Civic Responsibility</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Empathy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Responsible Decision-Making</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Self-Regulation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Self-Awareness</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Social Skills</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>55</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 18
Themes 3: Implementation Requirements, Categories and Frequencies of Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1: Format &amp; Structural Elements</th>
<th>HES Educators</th>
<th>HES Students</th>
<th>PS Educators</th>
<th>PS Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) CLEP Facilitators</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Schedule</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Time</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Duration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Frequency</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Daily Application</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 2: Implementation Challenges to Overcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) General Obstacles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Reasons Why Students Would Not Participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 3: Instructional Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Preferred Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) New Activity Ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Instructional Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Common Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Whole-School Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 4: Recommendations for Implementation</th>
<th>HES Educators</th>
<th>HES Students</th>
<th>PS Educators</th>
<th>PS Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Ideas for Improvement</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Professional Development</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Trust in Program Facilitators</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Codes for Theme 3:</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 19

*Theme 4: Benefits of SEL, Categories, and Frequencies of Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1: School Climate</th>
<th>HES Educators</th>
<th>HES Students</th>
<th>PS Educators</th>
<th>PS Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Community Building</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Equity</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) School/Classroom Management</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Improved Relationships</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Benefits for Educators</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Ripple Effect</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 2: Prevention and Intervention</th>
<th>HES Educators</th>
<th>HES Students</th>
<th>PS Educators</th>
<th>PS Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Prevention</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Intervention</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 3: SEL Outcomes of Choose Love Curriculum</th>
<th>HES Educators</th>
<th>HES Students</th>
<th>PS Educators</th>
<th>PS Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Courage</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Gratitude</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Forgiveness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Compassion in Action</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Choose Love Formula</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Continued)*
Table 19

*Theme 4: Benefits of SEL, Categories, and Frequencies of Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 4: Student Participant Perspectives</th>
<th>HES Educators</th>
<th>HES Students</th>
<th>PS Educators</th>
<th>PS Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Differences Between CLEP and Non-CLEP Schools</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Importance of SEL Instruction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Codes for Theme 4:</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 20

Support for CASEL SEL Competencies in Data Analysis and Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASEL SEL Competency</th>
<th>Theme, Category, Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Awareness</td>
<td>Theme 2, Category 3, Code 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Management</td>
<td>Theme 2, Category 3, Code 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Awareness</td>
<td>Theme 2, Category 3, Codes 1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Skills</td>
<td>Theme 2, Category 3, Code 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Decision-Making</td>
<td>Theme 2, Category 3, Code 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Perceived Role of SEL in Schools</td>
<td>Case 1 (HES)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I think it’s our responsibility to help them understand what they’re feeling and help them have the language to express themselves…” (Madeline, Kindergarten)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I would say that for years of not having something put in place at our school and for this to come on and be embraced with our teachers and our students, I have to agree it’s amazing to see what it’s done for a lot of the kids who didn’t have those strategies or those techniques to help deal with situations that may come up in their lives at home or at school and be able to solve them on their own and also in a thoughtful way. So that’s what I think about it.” (Stephanie, Second-grade teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Yeah, I see it as part of my job as a teacher to also meet those needs, the social emotional needs as well as the academic, because they’re not going to learn if they don’t have those needs met.” (James, fourth-grade teacher)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
Table 21  
*A Summary of Themes by Quotations from Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 2: Purpose of SEL Instruction</th>
<th>Case 1 (HES)</th>
<th>Case 2 (PS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Just the program itself, Choose Love, I mean everybody knows what love is and they want love, so I think that’s another big aspect that really makes this program wonderful is that the whole idea is based on love and everybody wants to feel love and wants to give love and I think that makes it easier for elementary kids to understand that because they know what love is and what they want to get out of it. So that’s why I also buy into it, just because also my wife was doing it and it was part of our program, but I feel that it’s even more so because it’s dealing with that kind of situation.”  <em>Frank, second-grade teacher</em></td>
<td>“When I was principal of the high school here, your problems multiply, and there are different things that you have to contend with in terms of violence, drugs, in terms of things like that. I think forever we knew that SEL was important because the kids that you face on your first day of teaching, you don’t know where they come from, you don’t know all the things that are in their lives and you walk in trying to get them to pay attention to the academic part of it and yet if they’re not well socially and emotionally you’re not going to get them to go anyplace and in the high school we had students like that that were addicted to drugs and depressed or suicidal and you didn’t go anyplace, and it’s not just high school.”  <em>David, content specialist</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It helps them understand their emotions and manage their emotions, like the breathing technique… take a deep breath in, take a deep breath out… When you have a child that has anger issues or is easily set off just learning those techniques, because nobody at home is teaching them, when you feel this way this is how you need to calm yourself down. So just learning those calming techniques and teaching them how to manage their emotions, it’s a fabulous tool, that I see myself doing, just from listening, I mean I’ve always done it, just take a deep breath in and then I carry it over from Kristen’s lessons to my class when they start getting rowdy and someone starts getting upset I say take a deep breath in… so I carry it over, it really has a calming effect, I think it helps them get a grip on noticing their emotions...”  <em>Stephanie, second-grade teacher</em></td>
<td>“Well there was this one activity where we learned about the lizard brain and how it taught us that you should think about other people before you do your actions. So that kind of taught me that you should really think about what you do because it could affect someone else and that you should kind of step out of your comfort zone sometimes and that kind of taught me, because this past month I’ve been doing a lot of things that I wouldn’t usually do, so I feel like that had the most effect on me.”  <em>Kelly, eighth-grade student</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 1 (HES)</td>
<td>Case 2 (PS)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 3: Implementation Requirements</strong></td>
<td>“I found that in teaching teachers how to do this I found that you have to individualize that also because they have different ways of doing things. You still have the same goal, you still have the same skills and things like that but you’ve got to take the resources out of choose love, which I believe is the ultimate remedy, everything is there, but you’ve also got to just like you do use the resource in the textbook, or you use other things, you really have to get them to adapt the teaching of it to their own style. It’s not strategic, you know, the resources are not exactly, it tells you what to do but you have lots of different strategies.” <em>(David, content specialist)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“at the end of announcements, Ms. (Principal) always says choose love or courage, empathy, yeah she always has a little message to throw in there.”</td>
<td>“We have to accept it and you have to make the time for it but we’ve done that here. I normally do it as part of my religion curriculum because if you look at this it’s not that different than, right?” <em>(Donna, fifth-grade teacher)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think that everybody has adaptations, I mean we follow the main point of the lesson or the main point of being taught, but I think everybody as a person would make adaptations too.” <em>(Stephanie, second-grade teacher)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“it would be better because if there were more counselors doing the Choose Love Program and maybe some parents doing it in home schools, there could be like a building where there would be meetings of what to do better in the Choose Love Program.” <em>(Barbara, second-grade student)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
Table 21

*A Summary of Themes by Quotations from Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 4: Benefits of SEL</th>
<th>Case 1 (HES)</th>
<th>Case 2 (PS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Benefits… I just think it’s doing great things for kids. I think… <em>HES</em> is a diverse group economically and so because of that kids come to us with all different capacities, various levels of capacities in dealing with day to day life and I think it levels the playing field in that sense.” (<em>Bonnie, Principal</em>)</td>
<td>“It’s a great program, it’s helped me and everybody in my class a lot, like we’ve learned that if you forgive it can make your life like way better. Like Scarlet forgave the man that killed her son, it made her life like way better. If she didn’t her life would be miserable to this day and out of a bad thing you can make a great program like she did. The one thing I wish she could make better is just make it worldwide. If it was world-wide everybody could just be learning about it and the world would just be way better than it is now.” (<em>Anthony, fifth-grade student</em>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 22

*Findings Related to Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Microsystem</td>
<td>Theme 1, Perceived Role of SEL in Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2, Purpose of SEL Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 3, Implementation Requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 4, Benefits of SEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesosystem</td>
<td>Theme 1, Perceived Role of SEL in Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 4, Benefits of SEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exosystem</td>
<td>Theme 4, Benefits of SEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macrosystem</td>
<td>Theme 4, Benefits of SEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronosystem</td>
<td>Theme 4, Benefits of SEL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 23

**Findings Related to Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs Hierarchy</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical/Physiological</strong></td>
<td>Theme 2, Category 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose of SEL Instruction; Addressing Basic SEL Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Safety/Security</strong></td>
<td>Theme 2, Category 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose of SEL Instruction; Addressing Basic SEL Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social</strong></td>
<td>Theme 2, Categories 2 &amp; 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose of SEL Instruction; Strategies for Coping with Challenges, Values and Skills Learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ego</strong></td>
<td>Theme 4, Category 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Benefits of SEL; SEL Outcomes of CLEP Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Actualization</strong></td>
<td>Theme 4, Category 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Benefits of SEL; SEL Outcomes of CLEP Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder / Theme</td>
<td>Recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students / Theme 4</strong></td>
<td>Model the Choose Love Formula (Courage, Gratitude, Forgiveness, Compassion), especially during social interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students / Theme 3</strong></td>
<td>Tell other students what you like about the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students / Themes 3 and 4</strong></td>
<td>Respect others and their participation in program (be a good listener)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educators / Theme 3</strong></td>
<td>Collaborate with colleagues and others involved with promoting SEL initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify SEL Coordinator(s)</td>
<td>Build Capacity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Recommendation Category</th>
<th>Implication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educators / Theme 3</td>
<td>Communicate with parents • Provide strategies and guidance for ways parents can reinforce learning at home (newsletters, weekly reports, host presentations…)</td>
<td>Home-School Partnerships</td>
<td>If school personnel communicate with parents about SEL initiatives in school, then this will foster better home-school partnerships and help parents to support SEL in their children at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design building schedules so SEL lessons can be implemented on a regular basis.</td>
<td>Implementation Planning</td>
<td>If building master schedules are designed with consideration of SEL as a priority, then schools will be better equipped to implement SEL programs with fidelity on a regular basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make SEL data regarding programs implemented available to those who implement so there can be shared ownership and ongoing “regeneration” of practices as needed.</td>
<td>Shared Ownership</td>
<td>If educators are regularly informed of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of SEL initiatives, then they can modify programs as needed to support successful program implementation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
### Table 24

*Recommendations and Implications for Stakeholders*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Recommendation Category</th>
<th>Implication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Educators / Themes 1 and 3 | Survey educators to assess confidence level with implementing SEL initiatives  
  - Design professional development to close gaps  
  - Provide support to building administrator and SEL coordinators  
  - Schedule professional development sessions into school district calendar to allow for common planning time and collaboration, or SEL Professional Learning Communities | Professional Development | If school leaders understand the needs of educators related to SEL implementation, and provide support to administrators and staff as needed, then the district will demonstrate its commitment to SEL as well as reduce any feelings of frustration people may experience with implementation efforts. |
| | Host conferences to facilitate collaboration and offer opportunities for students as well as faculty/staff to meet each other and present on their experiences with SEL | Community Building | If schools take the initiative to host conferences and invite others to come share their experiences, then they will help build connections between educators that may support effective implementation practices. |
### Table 25

**Suggestions for Future Research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder / Theme</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Recommendation Category</th>
<th>Areas of Future Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students / Themes 2, 3, 4</td>
<td>Model the Choose Love Formula (Courage, Gratitude, Forgiveness, Compassion), especially during social interactions</td>
<td>Support Peers</td>
<td>How do students perceive the Choose Love Formula (Courage, Gratitude, Forgiveness, Compassion) as part of their daily interactions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students / Theme 3</td>
<td>Respect others and their participation in program (be a good listener)</td>
<td></td>
<td>How does the behavior of students who participate in the CLEP influence the participation of others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators / Themes 1 and 3</td>
<td>Collaborate with colleagues and others involved with promoting SEL initiatives</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>What are the perceptions of educators towards collaborating with colleagues regarding SEL initiatives?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Educators / Themes 1 and 3 | Identify SEL Coordinator(s)  
- Develop SEL Committee;  
- Involve cross section of staff to invite along with students and parents to participate | Build Capacity | How does the presence of an SEL coordinator support efforts to implement the CLEP in schools? |
| Educators / Themes 1, 3, 4 | Communicate with parents  
- Provide strategies and guidance for ways parents can reinforce learning at home (newsletters, weekly reports, host presentations…) | Home-School Partnerships | How does school-home communication about school-based SEL initiatives support home-school partnerships? |

(Continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder / Theme</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Recommendation Category</th>
<th>Areas of Future Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educators / Theme 3</td>
<td>Design building schedules so SEL lessons can be implemented on a regular basis.</td>
<td>Implementation Planning</td>
<td>How does the building master scheduling process account for student SEL programmatic needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make SEL data regarding programs implemented available to those who implement so there can be shared ownership and ongoing “regeneration” of practices as needed.</td>
<td>Shared Ownership</td>
<td>How does communication about SEL data influence educator practices with supporting SEL initiatives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators / Themes 1, 2, 3</td>
<td>Survey educators to assess confidence level with implementing SEL initiatives</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>How do the confidence levels of educators implementing SEL initiatives influence the creation of professional development opportunities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Design PD to close gaps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Provide support to building administrator and SEL coordinators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Schedule professional development sessions into school district calendar to allow for common planning time and collaboration, or SEL Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Host conferences to facilitate collaboration and offer opportunities for students as well as faculty/staff to meet each other and present on their experiences with SEL.</td>
<td>Community building</td>
<td>How does collaboration between schools and educators influence the motivation of educators to implement the CLEP?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 26

*Perceived Strengths and Opportunities for Growth of CLEP*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Growth Opportunity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Provides activity ideas to elicit student participation (i.e., Listening Game)</td>
<td>• Offer guidance to educators regarding how to group students in ways that will help facilitate discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Program can be supported via single classroom or whole-school approaches</td>
<td>• Guidance needed for leading change process in order to obtain teacher “buy in” to try something new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enhances resilience in students</td>
<td>• Guidance needed to help schools decide who should lead it in their school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provides opportunities for home-school connections</td>
<td>• Need for more teacher training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Addresses basic SEL needs of students</td>
<td>• Guidance needed on developing building master schedules to support SEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Promotes sense of emotional safety in class environment</td>
<td>• Provide guidance on how to facilitate collaboration between CLEP lesson instructors and classroom teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Promotes personal growth and development</td>
<td>• Need for ongoing professional development opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Promotes calming strategies</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Promotes reflection</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Promotes self-empowerment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Inspires civic responsibility</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Inspires empathy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inspires responsible decision-making</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Inspires self-awareness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Promotes social skill development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexible length of lessons can be fit into most school schedules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
Table 26

**Perceived Strengths and Opportunities for Growth of the CLEP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Growth Opportunity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supports equity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports teacher-student relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspires “ripple effect” of positive behavior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhances multi-tiered support system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspires courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports CASEL competencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diaphragmatic breathing exercises that students enjoy and actively engage in, i.e. “Brave Breaths”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for cross-curricular connections (i.e., artwork re. CLEP)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to connect CLEP with other school endeavors (i.e. Random Acts of Kindness club)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaches perseverance which can help build academic stamina</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of visuals and multi-sensory approach to engage students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal writing activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensures students received guidance in this area if they don’t at home, ensures exposure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
Table 26
Perceived Strengths and Opportunities for Growth of the CLEP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Growth Opportunity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helps students realize it’s ok to have emotions, helps students label them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides structured environment for socialization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows latitude for creativity with lesson delivery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers opportunity for informal daily application</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figures
Figure 1. CASEL Wheel, from https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CASEL-Wheel-2.pdf; Copyright 2017 by CASEL. Reprinted with permission; Refer to Appendix A.
Figure 2. Choose Love Formula. From https://www.jesselewischooselove.org/. Copyright 2019. Reprinted with permission; Refer to Appendix B.
Figure 3. Initial Literature Search Process
Figure 4. Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model. Graphic developed by researcher.
Figure 5. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs triangle. Reprinted with permission from “Renovating the pyramid of needs: Contemporary extensions built upon ancient foundations,” by Kenrick, D. T., Griskevicius, V., Neuberg, S. L., & Schaller, M., 2010, Perspectives on psychological science, 5(3), 292-314. Refer to Appendix J.
Figure 6. Tiered Model of Support
Figure 7. Triangulation of data sources.
This week we will focus on friendship skills. Choosing love means having the courage to use positive friendship skills when we have a conflict with a friend. We will learn the CALM way to deal with friendship problems. C-cooperate, A-ask questions, L-listen, M-make your move.
EdD in Instructional Leadership
Department of Education and Educational Psychology
Dissertation Registration Form

Student: Elizabeth Anne Kennedy    Date: April 8, 2020

Dissertation Title: THE PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS TOWARDS A PROGRAM IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Dissertation Committee Members: See attached Dissertation Approval Page

For Office Use Only.

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Associate Director, Division of Graduate Studies