

Explaining Parental Perspectives on Social Emotional Learning

by

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ABSTRACT

Education in the United States is highly influenced by local perception, wants, and needs. Parents of children in school are a large portion of the voting block for local political candidates. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is an educational concept that has gained traction over the past 60 years but has undergone much scrutiny in recent years due to political polarization and media coverage. The purpose of this study is to determine whether parents have differing opinions of SEL which may be evidenced in which type of school they enroll their children: public, public charter, or private. This information may be beneficial for interested parties such as policymakers, educators, advocates, et cetera. Data from this research, which includes quantitative and qualitative information from parents with children in public, public charter, and private school, indicates that parents overwhelmingly approve of SEL and consider it a priority in their child(ren)'s education.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family. First, to my husband, Adam, who picked up the slack at home while I returned to school during our 20th year of marriage. You are patient, supportive and always a safe space for me to say what I need to say and feel what I need to feel. I choose you.

Next, to my four children: Hayden, Lila, Griffin and Alexa. The four of you will forever be my greatest work; being your mom will forever be my greatest privilege.

Hayden, thank you for being the family chauffeur your Junior and Senior years of high school. Your example of commitment, diligence, and work ethic are inspirational to me. Lila, thank you for always being the girl boss that you are. Your example of passion, creativity, and desire to be and do good are inspirational to me. Griffin, thank you for always being a rock in our family. Your example of ease, friendship, and loyalty are inspirational to me. Alexa, thank you for always keeping things interesting at home. Your example of joy, playfulness, and spontaneity are inspirational to me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is an educational structure to teach school-aged children social and emotional skills as part of their academic curriculum before graduating high school. All U.S. states currently have pre-K SEL competencies, although only 27 states report SEL standards for grades K-12 (Casel, 2022). Prior work indicates that there is current controversy surrounding the teaching of SEL in schools (Pollok, 2022; Anderson, 2022; Blad, 2020).

While SEL has been studied and implemented in some schools since the 1960s, it has not historically received as much attention at the national level as it has in the previous few years. With political polarization becoming increasingly extreme over the previous two decades (Johnson, et al., 2020) the public is seeing more reporting, both news and social, about a variety of controversial topics. The focus, and controversial, topic for this thesis is Social Emotional Learning. This topic is currently debated between different ideological groups because there are claims that SEL is 1. A subjective value system (Greene, 2019), 2. Not a subject necessary to be taught at school (Kingkade, 2021), 3. A system of indoctrination (McCaughey, 2021). Each of these claims have been made in news outlets through reporting on different perceptions of SEL in varying communities.

Policymakers, educators, mentors, counselors, guardians, parents, etc. will continue to debate whether schools should be teaching SEL. This argument will not be definitively settled in this thesis; however, because it is proven that desirable outcomes are persistent with SEL programs (Taylor, et al., 2017), more consideration is worth

expounding upon with further research. Groups of interest, which are proponents of SEL, would like to see it implemented in schools, understanding parents' perception of SEL is an important variable.

When asked during data collection, parents often indicate that they agree with different SEL standards and their applicability to providing a comprehensive education. However, some parents also demonstrate a wariness around SEL when the standards are not specified. There may be a disconnect between knowledge of SEL and understanding SEL (Watkins, 2021; Tyner, 2021; Sutton, 2021).

Historically, there has been little data related to parents' opinions of SEL. While these measurements are difficult to ascertain, one way to gauge parents' perceptions of SEL is to determine what type of school they enroll their children. The assertion for this thesis is that parents have differing perspectives of SEL which is indicated by what type of school they send their children.

Parents have the option to make choices about their children's education in the United States. The ability to receive a public education, for free, in the United States is a pillar of democracy. For over 150 years the American public has been assured an education through the 14th Constitutional Amendment. While many different formats for schools exist in the United States, with the exception of homeschooling, the major systems of education are free public school, free public charter school, and private school, which comes with a cost (n.d., 2023).

Generally, parents have a choice of what type of school their children attend. Often the type of school parents would choose does depend on the different needs/wants/opinions parents have about different systems. Public schools tend to offer

more opportunities such as a large variety of sports, cheerleading and dance, band, choir, a variety of extracurricular clubs for kids to join, a bus system, and money from federal programs to offer free or reduced breakfast and lunch to students. Public charter schools have less funding than public schools and do not tend to have a bus system, free or reduced lunch, a variety of sports or extracurriculars. However, guardians may choose a public charter because there is less government oversight with curriculum at charter schools. This incentivizes parents to choose a charter that may have provide curriculum that a local public school does not. Private schools receive no funding from the government, which means that any programs the school offers must be met by the financial contributions of the parents (Ballantine, et. al, 2018). Private schools have very little oversight from the government and may teach using variety of theories, methods, curriculums.

Of course, one cannot discount the reality that many parents, although the choice may be apparently available to them, do not actually have the ability to send their children to a public charter or private school. Most children in the US attend the public school within their geographic location simply because the bus system and government assistance available to those who attend their local public school. A study of these parents with children enrolled in public school in comparison to parents who have the privilege of enrolling their children in a public charter school or private school may still produce data of interest to policymakers, parents, educators, and advocates.

Public charter schools and private schools do not have the same government oversight and regulations as public schools; thus, charters and private schools can be more selective in the curriculum available at their schools. Often, parents choose charter

schools and private schools specifically for the curriculum offered at the school. Charter schools and private schools may have differing teaching methods or values and may choose curriculum accordingly. A study of the demographics of the parents at this variety of schools may provide information about what type of curriculum appeals to different populations.

This paper analyzes the data collected from parents at one public charter school, one private school, and one public school. In hopes of determining whether parent perceptions of SEL is evidenced in the type of school they choose for their students, a survey was submitted to parents asking questions about their perceptions of SEL. The data includes a variety of demographics comparable between different school types.

With the information provided, interested parties will have concrete information about how parents in different school systems perceive SEL. Stakeholders such as school boards, parents/guardians, local governments, advocates, etc. will have information that can help them make decisions about the curriculum in their own schools. In addition to implementation of curriculum stakeholders may be able to determine different ways to communicate to parents about SEL and provide education to help them understand what SEL is and different outcomes generated by its teaching.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Section 1: History and components of SEL

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has been practiced in educational settings dating to 1968 when Dr. James Comer and his colleagues at Yale University's Child Study Center decided to implement a "whole child" approach to teaching children in two classrooms in Connecticut. By the 1980s the pilot programs had provided study results indicating that there were fewer behavioral issues in the schools with this original version of SEL and that academic performance had improved (Casel, 2023). This information was pivotal in the development of a community of teachers and researchers who decided to embrace and champion a curriculum for use in schools to develop and foster a social and emotional foundation for school-aged children.

For the purposes of this paper, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), is the main group foundation that fosters SEL in classrooms today. CASEL was founded in 1994 by a group of researchers, educators, child advocates, and practitioners. The term Social Emotional Learning was widely adopted at this time. Since its founding CASEL has grown to be a multidisciplinary group which works toward implementing SEL in classrooms across the nation by championing research studies, SEL initiatives, curriculum writing, support, and advocacy for practitioners, and providing information for policymakers (Casel, 2023).

CASEL has created a model to elucidate the skills taught by SEL and demonstrate who is involved with teaching the framework. The skills taught by SEL, which advocates of CASEL proposit to be the goals in developing a "whole child" include: Self-

Awareness, Self-Management, Responsible Decision-Making, Relationship Skills, and Social Awareness (Casel, 2023). Ideally these five different components are taught in classrooms, in other school environments, in families and communities. Partnering with community groups outside of the classroom, such as with families and caregivers, is an ideal scenario for children to receive the most benefit from SEL (Casel, 2023).

Each of the five skills taught in an SEL curriculum have clear goals stated by CASEL:

- **Self-Awareness:** The abilities to understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
- **Self-Management:** The abilities to manage one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.
- **Responsible Decision-Making:** The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.
- **Relationship Skills:** The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
- **Social Awareness:** The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts.

Section 2: How SEL is implemented in classrooms

Currently, there is no federal policy explicit for implementation of SEL in education. However, there was a push during 2021 when the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act was passed after COVID-19 quarantine that allowed some federal resources to be allocated toward SEL programs to rebound from quarantine. In addition, there are

components of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) passed by President Obama in 2015 that lend themselves to participating in SEL (US Dept. of Ed, 2023).

Nearly the entirety of efforts to implement SEL in classrooms comes from a state level, as is the case with most educational curriculums and reforms. Per the 10th constitutional amendment, in the United States of America, education is a field that is legislated state by state. The federal government has created a few policies that are instrumental in public education; such as de-segregation policy, free lunches, Title IX, etc., but most of the federal influence on education is not curriculum related. Not until the Reagan administration in 1984 did the federal government make any attempts to correlate curriculum. After the publishing of “A Nation at Risk” by the education branch of the US Government in 1983 the public became a little more educated and interested in what was being taught in classrooms.

The first large-scale federal effort to correlate curriculum came in 2002 with the George W. Bush’s administration’s “No Child Left Behind” policy. This policy was replaced in 2015 with the “Every Student Succeeds Act” of the Obama administration. Neither of these policies hold any direct implementation of SEL. ESSA does provide a broader framework for schools to produce “whole children” as it doesn’t limit the definition of education provided by public schools to purely academia; it also defines an education that includes “non-academic” achievements as successes worth funding. In addition to expanding the mental health services provided to public education sources, the federal government increased funding to these services by \$1 billion in the 2022 budget (US Dept. of Ed, 2023).

Original grants were disbursed through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act and the Fiscal Year 2022 Omnibus Appropriations. The first grant program is called School-Based Mental Health Services and is used to increase the number of credentialed mental health professionals in school. The second grant program is called Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration, also aimed at increasing the number of health professionals in high-risk school districts. The new additional \$1 billion budget increase from the federal government is implemented through a new grant called The Stronger Connections Grant. These funds are to be allocated to “supportive learning opportunities and environments that are critical for their success” (US Dept. of Ed, 2022).

With the federal government only accounting for about 8% of public education funding (not including add-on programs like free or reduced lunches) it falls on individual states to fund their schools. This reality is one component of why parents have some concerns about implementing SEL in their local classrooms. However, even with the concern over funding, 27 states have included SEL competencies in their K-12 curriculum and all 50 states have chosen to include SEL competencies in their pre-K curriculum. It is interesting that data demonstrates that there is less importance given to SEL as children grow older.

As with academic related curriculum such as math, science, history, English, etc. the source of education materials used in different classrooms is up to the local school boards to choose. There are many different sources that provide educational material in all subjects, this is the case with SEL materials as well. Local school districts can choose the SEL curriculum that they would like to have taught in their classrooms. SEL curriculum content, regardless of the publisher or content creator, focuses on the five

CASEL skill sets. How the information is presented varies from creator to creator which allows for a measurement of customization from district to district based on local needs. While there is public information available about instituting SEL goals in each state, it is not apparent which skill sets are most often taught or which ones are of most importance to parents.

Section 3: SEL Research on Parent Perception

In reference to Social Emotional Learning, no research has previously been published with variables considering the perception of parents based on the type of school in which they enroll their children. This is an original study for this thesis. The following studies about parent perceptions of SEL are all of parents/guardians with students in public school. The results of these studies provide useful information of what, in general, parents think about SEL.

Interest in SEL from the public has picked up over the last decade with catchphrases like “Critical Race Theory” and “Equity” entering the discussion in the public arena. It appears that with the influence of media, both news and social, parents may have a misconception of what SEL is, the goals established and the outcomes it generates. Recently three different studies have been conducted that demonstrate some of the communication and perceptions between SEL and parents. While this is not an exhaustive list of studies, these studies have been chosen for their comparable data collection and the timing of their publishing, all published in 2021.

First, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute conducted a survey in 2021 to determine parental support for SEL and authored an article called “How to Sell SEL: Parents and the Politics of Social-Emotional Learning.” Second, a survey for a dissertation written by

Heather Calkins in 2021 titled, “The Development of a Measure of Parent and Teacher Perceptions of the Importance of Social-Emotional Learning in the Schools.” Last, a dissertation by Jason Sutton in 2021 titled, “Middle School Parent Opinions of Social Emotional Learning Competencies.” These three studies give a limited, although informative and interesting insight as to what parents think about SEL.

Thomas B. Fordham Institute Survey Methods:

For two weeks in April of 2021, at the request of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, YouGov (a UK based market research and analytics firm) conducted a survey of 2,000 respondents with children ages 6-17 in the US. The survey asked questions about parental priority of SEL, responsibility of teaching SEL, questions about what SEL elements are taught, and which academic elements should be taught in schools, use of school resources for SEL, and major concerns parents have about the education of SEL (Tyner, 2021).

Heather Calkins dissertation Survey Methods

Calkins sent a survey to teachers and parents of K-12 students in 10 different states, 10 different cities within each state and random schools within each city (5 elementary, 3 middle/junior high, and 3 high schools) (Calkins, 2021). While she anticipated a greater response to her email inquiries, due to the COVID-19 pandemic she had difficulties recruiting an adequate sample. In the end, her sample was comprised of 70 teachers and 122 parents (Calkins, 2021).

The objectives for the survey by Calkins were 1) creating and validating a scale of teacher and parent perceptions of the importance for SEL and 2) examining differences among perceptions of SEL based on a variety of factors. These factors included SEL

attitudes, academic priority, and SEL effectiveness. The data examined parent and teacher perceptions of SEL.

Jason T. Sutton dissertation Survey Methods

Survey data for the Sutton dissertation was kept local to a school district in Kearney, Nebraska. The surveys were emailed to the parents of middle school students at two middle schools in the Kearney Public School District. Of all email inquiries (1,554) the surveyor received a response from 415 participants (Sutton, 2021).

This survey by Sutton gathered responses to three questions: 1) Do parents believe that it is important for SEL competencies to be taught? 2) Do sixth grade parents have a different opinion of the teaching of SEL than eighth grade parents? 3) Do parents believe that the specific SEL program being utilized at the school is helpful for their children?

Section 4: Previous Research Results

The survey results from all three sources of data determined five key findings. While each different survey gathered additional data, all surveys had these results in common. The Fordham Institute most precisely determined five different findings which are corroborated by the two additional dissertations.

The research findings from the Fordham survey were condensed into five different fundamentals: 1) There is broad support among parents for teaching SEL-related skills in school, although the term ‘social and emotional learning’ is relatively unpopular, 2) Democratic parents favor schools allocating additional resources to SEL more than Republican parents do. They are also more comfortable with the terminology, 3) Across the political spectrum, parents regard families as the most important entities for

cultivating SEL, yet there are partisan differences regarding how and where to emphasize SEL instruction, 4) Republicans are somewhat more wary than Democrats that SEL might divert schools away from academics or conflict with their own values, and 5) Differences by parents' race, class, and religion are rarely as pronounced as differences by political affiliation. Each of these fundamentals will be discussed at length along with the findings of the surveys completed by researchers finalizing their dissertations.

1. “There is broad support among parents for teaching SEL-related skills in school, although the term ‘social and emotional learning’ is relatively unpopular” (Tyner, 2021, p. 5).

There is board support among parents, but the term “social and emotional learning” being unpopular is supported by data. The survey conducted asked parents if schools should teach the following skills with the following results in parentheses: Set goals and work towards achieving them (93%), Approach challenges in a positive, optimistic way (91%), Believe in themselves and their abilities (91%), Navigate social situations (86%), Respond ethically (85%), Prepare to be an active, informed citizen (83%), Understand, express and control their emotions (82%), Stand up for people of different backgrounds (81%), and Empathize with the feelings of others (81%) (Tyner, 2021).

Most parents agree with teaching SEL standards in the classroom. Interestingly, even though all the components are social and emotional related, parents prefer other terms to describe the standards. The term that parents liked most, by a significant amount, (44%) was “Life Skills.” The second most preferred term was “Social-Emotional & Academic Learning” at 16% (Tyner, 2021). Whereas the term “Social-Emotional Learning” resulted as second to worst at -4% acceptance. Simply including the term “Academic” with

Social-Emotional demonstrated more approval from parents. It is unclear why parents react differently to the term social-emotional when the word academic is added. More research should be conducted to determine if this is a sociological response to terms used by media and other sources in describing SEL. Overall, the best outcome for SEL would be to remove the language of social and emotional and choose “Life Skills” to describe the contents of SEL curriculum.

Sutton found similar reactions from parents in the Kearney district, “...parents believe that the social emotional learning competencies are important to be taught in middle school. Each of the five core SEL domains of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making, received support from parents” (Sutton, 2021, p. 37). Not only do most parents with students currently enrolled in SEL programs agree that SEL should be taught in schools, but they have also found the programs to be successful, “Parents believe that the school-wide social emotional learning program has been helpful for their children.... most parents agree and many strongly agree that the social emotional learning program has been successful” (Sutton, 2021, p. 47). It is an interesting find that even though most parents believe the program successful, the Fordham Institute survey found that the term Social Emotional Learning is off-putting to parents (Tyner, 2021).

Additionally, the survey performed by Sutton seems to agree with the Fordham Institute that parents are in favor of the concepts of SEL being taught in schools but are wary of the term Social Emotional Learning.

Generally, parents believed that the program is helpful. But it is interesting to note that 14.8% of parents disagreed that the program was helpful and

another 2.2% strongly disagreed. This could be because parents don't have a solid understanding of the program. To put it simply, parents say **yes** to the SEL concepts being taught, but **maybe** to the program being used” (Sutton, 2021, p. 57).

The broader survey by Calkins during the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in information that parent's belief in the efficacy of SEL was even greater than the teachers. This piece of information should be studied further:

Parents in the current study responded significantly more positively to items regarding the beliefs of the efficacy of SEL in the schools compared to teachers; these results may indicate that parents are becoming more aware of the benefits of including SEL in the schools and recognize that schools are an important location for youth to learn and practice social and emotional skills. (Calkins, 2021, p. 35)

Another data find that needs further study is found in Calkin's survey: Although there was not a significant difference, the data trended in the direction which indicates that individuals who resided in states with SEL mandates for youth in kindergarten and above may have more positive beliefs about SEL. These data demonstrate that state based SEL mandates may translate into increased understanding about SEL amongst parents and teachers residing in those states, perhaps due to increased communication of information across settings. (Calkins, 2021, pp. 37-38)

2. “Democratic parents favor schools allocating additional resources to SEL more than Republican parents do. They’re also more comfortable with the terminology” (Tyner, 2021, p. 10).

Allocating different resources to schools for SEL is a concern for parents. The Fordham Institute chose to divide the responsive parents by political affiliation to glean information about different demographics and their perceptions and opinion about SEL. When it comes to using school resources for SEL Democrats and Republicans disagreed widely. This finding may have economic implications which may be understood differently by political parties. The survey asked specifically about six different areas for schools to use resources for SEL, the results by party affiliation (Tyner, 2021)

(D=Democrat, R=Republican):

1. Providing SEL training for teachers: D=58%, R=29%
2. Hiring more counselors or therapists for students’ mental health needs: D=51%, R=25%
3. Offering extra programs that explicitly address social and emotional learning: D=50%, R=29%
4. Adopting restorative justice policies (where offenders accept responsibility and make it up to those they hurt): D=40%, R=25%
5. Implementing and enforcing stricter disciplinary policies for violating school rules: D=24%, R=23%
6. None of these: D=8%, R=29%

As shown, in all categories Democrats are far more likely to approve of spending resources to strengthen SEL in schools.

While neither research study conducted by the dissertations differentiated between political party, there were some interesting quotes from parents surveyed about whether schools should be allocating additional resources to SEL. The survey by Calkins proved, “Consistent with past research, participants opined that parents should primarily be responsible for SEL (24.3% of teachers, 16.1% of parents) and schools have limited time and resources to implement SEL” (Calkins, 2021, p. 14).

While surveys by the Fordham Institute and Calkins both had arguments from parents against providing resources to SEL, Sutton makes a point of mentioning previous research, “...suggests substantial economic benefits to the implementation of SEL as there are hundreds of billions of dollars in public money used to address societal problems such as crime, substance abuse, and poor overall mental and physical health” (Sutton, 2021, p. 9).

Another source of SEL research has also found that there may be economic benefit to teaching SEL in schools. Although this research is not part of the Fordham, Sutton, or Calkins surveys it is useful information in portraying that even though parents may have fears that the cost of teaching SEL outweighs the benefits, their fears are unwarranted. A large meta-analysis found, “These findings build on a recent study examining the economic value of six SEL interventions that found for every dollar invested there was a return of 11 dollars” (Belfield et al., 2015).

- 3. “Across the political spectrum, parents regard families as the most important entities for cultivating SEL, yet there are partisan differences regarding how and where to emphasize SEL instruction” (Tyner, 2021, p. 15).**

Parents agree that it is primarily the responsibility of the family to teach SEL to their children. This data is supported by data collected in all studies mentioned. If parents believe that SEL should be taught in the home, it is understandable that parents wouldn't want to allocate economic resources to teaching SEL in classrooms.

This key finding is the most robustly analyzed finding by the Fordham Institute with multiple figures generated to display the information. One portion of the survey which the parents were asked to rank on a spectrum of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree is: "Schools should focus on academics and leave social and emotional learning to parents and others." Seventeen percent of respondents strongly disagree with this statement, 34% somewhat disagree, 28% somewhat agree and 21% strongly agree (Tyner, 2021).

Figure 10 (Tyner, 2021, p. 16) of the survey shows that Democratic parents are more likely than Republican parents to encourage SEL in schools. The question was, "Should Schools be playing more or less of a role in SEL?" Sixty-one percent of Democrats answered More, 5% said Less, and 28% Stay the Same. Whereas 35% of Republicans answered More, 18% said Less, and 43% answered Stay the Same. More studies are needed to evaluate why there is a political divide in desire for SEL to be taught in schools either rather than or in addition to in other communities such as families or religious communities.

Interestingly, even though Democrats are far more likely to say that schools should play more of a role in SEL teaching both Democrats and Republicans overwhelmingly agree that parents or guardians are most responsible for developing SEL.

The survey asked parents to rank which of 7 different categories of people are responsible for teaching SEL (Tyner, 2021):

1. Parents or Guardians: D=90%, R=90%
2. Family members other than parents/guardians: D=66%, R=69%
3. The child himself/herself: D=63%, R=63%
4. Teachers: D=46%, R=33%
5. Members of community, civic, faith or youth organizations: D=12%, R=21%
6. Child's friends/peers: D=12%, R=11%
7. Coaches, school club sponsors, leaders of other extracurricular activities at the school: D=12%, R=12%

These findings correspond to the CASEL recommendation that SEL should be taught at home and supplemented at school. Questions of study that may be of interest to social science are, "If a child isn't learning SEL at home, how can we as a society make up for that?" and "Is it society's responsibility to make up for that?"

An interesting aspect of social emotional learning is that most parents who responded to the Fordham survey feel strongly that it is theirs and other parents' responsibility to teach SEL to children. It is also the recommendation by CASEL that SEL be taught not only in classrooms but also in other communities. In addition to other curriculum routinely taught in classrooms, such as math, writing, reading, science, etc., why do parents perceive that social and emotional concerns are not a scholarly obligation? There may be a sociological aspect to the value different groups of people put on social and emotional competencies compared to academic competencies. This is an area for further study.

Not only did the parents from the Fordham study feel strongly that families are foremost responsible for teaching SEL, the Sutton study also found the same:

This study showed that parents generally believe in the importance of teaching SEL skills during middle school. Although many parents noted that the primary responsibility for teaching SEL should reside within the home structure, most agreed that the skills were important to be taught. One parent stated, ‘Some students may not have that structure at home, and it is great to be reinforced at school.’ (Sutton, 2021, p. 50)

Another parent noted:

We feel that although it is partially the school’s responsibility to teach social emotional issues (especially since students are in the school setting several hours a day and will be experiencing different interactions at school) we feel that it is primarily the family’s obligation and responsibility to teach appropriate social emotional behaviors at home. We realize that not all families are capable of teaching these topics, and so we understand why educators are taking more responsibility to incorporate this issue into the school curriculum. (Sutton, 2021, p. 50)

- 4. “Republicans are somewhat more wary than Democrats that SEL might divert schools away from academics or conflict with their own values” (Tyner, 2021, p. 20).**

Data from the Fordham Institute showed a partisan difference between academic priorities, “One-fourth of Republicans with concerns about SEL say that is in part because it may teach ‘values that conflict with my values’” (Tyner, 2021, p. 21).

While Calkins did not include any data in her survey about parental value aspects, some respondents to the Sutton survey had clear messages, “One parent went so far as to say, ‘the education system has no business in this area. These things are the job of parents. Please stop indoctrinating my child with your liberal agendas’ ...while another respondent said, ‘this begins and ends in the home—there is little schools can do to effectively teach what is essentially a family value system.’” (Sutton, 2021, p. 52).

Another parent took it a step further:

...this survey to me is a complete waste of time. Through natural learning some of these things should be picked up through the natural learning process. Additionally, I take my child to school to learn skills such as math, writing and spelling. It actually angers me that the school district spends so much time addressing things that are community driven. Here is the thing what is proper empathy? My family’s definition may be different than that of the teacher’s. Teach my kids math, focus on education, and when kids can’t follow the rules, send them home. I don’t need my children being told by someone with different beliefs than me the proper way to behave. (Sutton, 2021, p. 52)

5. “Differences by parents’ race, class, and religion are rarely as pronounced as differences by political affiliation” (Tyner, 2021, p. 21).

The Fordham Institute does expound on some differences between race, class, and religion overall, “Generally there are lots of similarities in how parents of different racial or ethnic background’s view SEL” (Tyner, 2021, p. 23).

While neither dissertation divided their data due to political affiliation, Calkins did have two data findings related to SEL attitudes that were evaluated based on residence in rural, urban or suburban area and also based on various regions of the US, “There was not a significant difference (in SEL attitudes) in the score from individuals from rural, urban or suburban areas” and “There was not a significant difference in (SEL attitude) scores from individuals located in different regions of the country” (Calkins, 2021, p. 33).

While neither the Calkins or Sutton dissertations demonstrated differences in political affiliation it should be noted that this partisan divide is pronounced in other realms as well, not just attitudes towards SEL. Political Science Research Methods, 9th Edition, Pgs. 188-189 demonstrate data collected from 1994-2017 shows the gap between conservative and progressive positions across political values is more pronounced across political parties than race, religious attendance, education, age or gender. This increasing gap shows a widening political divide is trending in the US. As with all social structures in the United States, including education, things have a way of becoming political which lends context for research results.

Section 5: Outcomes of SEL, indications of why it is important to teach

Social Emotional Learning has proven benefits to the lives of those who have participated in the curriculum. One large meta-analysis conducted in 2017 by CASEL studied the outcomes of seven different categories evident in positive youth development. Researchers stated, “Students in school-based SEL interventions continued to demonstrate significant positive benefits in seven outcomes collected, on average from 56 weeks and up to 195 weeks following program participation” (Taylor et al, 2017).

The seven different outcomes with benefits are divided into two categories: Social & emotional assets and positive and negative indicators of well-being. The two social and emotional assets with significant benefits are SEL skills and Attitudes. Five different outcomes in the positive and negative indicators of well-being include, Positive social behavior, Academic performance, Conduct problems, Emotional distress, and Drug use. Each of these outcomes showed long-lasting benefits from students engaging in SEL curriculum.

An additional examination of four meta-analyses of SEL programs found positive outcomes for participating students. The December 2018/January 2019 online journal by Kappan, published an article titled, “An update on social and emotional learning outcome research.” Of the four different meta-analyses analyzed, one is the Taylor meta-analysis from 2017. The other three meta-analyses are from 2011, 2016, and 2012. Together, these analyses had some major findings (Mahoney et al., 2018):

1. Compared to control students, students participating in SEL programs showed significantly more positive outcomes with respect to enhanced SEL skills, attitudes, positive social behavior, and academic performance, and significantly lower levels of conduct problems and emotional distress.

2. The higher academic performance of SEL program participants translated into an 11 percentile-point gain in achievement, suggesting that SEL programs tend to bolster, rather than detract from, students’ academic success.

Economically, it has been indicated that for each \$1 spent on implementing SEL in classroom, there is an \$11 return in the economy (Belfield et al, 2015). When people learn how to manage their emotions and implement social skills, they have greater

success at entering the workforce. It may be plausible that the decreased drug use by participants in SEL programs, found by the Taylor meta-analysis, indicates a greater ability to maintain a job.

While these analyses are not exhaustive, they are meta-analyses and provide significant information about the outcomes for students who participate in SEL curriculum. Society may benefit from an education system which universally teaches SEL. Because the education system in the United States is often influenced by policymakers from the direct deliberation with school boards, educational boards, local government, federal government, and parents, it is imperative to understand the perspective of curriculum from different points of view. For the intents of this paper, it is the parent's point of view which is studied.

Parents are constituents in their districts and different policymakers may have interest in what are their differing opinions. This thesis focuses on three different systems of education that parents can enroll their children. Policymakers for public, private and charter school systems may be enlightened by the general perceptions of the parents in their areas of jurisdiction. Knowing the needs and wants of constituents is useful for any policymaker who is trying to advocate on behalf of those in their area.

Section 6: Introduction to different types of Schools

According to The Digest of Education Statistics, as of the 2019-2020 school year there were 98,469 public schools in the U.S, of this number 7,547 were public charter schools. In addition, there were 30,492 private schools operating in the U.S during the 2019-2020 school year. Public schools are, by far, the most utilized type of school structure in the U.S. Of the three options studied, public charter schools are the least-

enrolled education structure although this type of school has seen an increase in enrollment in the past several years. Because the purpose of this study is to determine if parents' perception of SEL is evidenced in the types of schools they enroll their children, it is important to mention a few characteristics about each model of education which can supply information about the schools and why different parents may choose them.

The first type of school to characterize is public schools. For our purposes, we will characterize public charter schools in a separate category. Public schools account for the enrollment of the majority of children in the U.S. The reason why this type of school is most prevalent is because it is entirely subsidized by government money (federal, but mostly local...usually collected through taxes). Public schools enroll any and all children within a geographic location, usually near the school building itself. This often enables transportation to school through free bussing systems.

Public schools also often offer free and/or reduced breakfast and lunches to low-income families, which is a significant bonus to families that need assistance. Another aspect of public schools (including charters) is that they must adhere to state standards of education outlined by the State Department of Education. Each state maintains standards based on local guidelines and policies. Public schools often offer many more extracurriculars (clubs, activities, teams, etc.) than charter or private schools. Because public schools receive funding from the state, they may have more resources than their counterparts to provide different opportunities.

On the other hand, because public schools are run at a state level, the amount of financing per state for their public schools varies widely. For example, the state with the highest spending per pupil is New York with an average of \$29,897 spent per student in

school. The state with the lowest spending per pupil is Idaho, with an average of \$8,662 spent per student. On average, the U.S. spends \$15,047 per student per year (Statista, 2023).

Parents choose public schools for a variety of reasons which may include convenience, opportunity, resources, location, finances, etc. Additionally, even if a parent may want other options for their students' education, other options may not be available in the area.

The second type of school often found in the U.S. system of education is public charter schools. Charter schools are similar to traditional public schools, in the fact that they also have to adhere to state standards; however, there are a few differences. First, charter schools are usually both publicly and privately funded. While traditional public schools only receive public funding, charter schools cannot use public funds to pay for their facilities. This requires charter schools to seek private funding either from businesses or members of the community (often the parents who have enrolled children).

Another difference is how the school is regulated. Public schools must follow regulations at a district and state level. There are many levels of hierarchy in public schools. However, charter schools are often regulated by smaller entities on a local level. While they still must follow the same state education standards, how they follow them can differ from how public schools follow them.

Parents may choose to place their children in charter schools because they like different standards set by charters. Many charter schools require uniforms, which parents may find appealing. Charter schools can also vary in the pedagogy applied to their education. Some charter schools are liberal arts schools which use a Socratic Method

style of teaching, others may be Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM) heavy and require much testing to progress through the grades. There is a larger variety of options of pedagogy in charter schools versus public schools, which parents may find appealing.

One reason why parents may not choose charter schools includes the additional cost. While charters present themselves as tuition-free, it is often the case that there are additional costs to attending charter schools: books, materials, uniforms, etc. As mentioned earlier, most charters ask for a “Community Investment” or “Donation” from families to help cover the cost of the charter facilities. Charter schools do not offer free transportation to or from school and they are also not federally funded to provide free/reduced breakfast or lunch to their scholars. There are components to a charter education that are privileged compared to public schools.

The third type of school analyzed in this study is private schools. While charter schools are a newer type of education compared to public schools, private schools have been in use throughout history. Private schools are entirely funded by private entities, including parents, business, churches, etc. Like charter schools, private schools come in a variety of styles. Many private schools are parochial schools, meaning they are affiliated with private church organizations. However, there are private schools that are secular or based on other ideologies.

Parents may choose private schools because they value the religion or curriculum associated with the school. Unlike traditional public schools or charter schools, private schools are not regulated. Private schools do not need to teach any certain state standards.

Parents may find private schools advantageous because often class sizes are smaller than public or charter schools.

Private schools are cost prohibitive for most people. People may not choose private schools because there is no transportation system or food system in place at private schools. All costs are incurred by parents. It is worth noting that some states are now following voucher systems which allow parents to use private school vouchers to pay for (in some or in whole) tuition for private schools (Prothero, 2017). Arizona is one of these states which will be addressed.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Section 1: Design

The purpose of this cross-sectional Social Emotional Learning (SEL) study is to identify varying parent opinions about Social Emotional Learning. An additional focus of this study is to examine the differences in opinions between parents and any correlation between their opinions and the type of school in which they enroll their children, public charter or private. Brief narratives of the respondents' responses will be reviewed for their relevance to SEL policy implementation in their children's schools. A cross-sectional study was chosen because they are often inexpensive and easy to analyze (Wang & Chang, 2022).

Section 2: Question

The survey supplied to participants gathered simple demographic information. In addition to demographics, the survey gathered quantitative data about parent opinions along with one qualitative question asking the survey-taker to please leave any comment if they choose. The primary research question for this thesis is: Do parents of students in different types of schools (Public, Private, Public Charter) have differing opinions of Social Emotional Learning?

Section 3: Participants

Of importance for this study is to note that all schools which participated are located in the west valley of Phoenix. This suburban area is home to a variety of all types of schools: public, private and public charters. Noteworthy is also the fact that Arizona has a program called Empowerment Scholarship Account which allows taxpayers to

apply for a voucher-type program to receive funding from the state to attend whichever type of school the parent/guardian chooses, including private school (Arizona Department of Education, 2023).

Participants were recruited from three different school structures: public, private, and public charters. The email to parents and also the survey were written in English; therefore, any non-English speakers were naturally excluded from the survey if they chose not to take the survey (see appendices A & C). All survey participants were also asked to verify that they were 18+ years old and have an active child in school. Following are basic information about each school that participated in the study. The sample size N is 97. Of this number only seven are public school parents and of those seven parents one also has a child in a public charter and four parents have children in private school. The number of public charter sample is 41. Of these 41 parents one also has a child in public school. The total number of parents with children in private school is 54, of which four also have a child in public school.

Public School: Due to inability to obtain results from a singular public school, the sample data of public school information comes from parents who have children enrolled in both the private school or public charter and a public school. Total n for public school parent participation is 7. Four of the parents contacted from the private school also have older children in public school. Their opinions are recorded as both public school and private school or charter school parents. One parent at the charter school also has a public school student. Two parents have a child just in public school, these parents are administrators from the charter school.

Public Charter School: The principal of the local public charter that participated in the survey indicated that the email was sent to “nearly 500” families with children in grades K-8. This charter is a stand-alone charter, meaning it is not part of greater district or multiple schools under an umbrella charter group. A total of 41 respondents were recorded from the public charter.

Private School: The private school that chose to participate in the research is a local school with a religious affiliation. The principal indicated that the recruitment email was sent to 262 families with children in grades K-8. A total of 54 respondents were recorded from the private school.

Section 4: Procedure

First, the survey was compiled and edited (see Appendix A). Once the survey was completed, all instruments were submitted to Arizona State University Institutional Review Board. After approval from IRB the recruitment process was started. The service, SurveyMonkey, was utilized to generate the survey and provide a location for data collection and analyzation.

Recruitment consisted of emailing 43 different public, private, and public charter schools all located in the west valley of Phoenix. Additionally, six different district superintendents were contacted. More than half of the schools didn’t respond and only two schools chose to participate. The original email contact consisted of an IRB approved email to the headmaster/principal/superintendent (See Appendix B). Attached to the email was an IRB approved document titled “Email to Parents” which included recruitment and consent (See Appendix C). This document also included a link to

SurveyMonkey, the service utilized for data collection. A second attachment included the survey questions, for reference.

Schools that chose to participate then copied and pasted the document “Email to Parents” into an email that was sent, from the school to all parents/guardians of students in grades K-8. The email included indication of dates of participation. As indicated, the service utilized for data collection was SurveyMonkey. When a parent clicked on the link from the email, they were taken directly to SurveyMonkey where they completed the survey and data was sent directly to the survey team. Schools participating in the research were given no data or feedback.

Section 5: Measures

Likert scales were utilized to measure the responses of parents to various quantitative questions (see Appendix A). Scales varied from Agree, Disagree, or No Opinion to Strongly Disagree, Disagree, No Opinion, Agree, Strongly Agree. Another key scale asked parents to indicate their priority of the five different CASEL SEL concepts, from 0 (no priority) to 10 (Strong priority).

Comments from the one qualitative question, which many respondents skipped, were analyzed to support quantitative data collected (see Appendix D).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

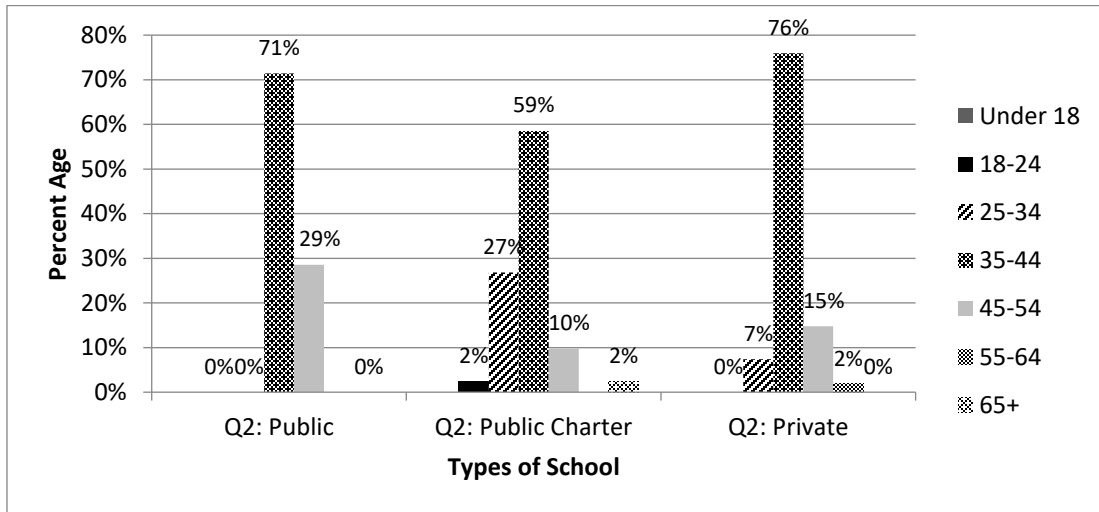
Research Question: Do parents of students in different types of schools (Public, Private, Public Charter) have differing opinions of Social Emotional Learning (SEL)?

The first portion of results gathered from the survey data is a collection of demographic information. While these demographics do not answer our research question, they provide valuable information for those interested in future research considering parent perceptions and comparisons between different types of schools.

Comparable demographics of schools:

Figure 1

Parent Age by School Type

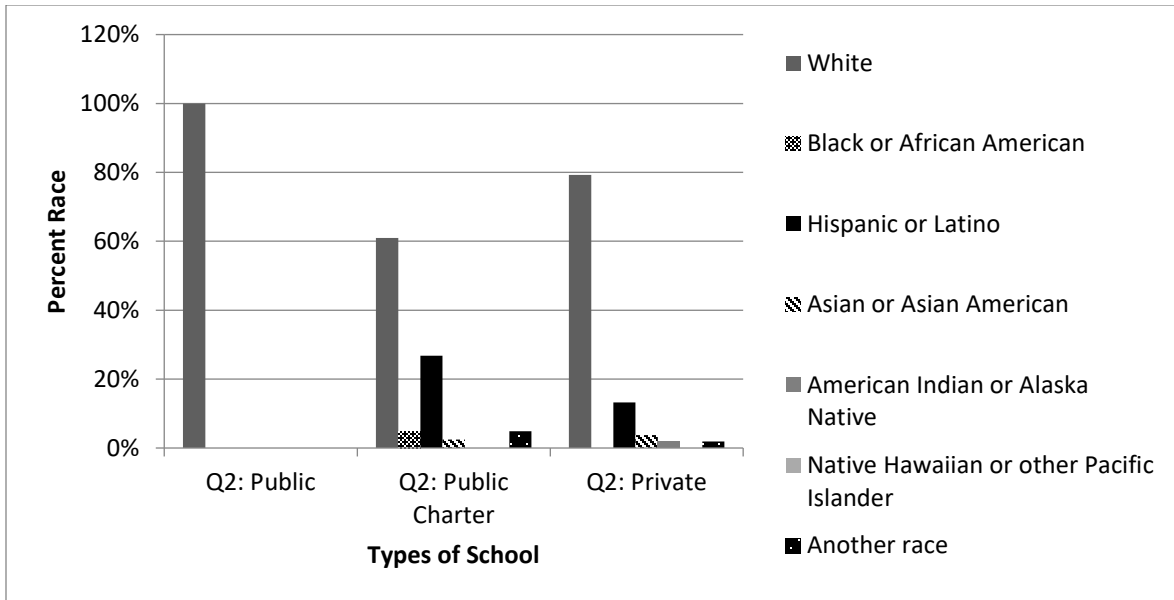


The public school sample size is only seven but of those seven parents five are between the ages of 35-44 (71%) and two are between the ages of 45-54 (29%). Public charter school parent results indicate one parent ages 18-24 (2%), 11 parents ages 25-34 (27%), 24 parents ages 35-44 (59%), four parents ages 45-54 (10%), and one parent age 65+ (2%). Finally, the private school population reports four parents between the ages of

25-34 (7%), 41 parents between the ages of 35-44 (76%), 8 parents between the ages of 45-54 (15%), and one parent between 55-64 (2%) years old. Sixty-eight percent of all parents were between the ages of 35-44.

Figure 2

Parent Race by School Type

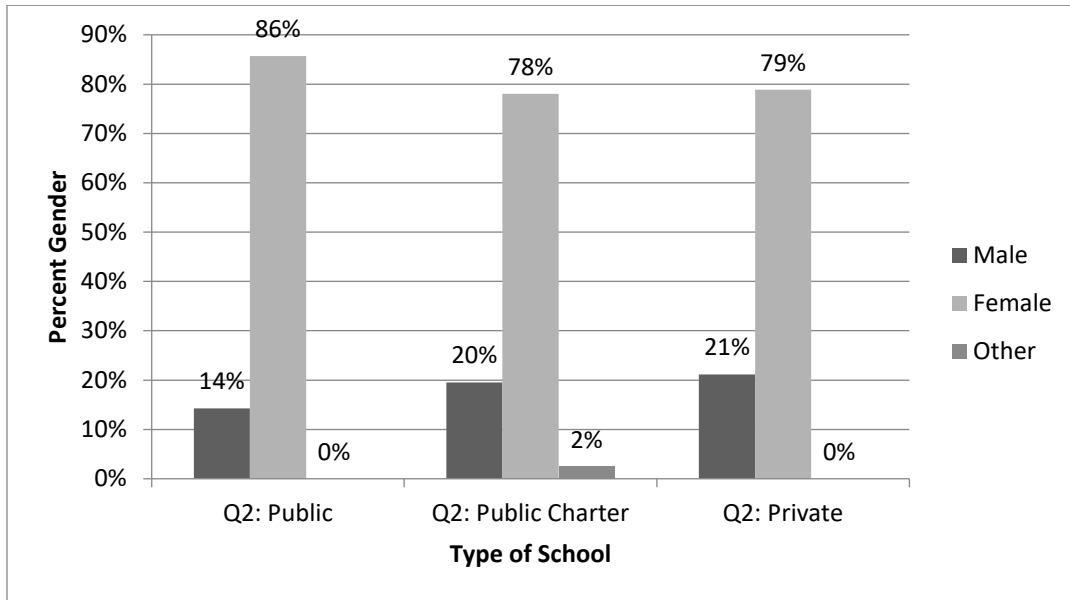


All seven respondents from the public school sample are White. Public charter parents reported 25 White (61%), two Black or African American (5%), 11 Hispanic or Latino (27%), one Asian or Asian American (2%) and two Another race (5%). Private school respondents are 42 (79%) White, 7 Hispanic or Latino (13%), two Asian or Asian American (4%), one American Indian or Alaska Native (2%), and one Another race (2%).

Total race demographics for the complete sample, not separated by school, is 69 White (72%), two Black or African American (2%), 18 Hispanic or Latino (19%), three Asian or Asian American (3%), one American Indian or Alaska Native (1%), and three Another race (3%).

Figure 3

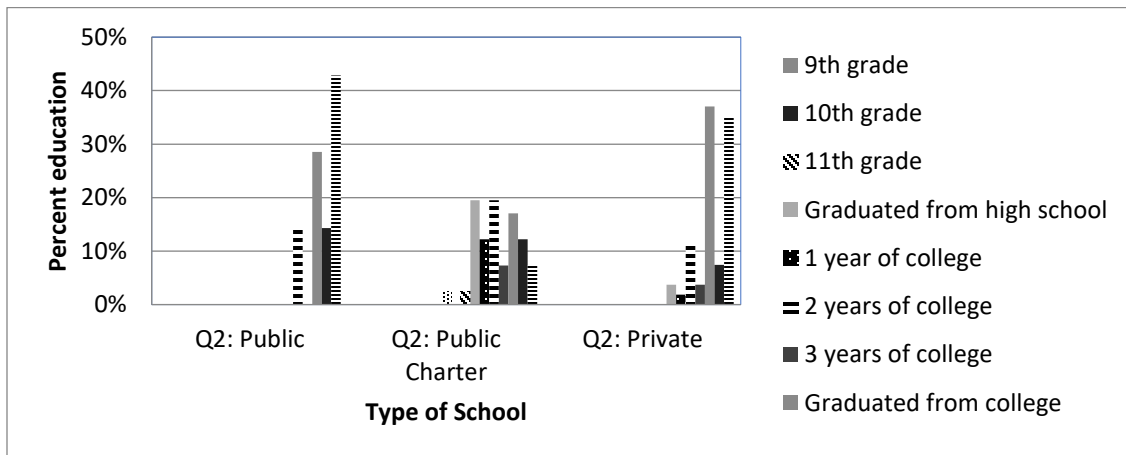
Parent Gender by School Type



Respondents from all three school types were overwhelmingly female. Public school respondents reported one male (14%) and six female (86%). Public Charter parents reported 8 male (20%), 32 female (78%) and one other (2%). Last, private school parents reported 11 male (21%), 41 female (79%).

Figure 4

Parent Highest Level of Education



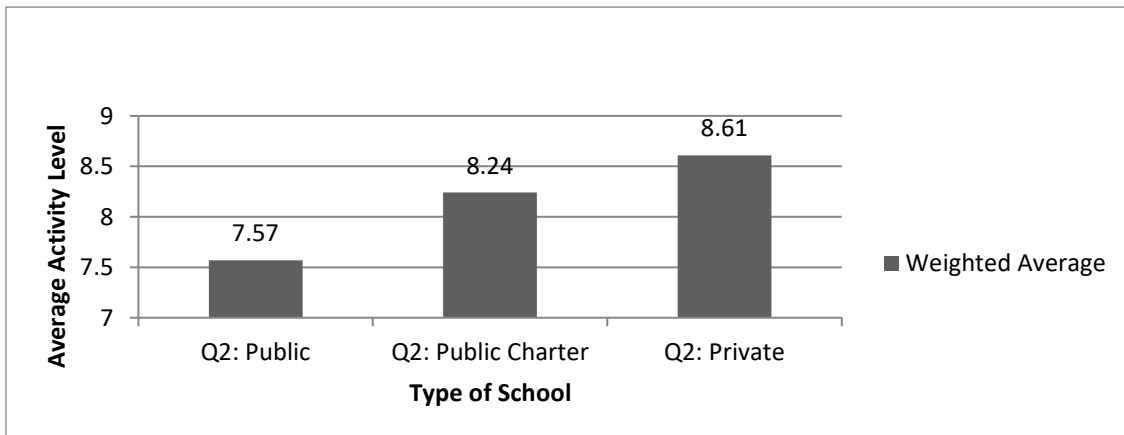
Of the public school parents, one reported that they completed two years of college (14%), two graduated from college (29%), one had some graduate school (14%) and three completed graduate school (43%). Respondents from the public charter school indicated one completed 9th grade (2%), one completed 11th grade (2%), 8 graduated from high school (20%), five completed one year of college (12%), 8 completed two years of college (20%), three completed three years of college (7%), 7 graduated from college (17%), five have some graduate school experience (12%), and three completed graduate school (7%). Finally, private school parents reported two graduated from high school (4%), one has one year of college (2%), 6 completed two years of college (11%), two completed three years of college (4%), 20 graduated from college (29%), four have some graduate school (7%) and 19 completed graduate school (35%).

Gathered data from the survey consists of nine different quantitative questions that were not demographic questions. Results for each of the nine question follows, in numerical order:

Question 1: “On a scale of 1-10, how active are you in your child’s education?”

Figure 5

Average Activity in Child’s Education

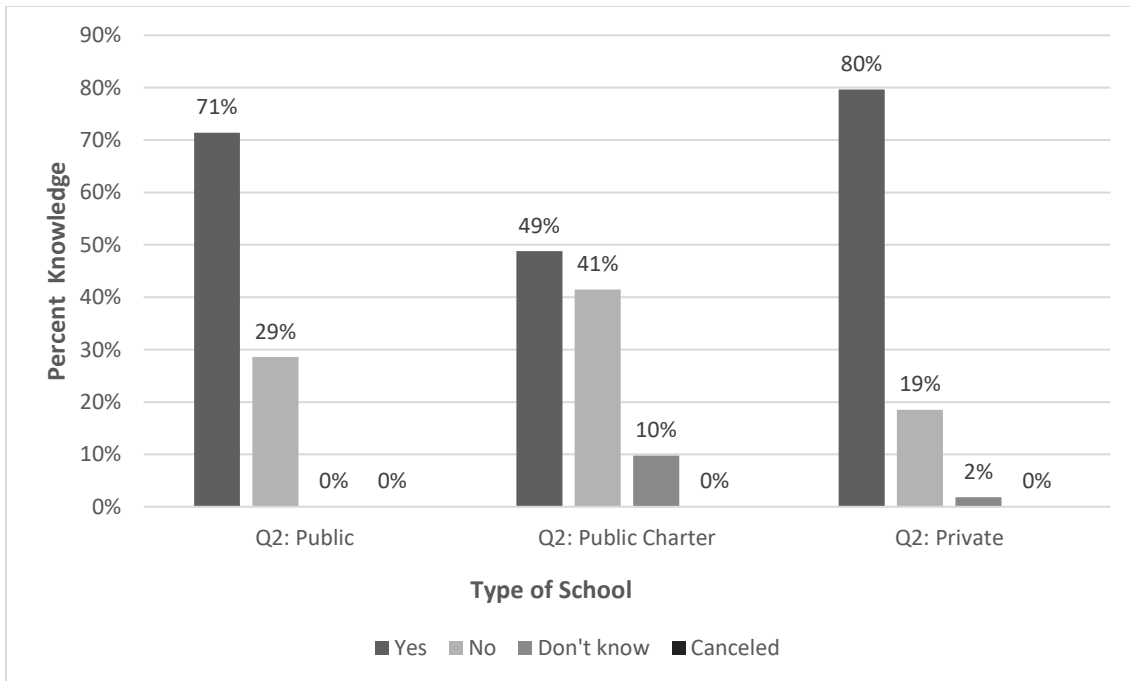


All 97 participants answered this question. On a scale from 1-10 (one being lowest), public school parents indicated they, on average, are involved at 7.57. Public charter school parents, on average, are involved at 8.24. Last, private school parents indicated they, on average, are involved in their child’s education at 8.61. These results determine that public school parents believe they are less involved with their child’s education than private school parents believe they are involved with their child’s education.

Question 2: “Have you heard about Social Emotional Learning?”

Figure 6

Knowledge of SEL



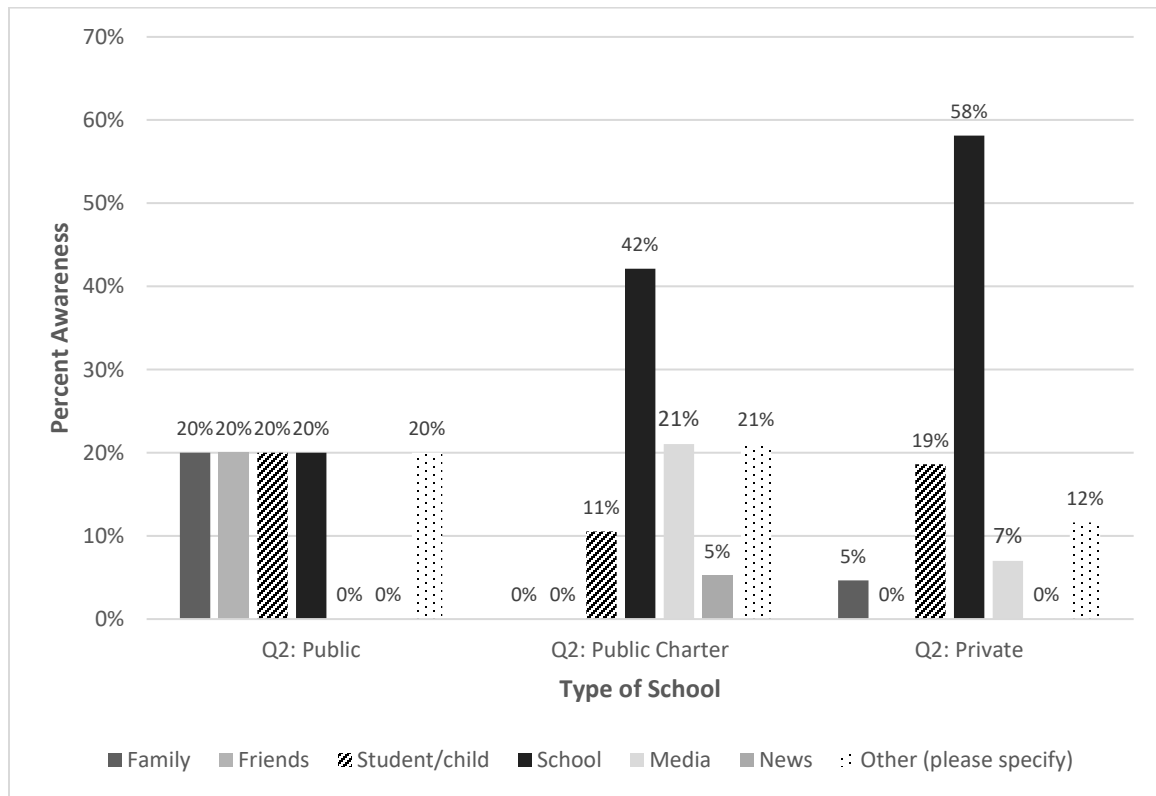
The entirety of the *N* answered this question. Public school parents indicated that 71% of them know what is SEL while 29% of them do not know. Public charter parents indicated that 49% have heard of SEL while 41% have not heard of it while 10% did not

know whether they had heard of it or not. Private school parents indicated that 80% have heard of SEL, 18% had not heard of SEL, and 2% are unsure whether they know of SEL or not.

Question 3: “If yes, How did you hear about SEL?”

Figure 7

Hear about SEL



Thirty-four of the 97 participants of the survey skipped answering this question. One of each of the five of the seven public school participants answered that they heard about SEL from family, friends, student/child, school or other (respectively). The “other” specified, “I’m a licensed social worker & have actually taught SEL in the schools.”

Of the original 41 charter school parents only 19 answered this question. None of the charter parents heard about SEL from family or friends but 11% heard from their

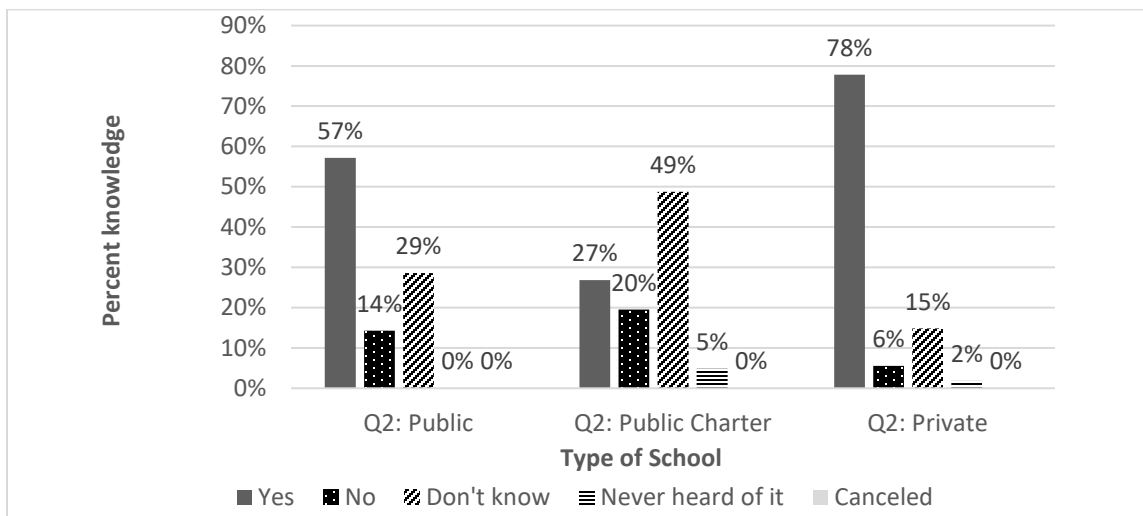
student/child, 42% heard from their school, 21% heard from media, 5% heard from the news, and 21% heard from other. The four parents that heard from other resources specified: “I have an associate degree in early childhood development,” “I am a teacher,” “Google”, and “I also work in a school district.”

Fifty-four private school parents replied to the survey but only 43 responded to this question. 5% of private school parents learned of SEL from family, 19% heard from their children, 58% heard from the school, 7% heard from media and 12% heard from other. The five “other” respondents specified: “Military family,” “I have taught SEL, as a school teacher,” “family friend who teaches SEL,” “I’m a licensed social worker & have actually taught SEL in the schools,” and “I am a public school administrator.”

Question 4: “Do you know whether your school has considered SEL in the curriculum?”

Figure 8

Knowledge of School Curriculum



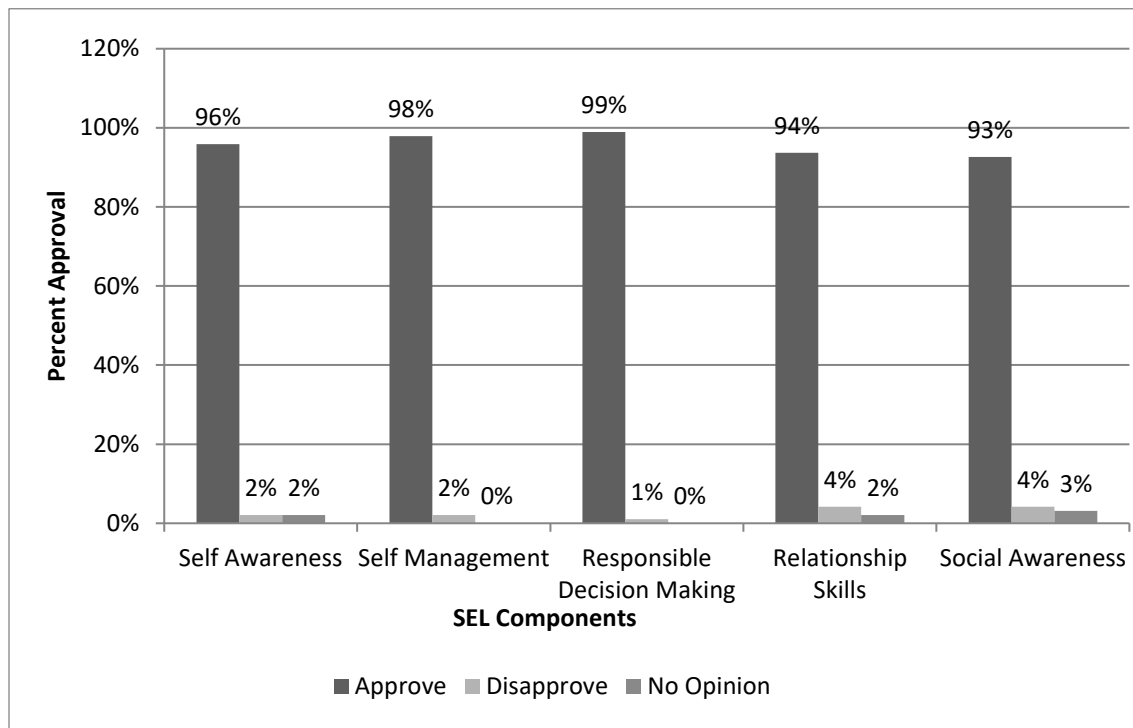
All 97 participants answered this question in the survey. 57% of public school parents indicated they know their school has considered SEL curriculum while 14%

responded that their school didn't consider SEL and 29% answered they didn't know. Public charter parents responded that 27% knew the school has considered SEL, 20% says the school has not, 49% didn't know and 5% had never heard of SEL. Lastly, private school parents answered affirmatively that 78% knew their school has considered SEL curriculum, 6% said the school hasn't, 15% didn't know and 2% have never heard of it.

Question 5 “Choose Level of Approval of each SEL component”

Figure 9

Level of Approval per SEL Component



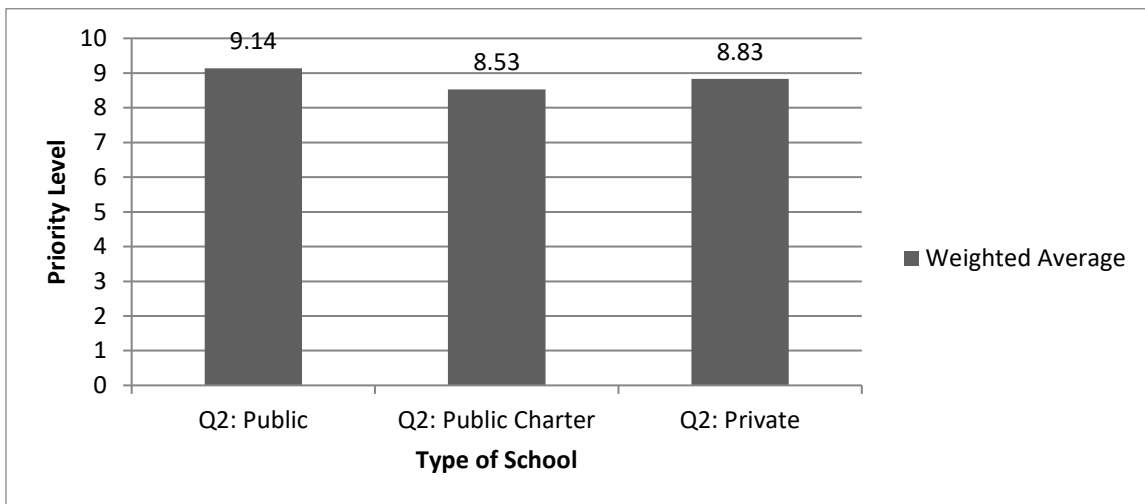
Parents overwhelmingly support all SEL components. Only one person chose to skip this question entirely and another didn't answer all components. Combining all parents, 92 of 96 respondents approve of teaching Self Awareness (96%), two disapprove (2%), and two have no opinion (2%). Ninety-three of 95 respondents approve of teaching Self Management (98%) with two disapproving (2%). Ninety-four of 95 respondents

approve of teaching Responsible Decision Making (99%) with one disapproving (1%). Relationship Skills were approved of by 89 parents (94%), disapproved of by four (4%) and no opinion from two (2%). Last, Social Awareness had the least approval, with 88 parents approving (93%), four disapproving (4%) and three with no opinion (3%).

Question 6: “Please indicate on a scale of 0-10 how you prioritize each component of SEL. 0=No Priority, 10=Most Priority”

Figure 10

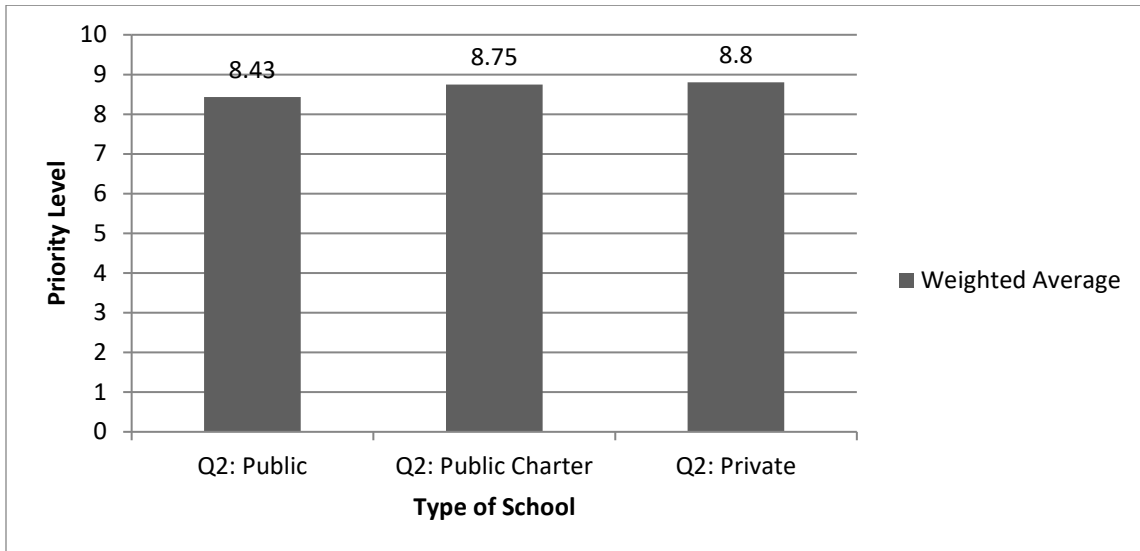
Self Awareness Level of Priority



Ninety-six of 97 respondents answered this question. The one person who chose not to answer was a public charter school parent. Per school, on a scale of 0-10, the level of priority averaged 9.14 for the public school parents, 8.53 for the public charter parents, and 8.83 for the private school parents.

Figure 11

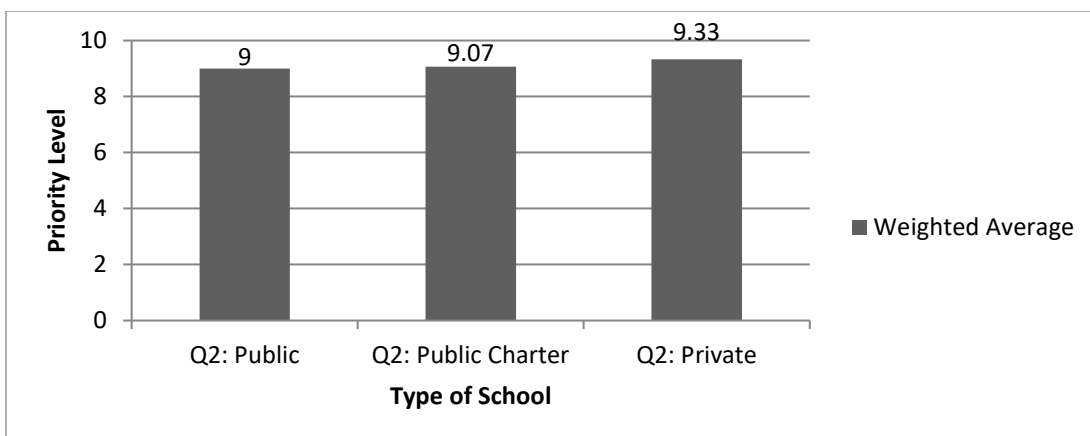
Self Management Level of Priority



On a scale from 0-10 the public school parents prioritized Self Management at a level of 8.43, public charter school parents prioritized it at level 8.75 and private school parents leveled it at 8.8.

Figure 12

Responsible Decision Making Level of Priority

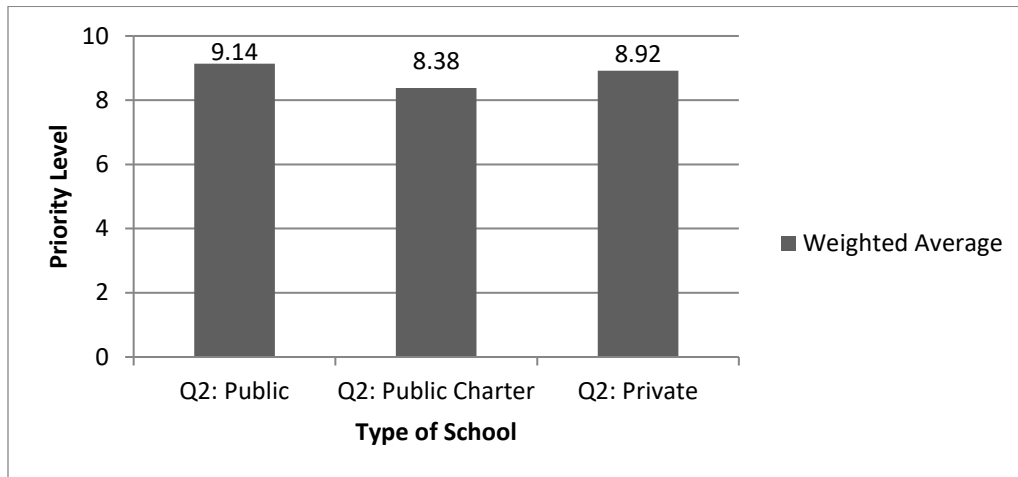


Responsible Decision Making is the SEL component that averaged the highest SEL priority among parents. Public school parents averaged a nine in priority while

public charter parents indicated 9.07 and private school parents averaged 9.33 priority on a scale of 0-10.

Figure 13

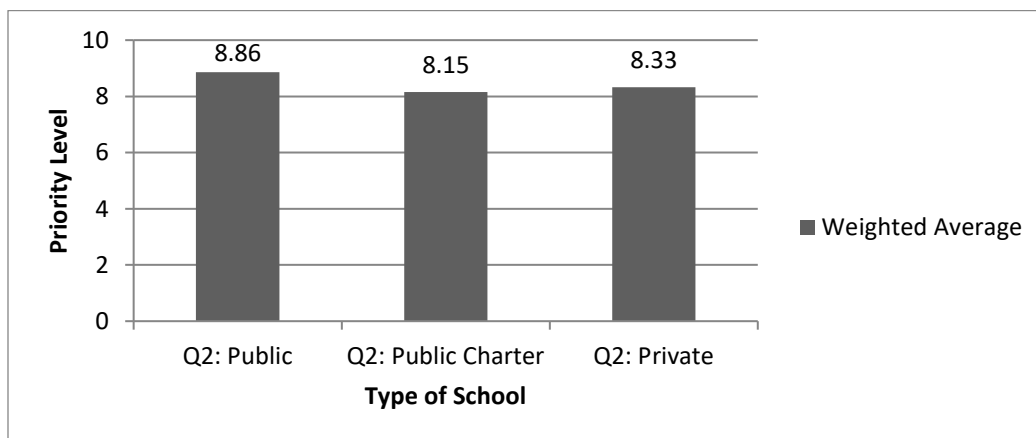
Relationship Skills Level of Priority



As an SEL component, Relationship Skill were evaluated at a priority of 9.14 for public school parents, 8.38 for public charter parents, and 8.92 for private school parents.

Figure 14

Social Awareness Level of Priority



The fifth component of SEL averaged 8.86 priority for public school parents, 8.15 for public charter parents and 8.33 for private school parents.

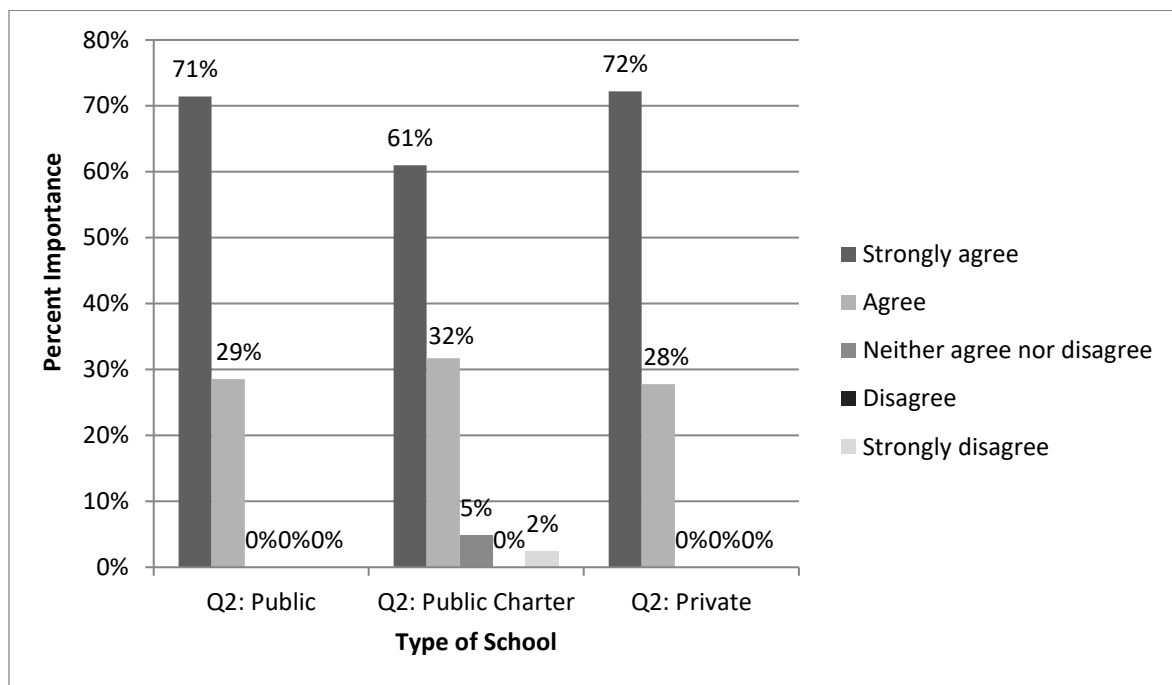
Question 7: “Of the three (3) social structures provided, please place the structures in order of responsibility for teaching SEL.”

All three types of schools concluded that Home/Family structures are the most responsible for teaching SEL skills, with school placing second responsible and community groups the least responsible for teaching SEL skills.

Question 8: “In your opinion, are SEL competencies important in a child’s development?”

Figure 15

Importance of SEL in Child Development



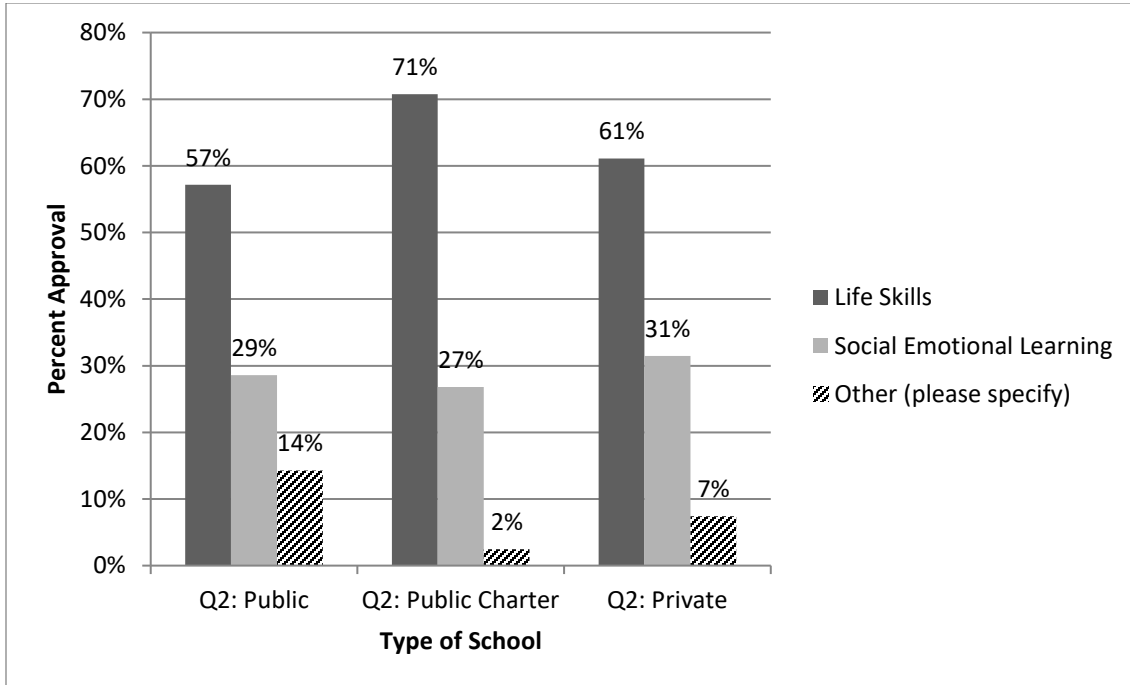
This survey question was answered by all 97 participants. Five of seven (71%) public school parents strongly that SEL competencies are important in a child’s development. Two (29%) said they agree. Twenty-five (61%) of public charter parents strongly agree, 13 (32%) agree, and two (5%) neither agree nor disagree and one (2%)

parent strongly disagrees that SEL competencies are important. Of the 54 private school parents 39 (72%) strongly agreed and 15 (28%) agreed.

Question 9: “In your opinion, which term is more agreeable?”

Figure 16

Agreeable Terms



Overall, public, public charter, and private school parents agreed that the term “Life Skills” is preferable to Social Emotional Learning. There were several comments left by parents who suggested other terms. A public school parent mentioned, “You can have life skills without having emotional competency so I prefer SEL as the best term.” Two private school parents have additional ideas, “Social Emotional Well-Being” and “Character---negative connotations with SEL, which have now become politically charged.” Another private school parent said, “I don’t have a personal preference. I think Life Skills would be more agreeable to folks who may have a negative perception of

teaching emotional intelligence, but I personally think that it's important, so I like the SEL term.”

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

Do parents of students in different types of schools (Public, Private, Public Charter) have differing opinions of Social Emotional Learning (SEL)? The population for this research indicates, overall, that parent perceptions of SEL are positive and do not differ between different types of schools. The final question on the survey gleaned qualitative data about parent opinions of SEL. Even though the question was optional, 19 parents chose to leave comments/opinions about SEL. This result indicates that parents want to share their opinions (see Appendix D).

Social Emotional Learning concepts are important to parents for their children to learn as a part of their development. Parent opinions showed that families hold primary responsibility for teaching these skills to their children, but it is also a priority of parents that their children learn these skills in school, which proves research by the Fordham Institute and CASEL.

Parents indicated little difference in which SEL skill were of most importance to be taught to their children; however, social awareness had the lowest rankings overall. All five skills ranked between an importance of 8+ out of 10 level priority.

The reason for studying parents' opinions in this study is because education in the U.S. is largely determined by local parties. Parents constitute much of the voting public that installs school boards, superintendents, etc. Understanding the opinion of parents is paramount in understanding the needs and wants of constituents in different districts. What is interesting, in this study, is the indication that parents value SEL but also the fact that there is much controversy in local politics about teaching SEL in schools, as

evidenced in the inability to attain participation by a public school and the direct communication from superintendents that they will not participate due to the nature of the topic.

The research for this study was completed in the state of Arizona, particularly on the west side of Phoenix, in a demographically conservative area. Noteworthy, the current Superintendent of public education in Arizona is an educational conservative. During his first year in office, he declined to hold any teacher seminars about SEL and also set-up a hotline through the Arizona Department of Education for parents to report emotional support curriculum (Associated Press, 2023). One public charter parent commented in the survey results, “(State Superintendent) does not like SEL. It is best to stay away from that term while he is in office. I use more youth development.”

It is possible that one of the reasons it was difficult to find a public school to participate is because of local government. One email response from a local district superintendent read, “We will need to decline participation due to the nature of the topic. We do not engage in topics related to social emotional learning.” This is indicative of a general politicization of Social Emotional Learning that is controversial in the local environment of education.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample of parent perceptions could only be collected by schools which chose to participate. This intercession of school administration between the research and the parents provided a direct detriment to collecting information from a larger variety of parents. Parents only received the survey if their school chose to participate. Second, the survey was written only in English. U.S. Census reports that Maricopa County (where the survey was administered) has nearly a

33% Hispanic/Latino population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022), this may have excluded a sizeable portion of the sample. Third, the small sample size is undesirable and creates the potential for biased estimates. Fourth, no public school participated. The narrow results for the public school parents is only from public school parents who also have a child enrolled in a private school or public charter.

Further research about parent perceptions of SEL could include a similar study with a larger sample size or the same study in a different location. Because education in the U.S. is variable in different states, it would be interesting to see results of parent perceptions between different school types from education systems in different states. Additionally, research on if there is a discrepancy between parent perceptions of SEL (overwhelming positive results in this study) and educational implementation of SEL could indicate economic, social or political relationships.

While data gathered for this study focused on parent perceptions, some of the data collected provides information for other potential future studies. For example, demographic information provided about the parent population showed some findings that could be studied further. Private school parents indicated they are highly involved with their children's education, they also were the most highly educated themselves, and they viewed SEL most positively. Is there a correlation? Furthermore, the parent comments (see Appendix D) denote that there may be some miscommunication about SEL between schools and their parent population. Three different parents at the same private school commented, "I love that our school has a dedicated SEL curriculum and sets aside time to teach SEL...", "SEL has a negative connotation because schools do not do a good job explaining or communicating to parents what is (and is NOT) included in

SEL curriculum.”, and “...I chose a private school that does not teach SEL or CRT...” This objective difference in perception at one school indicates a potential lack of communication or misunderstanding between parents and school administration.

Other areas for future research include implementing tools and measurement to determine if parents understand what is SEL. Potentially, the disconnect between SEL skills (which parents indicate are of importance) and the actual implementation of SEL curriculum in school may be due to a lack of understanding by the parent or a lack of communication from schools. The quandary, “Do parents know the outcomes of SEL?” should be studied.

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APPENDIX A
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

There are no right or wrong answers. The answers you provide should be your opinion or experience.

Section 1:

1. Please confirm that you have a child in school.
Yes___ No___
2. If your child is currently in school, please indicate which school setting:
Public___ Public Charter___ Private___ Other (Please specify)___
3. Indicate which grade(s) is/are your child(ren)? Check all that apply:
Kindergarten___ 1st___ 2nd___ 3rd___ 4th___ 5th___ Other___
4. On a scale of 1-10 how active are you in your child's education? 1=least active, 10=most active. Click on the star which indicates your level of activity.
1___ 2___ 3___ 4___ 5___ 6___ 7___ 8___ 9___ 10___

Section 2:

- 1) Have you heard about Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)
Yes ___ No ___ Don't know ___ Canceled ___
- 2) If Yes, how did you hear about SEL? Dropdown menu options: Family, Friends, Student/Child, School, Media, News, Other
- 3) Do you know whether your school has considered SEL in the curriculum?
Yes ___ No ___ Don't know ___ Never heard of it ___ Canceled ___

Social and Emotional Learning focuses on five areas: Self Awareness, Self Management, Responsible Decision-Making, Relationships Skills and Social Awareness.

- 4) Please indicate which skills taught through SEL you approve or disapprove.

A. Self Awareness
Approve___ Disapprove___ No Opinion___

B. Self Management
Approve___ Disapprove___ No Opinion___

C. Responsible Decision-Making
Approve___ Disapprove___ No Opinion___

D. Relationships Skills
Approve___ Disapprove___ No Opinion___

E. Social Awareness.
Approve___ Disapprove___ No Opinion___

5) Based on your answers to the previous questions please indicate on a scale of 0-10 how you prioritize each component of SEL. 0= No priority, 10=Most priority.

A. Self Awareness:

0 ___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ 6 ___ 7 ___ 8 ___ 9 ___ 10 ___

B. Self Management:

0 ___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ 6 ___ 7 ___ 8 ___ 9 ___ 10 ___

C. Responsible Decision-Making:

0 ___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ 6 ___ 7 ___ 8 ___ 9 ___ 10 ___

D. Relationship Skills:

0 ___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ 6 ___ 7 ___ 8 ___ 9 ___ 10 ___

E. Social Awareness:

0 ___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ 6 ___ 7 ___ 8 ___ 9 ___ 10 ___

Section 3:

- 1) Of the three (3) social structures provided, please use the arrows to place the structures in order of responsibility for teaching SEL. The structure in the top position= Most responsibility, the structure in the bottom position=Least responsibility.

Schools:

Home/Family:

Community Groups:

- 2) In your opinion, are SEL competencies important in a child's development?

Strongly Disagree ___ Disagree ___ Neither Agree nor Disagree ___ Agree ___ Strongly Agree ___

- 3) In your opinion, which term is more agreeable:

Life Skills ___ Social Emotional Learning ___ Other (Please specify) ___

Section 4:

1. Are you currently employed?
Yes. ___ No ___
2. Are you retired?
Yes ___ No ___
3. What is your current occupation? (Fill in the blank)

4. Please select your age group
18-25___ 26-35___ 36-45___ 46-55___ 56-65___ 66+___
5. Are you a single parent/guardian?
Yes___ No___
6. Please select your race from the dropdown menu.
7. Please select your gender:
Male___ Female___ Other___
8. What is the highest level of education you have completed? Select from dropdown menu.

Section 5:

If you have any comments or opinions about SEL that you would like to share, please use the text box to share.

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO PRINCIPAL/HEADMASTER/SUPERINTENDENT

To:

Dear

My name is Megan Armstrong, and I am writing to request your assistance in contacting parents in your school district for my graduate thesis. I have a bachelor's degree in education, and I am a resident of Litchfield Park. Currently, I am pursuing a Master of Science degree at Arizona State University.

The aim of my research is to collect data of different parent perceptions of the educational model of Social Emotional Learning. I am collecting information from a variety of school structures: charter, private and public. Each school is an elementary or K-8 school. My hope is to get a better understanding of parents' perception of Social and Emotional Learning in school curriculum. My survey instrument has been approved by ASU's Institutional Review Board. I would like your help to distribute the survey to your school parent population. SEL may not be part of the curriculum at your school and the parents may or may not know about it, this will not adversely affect the results of the survey. Indeed, this is part of the data collection.

The survey consists of several questions regarding Social Emotional Learning. The survey is entirely anonymous and no identifying information will be gathered of the participants except basic demographic information. Participation by parents is entirely optional and will be indicated in the email with the link to the survey.

SurveyMonkey is the service being utilized in generating the survey and collecting data. My three advisors, Dr. Nick Alozie, Dr. Laverne Dacosta, and Dr. Kathy Thomas are also on my research team. I am the only member of my research team who will be analyzing the data.

If you are willing to participate in this research, please respond to this email. I know it is the beginning of the school year and it's a frenzied time of communication between schools and parents. My intention is to create an email for the parents with the following:

1. Recruitment information (similar to what I've provided here)
2. Consent information
3. Link to SurveyMonkey survey

None of the survey data will return to the school, it will all be sent directly to me via SurveyMonkey. I will make it clear that your school is separate from the content of the research. The part for your participation is that I ask the school to send the email to all parent email addresses at the school. Once they have received the email, they can decide whether to participate.

If your school would like to participate, I anticipate the surveys being emailed during the month of September. I will include a notice in the email to parents that all surveys must be completed by October 1st.

I appreciate your willingness to consider participating in this research.

Thank you,

Megan Armstrong

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO PARENT/GUARDIAN

Hello, my name is Megan Armstrong, and I am currently a Graduate Student working on my Master's degree at Arizona State University. Your school has voluntarily accepted my invitation to participate in research for my master's thesis. This research is separate from your child(ren)'s education.

There is increasing interest and discussion on Social Emotional Learning in education. Social Emotional Learning is an educational concept developed in the 1960s which involves teaching children social and emotional skills. The purpose of the master's thesis is to determine the view of parents and guardians on the inclusion of Social Emotional Learning in education.

The link provided will take you to a survey about parent perceptions of Social Emotional Learning. The survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the survey at any time. There are no foreseeable risks to your participation. All participants must be 18 years or older. All surveys must be submitted by participants by October 20th.

I will analyze data across the board, providing parental views on the matter. The views of individual parents will not be reported. The survey is anonymous. All results will be reported directly to me for analysis, not returned to your school. The school your child(ren) attend is independent of this research.

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. The advisor for Megan Armstrong is Dr. Kathy Thomas of ASU. She can be reached at (480) 727-1490.

Consent is implied upon voluntary participation of survey. Thank you for your participation in the survey.

Link to Survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FZNRN95>

If link does not work, please copy and paste into your browser

APPENDIX D
PARENT COMMENTS

Table 1*Parent Comments*

School Type	Comment
Public	As long as SEL avoids politics or controversial subjects, I approve of my children leaning about it.
Public Charter	I am unaware of what exactly is being taught in this class. I am not okay with speaking to children about transgender, sexual orientation, or cancelled culture. I would love for kids to understand how to communicate, process feelings and emotions, and how to respect others.
Public Charter	I feel like SEL is a life skill, or it should be considered one. It's hard to navigate the world without these skills
Public Charter	Teach kids life skills, don't indoctrinate or push social agendas. Teach more basic skills, and curriculum needs to be open and available, not masked and obscured.
Public Charter	I'm ok with this as long as there is NO teaching of they/they. Talking about changing gender or having that choice. God made man and women. And no teaching of sex or any behavior
Public Charter	Since the United States status on Education has fallen to near the middle of education across the "1st World" countries globally...how about we NOT focus on "feelings" and instead work on teaching "writing, reading and arithmetic"? Stop putting emphasis on how people feel BEFORE facts!
Public Charter	With the lack of counselors available to students, something needs to be in place to help students(especially ones with support at home) deal with emotions. Life is hard sometimes. Giving students the tools to handle tough situations is the least we can do in our schools.
Public Charter	I am a strong supporter of SEL at all grade levels.
Private	I feel sad that I wasn't already more aware.
Private	SEL is great! Teachers for many years have been implementing this with their language arts texts. Read alouds and modeling provide a strong structure for these skills.
Private	I love that our school has a dedicated SEL curriculum and sets aside time to teach SEL. I'd never heard of it before my daughter was I. kindergarten. But after thinking about the goals of SEL, I think schools should make SEL a priority.
Private	SEL is must be grounded in a Christian world view. I think self-awareness can be misconstrued into some of the woke and gender nonsense. Once we acknowledge there is objective right and wrong, then we can begin to see how our own behaviors interact with the world and people around us.
Private	SEL itself is not a bad idea but has gotten negative publicity, especially around the time of the pandemic. While SEL itself likely isn't controversial, the types and application of the skill is what becomes controversial because there are so many differing perspectives on how people should behave. So

	while I think SEL is valuable, I do have concerns around what is taught and how it's taught to my children.
Private	I think SEL is very important and appreciate it being taught in schools to supplement what is done at home and to practice those skills in a school environment.
Private	I think effort in SEL should include the ability to respectfully disagree but understanding other perspectives.
Private	I've worked in the mental health field for years (inpatient, outpatient, schools, hospitals, etc). Our mental health crisis could be lessened in my opinion if kids learned these tools at a young age! So many struggle with self awareness and social awareness which hinders their academic and social success!
Private	These skills were standard values from every teacher throughout my entire education path. I don't view them as teachable skills. They are traits that are nurtured with compassion, encouragement, and accountability.
Private	The idea of SEL sounds great but it is the implementation and consequences of the teaching that are alarming. I chose a private school that does not teach SEL or CRT and instead teaches the Bible which is our guide and book for how to live our lives.
Private	SEL has a negative connotation because schools do not do a good job explaining or communicating to parents what is (and is NOT) included in SEL curriculum. This has led many parents to believe that it is "indoctrination" and the issue has become politically charged.

APPENDIX E
IRB APPROVAL



EXEMPTION GRANTED

Kathy Thomas
Sch Applied Sci & Arts/P
480/727-1490
Kathy.Thomas@asu.edu

Dear [Kathy Thomas](#):

On 8/28/2023 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Parent Perceptions of Social Emotional Learning
Investigator:	Kathy Thomas
IRB ID:	STUDY00018448
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• consent_methods_email_25-08-2023, Category: Consent Form;• Irb protocol, Category: IRB Protocol;• recruitment_methods_email_parents_25-08-2023, Category: Recruitment Materials;• recruitment_methods_email_principals_25-08-2023, Category: Recruitment Materials;• SurveyText__18-08-2023, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2)(ii) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation (low risk) on 8/28/2023.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

If any changes are made to the study, the IRB must be notified at research.integrity@asu.edu to determine if additional reviews/approvals are required. Changes may include but not limited to revisions to data collection, survey and/or interview questions, and vulnerable populations, etc.

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Megan Armstrong
Megan Armstrong
Kathy Thomas
Laverne Dacosta