# Developing Teacher Efficacy Toward Social Emotional Learning Through an Advisory Professional Learning Community

by

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ABSTRACT

This action research study explored the effects of implementing a professional learning community (PLC) as part of an eighth-grade advisory program on teacher confidence and attitudes toward social emotional learning (SEL) and perceptions of school climate. The two-semester long study was implemented in a K-12 private independent school. Using a mixed-methods research design, this study answered the following three research questions: 1) How does participation in a PLC to develop teacher social emotional competence (SEC) and curriculum for an eighth-grade advisory program focused on SEL affect teachers' confidence in advisory and SEL? 2) How does participation in the PLC affect teachers' attitude toward advisory and SEL? 3) What affordances and constraints are experienced by teachers participating in the PLC during remote learning? Likert scale surveys were administered at the start and conclusion of the intervention. The surveys measured teachers' confidence in and attitude toward advisory, how well advisory supported remote learning, and perceptions of administrative support for the program. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the midpoint and conclusion of the intervention. The interviews assessed perceptions of the advisory curriculum, teachers' confidence and attitudes toward advisory, and affordances and constraints of the PLC. Study findings indicated three key results. Participation in the PLC (a) promoted teacher competence and commitment toward SEL, (b) increased SEL professionalism, and (c) increased camaraderie among advisory teachers as they evaluated the affordances and constraints of remotely teaching SEL. PLC participants demonstrated a more nuanced assessment of advisory curriculum and how to implement SEL content, and an increased commitment to continued professional growth. The PLC

also fostered teachers' sense of connection with colleagues. This study contributed to existing research on professional development for SEL and its effects on teacher efficacy and school climate, including satisfaction as an SEL teacher. In relation to practice, suggestions for middle school SEL interventions include the incorporation of collective learning for teachers as well as distributed leadership to promote teacher efficacy and commitment to SEL. Future research should focus on measuring the effects of teachers' collective learning and distributed leadership on school climate outcomes for students.

# DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my students and my colleagues, whose generosity in sharing their perspectives made each of us wiser, more connected, and more resilient.

To my family, friends, and mentors, I am forever grateful. This endeavor would not have been possible without your tireless support and encouragement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

CHAPTER Page

CHAPTER Page

CHAPTER Page

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

# CHAPTER 1

## LOCAL CONTEXT AND PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

At a middle school orientation or open house event, parents often ask, with admiration or shock, “Whatever inspired you to teach middle school?” By way of explanation, the question may be followed by a list of the challenges the overwhelmed parent is experiencing while raising their young adolescent. Perhaps the most straightforward among these explanations focuses on the difficulty of helping their child get organized, make responsible decisions, or complete schoolwork or chores. More nuanced challenges include trying to communicate with their child as he or she may be seeking more privacy or separation from parents, or trying to keep their child emotionally and physically safe. Parents worry about their adolescent children being exposed to negative influences through peers or social media, and about the risks associated with their children’s greater independence (Barry, Sidoti, Briggs, Reiter, & Lindsey, 2017; Ferguson, Muñoz, Garza, & Galindo, 2013; Herrman & Nieginski, 2014). Parents find it more challenging to guide their middle schoolers as they navigate changing relationships and are perhaps on the giving or receiving end of mean, exclusionary or bullying behavior (Wood, 2018). Conversely, parents may recall the challenges of their own middle school years, perhaps illustrated by a particularly embarrassing or challenging social, familial, or academic event. This may be recalled in the present with humor or with lingering pain, but it is nearly always accompanied by a sense of relief at no longer being an adolescent.

Middle school teachers are often asked to explain how they found their professional calling, and many can readily share the joys associated with teaching

adolescents. Their students are curious and eager to explore academic topics more deeply and are developing the skills to engage in learning in a more critical and self-directed way. Middle schoolers are becoming more discerning consumers and creators of art, literature, music, and digital media, and they approach these with a playful and ever more nuanced sense of humor. In addition, adolescents are developing empathy and a more profound sense of social justice, which can motivate them toward service, advocacy, and community engagement (Wood, 2018). However, teaching 11- to 14-year-old children is not without its challenges. Middle school teachers, like their parents, are similarly challenged by students who struggle to participate in constructive and socially acceptable ways. In the middle school years, students do not always communicate effectively, respectfully, or kindly with peers or adults and they may find themselves more often in conflict with adults (Spano, 2004; Smetana, 2011). Furthermore, it has been claimed that some adolescents are awkward and self-conscious in their rapidly changing bodies (Milevsky, 2015). They may have an intense interest in certain topics, while showing apathy toward their studies. Even students who are highly engaged may not fully demonstrate their learning, as they may not yet have the organizational skills, literacy skills or the self-regulation needed to follow instructions or to complete assignments on time (Wood, 2018).

**Middle School Student Challenges**

For students, the middle school years are a time of rapid physical and mental development. As Fagell (2019) observed:

> [Middle school children] are starting to think abstractly, engage in moral reasoning, and look for meaning. They're tuned into fairness and equity, and they're starting to solidify the beliefs and values they'll hold for life. Social-

> emotional maturity is still a work in progress, and sorting out relational drama is a time-consuming task. Many are in the throes of puberty and becoming moodier, more self-conscious, and less self-assured…. As they toggle between wanting to form their own identity and fit in with peers, they may withdraw or rebel. (p. 2)

As middle school students' intellectual capacity develops, they seek opportunities for "autonomy, competence, relationship and fun" (Crawford, 2008, p. 11). At times, they may feel frustrated by a school curriculum and structures that do not allow sufficient opportunities for them to develop their growing capacity for deeper intellectual engagement and relationships (Crawford, 2008; Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013), or that do not support their self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 2004; Crawford, 2008).

**Middle School Teacher Challenges**

As children move into adolescence, their ability to think abstractly, work independently, and to empathize increases (Wood, 2008). Adolescents' sense of morality, ethics, and social justice is also developing, and is often accompanied by growing interest and capacity to engage in advocacy (Eisenberg, Morris, McDaniel, & Spinrad, 2013; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Ozer, Ritterman, & Wanis, 2010; Stilwell, 2008). At the same time, the middle school grades present unique challenges for educators with regard to academic engagement, discipline and classroom management (Boulden, 2010; Cornell, Shukla, & Konold, 2016; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Mears, 2012). School climate is defined as "the quality and character of school life" as experienced by students and adults, and it "reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (National

School Climate Center, n.d.). School climate can also be seen as taking a downward turn in these years (McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor, & McClowry, 2015a; Voight, 2015).

In response to these challenges, many schools across the United States implemented curriculum designed to support adolescents' social and emotional learning (SEL). Often, SEL curriculum emphasizes five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, Gullota, 2015; Domitrovich, Durlak, Staley, & Weissberg, 2017). Curriculum interventions may consist of instructional methods designed to support the development of students' SEL skills while engaging in the core academic curriculum, as is the case with Responsive Classroom (https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/about/). Other approaches may consist of instructional time devoted specifically to developing SEL competencies, such as advisory programs, SEL lesson plans, and curriculum like Second Step (https://www.secondstep.org/) or Wyman's Teen Outreach Program (TOP) (https://wymancenter.org/top/). There is evidence of a relationship between a wide range of SEL instructional practices and broad, positive school climate outcomes (Adams & Khojasteh, 2018; Castillo, Salguero, Fernández-Berrocal, & Balluerka, 2013; Durlak et al., 2011; McKown, 2017; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). Effective SEL interventions have been shown to improve academic performance, attitudes, and behavior as measured by a reduction in student discipline incidents and substance abuse, while showing improvements in graduation rates (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). Because of the benefits of SEL curriculum, there is a national trend to encourage the implementation of SEL interventions for students.

**National Perspectives**

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is a national organization founded in 1994 to advance SEL curriculum in grades K-12. They advocate for high-quality, evidence-based approaches to support instruction in the SEL competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) (Elias et al., 1997). In the decades since its founding, CASEL has partnered with universities, school districts, and national professional organizations for educators to support continued research and development of SEL practices. These professional organizations include The Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (NCSEAD) and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

School-based SEL is becoming more of a priority in K-12 education in the United States. In 2011, Congress passed the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2011 (H.R.2437) authorizing funding for schoolwide training in SEL practices. Today, nearly every state has adopted learning standards for SEL, either as separate SEL guidelines or as part of broader academic guidelines (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010; Dusenbury, Weissberg, Goren, Domitrovich, & Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2014). In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education announced the Skills for Success Program. This program was designed to support Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) in developing approaches for teaching "non-cognitive" or SEL skills. The Skills for Success Program provided funding for various national agencies. These include the City of Chicago Board of Education's Start on Success Program, KIPP, Inc.'s, Project LEADS (Lifelong Education Achieves

Determination and Success) in Houston, Texas, Long Beach Scholars 2.0 in Long Beach, California, and the Los Angeles Unified School District's Mindset for All through Teacher Training and Parent Engagement.

There is evidence indicating the importance of developing SEL curriculum that is aligned with a school's strengths and challenges (McCormick et al., 2015a). There is also evidence that SEL curriculum is most effective when it is responsive to the culture of the learners (Sciuchetti, 2017). However, the relationship between the development of specific, malleable skills and distinct SEL interventions is still not fully understood (McKown, 2017). As a result, it is difficult for a school to know if particular practices are improving school climate or academic outcomes (McKown, 2017). One of the challenges for educators is that there is no agreed upon approach to SEL instruction or curriculum. There are no national assessments or nationally adopted standards. For example, in California, the Department of Education has expressed its commitment to developing students' social and emotional skills. However, it does not offer specific guidelines. In an effort to develop SEL standards to guide and assess program effectiveness, 25 states are now participating in the Collaborating States Initiative (Blad, 2016; Weissberg, 2019).

There are efforts to develop school climate measures to help schools understand their SEL curriculum strengths and identify areas for improvement (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012; Panorama Education, n.d.). For example, Panorama Education developed 5-point Likert scales designed to assess student and teacher perceptions of school climate (Panorama Education, n.d.). In their survey package, Panorama Education provides three question banks: student competencies, student supports and environment, and teacher skills and competencies. The first competency

emphasizes student development, while the second and third focus on school and teacher development. To better meet their goals, schools are free to modify or add items. Panorama Education also provides schools with detailed comparison reports of peer schools. Schools can monitor changes in perceptions over time. This type of data can be used to monitor student and faculty perceptions of school climate, as well as the impact of school wide SEL curriculum. Panorama SEL school climate survey data informed the design of the present research study.

**Local Context**

The local context of this research is an independent private school in Southern California. During the academic year in which this study was conducted (2020-2021), there were 272 students enrolled in the middle school division, which spans grades 6-8. Tuition was approximately $37,000 per year; approximately 20% of the enrolled students received some form of financial aid. Students of color represented about one-third of the student population. Most of the students came from middle- to upper-income households.

My employment as an administrator at this school began in 2015. There was some instability prior to my arrival that led to a shift in leadership styles and pedagogical philosophies. In addition, a sense of uncertainty regarding teaching and learning continued to cause challenges as division heads were continually changing. In my role as the Assistant Head of Middle School, veteran teachers often shared with me their concerns regarding perceptions of a deteriorating school climate. The teachers felt that students were less kind to each other. Incidents of bullying on campus and through social media were reported. There were perceptions of an increase in cliquishness, gossip, major disagreements, and physical altercations. Defiant behavior towards teachers and

disrespectful rowdiness at school events seemed to be at an all-time high. For a school that prided itself on providing a safe and nurturing environment, the occasional reports of risk-taking behaviors like theft and substance use were especially alarming. At the same time, parents seemed less supportive of teacher and administrative decisions. They questioned whether teachers and leaders truly valued the school community and whether administrators had students' best interests in mind.

Though teachers and administrators suspected that middle school climate was suffering, there was a lack of empirical data. It was possible that adults' sense of insecurity, given the volume and rate of change at the school, might influence perceptions and yield inaccurate observations and inferences. In addition to changes in administrative leadership, a new bell schedule was introduced, changing the structure of the school day while adding more pressure on teachers. The new schedule required major shifts in curriculum implementation and programs. In sum, the scope and pace of administrative change resulted in a school community that found itself grappling with its identity. To better assess student perceptions of school climate, Panorama SEL surveys were administered to all students in grades 3 through 12 in fall 2017, spring 2018, and fall 2018 semesters. This data offered an initial opportunity to investigate how specific school based SEL interventions might improve our school climate.

**Advisory and SEL**

All middle school students participated in an advisory program. This was a required part of the middle school curriculum, designated by scheduled meeting times with an advisor, that was designed to support SEL skills instruction. Although advisory was a part of the middle school program for years, the new bell schedule provided more

time for advisory meetings and related activities. During the first year of the present study, grade-level, mixed gender groups of approximately 12 to 17 students per advisory teacher met for about seven minutes each morning during homeroom. In the second and third years of this study, these homeroom meetings were extended to ten minutes. In addition, the advisory program included a weekly 40-minute class period to engage in lessons designed to build social and emotional skills by engaging in team and community building events.

The middle school advisory program goals were: 1) to establish meaningful relationships between students and adults; 2) to foster social-emotional learning and self-advocacy; 3) to provide academic advising and support individualized learning; 4) to encourage cross-cultural competencies and activism; and 5) to build inclusivity and school spirit. These learning and community goals were inspired by our school culture and mission, as well as by the guidelines provided by CASEL.

Advisory also served to establish a primary point of communication between the students, parents, and the school. For new students, fellow advisory classmates were often the first interactions new students had within the school community. For returning students, advisory was an important space to connect with others, as evidenced by frequent requests to be placed in advisory groups with friends. The advisory teacher often had the most frequent contact with a student. The advisors interacted with students through homeroom meetings, advisory meetings, and study halls, in addition to teaching their advisory students in another class. Because of these wide-ranging interactions, advisors were often the teacher who knew the student best. Parents were encouraged to reach out to advisors with questions about students' social adjustment, academic progress

or any other concerns. In addition to leading parent-teacher conferences, advisors monitored students' progress while providing guidance and support. Finally, advisors supported the development of a community by encouraging school spirit through games and competitions.

In my setting, the SEL curriculum continually evolved based on the feedback of the advisors with the overarching goal of fostering SEL competencies through continual improvement. Many of the selected lesson plans and activities were adapted from research-based, nationally recognized SEL curriculum providers, such as Second Step (https://www.secondstep.org/middle-school-curriculum), Common Sense Education (https://www.commonsense.org/education/digital-citizenship/curriculum), Random Acts of Kindness (https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/), and Teaching Tolerance (https://www.tolerance.org/). Other activities were developed by our school or were adapted from materials shared by peer schools. However, advisors and students expressed disinterest or aversion to certain activities, particularly ones that asked students to consider and share feelings in a group setting. This resulted in an undercurrent of complaints from some teachers, students, and parents about engaging in the advisory program. At the same time, others expressed concern that avoiding such activities would result in less academic engagement, more student conflicts, and an overall declining school climate. The recognition of the importance of SEL, with the lack of a clear plan to engage advisors in professional development, often resulted in complaints about the advisory curriculum being addressed in one of two ways. At times, advisory lessons that felt ineffective were retained because they were familiar to teachers. At other times,

lessons that were deemed inadequate were replaced with new ones that teachers felt unprepared to deliver.

Some advisory teachers sought or were encouraged to participate in off-campus workshops or other focused training in SEL principles and practices. However, this was not required during the years prior to the start of this study. Professional development in SEL was brief, infrequent, and usually included as part of a faculty meeting. When provided, training often consisted of a short demonstration, coaching session, or explanation of an upcoming advisory lesson. There was also the perception that advisory was a secondary responsibility to other obligations. As such, teachers often reported that the lessons were too difficult to effectively implement given the limited time to prepare. Additionally, the lessons' SEL concepts were perceived as too basic, the social scenarios unrealistic, and the skills exercises too contrived. Not surprisingly, this confluence of factors resulted in delivering some SEL lessons in a way that felt less than satisfactory. Lessons were sometimes partially completed or not used at all. There was a negative perception that the advisory lessons were boring or pointless, and the SEL curriculum was not adequately implemented.

Although some of the feedback about advisory was negative, teachers responded positively to certain aspects of the program. A number of teachers asked for a focus on team-building activities. These activities were described as authentic and, therefore, easier to implement; they were perceived as meaningful to both advisors and students. However, it was difficult to assess the advisory curriculum, as there was not a systematic approach to soliciting teacher feedback regarding implementation, student engagement, or observed SEL outcomes.

**Professional Development in SEL**

During the winter and summer of 2020, in part to address school climate concerns, all middle school teachers were required to engage in training to support the development of positive classroom climate using the Responsive Classroom approach (www.responsiveclassroom.org). This training was extended to the middle school after it was first implemented in the lower and primary school divisions. This was the first time such training was required of all middle school teachers. At the time of implementation, the school did not have a plan to assess the effectiveness of this training in terms of student or teacher outcomes.

Although such division-wide training has the potential to address some of the concerns about SEL instruction cited by middle school advisors, outside training programs are not customized to the unique culture of a school. By not responding to the culture of the school, SEL programs may fail to engage students or to meet their specific needs (McCormick et al., 2015a; Sciuchetti, 2017). Programs such as Responsive Classroom introduce a set of SEL practices, but do not recognize teachers' existing strengths or interests. Moreover, they do not offer a means of assessing the impact of any specific SEL intervention or instructional method on SEL skills development and academic outcomes in a particular school (McKown, 2017). Outside training in SEL teaching methods may form part of a strategy to improve our middle school's approach to SEL. However, a successful strategy must also include ongoing assessment of our school culture, strengths, and areas for improvement. In this way, it will be possible to develop an advisory program that is engaging to students and teachers, and that will also better support advisors in other aspects of their role (such as academic advising and

communication with parents). Lastly, an effective SEL program should include a means to assess the relationship between the SEL practices in our school and student outcomes.

**Prior Cycles of Research in this Study**

The current study is influenced by previous cycles of research. During Cycle 0, interviews were conducted with four middle school teachers to assess teacher perceptions of our middle school climate, strengths and weaknesses of our current approach to SEL instruction, and techniques to support SEL and school climate. Results from this preliminary research revealed that teachers felt insufficiently trained and unsupported in the advisor role, and that there was a need for further professional development and development of SEL curriculum. Cycle 0 findings suggested that development of an SEL curriculum that better reflected our school mission, and that would leverage teachers' strengths, might serve to improve teachers' confidence in leading advisory. In spring semester 2019, the end of Cycle 0, a pilot version of a curriculum intervention that sought to increase student engagement in advisory and teacher engagement and self-efficacy toward SEL was tested.

From fall 2019 through spring 2020, Cycles 1 and 2 were conducted. An expanded version of the curriculum intervention was tested, this time designed to take place over these two semesters (fall and spring). However, Cycle 2 of the civic engagement intervention was interrupted in March 2020, as the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic spread. In response to the public health crisis, all on-campus classes were required to be delivered remotely in compliance with physical distancing guidelines. At that time, the focus of the advisory program shifted to providing SEL support to students in the context of remote learning. This interruption to the civic

engagement project suggested another potential avenue of research. The positive engagement of advisors in adapting the SEL curriculum to support students during the pandemic suggested that the process of collaboratively developing SEL curriculum may strengthen teacher SEC. Advisor team meeting memos from Cycles 1 and 2 were examined to determine how participation in these meetings may reflect teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy toward SEL. Student and teacher interviews and other qualitative data from Cycles 1 and 2 suggested that the process of collaborative professional learning increased teacher self-efficacy toward SEL, and that the curriculum intervention improved student attitudes toward advisory. Based on findings from Cycles 0, 1, and 2, Cycle 3 of this research study focused on the effects of participating in a professional learning community (PLC) to support SEL instruction on teacher self-efficacy and attitudes toward SEL.

**Problem of Practice**

At the inception of this action research project, it was clear that our middle school advisory program did not meet its established goals, which were inspired in part by tradition and in part by a changing school culture. The advisory program goals of self-advocacy, service to and exchange with others, cross-cultural competencies, and activism were perceived as lacking. Our teachers did not feel adequately supported, nor did they feel effective in delivering all aspects of the advisory curriculum. As a result, the advisory program did not meet two of the necessary criteria that would lead to the effective implementation of SEL curriculum. First, the SEL curriculum must be contextually appropriate, responding to the specific culture and needs of the school environment in which it is implemented (McCormick et al., 2015a; Sciuchetti, 2017).

Second, teachers need sufficient SEL skills and confidence in their ability to deliver the curriculum (self-efficacy) (Jones, 2013; Waajid, Garner, & Owen, 2013; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

In the fall and spring semesters of the 2017-2018 school year, our school administered the previously described Panorama SEL surveys to students in grades 3-12. Our results indicated lower scores in relation to students enrolled in comparable schools. The survey measured teacher-student relationships, teacher expectations for students, students' sense of belonging, and student engagement. For example, results from the fall 2017 survey resulted in scores below the 19th percentile in all categories but engagement. Spring 2018 results showed scores below the 19th percentile in all categories. The fall 2018 survey showed slightly higher but still concerning results. Importantly, scores rose to the 59th percentile on constructs that measured belonging and engagement but were still below the 37th percentile in concepts that measured expectations and relationships. Even with this improvement, the trend in responses from students in both our middle and upper school divisions was concerning.

Our SEL was treated by previous administrations as an afterthought rather than a core component of curriculum. Any such intervention is influenced by existing school climate and relationships among community members (Hoy & Miskel, 2012). However, teachers were not treated as professionals in the development of the program and their existing skills were not sufficiently employed. This ultimately contributed to the ongoing challenge of teacher burnout. Teachers were asked to teach SEL using materials that felt inauthentic and difficult to deliver. The content did not speak to their interests and skill sets and did not meaningfully engage students. Given the flexibility of our advisory

program and the identified need to improve it, advisory was the perfect place to develop an intervention intended to improve school climate. Evidence suggested that in order to be successfully implemented, an SEL program would need to resonate with school culture, values, and pedagogies, and would also require focused administrative support, including appropriate training of faculty and staff (Osher et al., 2016).

**Purpose of the Study**

This action research project aimed to improve school climate by increasing teacher confidence in teaching SEL and providing a voice for teachers to participate in the curriculum development process. Based on findings from Cycles 0, 1, and 2, Cycle 3 of this research study focused on the effects of participating in a PLC to support SEL instruction on teacher self-efficacy and attitudes toward advisory and SEL. This intervention was designed to support teachers in developing a contextually relevant advisory curriculum that was worthwhile, engaging and enjoyable to students and teachers. This concurrent mixed-methods action research study (Ivankova, 2015; Mertler, 2017) was designed to answer the following three research questions:

1) How does participation in a professional learning community (PLC) to develop teacher social emotional competence (SEC) and curriculum for an eighth-grade advisory program focused on SEL affect teachers' confidence in advisory and SEL?

2) How does participation in the PLC affect teachers' attitude toward advisory and SEL?

3) What affordances and constraints are experienced by teachers participating in the PLC during remote learning?

# CHAPTER 2

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH GUIDING THE STUDY

There is a substantial body of literature on the importance of social and emotional learning (SEL) skills to students' healthy social adjustment, prosocial behavior, and academic achievement in school and in life, as well as on the effects of SEL instruction on these positive outcomes (Zimmerman, 2002; Castillo et al., 2013; McKown, 2017; Adams and Khojasteh, 2018). However, researchers are also only just beginning to consider the influence of teachers' attitudes, such as their own perceived ability in teaching SEL, on the success of SEL instructional practices toward positive student outcomes and school climate (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012). Moreover, there is little research to consider the effects of teaching SEL, or of professional development in strategies and approaches toward teaching SEL, on teacher outcomes, such as perceptions of school climate, job satisfaction, and self-efficacy (Collie et al., 2012; Jones, 2013). This research attempts to address this void by exploring how SEL curriculum can influence school climate focusing on teachers. This literature review will explore theoretical perspectives as related to the research.

In this chapter, social cognitive theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1977; 2000; 2005) and self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2000) will be defined and applied to the problem of practice of school climate and SEL instruction. These frameworks offer perspectives to understand teacher motivation, perceptions of school climate, job satisfaction and attitudes toward SEL. Next, the concepts of collective efficacy (Goddard, 2001; Goddard, Goddard, Sook Kim, & Miller, 2015) and professional capital (Fullan, Rincón-Gallardo, & Hargreaves, 2015; Darling-Hammond,

2009) will be considered, emphasizing how these concepts may inform a more effective approach toward professional development. Lastly, the implications of each of these theories toward developing the SEL professional development intervention in the present study will be discussed.

**Social Cognitive Theory and Self-Determination Theory**

There are two main theories that situate this research: SCT and SDT. Both theories present complementary explanations of learning and motivation and inform the SEL professional development intervention in this research study. SCT posits that learning takes place in a social environment (Bandura, 1977; 2000; 2005). Individuals plan and set goals for themselves based on social norms, values, personal motivations, and ideals. People reflect on progress toward their goals and adapt their behavior based on external and internal feedback (Bandura, 2005). Through this process of self-regulation, individuals assess and adjust their behavior based on personal or socially influenced values and standards.

SDT is a theory of motivation that, like SCT, asserts the importance of self-regulation and aspirations toward personal growth in understanding human behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, according to SDT, there are three primary needs that drive human motivation: the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. One may perceive competence through success at an interesting task, or positive feedback on one's performance. Relatedness is defined as a feeling or belief that one belongs and is connected to a community. Autonomy is the feeling or belief that one has opportunities to choose pursuits and the ability to independently decide how to accomplish them (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

With SCT, there is a focus on internal, self-regulating processes to explain learning, in contrast to behaviorist theories, which frame learning as a response to positive and negative stimuli (Clark, 2018). In SCT, self-efficacy, or an individual's beliefs regarding the likelihood of success (Bandura, 1977), informs a person's decision to pursue a goal (Bandura, 2005; Schwarzer, 1992; Maddux, 1995). There are many influences that factor into self-efficacy beliefs, including previous success (or failure) at a task, physiological or emotional status, enjoyment, or anxiety, among others (Bandura, 1997). Social modeling, or vicarious experience, also plays a part in learning. Through social modeling, individuals observe the outcome of others' actions and adjust their behavior accordingly (Bandura, 1997; 2005). Decisions people make based on self-efficacy can shape their environment, as a person may seek or avoid opportunities based on their perceptions of success. Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) is an important and related theory with respect to this research. SCCT describes the relationship between self-efficacy, outcome expectations, personal goals, and career outcomes (Lent, 2013; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). SCCT explains how self-efficacy can motivate individuals to engage in opportunities for mastery experiences in specific professional domains, leading to particular skills development and career outcomes.

Similar to SCT, SDT also offers a theory of behavior that focuses on intrinsic motivation. Both SCT and SDT acknowledge that individuals exercise agency in choosing pursuits. However, SDT connects motivation to innate psychological needs, which are not subject to individual choice (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Though this statement may seem contradictory, SDT simply asserts that individuals exercise choice in how they meet their innate needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. This choice is

reflected in their selection of goals, and their enjoyment, effort, and persistence in the pursuit of these endeavors. It is important to note that environmental factors play a part in meeting these needs. For example, a student who plays soccer may form close friendships and be recognized by family and teammates for her skills. If she struggles to learn fractions, receives low scores on math tests, and feels isolated from friends while studying, she may choose to devote more time and effort toward soccer than toward mathematics.

Like SCT, SDT recognizes self-efficacy as a factor in one's sense of competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Relating to personal growth and professional development, both SCT and SDT note the significance of relationships in shaping behavior. According to SCT, deciding to pursue an endeavor is socially situated, and decisions are made based on the norms and values of the community (Bandura, 2001). SDT identifies the influence of shared engagement on motivation, including the need to feel cared for and connected (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Key motivations with SCT include the importance of personal agency, the desire for control over one's environment and personal choices (Bandura, 1977; 2001; 2005). According to SDT, perceived autonomy in choosing pursuits or deciding how to complete a task is also a key source of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Because of the interdependence between environmental factors, the development of self-efficacy, and experiences of competence, relatedness and autonomy, workplaces and schools can nurture or impede individual motivation. In the following sections, related studies applying SCT and SDT to teacher self-efficacy, school climate, academic outcomes and SEL will be considered. Next, the theories of collective efficacy and professional capital are discussed in the design of a professional development

intervention that should improve self-efficacy toward SEL. Teacher participation in the development and implementation of the intervention is intended to serve the objective of increasing teachers' intrinsic motivation as they engage in professional learning.

**Related Studies Based on Self-Efficacy**

Research shows a positive correlation between teachers' sense of self-efficacy and the academic outcomes of their students (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007; Pedota, 2015). There may be a connection between teacher self-efficacy and perceptions of competence in SEL and their perceptions of school climate, their job satisfaction, and student outcomes. Greater teacher social emotional competence (SEC) and efficacy in SEL have been associated with a more positive classroom climate (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), more positive teacher perceptions of school climate, and greater job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2012). Low teacher SEC is associated with increased stress and decreased job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2012), suggesting that SEL professional development might reduce teacher burnout (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Collie, Shapka, Perry, & Martin, 2015; Collie, 2017). For example, Jennings et al. (2017) examined the impact of mindfulness-based professional development with K-5 teachers. Their results showed a modest but significant improvement in classroom interactions while also indicating a decrease in teachers' perceptions of stress.

In their research, Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd (2013) found that teachers who exhibit greater SEL skills were more effective at building positive student relationships, creating favorable classrooms and modeling SEL skills for their students. As such, the researchers recommend a focus on the development of teacher competencies through ongoing, daily professional development activities. For example, professional

development might provide support for teachers' social and emotional well-being by modeling practices that foster professional reflection and SEL skills.

There is evidence that indicates secondary school teachers are less comfortable leading SEL instruction than elementary teachers; however, more research is needed regarding how to support secondary teachers' SEL instruction (Collie et al., 2015). SEL-focused professional development may increase the effectiveness of SEL instruction, perhaps leading to increased positive teacher outcomes (like reduced stress and improved job satisfaction) (Collie et al., 2015). In a study of elementary and secondary school teachers, a positive relationship was found between confidence in teaching SEL, teaching efficacy, and job satisfaction, and a negative relationship was found between comfort in teaching SEL and teacher stress (Collie et al., 2012). Focusing on SCCT, Granziera and Perera (2019) conducted a longitudinal study exploring the connectedness of teacher self-efficacy, engagement, and job satisfaction. They found evidence indicating that teachers with higher self-efficacy were more professionally engaged by an increased investment in professional development and opportunities for growth. This increased engagement may lead to greater job satisfaction and improved perceptions of school climate (Granziera & Perera, 2019).

This reviewed research suggests that an intervention designed to develop teachers' efficacy toward SEL might improve teachers' attitudes toward SEL and perceptions of school climate. In the present study, an intervention was developed that incorporated the principles of SCT and SDT. The intervention was designed to increase teachers' motivation to develop their SEL skills by simultaneously providing support for teachers to satisfy the needs for connectedness, competence, and autonomy that are

posited by SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This intervention was also designed to facilitate self-regulation and social learning as mechanisms for developing efficacy toward SEL.

**Related Studies Based on Self-Determination Theory**

Although self-efficacy plays a role in improving teachers' sense of competence in SEL, motivation to engage in professional learning may be increased through other levers. Deci (2009) considered how SDT might guide approaches to large-scale school reform, citing the example of the Israeli First Things First (FTF) model. The FTF model was designed to foster competence, relatedness, and autonomy in both students and teachers through membership in small learning communities (SLCs) and in family and student advocate system (FAS) groups formed within the SLC (Deci, 2009). Student and teacher relatedness was developed by membership in FAS groups (consisting of a faculty member and approximately 20 students), while teachers within an SLC exercised autonomy in choosing foci for collaborative professional learning (Deci, 2009).

Similarly, in a qualitative case study, Power and Goodnough (2018) documented positive outcomes from STEM teachers' engagement in teams of two to eight in an action research professional learning program, Teachers in Action (TIA). TIA participants showed an increase in sense of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. In discussing the findings, the authors identified participants' autonomy in choosing topics for self-directed learning, their increased competence as demonstrated by anecdotes of mastery experiences, and their development of supportive relationships with other participants as key factors in the success of the program.

School and system factors can foster competence, relatedness, and autonomy for teachers, and can also relate to teachers' job satisfaction and stress (Collie et al., 2017).

Autonomy-supportive work environments are defined as those in which administrators share decision making with teachers. In these environments, curricular reform tends to be bottom-up rather than top-down (such as through district mandates), and such environments are associated with greater job satisfaction and lower stress (Collie et al., 2017). In contrast, more controlling environments, defined as those in which individuals are not included in decision-making or are pressured to think or behave in a certain way (Reeve & Cheon, 2014), are associated with increased teacher stress and decreased job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2017).

In considering the present study, these findings suggested that interventions for professional development in SEL that are guided by the principles of SDT may be effective in increasing teacher SEC, increasing job satisfaction, and reducing teacher burnout. However, these studies did not directly measure how or whether increasing teacher SEC may also increase the effectiveness of teachers in designing or delivering SEL instruction to their students (McKown, 2017). Moreover, research is still needed to inform understanding of student attitudes toward SEL instruction, or how increasing teacher efficacy toward SEL may increase student engagement in and satisfaction with SEL programs and practices.

**Collective Efficacy and Professional Capital**

Enactive experience can serve not only to create self-efficacy in individuals (Bandura, 2001), but can also promote perceptions of collective efficacy as individuals experience mastery because of individual or group effort (Goddard et al., 2015). Beliefs about the collective efficacy of a group depend, in part, upon the individual self-efficacy beliefs of group members, but also depend upon perceptions of the group's ability to

work effectively together (Bandura, 2000). Applying this concept to school settings, Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy (2004) define collective efficacy as teachers' belief that "the faculty as a whole can organize and execute the courses of action required to have a positive effect on students" (p. 4). In considering curriculum development and school reform, it is important to consider the concept of collective efficacy separately from self-efficacy. School reform efforts generally require collaborative work for effective implementation. Perceptions of collective efficacy may be more important in such collaborative efforts, as individuals may be more likely to persist in large-scale group endeavors when confidence in the effectiveness of the group is high (Bandura, 2000).

The concepts of self-efficacy and collective efficacy are further operationalized for the field of education by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) in their coining of the term "professional capital." In considering the necessary conditions for school improvement, there are three key components of professional capital: human capital, social capital, and decisional capital. Human capital refers to what one might consider individual talent (such as skilled and well-prepared teachers). However, the authors assert that within a professional organization, human capital is only useful in conjunction with the second component, social capital. Social capital is the quality and nature of interactions among individuals in the organization: it is the ability to effectively collaborate. Decisional capital refers to the ability to exercise good judgment or to improvise when faced with a new challenge. The sum of these components amounts to the individual and collective professionalism, also defined as professional capital, of the organization. Professional capital includes the competence, responsibility, and dedication of educators, and the

setting of high standards for individual and collective performance (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

In organizations that support the development of professional capital, the group will serve to self-regulate: members hold each other accountable for meeting agreed upon standards (Fullan et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2009). Conversely, lack of organizational support for change can thwart collective efficacy (Bandura, 1986). For example, a singular focus on individual learning as opposed to collective professional learning, or on external rather than internal accountability, can undermine the development of professional capital (Fullan et al., 2015). However, an organization may develop its professional capital by fostering a culture of collaboration. Professional capital is developed by "simultaneously [building] individual and collective efficacy and [creating] links of lateral accountability that push and pull team members to get better at their practice" (Fullan et al., 2015, p. 8).

**Related Studies Based on Professional Capital and Collective Efficacy**

Early studies have also postulated the importance of teacher collaboration as a means of developing teacher professionalism and efficacy, finding a relationship between perceptions of trust and the degree of collaboration among faculty (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). In a study measuring the relationship between the construct of collective efficacy and academic outcomes, Goddard (2001) examined 91 elementary schools. It was found that differences in mastery experience (defined as past school performance) were associated with collective efficacy. The study did not determine a causal relationship. However, findings suggested the need for future investigations into factors that may

influence teachers' collective efficacy, and how increasing collective efficacy may result in improved student outcomes (Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002; Goddard et al., 2004).

There is also evidence that certain contextual factors in schools, such as a supportive leadership style and distributed leadership, can foster greater trust and professionalism in teachers (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). This leadership style is sometimes referred to as a professional approach (Darling-Hammond, 2009). It can be contrasted with a bureaucratic or command-and-control style, in which standardized curriculum and instructional methods are prescribed rather than selected or designed by teachers (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Using a professional approach, institutions provide the necessary conditions to support the professionalism of faculty. Educators are then trusted to "make responsible decisions" and to "behave in knowledgeable and ethical ways" (Darling-Hammond, 2009, p. 49). In examining highly effective schools in the United States and abroad, Darling-Hammond (2009) cites strategies such as investing in highly skilled teachers, supporting ongoing professional learning for faculty, and providing substantial time for collaborative learning and curriculum development.

The effects of teacher collaborative learning have been examined in research on the professional practice of lesson study, as well as in professional learning communities (PLCs). When teachers use a lesson study approach, they work together to design lesson plans that will be implemented by all teachers in the team. Research, peer classroom observations, assessment, and revision are cyclically employed to continually improve on lessons, methods, and materials (Hiebert & Stigler, 2000). In a qualitative study of high school teachers in Singapore, such collective learning was found to be correlated with increased teacher self-efficacy (Chong & Kong, 2012). In addition to increasing self-

efficacy, there is also evidence to suggest that lesson study could be a useful practice for developing teacher professionalism (Taylor et al., 2005; Dudley et al., 2019).

In the United States, PLCs are more common than lesson study. They are an organizational structure for collaborative learning that offer the potential to increase faculty professionalism and collective efficacy through professional development (Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017). There is some variation in how PLCs are defined and implemented (Blankenship & Ruona, 2007). A widely accepted definition of a PLC includes five elements: 1) shared beliefs, values, and vision, 2) shared and supportive leadership, 3) collective learning and its application, 4) supportive conditions, and 5) shared personal practice (Hord, Sommers, & Hargreaves, 2008, p. 9). Research studies found an association between the PLC practices of teacher collaboration and collective learning and an increased sense of collective efficacy (Goddard et al., 2015; Lee, Zhang, & Yin, 2011). In a study of international schools, trust among colleagues and faculty collective efficacy were correlated with an increased likelihood of engaging in a professional learning community (Gray & Summers, 2015). Distributed leadership was also found to be correlated with increased likelihood of engaging in PLCs, as well as with greater teacher collective efficacy (Jamil & Hamzah, 2019). Moreover, there is evidence that collective efficacy is associated with increased job satisfaction (Viel-Ruma, Houchins, Jolivette, & Benson, 2010). As Vescio, Ross, & Adams (2008) found in their review of eleven studies on PLCs, learning communities fostered increased "collaboration, a focus on student learning, teacher authority or empowerment, and continuous learning" (p. 88).

The present study considers the insight these findings offer for the design of an intervention to increase faculty self-efficacy toward SEL. An intervention with the potential to promote collective efficacy and professionalism toward SEL, such as a PLC, may increase teacher job satisfaction. In addition, it may improve the school community as a whole by increasing collaboration, shared accountability, and a sense of belonging. Specifically, this study focuses on improving professional capital through an intervention that promotes a competence-supportive professional teaching environment, including the practices of collective learning, shared personal practice, and shared decision making for SEL instruction. The intervention was designed to provide the conditions and supports needed to successfully implement and sustain these practices in my school.

**Prior Cycles of Action Research: Introduction**

The purpose of action research is to identify a problem or concern in the researcher's local context, to propose and implement an intervention, and then to measure any changes that may have occurred (Mertler, 2017). In an iterative process, data is used to assess and refine the intervention as the cycle is repeated. Prior cycles of research were critical in informing the trajectory of this current research study. Cycle 0 was most impactful in assessing weaknesses in the approach to SEL in my school. Based on my Cycle 0 findings, I hypothesized that the development of an SEL curriculum that better reflected our school culture, and that would leverage faculty members' strengths, might serve to improve teachers' confidence in leading advisory. In Cycle 1, as the middle school responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus of this research project shifted from examining the effects of a particular SEL curriculum to examining the effects of

professional learning to guide SEL. Together, the findings of Cycles 0 and 1 led to the development of the PLC intervention.

**Cycle 0: Identifying Challenges in SEL Instruction**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Cycle 0 with four middle school faculty members in March 2019 to assess faculty perceptions of school climate and attitudes toward advisory and SEL. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix A. Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants: one advisor was interviewed from each middle school grade level, as well as one middle school teacher who was not an advisor. An advisor was chosen from each grade level to assess similarities and differences in attitudes between advisors of different grades, and to compare these with a teacher who did not participate in advisory.

Several common themes related to SEL curriculum integration emerged from these interviews. First, professional and administrative support for teachers was identified as a weakness in the current approach to SEL. Some teachers ($n$ = 3) were unable to identify personal strengths when teaching SEL curriculum. One participant commented, "I don't know; I've never really thought about it." When asked about teaching, another participant commented that "[offering] SEL education is assuming that the teachers who take it on are equipped." In addition, the teacher had some resentment at being asked to teach SEL skills, stating that this responsibility "used to be the purview of families." The teacher felt negatively challenged by the curriculum, questioned whether they possessed sufficient SEC to be an advisor, and felt that this should not be their responsibility. Unclear consequences for students who demonstrated disciplinary infractions was another concern ($n$ = 3). Similarly, teachers indicated insufficient administrative support

for implementing consequences. One participant commented that "one student can affect the whole class and it's not fair for the other students," and that "there's no help from above sometimes," referring to administrative support for disciplinary issues.

In contrast, some strengths toward SEL were indicated. Student-teacher relationships ($n$ = 3) were cited as an asset by the teachers interviewed. Advisory period was seen as an opportunity for teachers to improve their relationships with students by providing support and getting to know their students on a deeper level, which is not always possible in traditional content courses.

There were also several themes in relation to how the school could better support SEL instruction. Most teachers ($n$ = 3) indicated a need for additional professional development, with a specific emphasis on the topics covered in the SEL curriculum. One noted that more guidance was needed in "how to teach SEL, as opposed to why teach SEL," and suggested workshops or activities to practice facilitating advisory conversations or protocols. Another teacher broadly requested "comprehensive training for advisors." Another suggestion was to focus on more inclusive teaching practices and classroom environments to bring "everyone into the conversation," referring to inclusion of all students. To improve instruction, some ($n$ = 2) thought that there should be more hands-on learning for students with a clear, well-defined "scope and sequence" of SEL skills, curriculum, and expected outcomes by grade level.

The results from these interviews offered some insight into the teachers' perspectives of SEL curriculum in relation to their attitudes and dispositions. For example, one of the teachers was very supportive of SEL and was motivated toward improving SEL teaching skills while also indicating a perception of administrative

support. This reflects an "SEL-thriver" profile, or a teacher who is "confident, supported, and committed to professional growth" in SEL (Collie et al., 2015, p. 155). Although it was not possible from this limited data to determine whether a causal relationship existed, it suggests the possibility that increased teacher efficacy toward SEL may be correlated with a more positive perception of school climate. In addition, some teachers ($n$ = 3) suggested a need for more training in SEL instructional methods, facilitation protocols, or in advisory curriculum overall. These teachers also suggested that they felt unsupported by the administration in their implementation of the SEL curriculum.

**Cycle 0 and Cycle 1: Exploring a Civic Engagement Approach to SEL**

Using the findings from the Cycle 0 faculty interviews, the initial emphasis of this next cycle was an SEL curricular intervention centered on civic engagement. Civic engagement was selected because it was contextually relevant (McCormick et al., 2015a), aligning with the school culture, and because it had the potential to foster student SEL skills development (Association of American Colleges & Universities, n.d.; Battistoni, 2013; Deardorff & Edwards, 2013; Kornbluh et al., 2015; Ozer et al., 2010). This focus could better leverage faculty members' current strengths and knowledge, while potentially improving the transfer of that knowledge to teaching SEL (Perkins & Salomon, 1988). Finally, the curriculum might better engage students by applying SEL skills to accomplish hands-on, choice- and inquiry-based projects.

A limited version of a civic engagement curriculum was implemented during Cycle 0, receiving positive feedback from advisors. As a result, the advisor team agreed to expand the intervention in the 2019-2020 school year (Cycles 1 and 2). At that time,

the civic engagement project intervention became the central focus of the eighth-grade advisory curriculum. The Cycle 1 and 2 research questions were as follows:

1) How and to what extent does implementing a contextually relevant civic engagement intervention in the eighth-grade advisory program affect teachers' sense of self-efficacy, attitudes toward SEL, and perceptions of school climate overall?

2) How and to what extent does implementing a contextually relevant civic engagement intervention in the eighth-grade advisory program affect those students' attitudes toward SEL and perceptions of school climate overall?

Eighth-grade student perceptions of school climate and of their own SEL competencies were assessed in fall 2019, near the start of the Cycle 1 intervention, in a schoolwide Panorama SEL survey (Panorama Education, n.d.; www.panoramaed.com). Starting in October 2019, advisory teachers administered an expanded version of the civic engagement intervention to all eighth-grade students. The curriculum included a guest speaker and trips to local service organizations. In addition, students were introduced to the fundamentals of design thinking, youth participatory action research, and project-based learning. In the spring semester (Cycle 2), students were grouped into cohorts. Within those cohorts, students designed their own small-group, inquiry-based projects designed to address a community need. The projects would culminate in a poster session near the end of the second semester (May).

**Cycle 2: SEL Instruction in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Cycle 2 of the civic engagement intervention was interrupted in March 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as all on-campus activities ceased in adherence to physical

distancing guidelines. At this time, the advisory team turned its attention to supporting students academically, socially, and emotionally in the context of remote learning. Advisory teachers continued to meet for collaborative planning by video conference. The group met more frequently during remote learning, generally once per week, and detailed meeting minutes and researcher memos were recorded. Teachers appeared to engage more deeply in the advisory program than they had during the civic engagement project. This raised the question of whether the SEL intervention that was being tested in Cycles 1 and 2 was the only mechanism by which faculty might increase self-efficacy toward SEL, given that faculty SEC appeared to be increasing even after disruption of the civic engagement curriculum. With the shift to remote learning, SEL interventions were developed collaboratively by the advisory team on a weekly basis, in response to their observations of students' interests and needs. As a result of this preliminary observation, the focus of the research was shifted in Cycle 2 to explore the potential of collective professional learning to improve faculty efficacy and attitudes toward SEL.

Qualitative content analysis, a process that includes "selecting material; structuring and generating categories; defining categories; revising and expanding the frame" (Schreier, 2013, p. 7), was used to code advisory team meeting materials. Over five rounds of coding, codes were identified and organized into themes, eliminating redundant codes. New codes were also identified as the initial themes were revised and more materials were added to the document analysis. As a result of this process, a framework for collaborative professional development for SEL was developed (Table 1).

Table 1

*SEL Self-Efficacy: Framework for Collaborative Professional Development*

| Theme | Code |
|---|---|
| *Critiquing advisory / SEL* | Identifying problem, offering critique |
| *Building knowledge / skills* | seeking information, seeking input, seeking expertise, inviting collaboration |
| *Contributing to advisory / SEL instruction* | Problem solving, making suggestion, sharing information/observation, making curricular connections, sharing related expertise, taking initiative, reaching consensus, demonstrating leadership, evaluating |

During remote learning, there was a growing tendency of advisory teachers to engage in meta conversations regarding the purpose of advisory in the context of the pandemic. Teachers engaged in active problem solving, took initiative in planning SEL activities, and shared information and expertise with colleagues in these meetings more often than they had at the beginning of the year. This engagement included identifying student needs, making suggestions to support learning, community connection, health, and wellness, and sharing successful and unsuccessful examples from their own practice in order to improve. Qualitative evidence suggested that teacher self-efficacy and engagement toward SEL was increasing, possibly a result of the professional learning that the group had engaged in while developing and implementing the first portions of the civic engagement curriculum. However, it may also have been the result of the need to develop new SEL strategies in response to this novel challenge.

### Cycle 2: Faculty Perceptions of Collaborative Learning for SEL

In order to assess the perceptions of teachers with regard to the effectiveness of the advisory team meetings in supporting their ability to deliver SEL instruction, individual interviews were conducted with each of the eighth-grade advisory teachers over video conference in June 2020. The interview included questions to solicit feedback regarding what aspects of the advisory team meetings teachers found helpful, in what ways the meetings could be improved, and general impressions or suggestions with regard to the past year's advisory program. See Appendix B for the complete list of questions.

Teacher responses were overwhelmingly positive regarding the usefulness of advisory team meetings in preparing them to lead advisory lessons and guide students in the civic engagement project. Several teachers acknowledged the fact that they found leading advisory to be challenging at times due to their inexperience or to student resistance toward engaging in the activities. However, common themes mentioned by teachers included appreciation for the planning by the coordinator (the researcher) of advisory team meeting agendas and materials, the opportunity to seek advice from colleagues, and the support for flexible approaches to teaching SEL. Several teachers noted with appreciation that lesson plans, especially in the latter part of the year (both during the civic engagement project and after the transition to remote learning) were often revised or changed completely in response to teacher input. Teachers observed that the collaborative development of curriculum and providing different options to address a learning goal increased during remote learning, after the civic engagement project was interrupted.

Although some teachers noted that it was occasionally difficult to attend advisory team meetings, feedback was mixed regarding the length of time spent in meetings. Some teachers expressed a preference for the greater frequency of meetings during remote learning, noting that the meetings felt purposeful and effective. Other teachers expressed a preference for less frequent meetings, or alternatives to synchronous meetings, such as email or shared Google Docs. However, nearly all teachers gave positive feedback regarding collaborating with colleagues to plan curriculum and share expertise.

**Cycle 2: Student Perceptions of the Advisory Curriculum**

To assess student perceptions of the advisory program during Cycles 1 and 2, a focus group interview was conducted through video conference with four eighth-grade students (three girls and one boy) on May 22, 2020. Each student was selected at random from different advisory groups, which were also selected at random from amongst the nine advisory groups. (Two additional students, one girl and one boy, who had been invited to participate did not respond and were not included in the focus group.) The interview included questions to solicit feedback regarding the civic engagement project, advisory class meetings and materials, and the advisory curriculum overall. The purpose was to assess whether students found the civic engagement project to be sufficiently worthwhile, despite its interruption, to keep in the advisory curriculum the next year. In addition, as the advisory curriculum changed during remote learning, students were asked to provide their overall perceptions of the value of the advisory curriculum, including but not limited to the project. See Appendix C for the complete list of questions.

The feedback of the student focus group was unanimously positive regarding the civic engagement project. All the students expressed interest in the topics provided, found

the advisory resources to be helpful in designing and engaging in their projects, and expressed disappointment at being unable to complete them. The students also offered constructive feedback regarding the advisory program overall. Students expressed preferences for a variety of different activities, such as game-oriented advisory competitions, collaborative or creative projects, or activities in which students discussed identity and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). They also perceived less value in certain activities, such as the video based Second Step SEL curriculum, or activities that involved writing or filling out worksheets. However, one of the most noteworthy themes in their responses was the importance of understanding the purpose of an advisory activity. Regardless of the type of activity, when students were able to connect the activity to a larger learning goal or personal interest, they found the activity more engaging.

**Synthesis**

The findings from previous cycles of this action research study provided evidence of the important role that self-efficacy toward SEL played in middle school teachers' perceptions of SEL and school climate in the local setting. In addition, the need for flexible approaches to SEL instruction given social distancing protocols in response to the COVID-19 pandemic made the need for teacher efficacy toward SEL ever more urgent. Not only must SEL instruction adapt to new modalities, such as video conferencing, but it must also respond to new and increased social, emotional, health, and economic stressors placed on the community. Student feedback on Cycles 1 and 2, in which an inquiry-based civic engagement SEL curriculum was partially implemented, also suggested that a contextually relevant approach to SEL instruction informed by

faculty experience may result in greater student engagement. In this synthesis, a learning community for SEL will be presented as an intervention with the potential to foster professional capital toward SEL, supported by the theoretical frameworks of SCT and SDT (Bandura, 1977; 2000; 2005; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In considering professional learning through the framework of SDT, engagement in a PLC could foster intrinsic motivation by providing a sense of connection with colleagues (Hord et al., 2008). An additional benefit that a PLC presents over individual professional development is the fostering of social learning, which has been associated with more positive learning outcomes (Salomon & Perkins, 1998). Such social learning may also serve to increase self-efficacy and collective efficacy through social persuasion and affective support among teachers, mechanisms for self-efficacy identified by SCT. A PLC may also provide opportunities for teachers to see evidence of the effectiveness of new practices through classroom observation and the shared experience of colleagues, referred to in SCT as vicarious learning.

**Professional Learning Community**

In accordance with SCT and SDT, the establishment of a PLC may be a particularly apt approach to improving faculty self-efficacy toward SEL (Hord et al., 2008). First, a PLC provides teachers with a structure for frequent, ongoing support and feedback in the collaborative development of their SEC, in part through socially shared regulated learning (Hadwin & Oshige, 2011). The resulting increase in self-efficacy may lead teachers to be more willing to try new instructional methods (Guskey, 1988) and to be more successful in implementing the SEL curriculum (Jones, 2013; Waajid et al., 2013; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Second, the collaborative development of the SEL

curriculum can provide teachers with autonomy-supportive strategies for SEL instruction and may increase the fit of the curriculum to school culture, improving the likelihood of successful outcomes (McCormick et al., 2015a; Sciuchetti, 2017). Third, working with fellow teachers to develop these skills can foster a sense of connection and supportive professional relationships (Hord et al., 2008). Fourth, a PLC can provide teachers with opportunities to observe successful outcomes, as well as to be exposed to new approaches and to problem-solve, in the shared experiences of colleagues. By fostering confidence in the potential for a successful outcome (Bandura, 2005), such social modeling may increase the likelihood that faculty will attempt new SEL practices. Providing a space for examples of positive SEL practices can benefit those who have not yet mastered such strategies, increasing their investment in SEL instruction and fostering the development of their own SEC (Collie, 2017).

A PLC has the potential to support the development of professional capital toward SEL (Fullan et al., 2012; Fullan et al., 2015) by creating the organizational conditions for a professional approach toward teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, 2009). Successful implementation of a PLC intervention requires administrative support, such as autonomy-supportive leadership (Collie et al., 2017) and regular and frequent meeting time for collective professional learning in SEL (Hord et al., 2008). Practices for effective collaboration need to be developed, including PLC meeting protocols (Boudette & City, 2014). PLC members should engage in shared personal practice (Hord et al., 2008), which requires continuous development of a culture of trust among teachers and between teachers and administration (Tschannen-Moran, 2000; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Through these methods, a PLC intervention could encourage faculty to invest more

deeply in the advisory program, solving problems at greater levels of complexity (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993) and increasing internal accountability (Fullan et al., 2015).

**Cycle 2: Revised Research Questions and Intervention**

Based on findings from Cycles 0 and 1, this research study was revised to answer the following three research questions:

1) How does participation in a professional learning community (PLC) to develop teacher social emotional competence (SEC) and curriculum for an eighth-grade advisory program focused on social emotional learning (SEL) affect teachers' confidence in advisory and SEL?

2) How does participation in the PLC affect teachers' attitude toward advisory and SEL?

3) What affordances and constraints are experienced by teachers participating in the PLC during remote learning?

A concurrent mixed-methods action research approach (Ivankova, 2015; Mertler, 2017) was used to answer these questions. Qualitative and quantitative data were gathered to assess changes in teacher confidence and attitudes toward advisory and SEL over the course of the intervention. The data collection methods included an examination of how factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic affected the implementation of the intervention and teacher confidence and attitudes toward advisory and SEL. Qualitative and quantitative data related to student attitudes toward advisory, confidence in SEL skills, and perceptions of school climate were also collected and assessed for changes over the course of the intervention to inform the work of the PLC. However, because the

focus of this research study is on teacher attitudes, student data were not included in this analysis.

# CHAPTER 3

# METHODOLOGY

The experience of competence and mastery in teaching SEL can be facilitated by an evidence-based, action research approach to assess learning outcomes. Changes in teachers' attitudes and beliefs may take place after seeing evidence of improved SEL outcomes because of changes in teaching practices, especially in the case of veteran teachers (Guskey, 1985). Such evidence can be produced by an intentional focus on assessing the relationship between professional development efforts and improved outcomes for students, rather than embarking on a change initiative without a well-designed plan for assessment (Guskey, 2009).

The present study focused on the professional learning community (PLC) (Hord et al., 2008) as an intervention to promote teaching efficacy toward SEL. Action research was used as a means of assessing the effectiveness of the PLC intervention. Action research can support data-driven design and assessment of SEL professional learning (Dick, 2014), connecting teacher practice to measurable outcomes regarding attitudes and confidence toward skills development and school climate.

Lewin (1946) is credited for coining the term "action research." He defined action research as a cyclical approach in social science research that consists of planning, executing, and reconnaissance, or "fact-finding" (p. 38). This iterative approach of studying a problem of practice includes testing an intervention, observing the results, and refining the approach for future cycles of research. Dick (2014) expands on Lewin's definition. In defining action research, Dick (2014) focuses on continual improvement while also consciously directing interventions to improve experiences for those affected

by the change. A key concept in both definitions of action research is the application of research to practice.

A reflective stance toward practice is a critical element in action research (Hase, 2014). The participants, the methods, and the philosophical perspectives are taken into consideration when conducting action research. Some action research may be conducted at an individual level, as when a teacher seeks to improve classroom practice (Dick, 2014). Other action research may be conducted by an individual who engages in the process through consultation with community members (Dick, 2014). For example, a method or intervention might be tested and evaluated by a team of teachers or a school community. Some action research, such as participatory action research (PAR) (Jordan, 2012) or critical action research (Davis, 2012), may involve a group or community in the research process. These approaches focus on identifying a problem of practice based on community goals and together designing, testing and reflecting upon the intervention. Lastly, while some action researchers seek to improve technical or practical understanding of a problem of practice (Herr & Anderson, 2005), others seek to emancipate members of their learning community (i.e., students, educators, families, and local members) from inequitable or oppressive practices (Tripp, 1990).

**Action Research in the Present Study**

As related to this present study, action research is the practice of critically engaging in one's community of practice (Wenger, 2008) to improve equity and access to quality education. Quality education is centered around critical inquiry (Labaree, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Leonardo, 2004) and nurtures personal and community growth by maintaining positive and supportive community partnerships. Such partnerships also

serve to promote the investment in an endeavor that reflects shared values and priorities, such as improving school climate through teacher self-efficacy. The testing of solutions to problems of practice requires not only the trust, but also the collaboration of the community. In short, the researcher must exercise the collaborative and leadership skills to earn the support of the community of practice.

**Definition of Mixed Methods Research**

As Greene (2007) asserted, the choice to engage in mixed methods research reflects the desire to gain a better understanding of a problem. Such research often generates new questions and adds depth and complexity to the process. Mixed methods researchers recognize the value of different ways of knowing (Greene, 2007). For example, researchers may take advantage of what can be learned from quantitative approaches, such as Likert scale surveys or test scores, as well as from qualitative approaches, such as interviews or field note observations (Tashakkori, Teddlie, & Johnson, 2015; Yin, 2017). They also recognize the inherent multiplicity of perspectives and values that inform a problem of practice and may challenge traditionally positivist approaches by building dialogue into the methods of research and analysis (Charmaz & Bryant, 2008; Hesse-Biber, 2010). A particular benefit of using a mixed methods approach is the insight that can be gleaned from the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to posit meta-inferences regarding a problem of practice (Tashakkori et al., 2015).

**Mixed Methods in the Present Study**

Perceptions of school climate may vary according to aspects of one's identity, such as gender and race (Shukla, Konold, & Cornell, 2016; Konold, Cornell, Shukla, &

Huang, 2017; Pérez-Gualdrón & Helms, 2017). In the case of teachers, perceptions of school climate may also be affected by job satisfaction and sense of self-efficacy (Collie et al., 2012). As such, to improve the experience of community for all of their members, schools must develop SEL practices that are responsive to the differing perspectives, strengths and needs of students and faculty. Greater understanding of community members' experiences of school climate can foster the development of more effective SEL supports (Konold et al., 2017; Sciuchetti, 2017). This study aimed not only to explore how increasing teacher self-efficacy toward SEL might improve their attitudes toward advisory, but also to highlight the mechanisms connected to observed change.

Quantitative data were collected in the form of Likert scale surveys to assess teacher attitudes toward SEL instruction and perceptions of the advisory PLC intervention. Qualitative data in the form of faculty interviews were collected to record and analyze in detail the experiences of individual faculty as they engaged in the PLC: their attitudes and confidence toward advisory and SEL, their perceptions of the PLC, and the affordances and constraints they perceived during the PLC intervention. These interviews, along with researcher memos and PLC meeting minutes, were also used to develop further refinements to the intervention. The use of qualitative and quantitative data sources served as a means of triangulation and to identify common themes.

Additionally, qualitative methods (interviews) and quantitative methods (surveys) were used to assess student attitudes toward SEL instruction, perceptions of the advisory program, and opinions of school climate over the course of the intervention. Student data were not included in the study findings, as the focus of the present study was on teachers.

However, student feedback was used to inform the work of the PLC in developing and assessing the effectiveness of the advisory curriculum.

**Setting**

This study was set in the middle school division of a K-12 private, independent day school. The school is located in an affluent suburb of a major city in the southwestern United States and enrolls students residing throughout the metropolitan area. There were 1,116 students enrolled in the school during the 2020-2021 school year. Of those, 272 students were enrolled in the middle school division during the intervention: 80 in sixth grade, 99 in seventh grade, and 93 in eighth grade. Students of color made up approximately one third of the student body, and approximately 20% of the student body received financial aid. There were approximately 40 faculty members teaching classes in the middle school division during each term, some of whom were also teaching courses in other divisions.

Students in all middle school grades were enrolled, by grade level, in mixed gender advisory groups consisting of nine to 15 students. The intervention took place in the eighth-grade advisory program. It was made up of 8 advisory groups, each led by an advisory teacher. During the intervention, the advisory program required one 40-minute class period per week, as well as daily homeroom meetings of 10 minutes at the start of each school day.

The primary instructional goal of the advisory program was to develop students' SEL skills through direct instruction and activities. However, the advisory program also served several other important functions within the middle school. In the morning homeroom, school news and community announcements were shared by reading the daily

bulletin. Teachers of advisory also served as a primary point of contact for parents and provided overall academic support for students. Most advisory teachers were also teachers of another course that included members of their advisory group, such as mathematics or English. Occasionally, a student had an advisor who was not also their instructor in another course, but who served in a different role in the middle school, such as school administrator, counselor, coach, etc. In addition, advisory teachers supported the school administration in communicating and reinforcing school rules and policies. When infractions occurred, advisory teachers were expected to counsel students to correct the behavior, and to communicate incidents to the student's parents, the middle school dean, and/or the school administration, as appropriate. The overall goal of each advisor was to develop a supportive relationship with their students so that students had a caring, vested, dedicated adult to assure academic and emotional success in school.

The advisory program was chosen as the locus for this intervention for several reasons. First, quality SEL instruction and supports have the potential to directly improve school climate (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). Second, teachers indicated that they did not feel sufficiently prepared to teach SEL or to successfully lead advisory, and they perceived the program as unengaging to students. Given the differences in advisory curriculum in each of the three middle school grades, I chose to limit the intervention to advisory teachers working with eighth-grade students. This grade was selected because it was the grade in which teachers reported the greatest perceived dissatisfaction from students and the least amount of student engagement in advisory activities. After analyzing results from previous cycles, eighth-grade students also reported the most negative perceptions of school climate, as indicated by administrations of the Panorama

Social-Emotional Learning Survey (Panorama Education, n.d.). Lastly, it appeared that the eighth-grade advisory program offered the greatest potential for a wide range of SEL instructional approaches and activities, given the more developed social and academic skills of students in this grade level.

**Participants**

The participants in this study consisted of the middle school teachers ($n$ = 8) who led seven of the eight sections of the eighth-grade advisory program and the eighth-grade student body ($n$ = 93). The teacher participants included four female advisors (two non-Hispanic White, one Latina and one African American), and four male advisors (all non-Hispanic White). Two advisors (a male and a female) collaboratively taught one of the eight sections. I participated as the ninth advisor, leading one of the sections, and as coordinator of the PLC intervention. Cycle 3 took place during the 2020-2021 school year and was my second year serving as an eighth-grade advisor. During the three years prior to the start of this study, I served as advisory curriculum planner and as a frequent substitute advisory teacher, leading various advisory groups in all three middle school grade levels.

**Intervention: Professional Learning Community for SEL**

The intervention consisted of the implementation of a PLC for SEL; eighth-grade advisory teachers collaboratively developed the curriculum for the year-long advisory program. The PLC also supported the development of the social and emotional competence (SEC) of the team in delivering SEL instruction for the duration of the project. The PLC also assessed student confidence and attitudes toward SEL and the advisory program to inform its development of SEL curriculum and instructional

methods. Formal assessment methods included Likert scale surveys and interviews administered to students at the start and end of the intervention. Informal assessment of student confidence and attitudes toward SEL and the advisory program took place throughout the intervention, including observations shared by teachers in PLC meetings, their evaluation of student engagement and work produced in advisory, and researcher memos. The rationale for the PLC intervention was to increase teacher self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and professional capital toward SEL, and to increase student and teacher engagement in and satisfaction with the advisory program. A more effective advisory program would likely provide better support for a positive school climate.

Dufour and Eaker (1998) identified PLCs as having six key qualities or goals: 1) "shared mission, vision, and values;" 2) "collective inquiry;" 3) "collaborative teams;" 4) "action orientation and experimentation;" 5) "continuous improvement;" and 6) "results orientation" (p. 25-29). Similarly, Hord et al. (2008, p. 9) enumerated five essential components of a PLC: 1) "shared beliefs, values and vision;" 2) "shared and supportive leadership;" 3) "collective learning and its application;" 4) "supportive conditions;" and 5) "shared personal practice." It is important to be clear as to how the term PLC was defined in this research study. The PLC intervention in the present study aimed to foster the characteristics outlined by both Dufour and Eaker (1998) and Hord et al. (2008). Hord et al. (2008) defined a "professional learning community" as necessarily a whole-school endeavor. However, the scope of this intervention was limited to members of the eighth-grade advisor team. This distinction is made to focus specifically on the effects of increasing teacher professionalism (Darling-Hammond, 2009) toward SEL using a manageable, targeted approach.

**Role of the Researcher**

I served as both the researcher and a participant in this study. As a participant, I led one of the eight advisory groups. This included conducting daily morning homeroom meetings and weekly advisory class meetings. As a researcher and advisor/participant, I led, participated in, and observed the PLC meetings.

In both Dufour and Eaker (1998) and Hord et al.'s (2008) definitions of a PLC, school leaders are expected to direct the learning of the PLC to foster a school culture of professional learning and accountability. In this sense, the PLC intervention adhered to these models: I held a position of administrative leadership as the Assistant Head of Middle School. I also served as an eighth-grade advisor. These dual roles had the potential to support successful implementation and assessment of the intervention. Serving on the administrative leadership team granted me greater access to information and to decision makers in our school, thereby conferring an advantage in gaining approval and support for this action research study and intervention. Serving as an advisor also granted me first-hand knowledge of the advisory program and the potential for participant-observation of the intervention (Yin, 2017), and yielded insider status in the advisor community of practice (Wenger, 2008). This insider status was limited by my simultaneous membership in the school administrative team, however, placing me in a brokering role (Wenger, 2008) between administration and teachers.

It is important to acknowledge the power imbalance between myself and other PLC members that is inherent in our respective roles in the school. A key practice of this PLC was to promote shared and distributed leadership (Spillane, 2009). Rather than promoting a hierarchical structure, there was an emphasis on creating a culture that was

supportive of teacher adaptability (Collie & Martin, 2017). Citing self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012), Collie and Martin (2017) define teachers' perceived autonomy support as "teachers' perceptions that their principal supports their interests, is respectful of their opinions, and promotes their volition and autonomy" (p. 31). To this end, the practices of the PLC were designed to foster shared decision making and leadership in designing the curriculum, as well as to promote flexibility for teachers to select from among lesson choices or to adapt lessons to better meet students' needs.

**Data Collection: Overview**

The three research questions posed in this study were as follows: *1) How does participation in a professional learning community (PLC) to develop teacher social emotional competence (SEC) and curriculum for an eighth-grade advisory program focused on SEL affect teachers' confidence in advisory and SEL? 2) How does participation in the PLC affect teachers' attitude toward advisory and SEL? 3) What affordances and constraints are experienced by teachers participating in the PLC during remote learning?*

All three questions were answered through quantitative and qualitative methods, consisting of Likert scale surveys and interviews. Likert scale surveys were administered to teachers at the beginning and end of the PLC intervention. Individual teacher interviews were conducted at the midpoint and end of the intervention. Data were collected from October 2020 through June 2021. Due to COVID-19 social distancing restrictions in place at the school from March 2020 through March 2021, data were gathered virtually during this time using online surveys (Qualtrics) and video conferencing software (Zoom). In response to changes in social distancing guidelines in

March 2021, some end of year interviews were conducted in person. All surveys were conducted online.

Qualitative and quantitative data were gathered to assess confidence and attitudes toward advisory and SEL. Data were also collected to provide insight regarding teachers' perceptions of the affordances and constraints experienced in a PLC during the pandemic. Such conditions included schoolwide impacts. For example, there was a mandatory shift from in-person to remote/blended instruction in response to social distancing guidelines. Interviews provided a means of examining personal and unique impacts of the pandemic on teacher participants, students, and the school community. Limited qualitative data were also collected through two open-ended questions included on each of the Likert scale surveys.

**Data Collection: Quantitative Methods**

Participants ($n$ = 8) were administered a pre-test and post-test survey. The pre-test survey (Appendix D) was administered in September 2020 and the post-test survey (Appendix E) was administered in May 2021. I developed the surveys specifically for this study; each consisted of 24 5-point Likert scale items, as well as two open-ended items. The purpose of these surveys was to measure teacher confidence and attitudes toward advisory and SEL, as well as perceptions of affordances and constraints of the PLC, at the start and conclusion of the intervention. Both surveys were administered online using Qualtrics. The surveys were completed anonymously, with each respondent creating a unique identification code known only to them for use in both surveys, making it possible to compare responses of individual participants for changes over the course of the intervention.

To answer the first research question, participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements about their confidence in a range of advisory-related activities. Items included perceptions regarding their ability to engage students in advisory activities, to communicate with parents, to address discipline issues, and to support the learning of students with diverse social, emotional, and academic needs. To answer the second research question, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements about their attitudes toward the advisory program, including their perceptions of the value of student skills development through advisory, their enjoyment of the advisor role, and the effectiveness of the advisory program in supporting students during remote learning. To answer the third research question, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements about their perceptions of administrative support for teachers in the advisor role and for the advisory program. The survey also included two items designed to assess how well the advisory curriculum created during the PLC intervention supported student engagement and teacher adaptation when needed to accomplish learning goals.

**Data Collection: Qualitative Methods**

An interview was conducted individually with each of the eight participants at the midpoint of the intervention, between December 4 and December 15, 2020. Another interview was conducted individually with each of the participants near the conclusion of the intervention, between May 3 and May 14, 2021. See Appendices F and G for the full list of questions in each interview. Each of these interviews followed a semi-structured, open-ended format. The interview questions were designed to provide insight into teachers' perceptions of the advisory curriculum and the PLC intervention, in what ways

the intervention impacted their SEC, and their confidence in and attitude toward advisory during remote learning.

To answer the first research question, teachers were asked in each of these interviews to provide examples of successes and challenges in leading advisory and teaching SEL. To answer the second research question, teachers were asked to describe rewarding and frustrating aspects of being an advisor. In addition, teachers were asked to assess the value and effectiveness of the advisory program and SEL instruction and the effectiveness of the advisory program in supporting students during remote learning. Teachers were also asked to compare the effectiveness of the advisory program during the intervention with previous years. To answer the third research question, teachers were asked to assess how well the advisory program supported students in terms of SEL outcomes, to assess the value of the PLC intervention in supporting them personally or in their role as advisors, and to consider what additional support could have been helpful. In addition, teachers were asked to assess the value and effectiveness of the advisory program and SEL instruction, and the effectiveness of the advisory program in supporting students during remote learning. Teachers were also asked to compare the effectiveness of the advisory program during the intervention with previous years.

**Data Analysis: Quantitative Methods**

The Likert scale pre-test survey was scored in October 2020 and the post-test survey was scored in June 2021. Four constructs were evaluated in these surveys: (a) *confidence toward advisory,* (b) *attitude toward advisory*, (c) *attitude toward advisory to support remote learning*, and (d) *perceived support for advisory*. In order to assess the reliability of the questions within each of the four constructs being tested, the alpha

coefficient, or Cronbach's alpha, was calculated for the items included in each of these four constructs on each of the surveys (Fall 2020 and Spring 2021), as well as for each of the surveys as a whole. Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha$) scores of .7 or above are thought to indicate an acceptable level of internal reliability; $\alpha \geq .9$ is considered an indication of excellent internal reliability (Cortina, 1993; George & Mallery, 2003). In other words, a higher Cronbach's alpha value indicates that responses to items within a construct tend to be similar. Higher Cronbach's alpha can indicate that the items may be assessing the same (intended) construct.

Because of the small number of teacher participants ($n = 8$), data analysis of survey responses was limited to descriptive statistics, comparing means and standard deviations (Buss & Zambo, 2014). Results of individual items on each of the surveys were examined to assess any changes since the start of the intervention. This analysis included two survey items outside of the four constructs listed, which were designed to measure perceptions of the advisory curriculum.

**Data Analysis: Qualitative Methods**

Recordings of the participant interviews (Appendices F and G) were first transcribed using the NVivo transcription service. These initial transcripts were then reviewed by the researcher and compared to the original recordings to make corrections for accuracy. Next, the interviews were coded using the process of qualitative content analysis, consisting of "selecting material; structuring and generating categories; defining categories; revising and expanding the frame" (Schreier, 2013, p. 7). The initial categories were informed by patterns observed, applying the qualitative content analysis process to advisor meeting minutes, teacher interviews, and researcher memos from

previous cycles of research. Patterns observed in PLC meeting agendas and minutes and researcher memos collected in Cycle 3 continued to inform the development of these categories in order to assess teacher attitudes and efficacy toward advisory and SEL, as well as affordances and constraints they experienced during the PLC intervention. Themes related to the potential benefits of participation in a PLC as suggested by the literature were also included in the coding frame. In addition, themes that were not necessarily anticipated by the theory guiding the research project but were observed with frequency during the transcription review process, were included as codes. Subsumption and progressive summarizing (Schreier, 2013) of the initial codes through repeated rounds of coding resulted in a coding frame that addressed the interview data thoroughly and without redundancy. After coding, the qualitative data from the Cycle 3 interviews were analyzed using pattern-matching (Yin, 2017) to identify whether the data matched patterns that would be expected based on the primary theoretical constructs guiding the design of the intervention: social cognitive theory (SCT) and self-efficacy, professional capital and collective efficacy, and self-determination theory (SDT).

To answer the first research question, qualitative measures of teacher confidence toward advisory and SEL were identified in the interview coding process, including perceived and demonstrated competence and perceived lack of skill or expertise. To answer the second research question, attitudes toward advisory and SEL were assessed by examining references to satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the advisor role, as well as by references to advisory curriculum quality and curriculum deficits during the PLC intervention. To answer the third research question, perceptions of affordances and constraints experienced during the intervention were assessed by examining references to

professionalism toward SEL, to the presence or absence of supportive conditions for advisory and SEL, and teacher assessments of SEL outcomes. Responses to the two open-ended questions on the Likert scale pre- and post-test surveys were compared to the interview data in order to include in this analysis any themes that were not provided by participants directly in interviews.

**Threats to Validity**

As Smith and Glass (1987) explained, "The claim that changes of the independent variable cause changes of the dependent variable can be invalidated by history" (p. 127). A major focus of this research study was to measure the effects of a PLC intervention on teacher attitudes toward SEL. However, this study was also conducted in a unique historic moment, as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded. The conditions presented by the pandemic must be considered as a variable that impacted the results of this study. The school year presented new challenges to our students and faculty. National and international activism for social justice, the Black Lives Matter movement, and economic upheaval also placed pressure on the school community to engage in difficult conversations that challenged the norms of education. Within this historic context, the need for faculty to exercise professionalism toward SEL was arguably greater than ever before.

Questions to address how remote learning and the COVID-19 pandemic impacted teachers' perceptions of the advisory program and SEL were included in surveys and interviews. This was done to provide insight into the influence of this pandemic on SEL instruction and outcomes, as well as to address one potential threat to the validity. Not only did the pandemic influence the manner that the PLC intervention and advisory

curriculum were implemented, but it also had the potential to directly influence attitudes toward the advisory program and school. Qualitative data was a source of triangulation for quantitative survey results in an attempt to evaluate pandemic considerations.

In addition to the threat to validity presented by the unique historic moment, there is also the threat presented by the methods for implementation of the PLC intervention and the data collection methods of this study. For example, it is possible for experimenter effects to influence the observed outcomes of the PLC intervention (Smith & Glass, 1987), given my own participation in the intervention as an eighth-grade advisor. It is impossible to know if factors such as my social influence or personal investment in the success of PLC resulted in outcomes that might have been different had the intervention been implemented by someone else, or without my participation. Moreover, the fact that the teacher interviews were conducted by the researcher, rather than anonymously, may have presented a source of bias.

On the one hand, experimenter effects may be considered a potential threat to validity in many action research study designs. Action research is, by definition, often conducted by an insider who also participates in the intervention, data collection, and analysis (Hase, 2014; Dick, 2014). In fact, reflexivity on one's own practice is considered a strength of the method (Hase, 2014). The methods of this research study, however, also included anonymous pre- and post-test surveys of teachers, which were intended to serve as a method of triangulation for researcher observations and teacher interviews. In addition, student interviews were conducted by the researcher, and anonymous student surveys were administered, at the start and end of the intervention. These served as a source of data for advisory curriculum development by the PLC, and as triangulation for

teachers' assessments of their students' attitudes toward and engagement in advisory. Student interview and survey responses were not included in data analysis for this research study but were used to inform the work of the PLC in advisory curriculum development. They will be discussed in more detail in the "Procedures" section of this chapter.

This study was also informed by case study methods (Yin, 2017), such as the recording of detailed researcher memos. These memos included my own participant observations (Yin, 2017) of my experience implementing the advisory curriculum as the instructor of an eighth-grade advisory group. Researcher memos supported reflexivity in this study (Yin, 2017; Hase, 2014), creating structure for and making explicit the integration of my research into the ongoing development of the intervention.

Researcher memos were also recorded to document faculty perceptions, engagement, and development of the intervention, and to assess faculty sense of self-efficacy and perceptions of SEL over the duration of the intervention. PLC meeting minutes and faculty interviews provided an important source of qualitative data and insight into the perceptions of other participants in the study. Alternative interpretations and explanations for findings are addressed in the data analysis and discussion, increasing the trustworthiness of the findings.

**Procedures for Teachers**

In October 2020, a meeting was conducted through video conference by the researcher with the eighth-grade advisory teachers to provide them with an overview of the research study purpose and methods and to invite them to participate. Teachers were informed that all eighth-grade advisory teachers would participate in the PLC

intervention. However, surveys and interviews would only be conducted with those teachers who chose to participate in the research study.

In October 2020, teacher participants ($n$ = 8) were administered a pre-test Likert scale survey (Appendix D) to assess their confidence and attitudes toward advisory at the start of the PLC intervention. In December 2020, teacher participants ($n$ = 8) were interviewed about their perceptions of the advisory curriculum and PLC, and the affordances and constraints experienced during the intervention and remote learning (Appendix F). In May and June, 2021, teacher participants were administered a post-test survey (Appendix E) and qualitative interview (Appendix G) to assess their confidence and attitudes toward advisory at the conclusion of the PLC intervention.

Between October 2020 and December 2021, the PLC conducted five meetings (approximately two per month) through video conference to foster the building of advisor SEC and to collaboratively develop the advisory SEL curriculum. Based on teacher feedback, the PLC meeting frequency was reduced to once per month in the second semester, for a total of four meetings conducted between January and April. In both semesters, additional advisory planning and PLC communication took place through email and Google Doc.

During PLC meetings, teachers shared their observations of student attitudes and engagement in the advisory curriculum and their own assessments of the advisory activities. Agendas and meeting minutes were recorded by the researcher and members of the PLC. Researcher memos about the PLC intervention, advisory curriculum, and observations related to school climate outcomes were recorded over the course of the intervention (October 2020 through May 2021). These observations and materials were

used to evaluate the effectiveness of the advisory curriculum, to share and reflect on teachers' own practice, and to inform the ongoing development of advisory curriculum and professional development for the advisory teachers. Teachers also reviewed expert resources and instructional materials related to SEL instruction, selected, adapted, and created new advisory lessons, and engaged in collective learning and problem-solving.

**Procedures for Students**

Student data were also used to inform the work of the PLC. In October 2020, all eighth-grade students were invited to complete a survey; most students ($n$ = 73) submitted responses. The survey was administered online using Qualtrics software, and student responses were anonymous. Questions were designed to assess student confidence toward SEL skills, attitudes toward the advisory program, and perceptions of school climate at the start of the intervention. See Appendix H for the full list of questions.

In addition, students ($n$ = 6) were interviewed by video conference in October 2020. The interview questions focused on student perceptions of the advisory program and SEL, school climate, and remote learning near the start of the advisory PLC intervention. Students were randomly selected from each of the eight different advisory groups to participate in these interviews that followed a semi-structured, open-ended format. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Questions were included to assess student feedback on the advisory curriculum, as well as students' perspectives on how homeroom and advisory could be used to support students during remote learning, to help students build or maintain friendships, and to help students meet their goals. See Appendix I for the full list of questions.

In May 2021, all eighth-grade students were invited to complete a post-test survey. Most students ($n$ = 70) responded to the survey. This survey assessed student confidence toward SEL, attitudes toward advisory, and perceptions of school climate at the conclusion of the intervention. See Appendix J for the full list of questions. In addition, some ($n$ = 7) students were interviewed in May 2021. Because most students returned to on-campus instruction at this time, some interviews were conducted in person and others were conducted by video conference. The interview questions focused on student perceptions of the advisory program and SEL, school climate, and remote learning near the conclusion of the advisory PLC intervention. See Appendix K for the full list of questions. The selection of student participants for these interviews followed the same procedure as for the fall interviews. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Deidentified student interview responses and responses to student surveys were discussed with advisory teachers during PLC meetings. The student feedback was used to inform the ongoing development of the advisory curriculum.

**Overview of Project Timeline and Procedures**

This research was conducted from October 2020, through May 2021. The study follows a concurrent mixed-methods action research design (Ivankova, 2015; Mertler, 2017). Eighth-grade advisory teachers and eighth-grade students were administered quantitative pre-test Likert scale surveys, and student participants were interviewed in October 2020, at the start of the PLC intervention. Analysis of fall quantitative and qualitative data took place in October. The PLC intervention was implemented from October 2020 through May 2021. PLC meeting minutes and researcher memos were recorded throughout the intervention. Teacher participants were interviewed in December

2020; analysis of winter interview data was conducted from December 2020 to January 2021. Teacher and student participants were administered quantitative post-test surveys, and teacher and student participants were interviewed, from May to June 2021. Analysis of spring qualitative and quantitative data took place from June to July 2021 and was also compared to qualitative and quantitative data collected previously in the study.

Approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Arizona State University. IRB documentation is provided in Appendix L. Table 2 provides an overview of the procedures followed throughout the course of this study.

Table 2

*Timeline and Procedures of the Research Study*

| Timeline | Procedures |
|---|---|
| September 2020 | • Teacher and student participants were invited and informed consent requested |
| October 2020 | • Administered teacher pre-test surveys<br>• Administered student pre-test surveys and conducted student pre-test interviews<br>• Analyzed fall survey and interview data |
| October 2020 – May 2021 | • Implemented PLC intervention<br>• Collaboratively designed advisory curriculum with PLC<br>• Recorded and collected PLC meeting agendas and minutes<br>• Recorded researcher memos |
| December 2020 | • Conducted teacher interviews |
| December 2020 – January 2021 | • Analyzed winter interview data |
| April 2021 | • Invited participants for student and teacher interviews |
| May 2021 | • Conducted teacher post-test interviews and administered teacher post-test surveys<br>• Conducted student post-test interviews and administered student post-test surveys |
| May – October 2021 | • Analyzed spring survey and interview data<br>• Wrote dissertation report |

# CHAPTER 4

# RESULTS

In this research, a professional learning community (PLC) intervention focusing on social emotional learning (SEL) was implemented throughout an academic year in a middle school. The research questions were as follows: *1) How does participation in a professional learning community (PLC) to develop teacher social emotional competence (SEC) and curriculum for an eighth-grade advisory program focused on SEL affect teachers' confidence in advisory and SEL? 2) How does participation in the PLC affect teachers' attitude toward advisory and SEL? 3) What affordances and constraints are experienced by teachers participating in the PLC during remote learning?*

## Overview of Quantitative Findings

To answer the three research questions, quantitative data from Likert scale surveys were collected in fall 2020 and spring 2021, at the beginning and end of the PLC intervention. Four constructs were evaluated in these surveys: (a) *confidence toward advisory,* (b) *attitude toward advisory*, (c) *attitude toward advisory to support remote learning*, and (d) *perceived support for advisory*. In addition to the survey items designed to evaluate these four constructs, two additional survey items, Q8 and Q9, were designed to assess how well the advisory curriculum created during the PLC intervention supported student engagement and differentiation of instruction. The construct *confidence toward advisory* was limited to four items: ability as an advisor, ability to adapt instruction to support students with diverse needs and strengths, ability to help students resolve conflicts with other students or adults, and ability to help students be better organized. Additional survey items were included to assess teacher confidence toward

communication with parents, enforcing student discipline, and supporting student health and wellbeing.

However, these were excluded from the construct of *confidence toward advisory* after analysis of internal-consistency reliability revealed negative inter-item correlations, possibly due to inclusion of too many subconstructs. Survey responses measured level of agreement with statements using a scale of 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*. See Appendices D and E for a complete list of items on the pre- and post-test surveys, and Appendix M for descriptive statistics of responses to all survey items.

Table 3 presents a summary of internal reliability for each of the four constructs tested. Three of the four constructs did not meet the threshold for reliability on one or both surveys, most likely due to the small number of participants. The construct *confidence toward advisory* did not meet the threshold for reliability in either survey, with $\alpha = .30$ on the pre-test and $\alpha = .51$ on the post-test. The construct *attitude toward advisory* met an acceptable level of internal reliability in both the pre- and post-test surveys, falling within the range considered excellent, $\alpha = .90$, in the pre-test and acceptable, $\alpha = .83$, in the post-test. In the pre-test survey, the reliability of the construct *attitude toward advisory to support remote learning*, $\alpha = .95$, was within the range considered excellent. However, this construct did not meet the standard for acceptable reliability on the post-test, with $\alpha = .67$. The construct *perceived support toward advisory* did not meet the standard for acceptable reliability in either the pre-test survey, with $\alpha = .32$, or the post-test survey, with $\alpha = .43$.

Table 3

*Estimates of Internal-Consistency Reliability for Teacher Survey, n = 8*

| Construct | Within Construct Items | Coefficient Alpha Estimate of Reliability, Pre-Test | Coefficient Alpha Estimate of Reliability, Post-Test |
|---|---|---|---|
| Confidence toward advisory | Items 2, 10 through 12 (4 items in total) | .30 | .51 |
| Attitude toward advisory | Items 1, 3 through 7, 17 (7 items in total) | .90 | .83 |
| Attitude toward advisory to support remote learning | Items 18 through 21 (4 items in total) | .95 | .67 |
| Perceived support for advisory | Items 22 through 24 (3 items in total) | .32 | .43 |

**Research Question 1**

To answer Research Question 1, Likert scale pre-test surveys were administered to teachers in October 2020, and post-test surveys were administered May through June 2021. The survey included questions designed to assess teacher confidence toward the advisory program. Qualitative data from individual interviews with teachers were collected at the midpoint and end of the intervention, in winter 2020 and spring 2021. The interviews included questions designed to assess teacher perceptions of challenges and successes experienced in their role as advisors. See Appendices F and G for the full list of questions on each interview.

### *Quantitative Data*

The mean of the construct *confidence toward advisory* (3.91) remained unchanged between the pre- and post-test surveys (Table 4).

Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics for the Construct of Confidence Toward Advisory, n* = 8

| Construct | Pre-Test Mean | Pre-Test Standard Deviation | Post-Test Mean | Post-Test Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Confidence toward advisory | 3.91 | 0.30 | 3.91 | 0.23 |

In considering specific items related to confidence (Table 5), a slight decrease was seen in Q12. In comparison, a slight increase occurred for Q10, whereas Q2 and Q11 demonstrated stability.

Table 5

*Descriptive Statistics for Survey Items Related to Confidence Toward Advisory, n* = 8

| Item | Pre-Test Mean | Pre-Test Standard Deviation | Post-Test Mean | Post-Test Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Q2. I feel confident in my ability as an advisor.* | 4.00 | 0.54 | 4.00 | 0.00 |
| *Q10. I am confident in my ability to adapt my instruction to effectively support students with diverse academic, social, and emotional needs and strengths.* | 3.38 | 0.52 | 3.63 | 0.52 |
| *Q11. I am confident in my ability to help students resolve conflicts with other students or adults.* | 4.13 | 0.35 | 4.13 | 0.35 |
| *Q12. I am confident in my ability to help students be better organized (in terms of time management, notes and materials, etc.).* | 4.13 | 0.64 | 3.88 | 0.35 |

### *Qualitative Data*

The mid-intervention interview was administered in December 2020, and the post-intervention interview was administered in May 2021. The coding frame for both

interviews was created based on two primary themes, which roughly separated the data into perceived affordances and constraints of advisory and SEL during the PLC intervention. The first theme was entitled, *Affordances for Advisory and SEL*. This theme referred to positive teacher attitudes, confidence, and commitment toward teaching SEL and the PLC intervention. Constructs such as enjoyment, accomplishment, or satisfaction in the advisor role or positive perceptions of school climate were included. Some examples include positive assessments of the advisory program, curriculum, SEL outcomes, professional practices related to advisory, and support provided to aid advisors in their role, such as the PLC intervention. The second theme was entitled, *Constraints for Advisory and SEL*. This theme referred to negative teacher attitudes, or lack of confidence or commitment toward teaching SEL and the PLC intervention. Examples included dissatisfaction or frustration experienced in the advisor role, or negative assessments of SEL outcomes, negative experiences with the advisory program, or lack of advisor support. The responses to the two open-ended questions from the Likert scale pre- and post-test surveys were also compared to the interview data as a source of triangulation. These questions were answered in brief by some participants and were found to refer only to topics also discussed by teachers in interviews.

Fourteen codes were identified in the primary theme entitled *Affordances for Advisory and SEL*. These were then grouped into three categories, *professionalism toward SEL*, *supportive conditions for advisory and SEL*, and *SEL outcomes*, outlined in Table 6 below. Codes for each teacher are used (e.g., T4 indicates Teacher 4).

Table 6

*Affordances for Advisory and SEL Identified in Teacher Interviews*

| Category | Description | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| *Professionalism toward SEL* | Codes include *competence and professional growth, shared practice and collective learning, collaboration with colleagues, choice and autonomy, quality of curriculum, camaraderie,* and *satisfaction and fulfillment in role.* | "Just when they connect with each other, is so rewarding with advisory. And that's the part that I like the most." (T4, spring)<br><br>"I love the individual connections that we get to build with the kids in advisory." (T1, winter) |
| *Supportive conditions for advisory and SEL* | Codes include *administrative support* and *innovation related to remote learning*. | "I enjoy the team meetings and I think they're really good preparation for what we're actually going to do." (T2, spring) |
| *SEL outcomes* | Codes include *student engagement, relationships and belonging, student wellbeing, teacher wellbeing,* and *academic support*. | "And then, we were having such a good time that they were like, can I go again?" (T7, spring) |

Fourteen codes were identified in the second primary theme, *Constraints for Advisory and SEL*. These were then grouped into three categories, *lack of professionalism toward SEL*, *lack of support for advisory and SEL*, and *SEL deficits*, outlined in Table 7 below.

Table 7

*Constraints for Advisory and SEL Identified in Teacher Interviews*

| Category | Description | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| *Lack of professionalism toward SEL* | Codes include *curriculum deficit, need for more or better teamwork, lack of skill or expertise, lack of fulfillment or discouragement,* and *differentiation as challenge.* | "Teaching in a remote setting was really challenging, because I wasn't getting [the students'] reaction to feed off of . . ." (T8, spring) |
| *Lack of support for advisory and SEL* | Codes include *need for administrative support, need for professional development, time constraints or workload,* and *remote learning or distancing detriment.* | "The administration or you or someone else could help . . . by having more of a requirement to be on camera and talk more." (T7, winter)<br><br>"If there were just more understanding of what we're all doing as a group, as opposed to like as an individual teacher." (T7, spring) |
| *SEL deficits* | Codes include *disconnection or lack of relationships, student disengagement,* and *lack of academic support*. | "It was a challenge a little bit to support students academically." (T1, spring) |

To answer the first research question, teachers were asked in the winter and spring interviews to provide examples of successes and challenges in leading advisory and teaching SEL. Measures of confidence or lack thereof were identified in the coding process, including perceived and demonstrated *competence* toward advisory and SEL, and perceived *lack of skill or expertise*. Table 8 outlines definitions and examples of these codes. The coding process identified two trends with respect to teacher confidence toward advisory and SEL: (a) teachers identified frequent examples of professional competence (mastery experiences or problem-solving) toward teaching advisory or SEL, or toward teaching in general, at both the midpoint and conclusion of the intervention; (b)

teachers identified unsuccessful experiences teaching advisory or SEL, or a need for additional training, more frequently at the conclusion of the intervention than at the midpoint of the intervention.

Table 8

*Codes Reflecting Confidence or Lack Thereof Toward Advisory and SEL*

| Code | Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|
| *Competence, professional growth* | Teachers describe a sense of competence, growth, expertise, or confidence in teaching SEL, or in exercising advisor responsibilities. This should also be used when teachers cite an example of problem solving to achieve a goal related to SEL, advisory, or teaching in general. | "I'm super proactive about parent communication." (T3, winter)<br><br>"It's not too hard actually to interact with kids, either, to get them to respond when you ask something specific of them." (T1, winter) |
| *Lack of skill or expertise* | Teachers cite a lack of skill, experience, or ability to deliver SEL instruction or to achieve desired SEL outcomes. This code should be used when teachers state that they do not know how to do, or are not good at, a skill or practice related to SEL instruction, but do not suggest an intervention or support. | "I was new with the curriculum. . . . I wasn't, I think I could have done better last year. I could have framed it a little better." (T6, spring) |

In the winter interviews, each of the eight teachers cited examples of successful problem-solving related to teaching SEL or leading advisory. For example, in discussing how to solicit student engagement over Zoom, one teacher noted, "It's not too hard actually to interact with kids, either, to get them to respond when you ask something specific of them" (T1). Several teachers shared a sense of competence in selecting activities from the advisory materials to elicit greater interaction from their students, such as games or music. For example, a teacher reported, "We did . . . the 'would you rather?' questions from the slide show, and that was great" (T2). Another said, "[My students] seem to relate to music right now . . . and [playing music] kind of made a smile on some

faces and that got a couple of responses" (T4). Another teacher expressed an overall feeling of competence, asserting, "I have never felt so competent being an advisor. . . . and ready to, like, handle it" (T5). Some teachers also expressed a sense of competence regarding parent communication. For example, one teacher reported, "I'll see a parent in the background. . . . and I'll say, hi, mom, you're welcome to join in if you like. . . . but I want them to know, hey, we're--you're our support" (T4). Another teacher expressed a sense of competence in their frequency of communication with parents (T3), while another noted a greater sense of competence in conducting parent-teacher conferences this year (T5). The teacher stated video conferences conducted with the parents of each advisory student felt more "accurate" and "meaningful" than the feedback teachers gave in prior years in the form of only a brief written report card comment (T5).

In the spring interviews, all but one participant (T5) demonstrated a sense of competence or problem solving related to advisory or SEL. Some examples provided by teachers included techniques for soliciting student engagement during remote learning (T4), exercising self-awareness about one's own emotions to more effectively engage students (T1 and T7), or confidence in teaching certain SEL related topics (T8). For example, one teacher cited using Zoom breakout rooms as an effective technique for increasing student engagement in advisory activities while remote (T1), and another teacher cited feeling "comfortable" addressing topics like sex education (T8). Another teacher described a sense of improvement in their organizational skills (T2), and another expressed that they were "doing a good job" of not bringing personal stress into the classroom to more effectively support students (T7).

Deficits with regard to teachers' sense of competence, identified by the code *lack of skill or expertise*, were very infrequent in both the winter and spring interviews. This finding was particularly salient because Cycle 0 interviews indicated most teachers felt they were lacking in SEC, and were insufficiently trained to teach SEL. In the winter interviews, only three of the eight teachers indicated a lack of training or skill as a factor in their ability to successfully lead advisory. For two of these teachers, the perceived lack of skill cited was related to teaching strategies for remote learning, such as getting students to show their work on camera (T4) or to engage during a Zoom lesson (T8), as opposed to a perceived lack of skill in teaching SEL. As one teacher noted:

> . . . When they're just not turning on their cameras, they're just not willing to speak or engage, I'll still do the lesson to the best of my ability and hope that some of the information or skills are landing for some of them. (T8)

The only teacher to cite relative lack of training in SEL (T1) did so in the context of expressing the value of the resources available to support the advisor team in teaching SEL. As the teacher explained:

> I like seeing, you know, drawing upon some of the SEL things that [our school counselor] shared. Some of the more, like, really well thought out documents about how SEL works. . . . I have no programmatic training in SEL except for professional development things that I've gone to . . . so I'm a big fan of getting experts also kind of helping guide our curriculum. (T1)

In spring, five of the teachers cited some perceived *lack of skill or expertise*, or a desire to improve upon something they had done in leading advisory, though these references were brief. Typically, these negative responses were just a few sentences over the course of a 20-minute-long interview. Of those five teachers, three of them cited challenges related to remote learning or physical distancing protocols (T2, T3, T4), such as the challenge of teaching SEL while remote, or of grouping students when restricted to

assigned seating due to social distancing requirements. One teacher cited relative lack of experience with the eighth-grade advisory curriculum as a first-year member of the team, explaining, "I wasn't quite sure . . . you know, [the curriculum] was all kind of new. . . . I could have framed it a little better" (T6). Another cited a general sense of challenge in the frequent shifts in teaching demanded by the pandemic, stating, "It just feels like everybody's first year teaching" (T3). The observation made by one teacher regarding leading advisory indicated more challenging teaching conditions during remote learning:

> SEL stuff would be the most difficult, especially because of being remote. That stuff's always easier to like, detect and, like, understand when it's going on when you're in person. . . . I mean, just talking in person was so much different than talking on Zoom. . . If there was any issue related to [social emotional wellbeing], it was always very hard to get anything out of any kid over the computer. (T2)

However, only two teachers (T2 and T6) indicated a perceived lack of experience or skill specifically related to advisory or SEL.

**Research Question 2**

To answer the second research question, *How does participation in the PLC affect teachers' attitude toward advisory and SEL?*, quantitative data from Likert scale surveys were collected in fall 2020 and spring 2021, at the beginning and end of the PLC intervention. Qualitative data from individual interviews with teachers were collected in winter 2020 and spring 2021, at the midpoint and end of the intervention.

***Quantitative Data***

The Likert scale surveys administered to teachers at the beginning and conclusion of the PLC intervention included items designed to measure the constructs *attitude toward advisory* and *attitude toward advisory to support remote learning*. Reliability measures for the quantitative data were presented previously in Table 3.

Table 9

*Descriptive Statistics for the Constructs of Attitude Toward Advisory and Attitude Toward Advisory to Support Remote Learning, n* = 8

| Construct | Pre-Test Mean | Pre-Test Standard Deviation | Post-Test Mean | Post-Test Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Attitude toward advisory | 4.04 | 0.52 | 3.79 | 0.64 |
| Attitude toward advisory to support remote learning | 3.53 | 0.84 | 3.69 | 0.59 |

The mean of the construct *attitude toward advisory* was relatively high pre-intervention but decreased slightly on the post-test, -0.25 points. The mean of the construct *attitude toward advisory to support remote learning* was relatively low pre-intervention and increased slightly post-intervention, 0.16 points. See Table 9 for details.

In considering specific items related to *attitude toward advisory*, decreases were seen in Q5, Q6, and Q7, while slight increases were seen in Q1 and Q17. No change was seen in mean attitudes for Q3 and Q4. See Table 10 for details. (Differences in wording between pre- and post-test survey items are in parentheses.)

Table 10

*Descriptive Statistics for Survey Items Related to Attitude Toward Advisory, n* = 8

| Item | Pre-Test Mean | Pre-Test Standard Deviation | Post-Test Mean | Post-Test Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Q1. I am (looking forward to / enjoying) being an advisor this year.* | 3.50 | 0.54 | 3.63 | 0.92 |
| *Q3. I believe that advisory is an essential part of the middle school program.* | 4.38 | 0.52 | 4.38 | 0.74 |
| *Q4. I believe that being an advisor (will be / is) a rewarding experience.* | 3.88 | 0.64 | 3.88 | 0.84 |
| *Q5. I believe that being an advisor (will help me / is helping me) to develop better relationships with my students.* | 4.75 | 0.46 | 4.13 | 1.13 |
| *Q6. I believe that I (will develop / am developing) important skills this year through my experience as an advisor.* | 3.88 | 0.64 | 3.13 | 0.84 |
| *Q7. I believe that being an advisor (will support / supports) my effectiveness as a teacher outside of advisory.* | 4.13 | 0.64 | 3.50 | 0.93 |
| *Q17. I believe that students (will develop / are developing) important skills this year through the advisory program.* | 3.75 | 1.04 | 3.88 | 0.99 |

In considering items related to *attitude toward advisory to support remote learning*, a slight decrease was seen in Q21, while an increase was seen in Q18 and a slight increase was seen in Q19. No change was seen in mean attitude for Q20. See Table 11 for details.

Table 11

*Descriptive Statistics for Survey Items Related to Attitude Toward Advisory to Support Remote Learning, n* = 8

| Item | Pre-Test Mean | Pre-Test Standard Deviation | Post-Test Mean | Post-Test Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Q18. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important supports for students to stay connected to each other during remote learning.* | 3.63 | 1.06 | 4.25 | 0.71 |
| *Q19. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important supports for students to learn about and participate in school events during remote learning.* | 3.75 | 0.89 | 3.88 | 0.84 |
| *Q20. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important supports for students to be successful in their classes during remote learning.* | 3.25 | 0.89 | 3.25 | 1.04 |
| *Q21. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important supports for student wellness (social, emotional, physical) during remote learning.* | 3.50 | 0.76 | 3.38 | 0.74 |

### *Qualitative Data*

Interviews were conducted with faculty participants at the midpoint and endpoint of the PLC intervention. A total of 14 codes were identified for the primary theme entitled *Affordances for Advisory and SEL*. These were then grouped into three categories, *professionalism toward SEL*, *supportive conditions for advisory and SEL*, and *SEL outcomes*, outlined previously in Table 6. Another 14 codes were identified for the second primary theme, entitled *Constraints for Advisory and SEL*. These were then grouped into three categories, *lack of professionalism toward SEL*, *lack of support for advisory and SEL*, and *SEL deficits*, outlined previously in Table 7.

To address the second research question, teachers were asked in the mid-intervention and post-intervention interviews to discuss rewarding and frustrating aspects of being an advisor. In addition, teachers were asked to assess the value and effectiveness of the advisory program and SEL instruction. Teachers were also asked to compare the effectiveness of the advisory program with previous years. Teacher attitudes toward advisory and SEL were assessed by references to *satisfaction* or *dissatisfaction* in the advisor role, as well as by references to *advisory curriculum quality* and *curriculum deficits* during the PLC intervention. See Table 12 for definitions and examples of these codes.

The coding process identified four trends with respect to teacher attitudes toward advisory and SEL: (a) most teachers perceived the quality and value of the advisory curriculum as improved during the intervention; (b) all teachers identified areas for continued improvement of the advisory curriculum, and did so more frequently, at the end of the intervention than at the midpoint; (c) teachers expressed satisfaction overall in the advisor role, which remained nearly unchanged over the course of the intervention; (d) dissatisfaction in the advisor role or with SEL outcomes was almost entirely associated with the constraints imposed by remote learning.

Table 12

*Codes Reflecting Teacher Attitudes Toward Advisory and SEL*

| Code | Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|
| *Satisfaction, fulfillment in role* | Teachers describe SEL, being an advisor, or functions of that role as personally or professionally rewarding, successful, meaningful, or enjoyable. | "Just when they connect with each other, is so rewarding with advisory. And that's the part that I like the most." (T4, spring)<br><br>"I love the individual connections that we get to build with the kids in advisory." (T1, winter) |
| *Quality of curriculum* | Teachers positively assess the value or effectiveness of the advisory instructional methods, curriculum, and activities, or when they positively assess the curriculum development approach or outcomes. | "The three weeks of gratitude that we've been doing, has been really helpful. And it feels thematic and it feels like the students are kind of remembering ideas that they said three weeks ago." (T6, winter) |
| *Dissatisfaction, frustration* | Teachers express dissatisfaction, discouragement, frustration, or lack of enjoyment in teaching SEL, in leading advisory, or in exercising other functions of the advisor role. This category should not be used when a critique is offered with regard to a specific aspect of the advisory program or role, or when a remedy is suggested. | "I don't know that I'm ever going to build community with this group." (T8, winter)<br><br>"Just, when all of this is going on, it's just, you're not getting a lot, you're not getting that usual joy and satisfaction, whatever. So you just move forward…" (T5, spring) |
| *Curriculum deficit* | Teachers cite a need for more advisory curriculum development, an aspect of the curriculum or type of activity that is lacking or insufficient, or a need to revise, improve, or eliminate existing content or activities. | "As we keep developing the program, I think, uh, increasing clarity about what is the purpose, what is the goal, where are we going over the course of, like, a full year?" (T1, spring)<br><br>"If we're actually going to be a school that cares about this, let's find a way to do both. . ." (T1, spring) |

In both the winter and spring interviews, teachers were asked to assess the effectiveness of the advisory program overall in comparison to the previous year. The spring interviews included an additional question to solicit feedback regarding the quality of the advisory curriculum in particular. In considering the overall quality of the advisory program, all teachers cited aspects of the program they perceived as having improved during the PLC intervention, with the quality of the curriculum cited by seven teachers in the winter interviews (T1, T2, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8). In spring, this topic was discussed at more length, with all eight teachers citing appreciation for the quality of the SEL curriculum.

Several teachers described the curriculum during the intervention as better than in past years. For example, one teacher observed, "I've seen improvements this year. . . . It feels like, at least recently in advisory, . . . we're actually, like, building some good socioemotional . . . skills in more of a sustained, just like, really thoughtful programmatic way" (T1). Another noted, "[The advisory curriculum has] just been shaped and molded and developed to meet [this] middle school so well" (T5). Another commented, "One improvement that I do see is just making the intentional changes to having some of these more thoughtful conversations during remote learning. . . . And it feels thematic and it feels like the students are kind of remembering ideas that they said three weeks ago. . . . And it seems very purposeful and intentional" (T6). A fourth teacher observed, "I think, for myself, comparing the two [years], this year is working much better. I think that it's a little more structured, and it feels at least a little more specifically focused on the SEL lessons" (T8).

The ability to quickly "shift" (T1) or "pivot" (T1, T4) the lessons or activities in response to current events or emergent student needs was cited as an improvement. Teachers also noted improved continuity between SEL lessons and themes across advisory sessions (T1, T6, T8), as well as a more effective "balance" (T2) with regard to types of advisory activities (T2, T1, T4, T6, T7). Specifically, teachers felt readings and videos were grade-level appropriate, properly varied, and supportive of students' developmental stage. SEL lessons were not perceived as "babyish" or "remedial" (T1). There were also "fun" activities (T2) designed to support positive SEL and school climate outcomes, such as games and community building activities. Teachers also cited high quality and/or improved curriculum content, either specifically related to coping with the COVID-19 pandemic (T4, T1) or to SEL skills development in general (T1, T3, T2, T5, T7, T8). For example, one teacher observed, "Working with issues concerning the pandemic, you know, those feelings of loneliness or gratitude or empathy, that's so much needed" (T4).

While advisors indicated a general sense of improved advisory curriculum quality during the PLC intervention, four advisors cited *curriculum deficits*, or a need for continued SEL curriculum development, in the winter interviews (T1, T3, T6, T7). Among the deficits cited in winter were the need to address the pandemic more directly in advisory lessons, as well as to revisit some earlier advisory topics. As one teacher observed, "Sometimes I think if we have something for one week, we get that checklist out and then we move on. But I wonder if students still want to come back and revisit some of those topics" (T6). Similarly, another teacher urged that the program not "lose the momentum" it built this year in addressing SEL topics in a thoughtful, sustained way

(T1). Conversely, another teacher felt that spending too much time on "heavy topics" resulted in less engagement from students and believed that more time should be devoted to play (T7). Similarly, another teacher recommended that advisors periodically allow students to choose from a menu of playful or interest-based advisory activities (sports, music, games, etc.) (T3).

The most frequent code in the spring interviews was *curriculum deficits*, with all eight teachers offering ideas for improvements to the advisory curriculum. Some teachers suggested developing clearer advisory program goals (T1, T2). As one teacher explained, ". . . as we keep developing the program . . . [we should be] increasing clarity about what is the purpose, what is the goal, where are we going over the course of, like, a full year?" (T1).

Other program revisions offered by teachers included placing greater emphasis on current events and civics (T3), service (T5), or games (T7). One teacher expressed concern that the school discouraged classroom conversation about topics that could be considered political (T3). In the interview, this teacher cited an expression that had been used by school administrators, the "double yellow line," to refer to the line separating the classroom from politics, to which the teacher responded, "If we can't talk politics, politics are off limits, and then everything gets lumped in as a political topic . . ." The teacher strongly felt that "as educators in this country, we have to talk more about topical, relevant current events and issues," and argued that "advisory is the best place to open up space for those conversations."

It was suggested that more time be spent on some lessons (T4), or that the order in which some lessons were presented might be changed (T5). As one teacher explained,

"Sometimes the lessons were too quick. . . . Sometimes our lessons would just be so different than the next" (T4). It was also recommended that the group have more concise or "manageable" lesson plans (T4). Additional ideas included doing more team-building activities (T4, T8), engaging eighth-grade students more with older or younger students to receive or provide mentorship (T5, T6, T7), and soliciting more student input and feedback about advisory lessons (T4). As one teacher suggested, "Polling [students], or getting their opinion, makes them feel really important. And they do, their voice matters, and they have a chance to say something" (T4).

In both the winter and spring interviews, teachers were asked to describe the most rewarding and frustrating aspects of being an advisor. In general, teachers indicated that being an advisor was a rewarding part of their role. Six teachers in the winter interview (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T7, and T8) and five teachers in the spring interview (T1, T4, T6, T7, T8) explicitly referred to feeling a general sense of *satisfaction* in being an advisor. Some advisors indicated a general sense of enjoyment in the role, such as one who asserted, "I just love being an advisor" (T5). Others experienced a sense of meaning in helping their advisory students, such as one teacher who stated, "Learning later on that I was helping them. . . . that feels great" (T4).

In considering rewarding aspects of the advisor role, positive relationships with students and families were cited by five advisors in the winter interviews (T1, T2, T3, T4, T7). One teacher noted that being recognized by a student in their advisory as the adult they would go to for help with a problem was particularly meaningful (T2). Another source of reward for advisors was the perception that they know their student advisees better and provide them with more support as compared to only seeing students in

academic classes (T7). In the spring interviews, developing long-term relationships with students in their advisory group and seeing them mature was cited as a source of satisfaction, as was greeting their advisory students every morning (T4). In addition, a sense that "the role of advisor is even more important this year," referring to the circumstances of remote learning and the pandemic, was explicitly cited (T7).

Nevertheless, teachers did experience some *dissatisfaction and frustration* in the advisor role. While the frequency of references to discouragement and frustration in the role decreased in the spring interviews (17) as compared to winter (29), six out of the eight teachers referred to such experiences in the winter interviews (T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8) and six did so in the spring interviews (T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T8). Experiences of dissatisfaction in the advisor role, or of frustration with SEL outcomes, were most frequently related to obstacles presented by remote learning and social distancing. One teacher lamented the lack of responsiveness from students during Zoom advisory meetings, stating, "So we talk about these topics, like, just empathy and caring and giving and, and just without making that connection, you kind of feel like there's just this wall sometimes" (T5). Another teacher expressed concern about their effectiveness as an advisor, admitting, "I don't know that I can help as well as I would be able to in a normal year" (T3). Another teacher summed up the concern teachers felt for students during remote learning regarding their isolation at home:

> This is a rough year for kids, it's a very rough year for them. And they are tired. . . Bring on this vaccine. Let's get out into the world. Get out of the seat. Get out of your room. You know, their homework is at home. Their classwork is at home. And they're always in the same spot. And I feel bad for them . . . (T4)

Of note, all teachers and most eighth-grade students returned from primarily remote instruction to hybrid on-campus instruction starting in March 2021, and transitioned to primarily on-campus instruction in April 2021. At the time of the spring interviews, all middle school grades were engaged in in-person instruction four days per week, with instruction on Wednesdays conducted remotely. A small number of students opted to remain entirely remote.

Some teachers described the lack of reward they felt in the advisory role this year, citing low student engagement related to remote learning. One teacher compared remote teaching to their first year as a teacher, feeling like a novice and constantly struggling to adapt, "only without all of that reward" or "positive feedback" (T3) that teachers may feel at the completion of a successful year of teaching. Another teacher noted, "Because I wasn't getting [students'] reactions to feed off of . . . it felt like an energy suck. . . . My motivation would dip sometimes, too. Like it was hard to put so much energy into something I wasn't really getting much back" (T8). Similarly, another teacher noted, "when all of this is going on, it's just, you're not getting a lot, you're not getting that usual joy and satisfaction" (T5). Detailed findings regarding *remote learning or distancing detriments* and *innovations related to remote learning* will be discussed in more detail in the next section, which will consider the affordances and constraints experienced by teachers during the PLC intervention.

**Research Question 3**

The third research question, *What affordances and constraints are experienced by teachers participating in the PLC during remote learning?*, was also explored using mixed methods. Quantitative data included Likert scale surveys collected in fall 2020 and

spring 2021, at the beginning and end of the PLC intervention. Qualitative data included the coding of individual interviews with teachers collected in winter 2020 and spring 2021, at the midpoint and end of the intervention.

***Quantitative Data***

The Likert scale surveys administered to teachers at the beginning and conclusion of the PLC intervention included items designed to measure the construct *perceived support for advisory and SEL*. Reliability measures for this construct were presented previously in Table 3. The perception of support for advisory had the highest pre-intervention mean of the four constructs included in the survey (see Table 13) and showed a modest decrease on the post-test, -0.33 points.

Table 13

*Descriptive Statistics for the Construct of Perceived Support for Advisory, n* = 8

| Construct | Pre-Test Mean | Pre-Test Standard Deviation | Post-Test Mean | Post-Test Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived support for advisory and SEL (SUP) | 4.21 | 0.43 | 3.88 | 0.67 |

In considering specific items related to perceptions of support, the means for all items were relatively high on the pre-test (4.00 and above). One of these items, Q23, presented the second highest pre-test mean of all survey items. On the post-test, modest decreases were seen in Q23, and Q24, and no change was seen in Q22. See Table 14 for details.

Table 14

*Descriptive Statistics for Survey Items Related to Support, n* = 8

| Item | Pre-Test Mean | Pre-Test Standard Deviation | Post-Test Mean | Post-Test Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Q22. If I have a challenging situation with a student or group of students, other advisors are a good resource to me in problem solving.* | 4.00 | 0.93 | 4.00 | 1.07 |
| *Q23. If I have a challenging situation with a student or group of students, school administrators are a good resource to me in problem solving.* | 4.38 | 0.52 | 4.00 | 0.93 |
| *Q24. I believe that teachers are given the support they need to be effective advisors.* | 4.25 | 0.46 | 3.63 | 0.92 |

The survey also included two items, Q8 and Q9, designed to assess how well the advisory curriculum created during the PLC intervention supported student engagement and teacher adaptation when needed to accomplish learning goals, outlined in Table 15.

Table 15

*Descriptive Statistics for Survey Items Related to Curriculum, n* = 8

| Item | Pre-Test Mean | Pre-Test Standard Deviation | Post-Test Mean | Post-Test Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Q8. It is easy to engage my students in advisory lessons and activities.* | 2.63 | 0.74 | 3.00 | 1.07 |
| *Q9. If an advisory activity isn't working, I am able to successfully adapt it to accomplish the targeted learning goals.* | 3.38 | 0.74 | 3.75 | 0.71 |

Overall, teacher assessments of the quality of the advisory curriculum with regard to student engagement and differentiation, as reflected in quantitative data, improved slightly over the course of the PLC intervention. On the pre-test survey, Q8 presented the lowest mean score of all survey items but increased slightly by the end of the

intervention. The Q9 mean score was also low at the start of the intervention but saw a similar slight increase on the post-test.

***Qualitative Data***

Teachers were asked in interviews at the midpoint and endpoint of the intervention to assess how well the advisory program supported students in terms of SEL outcomes. Teachers were also asked to assess the value of the PLC intervention in supporting them personally or in their role as advisors, and to consider what additional support could have been helpful. Affordances experienced by teachers during the PLC intervention were assessed by references to professionalism toward SEL, including *competence and professional growth*, *shared practice and collective learning*, *collaboration with colleagues*, and *choice and autonomy*. Supportive conditions for SEL were assessed by perceptions of *administrative support* and *camaraderie* with fellow advisors. SEL outcomes were assessed by perceptions of *student engagement*, *relationships and belonging*, *student wellbeing*, *teacher wellbeing*, and *academic support*. See Table 16 for definitions and examples of these codes.

Constraints experienced by teachers during the PLC intervention were assessed by references to lack of professionalism toward SEL, including *need for more or better teamwork*, and *differentiation as challenge*. Lack of support for advisory and SEL was assessed by perceptions of *need for administrative support*, *need for professional development*, *time constraints or workload*, and *remote learning or distancing detriment*. Poor SEL outcomes were identified by perceptions of *disconnection or lack of relationships*, *student disengagement*, and *lack of academic support*. See Table 17 for definitions and examples of these codes.

Table 16

*Codes Reflecting SEL Professionalism, Support, and Positive Outcomes*

| Name of category | Description | Example |
|---|---|---|
| *Choice and autonomy* | Teachers cite the ability to exercise choice in selecting advisory activities or methods as beneficial to SEL outcomes. | ". . . The nice thing about the setup we already have is that, as advisors, we have a lot of autonomy over how we do the lessons." (T8, winter) |
| *Shared practice and collective learning* | Teachers cite shared experience and wisdom, planning, and collective learning for SEL associated with participating in the PLC. | "And brainstorming together . . . has been a lot of fun, just to feel like, you know, we have a lot of say in the programming." (T6, spring) |
| *Collaboration with colleagues* | Used when two or more advisory groups combine to engage in an activity, or when advisors partner with a co-teacher. | ". . . it's been quite helpful to be partnered with somebody else who already knows the curriculum . . ." (T6, winter) |
| *Student engagement* | Teachers observe positive student participation, interest, or effort in advisory activities or curriculum. | "I think there was enough support that they actually, my group, at least, really engaged and [were] really thoughtful . . ." (T1, spring) |
| *Relationships and belonging* | Teachers cite positive relationships with or between students or their families, or feeling a sense of connection with students related to their role as advisors. | ". . . Advisory was definitely a place where . . . I was definitely able to maintain some, like, really strong relationships with kids." (T2, spring) |
| *Supportive conditions for teachers* | Teachers feel supported as advisors by the school administration, such as by setting of norms or allocation of time, or through professional learning or resources provided. | "I feel like things are so well planned out and so well supported that I feel like I have the tools and resources I need." (T7, winter) |
| *Innovation related to remote learning* | An instructional method or practice implemented to support remote learning or physical distancing is a support for SEL, or an improvement over past practice. | ". . . I loved doing the [parent teacher] conferences on Zoom." (T6, winter) |
| *Camaraderie* | Shared experience and relationships with other advisors are cited as a rewarding aspect of being an advisor or of engaging in the PLC intervention. | ". . . It just, like, reaffirms, like, I'm not in this alone, you know? Other people are having challenges, other people have had successes . . ." (T5, spring) |
| *Teacher wellbeing* | Teachers cite practices to support their own wellbeing, or describe teaching advisory or SEL as a support for their own wellbeing. | "Taking care of myself, it was like a really big prerequisite in a way that was maybe easier to do in previous years . . ." (T1, spring) |
| *Student wellbeing* | Participation in advisory or other school activities is cited as a support for students' wellbeing, or describe evidence of students' wellbeing. | "We would talk through some techniques, talk about sleeping, and just little things." (T6, spring) |
| *Academic support* | Teachers describe actions taken or resources provided by teachers or the school to support students to be successful in school. This may refer to programs, routines, structures, supervision, or monitoring of students. | ". . . I'm keeping up on their academic progress. I'm checking in with them on stuff. You know . . . any sort of support issues are communicated through the same channels." (T3, spring) |

Table 17

*Codes Reflecting Lack of SEL Professionalism and Support, or Poor Outcomes*

| Name of category | Description | Example |
|---|---|---|
| *Need for more or better teamwork* | An improvement is suggested for how advisors or the PLC work as a team, such as more collaboration, collective learning, partnering, or distribution of tasks. | ". . . And maybe these few advisors kind of take the lead in planning something really good and these ones plan or something like that." (T1, winter) |
| *Need for professional development* | Teachers cite a need for more professional development, outside of or in addition to the collective learning and shared practice of the PLC. | ". . . Like a couple hours just for advisors to learn some of these skills, or just kind of tighten up our own skills as advisors, like the SEL skills." (T8, spring) |
| *Need for administrative support* | Teachers describe a need for more administrative support to implement change, or a need to establish or enforce policies to support SEL or effective teaching in general. | ". . . Some type of direction on what is recommended to support the students at home and in person at the same time. . . . all be on the same page." (T7, spring) |
| *Differentiation as challenge* | Teachers describe the need to differentiate instructional methods or expectations as a challenge to SEL instruction or outcomes, or to effective teaching in general. | "I'm just wondering what's going on with certain kids and how they're learning. And I can see kids are getting frustrated." (T4, winter) |
| *Disconnection, lack of relationships* | Teachers cite a lack of relationship or connection with or between students. | "Like I feel like they're going to go on to ninth grade and I really don't know much about them at all." (T3, spring) |
| *Student disengagement* | Teachers describe lack of student participation, enjoyment, motivation, or interest in advisory activities or curriculum. | ". . . A lot of my students were withdrawn, not turning in assignments, not even speaking up . . ." (T4, spring) |
| *Student stress or stressors* | Teachers observe student stress, or cite student stress or lack of wellbeing as an obstacle to advisory or SEL, or to teaching in general. | "With the pandemic, I think, we needed some type of support group or some type of place to talk, more than we usually [do], because of how many hardships that our kids were going through this year." (T6, spring) |
| *Teacher stress / stressors* | Teachers cite feelings of stress or lack of wellbeing as an obstacle to teaching advisory or SEL, or to teaching in general. | "The whole waiting for employee contracts, everybody was anxious." (T4, spring) |
| *Lack of academic support* | Teachers cite lack of support, structure, or supervision as a hindrance to students' academic success in school. | "Some students not waking up in the morning was an issue. And still [laughs]. This shift to schooling." (T4, spring) |
| *Remote learning or distancing detriment* | Teachers cite an instructional method, material, or practice implemented to support remote learning or in response to physical distancing as a detriment to SEL or teaching in general. | "And it's, you know, that, that, really tough to engage back and forth with Zoom and even in hybrid when you're going back and forth." (T3, spring) |
| *Time constraints or excessive workload* | Teachers cite how time is allocated, or the type or volume of demands on students' or teachers' time, as an obstacle or limitation to SEL or satisfaction in the advisor role. | "So it just, overall feeling, it could be the same, but overall feeling, it just feels like more work . . ." (T7, spring) |

The coding process identified four trends with respect to teacher perceptions of affordances and constraints during the intervention: (a) remote learning was perceived as the greatest obstacle to positive SEL outcomes and to teaching in general; (b) though the effectiveness of advisory was hampered by remote learning, teachers still perceived advisory as having a positive effect on SEL outcomes; (c) teachers perceived the PLC as supportive of SEL and advisory and as a personal support during remote learning; (d) teachers identified more need for administrative support over the course of the intervention.

*Remote learning or distancing detriments*, or frustration with conditions related to remote learning, social distancing, or other adjustments made in response to the pandemic, were the most frequent code in the winter interviews and the second most frequent code in the spring interviews. Remote learning challenges were not always cited in the context of the advisor role and were often described by teachers as detrimental to teaching and to positive school climate in general. However, teachers experienced remote learning and videoconferencing as a hindrance to SEL instruction and to the advisory program goals overall.

Every teacher cited frustration with students' reluctance or refusal to turn on their cameras during video conferences. As one teacher explained, "It was a constant battle getting kids on screens and talking to black screens for too much of the day" (T1). Another teacher suspected that students would walk away from their computers or engage in something else while they were off camera, asserting, "I knew half the time [the students] weren't with me" (T5). Most teachers also cited frustration with the lack of spoken or written responses from students during virtual class meetings (T1, T2, T3, T6,

T7, T8). As one teacher declared, "[There were] days when, like, no one [would] turn their camera on and speak. It was very draining or exhausting" (T8). Similarly, teachers cited remote instruction as an obstacle to student engagement in class discussions. One teacher argued, "There's no just sort of organic back and forth [in Zoom]" (T3). Another thought some students may have "wanted to talk [during Zoom meetings] . . . but they just didn't feel comfortable" (T5). Others cited remote teaching as a hindrance to getting to know students (T5, T6, T8). As one teacher worried, "I feel like they're going to go on to ninth grade and I really don't know much about them at all" (T3).

Many teachers cited the challenges of teaching through videoconference, or of hybrid teaching (with some students in person and some remote) as a detriment to the quality of instruction (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5). A teacher observed, "I know a lot of academics just kind of got watered down. . . . [In my department] we know we didn't cover as much as we would have in the past" (T5). Some also cited the inability to observe students in person as a hindrance to their ability to provide academic support. One teacher noted that it was more difficult to provide ad hoc study support, as an advisor might do when she sees a student in the classroom: "When they're on Zoom, they're studying on flashcards on their computer. I never see that" (T6). Others cited remote instruction as an obstacle to teaching SEL and providing SEL support. For example, a teacher argued, "I think there's power in being in the room together and circling up and talking and interacting" (T3). Another was concerned that when a student is struggling during remote learning, "you can't give them a cup of hot chocolate and say, come in for lunch . . . . You can't just put your hand on their shoulder and say, I got you. Don't worry about it" (T5).

At the same time, some teachers noted helpful innovations related to remote learning, such as the change in the bell schedule to move advisory period to after lunch (T6) or the removal of the distractions of being on campus (T1, T4). A teacher reflected, "I think some kids thrive when. . . . they are seeing the teacher directly and they're not involved in chit chat from their neighbor. . . . So I do think there's a small group that [does] better [in remote learning]" (T4). For one teacher, "the chat function in Zoom was kind of a game changer," because it allowed some students who might be reluctant to speak up in class to contribute to discussions through writing (T8).

Most teachers, however, described advisory as less effective during remote learning, citing detriments to SEL instruction and outcomes (T3, T5, T8), student friendships (T4, T6), relationships between advisors and students (T5, T4, T3, T6, T7), and academic support (T6). Seven teachers in the winter interviews (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7) and four teachers in the spring interviews (T3, T4, T5, T6) cited a sense of *disconnection or lack of relationships* as a challenge during the current school year. In every instance, this sense of disconnection was perceived to be related to remote learning, as opposed to teacher skill or training in SEL.

In the winter interviews, some teachers did not feel that they knew students in their advisory group as well as they would in a typical year (T1, T3, T6). Others reported that it was difficult to get students to share their opinions or feelings, or to talk about personal struggles, even in private student/teacher conversations (T4, T5, T7). Additionally, teachers felt that it was more difficult to provide students with emotional support or encouragement during remote learning (T3), or to nurture community-building and friendship (T4, T6, T8).

In the spring interviews, teachers expressed a general perception that being remote was the biggest obstacle to the advisory goal of building relationships (T2, T3, T4). Some teachers felt that they didn't know their students well until they returned to on-campus instruction (T4, T3, T6). For some, returning to on-campus instruction was seen as a "highlight" (T6) and "the most effective" support to SEL instruction and outcomes (T4).

References to disconnection were far fewer in the spring. Of note, some teachers expressed an appreciation at that time for the relationship they and their students had built while remote (T2, T7, T8). As one teacher observed, "Advisory was definitely a place where . . . I was definitely able to maintain some, like, really strong relationships with kids. . . . [The return to campus] was kind of like we were never remote" (T2). Similarly, another teacher asserted, "Some of [the students] got to know each other online on Zoom first," and that the students were "mingling well" upon the start of on-campus instruction (T7). Another teacher stated that, because of the quality of the relationships students built while remote, the transition to on-campus instruction felt "seamless" (T8). The teacher went on to explain, "I felt really good about that because it's really hard to tell when we're all remote, like, how bonded [my students] were" (T8).

A frequently cited affordance of teaching advisory was the development of positive relationships with students. *Relationships and belonging* was the fourth most frequent code, and was identified in each of the eight advisor interviews in winter and spring. While not associated only with teaching SEL, the perceived importance of the relationships teachers built with their students may have been increased by the experience of remote learning. One teacher noted, "I've had a lot of one-on-one conversations with

kids. . . . I think it's especially valuable in remote learning for kids to kind of be seen on a deeper level, and be like, we have that connection" (T1). Another teacher expressed appreciation for the ability to get to know more about students and develop more personal relationships with them and their families through advisory than through teaching them in an academic class alone (T2). One teacher observed, "We are building a semblance of community [with students]," even though students and teachers were physically distanced for most of the year and logging into classes from their homes (T8).

In some cases, teachers suspected that stronger relationships had been formed with students during remote learning than during a normal year. For example, one teacher described remote learning as "a bonding experience" (T4). This teacher perceived the value students placed on being invited into teachers' homes through video conferences, or learning about a teacher's family obligations, such as when the teacher told students, "My grandson's down there, I've . . . [got to] make sure he's not playing video games." This teacher explained, "[the students] liked that we were real with them," and "they felt cheated, they [said], when [a] teacher just had . . . the virtual screen in the background" (T4). The positive examples of relationship building that teachers cited suggested that some aspects of the advisory program or SEL instructional methods were successful in promoting positive SEL outcomes, even during remote learning.

*Student engagement* was cited by seven teachers in the winter interviews (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T8) and by all eight teachers in the spring interviews as an affordance experienced during the PLC intervention. However, in the winter interviews, examples of positive engagement were sometimes cited as exceptions to the rule. Among the examples of engagement provided in the winter interviews were cases of students who

stood out amongst peers for volunteering answers during remote advisory activities (T1, T4). For example, one teacher asserted, "I have, honestly, like two students that I can go to," who could be counted on to provide a response in class discussions (T5). Another reported, "My biggest speakers are [two students], they're the ones who will speak up" (T4).

Other teachers expressed satisfaction with the overall level of student engagement in advisory. One teacher observed, "I think we're still getting pretty decent participation [in advisory]," even though it was being conducted remotely (T6). In other cases, teachers perceived their current advisory groups as being more engaged than groups they taught in the year prior to the intervention (T2, T8). As one teacher noted, ". . . I happened to have a little bit of a tough group last year that was like . . . I would describe them as too cool for school" (T8).

However, there were relatively few references to positive student engagement in advisory, or in school in general, during remote learning. References to engagement were often presented in contrast with much more numerous and detailed examples of *disengagement*, cited by each of the eight teachers in the winter interviews. Like the challenges that advisors experienced in fostering relationships, advisors perceived the challenges to engaging students in SEL curriculum and activities as directly related to remote learning. However, the support provided by the advisory program was unable to alleviate all of these obstacles.

Teachers noted that students were "barely awake" (T2) during morning homeroom. Some students also tended to do the "bare minimum" (T3) in terms of engaging in advisory activities. As one teacher described it, "It feels like there are some

kids who really–they know how to jump in when they need to, but they're not actually actively engaged" (T1). Teachers also asserted that it was difficult to get students to participate when the activity wasn't "fun" (T7), and that there was little motivation for students to participate in advisory "because it's not for a grade" (T6). As one teacher stated, "It's easier to manage as a teacher, when you're in person. You can walk over to someone and say, like, hey, are you writing? . . . Whereas now they can kind of slide away without doing as much" (T7).

In the spring interviews, teachers similarly observed that most students were "withdrawn" (T4) or disengaged for most of remote instruction (T3, T5, T6, T7, T8), with one teacher asserting, "It was pulling teeth to get any kind of response from them" (T4). Teachers described lower attendance in advisory or homeroom during remote learning than during in-person instruction (T4, T7). The modification of instructional practices was a strategy used to solicit student engagement, such as by instituting reading checks for an academic class (T5).

After returning to on-campus instruction, teachers described markedly increased enthusiasm from students. They cited positive examples of student engagement, sometimes with surprise: "[the Teach Somebody Challenge] ended up being pretty awesome" (T3); "they had so much fun doing that" (T2); "I could not believe the energy, the positivity" (T4). For most teachers, the improved student engagement and relationships experienced in spring were also associated with satisfaction in the advisor role (T1, T4, T6, T7, T8).

Despite the obstacles presented by remote learning, *supportive conditions for teachers* were cited as an affordance during the intervention. This theme was cited by

seven teachers in both the winter (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7) and spring (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T8). Participants described the support provided by the PLC as "reassuring" (T8) and "validating" (T7) of the challenges they experienced in teaching during the pandemic. Teachers also cited the benefits of engaging in the PLC in improving both the process and product of advisory curriculum development. In addition, they cited the PLC as important in helping them maintain professional and social connections and in countering the discouragement they experienced during remote instruction.

Among the specific conditions that teachers perceived as supporting the advisory program was the consistency of SEL programming. For example, one teacher contrasted the "momentum" (T1) of the advisory program and its focus on SEL activities during the intervention with the lesser consistency of the program in previous years, when advisory time was perceived as being used more often for activities that were not related to SEL. Teachers also cited the organized curation, distribution, and explanation of advisory lesson plans and materials (T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7). As one teacher observed, teachers have "this wealth of activities and people to pull from and resources to pull from" (T5). Another asserted, "Something I've been finding really helpful is just having the general lesson plan documents, and I feel like that's very well organized, and it ensures a chance to . . . take notes and revisit next year" (T6). Another teacher expressed a general appreciation for the support provided to advisors, stating, "I feel like things are so well planned out and so well supported that I feel like I have the tools and resources I need" (T7). One teacher expressed appreciation for the provision of school wide professional development for SEL: "The Responsive Classroom [training] was great" (T3). Another

appreciated the creation of assembly programming to foster positive school climate: "The assemblies have been great" (T4).

An important affordance of the PLC intervention was *shared practice*, or the regular conversations teachers engaged in with colleagues about advisory and SEL. Five teachers (T1, T3, T4, T7, and T8) cited shared practice as a benefit of teaching SEL or of engaging in the PLC intervention in the winter interviews, and seven teachers (T1, T2, T3, T4, T6, T7, and T8) cited this in the spring interviews. Shared practice included collaborative lesson planning: "Brainstorming together. . . . has been a lot of fun, just to feel like, you know, we have a lot of say in the programming" (T6). Another important aspect of shared practice was debriefing successful SEL practices. As one teacher observed, "That I can share what's working with them and learning all that, that's very helpful, where [teachers] meet together and come together and talk about our best practices and what we do in advisory" (T4). Teachers also cited problem solving with colleagues as a benefit. As one teacher observed, "I can hear, like, what's working for other people or what's not and brainstorm together" (T8).

The greater frequency of PLC meetings and conversations during the intervention was also cited by some teachers as a benefit in itself, and an advantageous support during remote learning. In the winter interviews, a teacher reported, "I think what we're doing now, where we're regularly meeting and collaborating and coming up with plans, I think it is going well" (T7). Another noted, ". . . Since we're remote and everything's on Zoom, I think it's been really beneficial to have us meet more often and have more input on that" (T8).

However, a frequently discussed obstacle to shared practice, to the PLC intervention, or to advisory in general, was *time constraints*. This obstacle was cited by six of the teachers in the winter interviews (T1, T3, T4, T5, T7, T8), and by five teachers in spring (T3, T4, T5, T6, T7). During the first semester, which consisted entirely of remote instruction, the PLC met on average twice per month. Additional communication regarding advisory planning and feedback took place by email and Google Doc. Based on teacher feedback, in the second semester the average PLC meeting frequency was reduced to once per month. Additional advisory planning and PLC communication continued to take place through email and Google Doc.

One teacher cited the time constraints of childcare as a considerable challenge and source of discouragement in the advisor role during remote learning (T3). As this teacher observed, leading advisory, and teaching in general, during remote learning presented greater challenges to teachers who are also parents of young children than to those teachers who are not also caring for children:

> There hasn't been a lot of public acknowledgement that there's two different types of teachers right now, that there's teachers that have kids and teachers that don't. And . . . it's just two different worlds . . . because I have no time, none. . . . I'm out here [in the backyard] talking to you. My kids are in the house by themselves. I'm hoping they get on their Zooms okay. You know. And the availability for me, the time to help–like I would love to be able to spend my afternoons helping students, like I know some of my fellow teachers are. I don't have afternoons.

In winter, two advisors cited the time spent in PLC meetings as a cost of participation in advisory (T1, T8). As one teacher confessed, "It feels like a lot of meeting time at this point" (T1), observing that the meeting frequency of the PLC was higher than for most other collaborative faculty teams. The teacher proposed that

collaborative lesson planning could be done more efficiently to reduce the frequency of meetings: “I would say planning more of a bulk strategy. . . . And I don’t know that we need to necessarily debate every single activity” (T1).

In total, four teachers briefly noted a *need for more/better teamwork* in how the PLC functioned in the winter interviews (T1, T2, T3, T7), as did four in the spring (T2, T3, T6, T7). In addition to the idea that lesson planning be distributed amongst PLC members, one teacher felt that “[it] could be helpful to actually do professional development with [the advisor team] as a cohort” (T2). Another teacher proposed “rotating advisories” or “shuffling the entire advisory groups” (T3) to periodically group students with different classmates in advisory or advisors with different students. For the same reason, a teacher recommended that groups “[join] in with another advisory” more often (T7). Another teacher cited a need for more PLC meeting time to be spent discussing students of concern (T6).

In the spring interviews, only one teacher specifically cited the time demands of advisory as greater than necessary (T4). All other references made in the spring interviews to time constraints were either unrelated to advisory or indicated that the time invested in advisory and the PLC was appropriate and valuable. Teachers continued to express the benefit of regular PLC meetings: “So those meetings helped me to figure out, oh, OK, this is what we’re doing” (T4); “It’s always nicer for us all to be planning [advisory] and talking about it ahead of time . . . rather than me just trying to figure out what I’m supposed to be doing just by reading through [the plans]” (T2). Teachers also specifically expressed approval of the meeting frequency in the second semester (T7, T8),

describing them as "just the right amount" (T4), or stating that "the balance was really nice" (T1).

Most teachers in the winter and spring interviews stated that the shared practice of the PLC supported SEL instruction and advisory. However, one teacher in the winter interviews (T4) and four teachers in the spring interviews (T3, T5, T7, T8) also cited *camaraderie*, "when you feel that others are in your shoes, to have someone that you—that you can relate to" (T4), as an important personal support. For some, this was perceived as particularly important during remote learning: "Honestly, when I think back on this particular year and all of our [PLC] meetings, it's just good to see people and check in and say hi" (T3); "And everyone's so supportive at [this school], and especially the eighth-grade advisors, that it's just always, [I] come out of those meetings with a good feeling and a positive outlook on what we're doing" (T7); "I thought the payoff was really nice, that we had, like, so much time together as a group . . . and just good to see everyone regularly, too" (T8). Teachers also stated that it felt "validating" (T8) to hear that colleagues were experiencing similar challenges during the pandemic and "reassuring" (T7) to know that others were using the same strategies to address them. It was also encouraging to know that a colleague experienced success in meeting those challenges (T4, T5, T8).

*Choice and autonomy* and *collaboration with colleagues* were the least frequently cited strengths or benefits of teaching SEL or the PLC intervention. *Collaboration with colleagues* was specifically defined as collaboratively teaching SEL or leading advisory with another teacher. Such collaboration was cited only by two teachers, who were partnered together in leading a single advisory group for the duration of the PLC

intervention. *Choice and autonomy* was cited by five teachers (T1, T5, T6, T7, T8). As one teacher noted, "the nice thing . . . is that, as advisors, we have a lot of autonomy over how we do the lessons" (T8). For example, a teacher explained that having a "menu" (T1) of activities and resources curated in the PLC was helpful to their practice. Another expressed appreciation for the flexibility of lesson plans, and the freedom to "tailor" (T6) their approach to shared SEL goals in response to student preferences and needs.

Lastly, the need for more *administrative support* was an important theme, cited by five teachers (T1, T4, T5, T6, T7) in the winter interviews and seven teachers (T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8) in the spring interviews. In winter, three advisors specifically cited a need for the school administration to consistently require students to be on camera during Zoom meetings (T1, T5, T7), though it was unclear how this would be enforced. One teacher wondered if "the administration or you or someone else could . . . [have] more of a requirement to be on camera and talk more" (T7). Another asserted, "The more we keep encouraging on-camera participation, the easier it is to get kids to assume that as a standard. . . . I think the school has kind of backed away from that a little bit, and that makes it a little harder . . ." (T1).

Two teachers (T6 and T7) proposed that the school do more to solicit feedback from students about remote learning. One asked, "I wonder if we teachers or admin or advisors could offer . . . like drop-in, give us feedback, how are things going-type periods?" (T6). Another teacher suggested that it would be helpful for the school to keep teachers better informed of their students' particular needs, such as learning differences or personal circumstances impacting their ability to engage in school. "Just [to] be

reminded of who those kids are would be helpful, too. . . . I don't even know where to find [the list] now, to be honest" (T4).

In spring, teacher feedback included providing more opportunities for dialogue between teachers and administration, "We're thinking of doing this, if you want to add input, please stop by, or send us an email, or something. Just, just like with the kids, we want to be able to have some, some voice. . ." (T4). As discussed previously, it was also recommended that the school administration support discussion of topics considered politically sensitive (T3). There were also requests for more clarity and enforcement of school policies and expectations for teachers and students (T5, T7). As one teacher explained, "To have, I think, some type of direction [from the administration] on what is recommended to support the students at home and in person at the same time. . . . We didn't have enough feedback, really" (T7). One teacher requested that students be assigned to an advisor with whom they are also enrolled in another class so as to improve relationship building: "Last year, I taught every single one of my students [in another class outside of advisory]. . . . I just feel like I'm much more effective . . . as an advisor when I know the kids as students" (T6). Other suggestions for how the administration might better support advisory included implementing an incentive for participation in advisory, such as a grade or another form of accountability (T6), as discussed previously, or instituting a peer counseling or mentoring program for students (T4), or emphasizing "more connection between [students] K through 12" (T7). Finally, one teacher recommended more education in SEL for teachers and parents (T8). For this teacher, their "end goal" would be "for this school to support every adult in, like, their own SEL journey and self-awareness process to then better serve the students in it" (T8).

# CHAPTER 5

# DISCUSSION

The purpose of this exploratory mixed methods action research study was to investigate how a PLC focused on SEL might increase confidence and improve attitudes toward teaching a middle school advisory program, leading to more positive school climate outcomes. Three research questions guide the discussion of the results: *1) How does participation in a professional learning community (PLC) to develop teacher social emotional competence (SEC) and curriculum for an eighth-grade advisory program focused on social emotional learning (SEL) affect teachers' confidence in advisory and SEL? 2) How does participation in the PLC affect teachers' attitude toward advisory and SEL? 3) What affordances and constraints are experienced by teachers participating in the PLC during remote learning?* Major findings are discussed as they relate to teacher professionalism and job satisfaction regarding SEL. In addition, how engagement in the PLC supported SEL teaching practices and SEC is considered. These findings are examined in the context of theories of motivation, self-efficacy, and collective efficacy. Implications for the development of positive school climate are considered. The limitations of this study are also evaluated. Recommendations for future practice and research are provided.

The findings suggest three general themes. First, collective learning promotes teacher competence and investment in SEL. Although quantitative results showed no improvement in teachers' confidence toward SEL and advisory at the conclusion of the intervention, interviews suggested increases in professional competence toward SEL over the course of the intervention. Teachers expressed satisfaction in the advisor role

throughout the intervention, despite frustration regarding SEL outcomes, especially as related to remote learning. In addition, teachers indicated a desire for continued advisory curriculum development, as well as individual and collective SEL professional development. This suggests an increase in professionalism and commitment toward the advisory program and students' social and emotional growth.

Second, professional development in SEL improves school climate for teachers. Participants cited the PLC as supporting a culture of collective learning and growth, while providing examples of how shared practice among colleagues benefited their own teaching. Shared practice and collective learning were seen as particularly important during remote learning, and unprecedented challenges led some to question their teaching skills. Perhaps even more crucial was teachers' perception that the PLC meetings fostered a sense of belonging and positive relationships with colleagues. Regular meetings with colleagues were perceived as valuable in relation to teachers' own social and emotional wellbeing, offsetting some of the social isolation imposed by the global pandemic.

Third, SEL professionalism fosters critical assessment by teachers of curriculum and institutional support for SEL. Survey data indicated a slight decrease in the perception of school support for advisory and SEL. However, this was countered by interviews indicating that teachers saw the PLC as very supportive of SEL practice. These findings suggest development by teachers of a more complex awareness of the structural factors that could better support positive SEL outcomes. Results also indicate the complexity of measuring teacher confidence toward advisory, given the range of skills comprised under the umbrella term "SEL," as well as the multitude of instructional goals and administrative components that many SEL programs entail (McKown, 2017).

Moreover, interpretation of the results is complicated by the unique challenges to teaching and learning that were presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. That said, it can be argued that a core purpose of SEL instruction is to help students develop the skills to respond to life challenges in healthy and productive ways. Students' demonstration of problem solving and coping skills has, in fact, been used to measure the impact of SEL programs (Taylor et al., 2017; Durlak et al., 2011).

## Interpretation of the Findings

This study provided evidence that engaging teachers in a PLC focused on SEL can help teachers develop contextually relevant instruction and improve professionalism. Collaboratively selecting and designing advisory curriculum to develop students' SEL skills fosters teacher competence and investment in student learning. Teachers identified benefits of the advisory curriculum during the intervention in promoting positive outcomes. The shared practice and camaraderie experienced by the PLC teachers had a direct impact on their perceptions of school climate, including their sense of community with colleagues, their competence toward SEL, and their satisfaction in the advisor role.

In survey responses, participants indicated improved confidence and more positive attitudes toward some aspects of the advisory program at the conclusion of the intervention, particularly with regard to advisory as a support for students during remote learning. However, they did not indicate increased confidence toward leading advisory, and their assessments of the effectiveness and value of the advisory program were slightly reduced overall. These findings do not detract from the benefit of participation in the PLC. Rather, they suggest that the process of increasing teacher professionalism toward SEL may not result in an immediate increase in confidence toward or a more

positive assessment of a school's approach to SEL instruction. Instead, PLC members may exercise more informed and critical assessments of curriculum, instructional methods, and their own skills as a result of professional learning. The stability of participants' assessments of their confidence toward advisory, as well as their slightly more negative assessments of the advisory program, may also reflect response shift bias (Howard & Dailey, 1979; Sprangers & Hoogstraten, 1989). The expansion of teachers' understanding of social and emotional competence as a result of participation in the PLC likely raised their standard for competence toward SEL, which may have resulted in a more critical self-assessment of their own ability following training. This is discussed in the limitations of this study.

**Collective Learning Promotes Competence and Investment in SEL**

Participants in the PLC indicated appreciation for the way the advisory SEL curriculum was developed. Specifically, teachers placed value on having a voice in the selection and design of lessons and regularly evaluating lessons with colleagues. Rather than simply delivering a prepared SEL program or a set of lessons to students, teachers consulted expert resources and applied their own knowledge and experience to select, adapt, or design activities. Teachers also valued learning from colleagues, who shared successful and unsuccessful experiences during PLC meetings. The variety of skills and ideas teachers shared during meetings enriched the program and strengthened the collaborative approach to planning curriculum. Participants provided numerous examples of individual and collective competence toward SEL, citing the quality of the advisory curriculum, their ability to adapt instruction based on their own students' interests and needs, and their ability to engage with parents.

The findings offer supportive evidence regarding the importance of collectively implementing and designing curriculum as a team. For example, Chong and Kong (2012) examined the impact of collective learning on teachers' self-efficacy. Their study showed that high school teachers who engaged in lesson study with departmental colleagues demonstrated an increase in motivation, commitment, efficacy toward teaching, and ownership of curriculum. Qualitative results from the present study also indicated an increase in efficacy and commitment toward SEL as a result of collective learning and curriculum design. In interviews, teachers expressed their belief that the shared practice fostered by the PLC improved their teaching and the quality of the advisory curriculum, and they indicated a commitment to continued professional learning. They also expressed confidence in the ability of the PLC to collectively develop quality curriculum and address challenges. Similar to Chong and Kong's (2012) findings, both interviews and survey results in this study suggest that when teachers engage in collective learning, their investment in the curriculum and in increasing their own competence increases.

In researching collective efficacy, Goddard et al. (2015) examined the importance of administrators' contributions to collective efficacy. They found that more frequent monitoring and guidance of instruction by principals strongly predicted a higher degree of teacher collaboration. They also found that teacher collaboration through instructional development was associated with greater collective efficacy. Voelkel and Crispeels (2017) found a positive correlation between the degree to which teachers in a California school district perceived their teams to exemplify the defining characteristics of a PLC and teachers' perceived collective efficacy. Results of the current study support these findings by demonstrating that engagement in a PLC resulted in an increased degree of

collaboration for instructional improvement and enhanced collective efficacy. In addition, as the action researcher and in my role as Assistant Head of the Middle School, I was directly engaged with teachers in developing the advisory curriculum through the PLC. Teachers indicated in interviews that the involvement of school leadership in the development of the advisory program made them feel valued and heard by the school administration. They also indicated that advisory and SEL should be a priority for the school.

With SEL curriculum quickly becoming a common component of K-12 curriculum, it is imperative that research examines the best way to implement the curriculum. The present study adds to the literature by considering the effects of teacher collective learning specifically to support SEL instruction. This study begins to answer the call of Collie et al. (2015) for more research into teacher development in SEL. Additionally, McKown (2017) highlighted the need for more data on the effects of such professional development on SEL outcomes. Secondary teachers tend to find teaching SEL more challenging than primary teachers (Collie et al., 2015). Collective learning for SEL instruction, including participation in a PLC, may be a useful support for secondary school teachers.

**Professional Development in SEL Improves School Climate for Teachers**

Teachers in the present study perceived positive effects of engaging in the PLC on their own experience of school climate, defined as "norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (National School Climate Center, n.d.). These findings are sustained by research indicating a positive association between professional engagement and perceptions of school climate.

In a short-term longitudinal study of almost 600 primary and secondary school teachers in Australia, Granziera and Perera (2019) found a positive correlation between teacher engagement, self-efficacy, and work satisfaction. Similarly, in a survey of over 600 elementary and secondary school teachers in Canada, Collie et al. (2012) found a positive correlation between degree of teacher collaboration and job satisfaction. Although Collie et al. (2012) did not specifically examine the effects of positive relations between teachers on their perceptions of school climate, the authors suggested this as an area for future study. Power and Goodnough (2018) and Deci (2009) highlighted the benefit of collective professional learning in promoting supportive relationships among teachers.

Qualitative results from the current study indicated that teachers felt an improved sense of camaraderie with their colleagues as a result of ongoing, collaborative professional engagement. The camaraderie was perceived by teachers as providing both professional and emotional support throughout the academic year. In interviews, teachers described their engagement in the PLC as an important source of personal connection and community with colleagues, especially during remote learning. Moreover, the PLC provided validation of the challenges they experienced in teaching SEL during the pandemic. This suggests that professional engagement in SEL may also provide teachers with support in responding to personal and professional stressors during times of crisis or change.

The present study provides evidence to support literature suggesting that engaging in professional learning for SEL may help mitigate factors associated with teacher burnout (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Collie et al., 2015; Collie, 2017). Although the present study did not directly measure teacher stress, findings indicate a promising

approach to increasing teacher comfort in teaching SEL. Survey results showed an increase in PLC members' perception of their ability to adapt and engage students in SEL lessons. Interviews also indicated increased comfort in teaching less familiar curriculum as a result of advance preparation of lessons with the PLC and working with the PLC to solve challenges as they occurred.

**SEL Professionalism Fosters Critical Assessment of Advisory and Supports**

Quantitative results from this study indicated that teachers' assessment of the skills students developed through the advisory program improved, and assessments of how well the advisory program supported student engagement and differentiation also slightly improved. In interviews, most teachers indicated that the quality of the advisory curriculum was better compared to previous years. Despite this overall assessment, teachers offered many recommendations for curricular improvement at the conclusion of the intervention. The feedback included not only revisions to curriculum content, but also regarding *how* the curriculum should be developed moving forward. For example, participants suggested that the program goals should be further clarified, and that student input should be solicited when designing the curriculum.

Although teachers offered detailed recommendations in the spring interviews for how to improve the advisory program, the post-test surveys indicated no increase in teachers' overall confidence toward advisory. In addition, there was a slight decline in teachers' assessment of the benefit of leading advisory on their own skills development. On the surface, these findings would seem contradictory. However, these results suggest that teachers developed more professionalism toward SEL. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), professionalism is defined as increased competence, responsibility, and

higher standards for instruction. Participants in this study demonstrated an increase in professionalism toward SEL as they became more critical in their evaluations of the advisory program, support for advisory, and their own competence. This finding is sustained by research indicating that a greater level of expertise does not necessarily result in "problem reduction," but instead may be defined by "progressive problem solving," or the ability to identify and solve problems at greater levels of complexity (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993). One of the key goals of collaborative professional learning is continuous improvement (Hiebert & Stigler, 2000; Hord et al., 2008; Vescio et al., 2008). In the current study, results suggested that the intervention did foster progressive problem solving and continuous improvement. Participants in the PLC felt better equipped to provide specific and actionable feedback on the advisory program and the associated curriculum. In addition, the participants seemed to acknowledge the complexity of the relationship between teaching advisory, the development of student and teacher SEC, and school climate. For example, there was a decrease in quantitative measures of school support for advisory. However, this decrease was likely due to the participants' gaining deeper awareness of the breadth of the instructional goals associated with SEL instruction (Howard & Dailey, 1979; Sprangers & Hoogstraten, 1989; Cartwright & Atwood, 2014). Teachers were likely more aware of the continuous improvement and investment of resources needed for successful SEL instruction.

Kennedy et al. (2011) asserted that expertise is not just the accumulation of skill, but also the recognition of areas for continued improvement: "We define expertise as subject knowledge and pedagogical skills, as well as self-knowledge of what one does well and what one needs to learn more about" (p. 21). As Lotan et al. (2019) explained,

an effective PLC should "[empower] teachers to lead sustainable professional development and advance instructional capacity" (p. 2). The present study suggests engagement in a PLC promoted a mindset of expertise in participants, as increased competence in SEL did not necessarily result in greater confidence toward the advisory program. Rather, it increased teachers' investment in improving the program and in developing their skills.

In interviews, teachers indicated they perceived substantial support from the PLC, with most teachers feeling more supported in their role as advisors than in previous years. The implementation of the PLC itself and the consistent use of advisory time for SEL-related activities were seen as evidence of greater administrative support for advisory. Conversely, survey results indicated a decrease in teachers' perceptions of overall support for advisors, including perceptions of support for advisors when facing challenging behavioral situations with students. The increase in constructive advisory program criticism may be an indication of confidence that such feedback would be welcomed by school administrators. In this regard, the findings are consistent with literature indicating that a more collaborative school culture can foster trust, and that trust nurtures collaboration (Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Gray & Summers, 2015). The effectiveness of a PLC depends upon material support from school and district administrators (Lotan et al., 2019). The ongoing commitment of time and resources for professional learning is both the result and the catalyst for a trusting relationship between teachers and school leaders (Lotan et al., 2019). Findings from the present study suggest that a PLC can help foster a culture of trust, as teachers were comfortable voicing both negative and positive feedback directly to an administrator. This comfort suggests that participants perceived the school

administration as valuing teachers' capacity for self-assessment and collective learning, as opposed to external control and evaluation.

## Outcomes Related to Theory and Research

Social cognitive theory (SCT) and self-efficacy, self-determination theory (SDT), collective efficacy, and professionalism were previously discussed to guide the design of an intervention for professional development. These theories of learning and motivation offer insight regarding the effects of the intervention. In this section, study outcomes related to participants' self-efficacy and collective efficacy are examined with respect to the literature, as are the motivations and benefits for professional development in SEL experienced by participants.

### Social Cognitive Theory and Self-Efficacy

Participants demonstrated self-efficacy toward advisory and SEL through their willingness to invest a considerable amount of time and effort by actively participating in the PLC to improve curriculum. In interviews, teachers acknowledged that their engagement in the intervention added to their workload. However, they also indicated that the work was important for improving student learning, as well as contributing personally and professionally to their growth as teachers.

During the PLC intervention, teachers demonstrated progressive problem solving (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993) and provided suggestions for continued professional development and curriculum improvement. These deep, consistent interactions as a collective group suggest that participants developed an increased self-efficacy toward advisory. Teachers focused their efforts on engaging students in advisory lessons, supporting students during remote learning, and building productive relationships.

Additionally, their efforts improved their confidence in their own ability to increase the effectiveness of advisory lessons. At the conclusion of the intervention, teachers felt that it was easier to engage students in advisory activities and adapt advisory lessons to meet learning goals. Moreover, the increase in self-efficacy toward advisory may have resulted in an increase in their prioritization of SEL professional learning. For example, in post-intervention interviews, teachers expressed a continued commitment toward contributing to the evolution of the advisory program and professional learning.

Though PLCs are proposed to foster supportive relationships among teachers (Hord et al. 2008), there is still a need for more data on the relationship between PLCs and other forms of collective professional learning regarding student and teacher outcomes (McKown, 2017; Collie et al., 2012; Jones, 2013). The findings of the present study are supported by the research on the relationships between collective learning, self-efficacy, and SEL. In a survey of 982 teachers in 31 primary and secondary schools in Shanghai, China, Zhang et al. (2020) found that PLCs characterized by collective inquiry, shared practice, shared responsibility, and supportive leadership fostered teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Collie et al. (2012) found a positive correlation between teacher SEC, efficacy in SEL, job satisfaction, and perceptions of school climate. In addition, Granziera and Perera (2019) found a correlation between self-efficacy and professional engagement. The current study builds on previous studies, offering evidence that professional engagement through a PLC increases teachers' SEC and efficacy, and suggests a positive influence on job satisfaction and perceptions of school climate.

## Self-Determination Theory

In her call for education reform, Noble (2019) suggested that PLCs may serve to reduce teacher burnout by fostering a school culture of faculty competence, relatedness, and autonomy. The present study provides evidence to support this assertion. The findings indicate that engagement in a PLC focused on SEL increased teachers' competence, relatedness, and autonomy in their role as advisors regarding SDT. Deci's (2009) study of small learning communities in Israel indicated that this learning model fostered relatedness between students and teachers and promoted autonomy in the teachers who selected the foci for their professional learning. Likewise, Power and Goodnough (2018) demonstrated that participation in an action research professional learning program increased participants' sense of teaching competence, relatedness to fellow participants, and autonomy through self-directed learning. The present study suggests collective learning designed to meet teachers' needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy increases their skills to teach SEL.

## Collective Efficacy and Professionalism

The results of the present study indicated a relationship between collective efficacy and a professional approach to educational leadership. Teachers in this study were treated as experts capable of seeking information and making informed decisions to produce positive learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2009). The present findings are consistent with research indicating that perceptions of collective efficacy can be fostered by experiencing mastery and success because of group effort (Goddard et al., 2004; Goddard et al., 2015). Supportive and distributed leadership may foster teacher trust and professionalism (Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2009). Implementing a

distributed approach to leadership of the advisory program can foster the collective efficacy of the group toward SEL. When participants select, design, and implement SEL curriculum through collaborative planning, they increase their skills as a result of shared practice and collective learning.

## Limitations

The use of a mixed-method design offers a means of reducing researcher bias in interpreting the effects of a PLC intervention. Although much of the data in this study consisted of participant interview responses, the inclusion of Likert scale surveys allowed a means for participants to provide anonymous feedback and evaluation regarding the intervention. As with all research, there are several limitations to this study, including lack of reliability of the survey constructs and threats to validity arising from historic events and other confounding variables.

The only survey construct that met an acceptable level of internal reliability in both the pre- and post-test surveys was *attitude toward advisory*. The construct of *attitude toward advisory to support remote learning* was only considered reliable in the pre-test survey, not the post-test. The remaining constructs, *confidence toward advisory* and *perceived support toward advisory*, were not reliable in either the pre- or post-test surveys. As Fraenkel and Wallen (2005) observed, "reliability refers to the consistency of the scores obtained—how consistent they are for each individual from one administration of an instrument to another and from one set of items to another" (p. 160). It is possible that, with only three to four items each, the constructs of *confidence toward advisory*, *attitude toward advisory to support remote learning*, and *perceived support for advisory* included too few questions to provide acceptable reliability as constructs. Moreover, even

after removing some of the original survey items from the construct of *confidence toward advisory*, the construct may still have measured too many aspects of the advisor role for analysis within a single construct. The small sample of participants may also have been insufficient to provide internal consistency for these constructs. Although these limitations do not invalidate the survey items as measures of teacher confidence and attitudes toward advisory and SEL, the lack of reliability of the constructs limits the utility of the results. As such, analysis primarily consisted of pre- and post-test comparisons of individual survey items. These limitations might be addressed in future iterations of this study by increasing the number of items for each of the constructs tested, and by separating the construct *confidence toward advisory* into several smaller constructs, such as *confidence toward relationships* and *confidence toward engagement*.

In addition, response shift bias may have resulted in a reduction in the apparent effects of the PLC intervention. As participants' understanding of social emotional learning and the needed instructional competencies grew, their self-assessments in this domain, as well as their assessments of the advisory program, may have become more critical. Future studies might attempt to address this limitation by instead conducting a retrospective pre-test, in which participants assess their initial skills and attitudes toward SEL after conclusion of the intervention. Although conducting a retrospective pre-test could result in a more accurate estimate of changes in skill and attitude toward SEL, different types of bias may be introduced in this approach, as participants do not always remember past experiences in the same way as they experienced them in the moment (Taminiau-Bloem et al., 2015). In addition, there is evidence that although teachers' internal standards for assessment of their own skill may change after training, they may

not change with regard to constructs such as program effectiveness or importance (Cartwright & Atwood, 2014). For these reasons, it could be useful for future studies to include a both a pre-test and a retrospective pre-test. However, as is the case in this study, qualitative measures will likely be needed to gain a fuller understanding of any changes in participants' skills and attitudes as a result of professional learning.

By and large, action research is not supposed to be generalizable. However, larger sample sizes can commonly support inferences (Gabrenya, 2003). As noted by Riley et. al (2018), a common rule of thumb for the use of inferential statistics is a minimum sample size of 10. In most cases, the authors suggested that the sample size should be even larger. The current study had a sample size of eight, representing all eighth-grade advisory teachers. The limited number of participants did not meet the threshold established by Riley et al. (2018). As such, data analysis was limited to descriptive statistics.

Researcher effects, such as the desire of participants to provide positive assessments of the advisory curriculum and PLC intervention in interviews with the researcher, also pose a potential threat to validity. Although Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) acknowledged that complete objectivity in conducting interviews is impossible, there are techniques that can be used to mitigate the potential bias introduced by a power imbalance or pre-existing relations between the researcher and interview participants. In this study, the interview questions were designed to avoid "leading" participants to respond in a certain way (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). As Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) suggested, this study was designed to incorporate researcher reflexivity and to consider the relations between the researcher and the participants. For example, the PLC

intervention was intended to promote distributed leadership and a trusting relationship between teachers and the school administration, including the researcher. The intervention was designed to create conditions for participants to provide honest, meaningful, and productive responses throughout data collection. Participant responses included negative and constructive feedback. Over the course of the study, the participants also became more willing to share negative feedback. This indicates success in reducing researcher effects, but it is acknowledged that such effects were unlikely to be eliminated.

In future research studies, this threat to validity might be further reduced by providing a means for participants to provide detailed qualitative feedback anonymously, or to an interviewer other than the researcher. Both of those options, however, introduce new challenges to the research design. For example, there is the possibility that a different interviewer would not ask sufficiently focused questions of participants. Moreover, the degree of teacher engagement in the interview process, as indicated by the length and depth of these interviews, suggested that providing detailed feedback in one-on-one conversations with the researcher was important to the participants. Results suggest that input on the PLC and advisory curriculum should be considered an essential component of the intervention. In addition, participants might be less likely to submit open-ended feedback if asked to do so anonymously. The data obtained from such responses might also be less thorough or less focused on the research questions than data obtained from interviews.

Historic threats are changes to the dependent variable that may be the result of other historic events occurring during the study (Smith & Glass, 1987). Due to the

COVID-19 pandemic, most of the intervention took place during remote learning. Students did not return to on-campus instruction until March 2021. As such, the pandemic presents a potential "super rival" (Yin, 2017, p. 176) to the hypothesis that the PLC is the cause of any changes observed in teacher efficacy toward advisory and SEL. Remote learning imposed a substantial number of conditions and constraints on teaching that would not be present during a typical school year. For example, student instruction was conducted entirely through Zoom video conferences, email communication, and cloud-based tools. These were also the only means for teachers to engage in the PLC intervention. Therefore, it is impossible to assess the effects of the PLC intervention on teacher attitudes and confidence toward advisory and SEL independent of other variables related to the pandemic.

## Implications for Practice

Collective learning through a PLC or other means is recommended to increase teacher efficacy toward SEL and to design curriculum that meets both the long-term and immediate needs of students and schools. Collective learning may increase teachers' skills in progressive problem solving (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993) to improve school climate. These findings suggest that using a commercially created curriculum can be supportive of teachers if there is an option of collectively and individually adjusting and supplementing the curriculum as needed. Fostering of teacher professionalism may capacitate teachers to use SEL curriculum in a more discriminating manner, selecting and adapting lessons as appropriate for their students or in relation to current events. Teachers may also develop the confidence and ability to design original SEL lessons and methods that leverage the strengths and interests of their school community.

During the pandemic, many teachers are expected to apply the fundamentals of SEL instruction to adapt existing practices to a remote learning environment (Harriott & Kamei, 2021). This requires a substantial amount of improvisation on the part of teachers, who may also be facing challenges in teaching SEL (Bendici, 2020). As Harriott and Kamei (2021) observed, teachers are asked to provide social and emotional support to students while dealing with the personal impacts of the pandemic, often with little resources for their own well-being. The findings from the present study suggest that engaging teachers in collective learning for SEL may provide an important source of social connectedness for teachers, who may face a similar sense of social isolation as their students. In addition, the shared practice and collective learning of the PLC may provide immediate and continuous support to teachers as they adapt to an online learning environment. Collective learning should be used to support teachers as they engage in problem solving relating to school climate, curriculum, or technology.

Though teachers benefit from shared practice and collective learning, this must not be outweighed by the burden on teachers' time. It is recommended that PLCs be used to manage workload related to SEL by focusing on activities that are perceived to be most supportive of the development of teacher SEC, such as shared practice and collective learning. Efficient and productive engagement in a PLC could reduce the time teachers otherwise would spend reviewing and preparing for SEL instruction in isolation. Other tasks, such as curation and review of SEL curriculum or methods for future adoption, might be conducted by individual PLC members or teams outside of meetings. In terms of practice, it is recommended that PLC meetings provide meaningful, productive lesson advice to teachers so that they value the time dedicated to the process.

Although this may seem like an obvious recommendation, it is critical for the success of any PLC program. In offering "meeting wise" strategies for making collaborative work more productive, Boudett and City (2014) highlighted the fact that quality is more important than quantity. Effective professional learning is sustainable, rather than overloading teachers and wasting resources (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). If teachers resent the time spent in the PLC preparing SEL, then the program will likely suffer from a lack of teacher support.

There are also recommendations for SEL curriculum development using feedback. Students should be asked to provide opinions regarding potential future curriculum, strengths and weaknesses of lessons, and suggestions for improvement. PLCs should develop a schedule and methodology for soliciting student feedback about their learning (Boudette, City, & Murnane, 2005). Additionally, students' perceptions of school climate should be measured regularly (The Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning, n.d.; DeArmond, Chu, & Gundapaneni, 2021; National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, n.d.).

Developing well-defined, distinct goals and objectives for SEL is imperative. Participants in this study indicated a desire to set priorities for the advisory curriculum that would guide the development of a sustainable program aligned with school culture and SEL learning goals. To develop a more specific and measurable approach to SEL instruction, schools should focus on establishing clear learning objectives for SEL (Boudette, City, & Murnane, 2005). Input from teacher, student, parent, and administrative stakeholders is a critical component when creating these goals and visions

(Davis, 2012). If there are clear goals and objectives for SEL instruction, then measuring whether the goals and objectives are achieved will be streamlined.

These findings offer implications for how schools may respond to the social and emotional challenges arising from impactful societal changes. Mental health experts anticipate many deleterious impacts on students' mental health arising from anxiety, social isolation, parental stress, trauma and loss, fewer opportunities for stress regulation, and the exacerbation of existing mental health conditions or other risk factors (Fegert, Vitiello, Plener, & Clemens, 2020; Imran, Zeshan, & Pervaiz, 2020). To provide more evidence regarding the increase in mental health concerns, adolescent emergency department visits for concerns related to mental health between April and October 2020 rose 24% for children between 5 and 11 years of age, and 31% for children between the ages of 12 and 17, in comparison with 2019 (Leeb et al., 2020). As such, there has been a call among educators and mental health experts for schools to prioritize SEL instruction, including through remote learning, to support student mental health through the pandemic (Bendici, 2020; Prothero, 2020; DeArmond et al., 2021). Schools should put into place SEL curriculum now, not when there is trauma in the school. Establishing a designated time and curriculum for SEL, as well as means for adapting these in response to changing learning conditions and stressors, will provide structure and a safe place for students when challenges occur. School administrators must be proactive, not reactive as they implement SEL.

## Implications for Research

Many school administrators affirm plans, including SEL instruction, to address the negative effects of remote learning and other conditions related to the pandemic on

student well-being. However, a review of publicly available data from 477 school districts nationwide indicated few districts with plans to collect data related to students' mental health (DeArmond et al., 2021). This void mirrors previous calls by school climate researchers for more data on the effects of SEL interventions on school climate outcomes and in different contexts (McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor, & McClowry, 2015b; McKown, 2017). Future research must focus on assessing how SEL interventions support students' and teachers' socio-emotional development and growth. It is critical to evaluate how SEL interventions impact students so that curriculum challenges can be addressed through revisions and adjustments. This research points to the need for further evaluative studies in relation to how SEL can be beneficial and what features afford SEL growth.

The implementation of a PLC focused on SEL may be an effective means of increasing SEL skills and sense of connection among teachers. Future studies could build upon these findings to assess whether such collective learning for SEL has a positive effect in reducing teacher stress or increasing job satisfaction, given research indicating the inverse relationship of SEC with each of these (Collie et al., 2012; Collie et al., 2015; Collie, 2017; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Given the assumed relationship between job satisfaction and teacher retention (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016), a large-scale study might also be conducted to directly compare retention rates between schools that engage faculty in high quality PLCs with those that do not. In addition, future research should include studies to measure the effects of teacher interventions such as collective learning and distributed leadership for SEL on school climate outcomes for students. For example, studies might examine changes in student stress or sense of connectedness as a result of

their teachers engaging in collective learning for SEL. Such research may be facilitated by the use of research-based school climate measurement instruments like Panorama Education's surveys. These surveys include instruments for students to assess their own SEL skills (Panorama Education, n.d.).

In addition, the long-term effects of remote learning and the pandemic on teachers and students with respect to mental health are still unknown. However, there is a body of research on the short- and long-term effects of adverse childhood experiences and trauma on student learning and wellbeing (Bartlett & Sacks, 2019; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Office of Policy, Planning and Innovation, 2014). It is important to gather data in the months and years ahead to assess impacts on mental health and school climate resulting from the pandemic. Future research should explore the effects of SEL interventions, including trauma-informed teaching practices for in-person and distance learning, on mitigating mental health impacts for teachers and students (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008; Pate, 2020).

## Conclusion

The adoption of state learning standards for SEL in K-12 schools (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010) is an important step in acknowledging the importance of these skills (Adams & Khojasteh, 2018; Castillo et al., 2013; Dusenbury et al., 2014; McKown, 2017; Zimmerman, 2002). However, with the adoption of these standards comes the need to develop effective SEL curriculum, as well as to provide professional learning for the teachers charged with providing such instruction. Teachers are required

to provide instruction in this domain without sufficient training and without explicit, thorough professional development (Collie et al., 2012; Jones, 2013).

This action research study was designed to respond to this need. Results of this study suggest that (a) collective learning promotes teacher competence and investment in SEL, (b) SEL professionalism fosters critical assessment of related curriculum and institutional support provided for SEL instruction, and (c) professional development in SEL improves school climate for teachers. These findings are important, as lack of efficacy toward SEL, particularly among middle school teachers (Collie et al., 2015), is associated with increased teacher stress and decreased job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2012; Collie et al., 2015; Collie, 2017; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teachers who feel effective and successful in their work are less likely to feel burned out ("Safeguarding Teachers' Mental Health through the Second Wave of COVID-19 and Beyond," 2020). Social connections and work autonomy have been identified as protective factors for teachers during the past year in particular (Kim et al., 2021). A PLC may provide the conditions for teachers to feel effective in their work and connected to their school community, allowing teachers in turn to be more effective in providing those supports for students.

This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and provides insight into the potential for SEL interventions to foster positive school climate in remote learning environments. A PLC intervention may be a valuable personal and professional support for teachers during remote learning. Specifically, teachers indicated that the PLC improved their sense of competence in SEL, including their ability to deliver instruction in a remote learning environment. A PLC can also foster social connections with

colleagues, especially if teachers are physically distanced from one another. In addition, although the conditions of remote learning presented major obstacles, collective learning, shared practice, and collaborative curriculum development were perceived to have a positive effect on teachers' ability to support students during remote learning.

As Darling-Hammond (2009) observed, fostering teacher professionalism enables teachers to make informed and ethical decisions, resulting in more positive outcomes for student learning. Schools are more effective when teachers are trusted and supported to develop internal systems of evaluation and accountability (Fullan et al., 2015; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Effective teaching requires educators to evaluate, adapt, and develop alternatives to establish teaching practices to meet the needs of their students (Hall & Hord, 2006). The findings from this study suggest that taking a professional approach to SEL may offer benefits that go beyond developing faculty SEC to fostering a more professional school culture and more positive school climate.

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# APPENDIX A

## CYCLE 0 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. What are the strengths of our middle school as a community? What are our areas for improvement?
2. In what situations do you observe that your students feel excited to learn, to work hard, and to do their best? In what situations are students less interested and motivated to learn, work hard, and do their best?
3. How would you define the necessary social and emotional skills for middle school students to develop, from your perspective?
4. What do you feel are your strengths in teaching SEL skills to your students (in advisory or elsewhere)?
5. Describe an example of an activity you led (in advisory or elsewhere) that effectively developed students' SEL skills. What made it successful? What would make it more successful?
6. What do you feel are the most challenging aspects of teaching SEL skills (for you personally)?
7. Is there something that the school could do to help? (This could be in terms of curriculum development, programs, professional development, administrative support, or any other idea.)

# APPENDIX B

## TEACHER INTERVIEW SPRING 2020

1. How helpful were our Advisory meetings for you in planning for upcoming advisory classes or activities?
2. What was the most effective part of the meetings, in your view?
3. What was the least effective part of the meetings, in your view?
4. Did you feel that the meetings were helpful to you, personally? Why or why not?
5. How effectively were our Advisory meetings facilitated?
6. Is there something else you wish we did in our meetings? (This question was added in interview #2 and after.)
7. Is there anything else I should know? Please share any additional comments or suggestions regarding how we improve our advisory professional learning community, the support for advisors, or the content and teaching of our advisory program overall.

# APPENDIX C

## STUDENT FOCUS GROUP SPRING 2020

1. How satisfied were you with the Civic Engagement project idea, and with the suggested topics?
2. Do you have any suggestions for how students may complete and share the results of their Civic Engagement projects this year, now that we are engaged in Remote Learning?
3. How effective were Advisory meetings, and the materials and ideas you were given by your advisor or topic leader, in helping you to develop and complete your project?
4. What suggestions do you have for how this project could be improved next year?
5. Is there anything else I should know? Please share any additional comments or suggestions regarding how we might improve our 8th grade advisory program overall.

# APPENDIX D

## TEACHER SURVEY FALL 2020

In this survey, you will be asked how well the following statements describe your feelings at the PRESENT moment. Please select the response that best applies to you.

Level of agreement anchors:
1 – Not at all, 2 – Slightly, 3 – Somewhat, 4 – Quite a bit, 5 – Extremely

1. I am looking forward to being an advisor this year.
2. I feel confident in my ability as an advisor.
3. I believe that advisory is an essential part of the middle school program.
4. I believe that being an advisor will be a rewarding experience.
5. I believe that being an advisor will help me to develop better relationships with my students.
6. I believe that I will develop important skills this year through my experience as an advisor.
7. I believe that being an advisor will support my effectiveness as a teacher outside of advisory.
8. It is easy to engage my students in advisory lessons and activities.
9. If an advisory activity isn't working, I am able to successfully adapt it to accomplish the targeted learning goals.
10. I am confident in my ability to adapt my instruction to effectively support students with diverse academic, social, and emotional needs and strengths.
11. I am confident in my ability to help students resolve conflicts with other students or adults.
12. I am confident in my ability to help students be better organized (in terms of time management, notes and materials, etc.).
13. I am confident in my ability to provide instruction and guidance to students in practices to support their social, emotional, and physical health.
14. I am confident in communicating and enforcing expectations for appropriate school conduct (tardies, dress code, academic integrity, etc.) with my students.
15. I am confident in my ability to work effectively with the parents / guardians of my advisees to support student learning.
16. I am confident in my ability to communicate with parents / guardians to address issues of concern (academic, social, and/or disciplinary).
17. I believe that students will develop important skills this year through the advisory program.
18. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important supports for students to stay connected to each other during remote learning.
19. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important supports for students to learn about and participate in school events during remote learning.
20. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important supports for students to be successful in their classes during remote learning.
21. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important supports for student wellness (social, emotional, physical) during remote learning.
22. If I have a challenging situation with a student or group of students, other advisors are a good resource to me in problem solving.

23. If I have a challenging situation with a student or group of students, school administrators are a good resource to me in problem solving.
24. I believe that teachers are given the support they need to be effective advisors.

Open response items:

25. Are there any specific supports that could be provided by the school* to help you as an advisor? Please explain.
26. Are there any specific things that the advisory program could do more / differently to support students socially, emotionally, or academically during remote learning, or in general? Please explain.

*Note: The name of the school was used in the survey administered to participants but has been removed here.

# APPENDIX E

## TEACHER SURVEY SPRING 2021

In this survey, you will be asked how well the following statements describe your feelings at the PRESENT moment. Please select the response that best applies to you.

Level of agreement anchors:
1 – Not at all, 2 – Slightly, 3 – Somewhat, 4 – Quite a bit, 5 – Extremely

1. I am enjoying being an advisor this year.
2. I feel confident in my ability as an advisor.
3. I believe that advisory is an essential part of the middle school program.
4. I believe that being an advisor is a rewarding experience.
5. I believe that being an advisor is helping me to develop better relationships with my students.
6. I believe that I am developing important skills this year through my experience as an advisor.
7. I believe that being an advisor supports my effectiveness as a teacher outside of advisory.
8. It is easy to engage my students in advisory lessons and activities.
9. If an advisory activity isn't working, I am able to successfully adapt it to accomplish the targeted learning goals.
10. I am confident in my ability to adapt my instruction to effectively support students with diverse academic, social, and emotional needs and strengths.
11. I am confident in my ability to help students resolve conflicts with other students or adults.
12. I am confident in my ability to help students be better organized (in terms of time management, notes and materials, etc.).
13. I am confident in my ability to provide instruction and guidance to students in practices to support their social, emotional, and physical health.
14. I am confident in communicating and enforcing expectations for appropriate school conduct (tardies, dress code, academic integrity, etc.) with my students.
15. I am confident in my ability to work effectively with the parents / guardians of my advisees to support student learning.
16. I am confident in my ability to communicate with parents / guardians to address issues of concern (academic, social, and/or disciplinary).
17. I believe that students are developing important skills this year through the advisory program.
18. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important supports for students to stay connected to each other during remote learning.
19. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important supports for students to learn about and participate in school events during remote learning.
20. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important supports for students to be successful in their classes during remote learning.
21. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important supports for student wellness (social, emotional, physical) during remote learning.
22. If I have a challenging situation with a student or group of students, other advisors are a good resource to me in problem solving.

23. If I have a challenging situation with a student or group of students, school administrators are a good resource to me in problem solving.
24. I believe that teachers are given the support they need to be effective advisors.

Open response items:

25. Are there any specific supports that could be provided by the school* to help you as an advisor, or to help advisors in the future? Please explain.
26. Are there any specific things that the advisory program could do more / differently to support students socially, emotionally, or academically during remote learning, or in general? Please explain.

*Note: The name of the school was used in the survey administered to participants but has been removed here.

# APPENDIX F

## TEACHER INTERVIEW WINTER 2020

1. From your perspective, what are the most challenging or frustrating aspects of being an advisor during remote learning? How have these challenges affected SEL instruction of your advisees?
2. Is there something that I, or the school, could do to help? (This could be in terms of curriculum development, programs, professional development, administrative support, or any other idea.) What additional efforts could be carried out to aid your PLC participation?
3. From your perspective, what are the most successful or rewarding aspects of being an advisor at this time?
4. Do you have any suggestions for how I, or the school, could better support students or faculty during remote learning?
5. From your perspective, compared to last year, how well is this year's advisory program supporting students, in terms of SEL skills development and general well-being?

# APPENDIX G

## TEACHER INTERVIEW SPRING 2021

1. From your perspective, what were the most rewarding aspects of being an advisor this year?
2. From your perspective, what were the most challenging aspects of being an advisor this year? Is there something the school could have done to help, or could do to help future advisors?
3. How important or effective do you feel that homeroom and advisory were in supporting students during the COVID-19 pandemic, including during remote learning?
4. From your perspective, how well did our advisory program support the development of students' SEL skills this year?
5. From your perspective, what are your personal strengths in teaching SEL skills to your students (in advisory or elsewhere)?
6. How has your knowledge about SEL grown since the start of the school year? (If not, how might the school better support advisors in developing expertise in SEL?)
7. How have your skills in teaching SEL changed since the start of the school year?
8. From your perspective, how well did the PLC support the development of the advisory program? (For example, you might consider the structure and content of advisor meetings, collaborative learning, sharing of practice, curriculum development, etc.) If it was not as helpful as it could have been, what could have been improved?
9. From your perspective, how well did the PLC support advisors in their role?

# APPENDIX H

## STUDENT SURVEY FALL 2020

In this survey, you will be asked how well the following statements describe your feelings at the PRESENT moment. Please select the response that best applies to you.

Level of agreement anchors:
1 – Not at all, 2 – Slightly, 3 – Somewhat, 4 – Quite a bit, 5 – Extremely / Almost always

1. I am looking forward to advisory this year.
2. I believe that I will develop important skills this year in advisory.
3. I understand the purpose of the activities we do in homeroom and advisory.
4. I believe that morning homeroom is an important part of my day.
5. I believe that what I learn in advisory will help me to be more successful in my classes.
6. I believe that what I learn in advisory will help me to set and achieve my goals.
7. I believe that what I learn in advisory will help me to be better organized (in terms of time management, class notes and materials, etc.).
8. I believe that what I learn in advisory will help me to develop better friendships.
9. I believe that what I learn in advisory will help me to manage stress.
10. I am confident in my ability to set and achieve my goals, personal and academic.
11. I am confident in my ability to make responsible choices.
12. I am confident in my ability to resolve conflicts with other students or adults.
13. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important ways for students to stay connected to each other during remote learning.
14. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important ways for students to learn about and participate in school events during remote learning.
15. I believe that homeroom and advisory will help me to be successful in my classes during remote learning.
16. I believe that homeroom and advisory will support my wellness, physical and emotional, during remote learning.
17. I believe that homeroom and advisory will be helpful to me in addressing any challenges I have this year, personal or academic.
18. I feel like I belong at this school.
19. I am enjoying my classes.
20. My teachers care about how I am doing, personally and academically.
21. I am part of the school* community.
22. I am interested in my studies at school.
23. If I arrive to class upset, my teachers are concerned.
24. I feel connected to my school.
25. I work hard to do my best in my classes.
26. If I have a problem, there is at least one adult in the school that I feel comfortable talking with for help or support.

Open ended item:
27. Do you have any other feedback or suggestions regarding homeroom or advisory, either for when we are learning remotely or on campus?

*Note: The name of the school was used in the survey administered to participants but has been removed here.

# APPENDIX I

## STUDENT INTERVIEW FALL 2020

1. What are some of the things you're looking forward to doing or achieving in school this year, personally or academically?
2. What are the challenges you anticipate or concerns you have about school this year?
3. Do you expect that remote learning, or other circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic, will create additional challenges for you? Is there anything that the school (or individual teachers / staff) could do to help?
4. From your perspective, how could homeroom and advisory be used to support students during remote learning and during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as in general?
5. How do you feel that homeroom and advisory could be used to build or maintain friendships with other students?
6. How do you feel that advisory could help you to meet your goals, academic or otherwise, this year?
7. What have you enjoyed most about advisory so far? (Is there something you would like to do more of?)
8. If you could change one thing about advisory, what would it be? (Is there something you would like to do less or differently?)

# APPENDIX J

## STUDENT SURVEY SPRING 2021

In this survey, you will be asked how well the following statements describe your feelings at the PRESENT moment. Please select the response that best applies to you.

Level of agreement anchors:
1 – Not at all, 2 – Slightly, 3 – Somewhat, 4 – Quite a bit, 5 – Extremely / Almost always

1. I am enjoying advisory this year.
2. I believe that I have developed important skills this year in advisory.
3. I understand the purpose of the activities we do in homeroom and advisory.
4. I believe that morning homeroom is an important part of my day.
5. I believe that what I am learning in advisory is helping me to be more successful in my classes.
6. I believe that what I am learning in advisory is helping me to set and achieve my goals.
7. I believe that what I am learning in advisory is helping me to be better organized (in terms of time management, class notes and materials, etc.).
8. I believe that what I am learning in advisory is helping me to develop better friendships.
9. I believe that what I am learning in advisory is helping me to manage stress.
10. I am confident in my ability to set and achieve my goals, personal and academic.
11. I am confident in my ability to make responsible choices.
12. I am confident in my ability to resolve conflicts with other students or adults.
13. I believe that homeroom and advisory were important ways for students to stay connected to each other during remote learning.
14. I believe that homeroom and advisory were important ways for students to learn about and participate in school events during remote learning.
15. I believe that homeroom and advisory helped me to be successful in my classes during remote learning.
16. I believe that homeroom and advisory supported my wellness, physical and emotional, during remote learning.
17. I believe that homeroom and advisory are helpful to me in addressing any challenges I have this year, personal or academic.
18. I feel like I belong at this school.
19. I am enjoying my classes.
20. My teachers care about how I am doing, personally and academically.
21. I am part of the school* community.
22. I am interested in my studies at school.
23. If I arrive to class upset, my teachers are concerned.
24. I feel connected to my school.
25. I work hard to do my best in my classes.
26. If I have a problem, there is at least one adult in the school that I feel comfortable talking with for help or support.

Open ended item:

27. Do you have any other feedback or suggestions regarding homeroom or advisory, either for when we are learning remotely or on campus?

*Note: The name of the school was used in the survey administered to participants but has been removed here.

# APPENDIX K

## STUDENT INTERVIEW SPRING 2021

1. How important do you feel that homeroom and advisory were to your learning in the middle school this year?
2. How important do you feel that homeroom and advisory were to building or maintaining friendships with other students this year?
3. Did remote learning, or other circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic, create additional challenges for you? Is there anything the school (or individual teachers / staff) did that was helpful to you in addressing those challenges?
4. How important do you feel that homeroom and advisory were in supporting students during the COVID-19 pandemic, and in general?
5. How did advisory help you to meet your personal goals, academic or otherwise? (If it did not, how do you feel it could be changed to better help future eighth graders?)
6. What is one thing you learned, or learned how to do better, in advisory this year?
7. From your perspective, how did your advisor support you as a student? Is there something they could have done more or differently?
8. What did you enjoy most about advisory? (Is there something you would like to do more of?)
9. If you could change one thing about advisory, what would it be? (Is there something you would like to do less or differently?

# APPENDIX L

# IRB APPROVAL LETTERS

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

APPROVAL: EXPEDITED REVIEW

Terri Kurz
Division of Teacher Preparation - Polytechnic Campus
-
Terri.Kurz@asu.edu

Dear Terri Kurz:

On 4/22/2020 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

| | |
|---|---|
| Type of Review: | Initial Study |
| Title: | Fostering Social Emotional Learning and School Climate in Middle School Grades |
| Investigator: | Terri Kurz |
| IRB ID: | STUDY00011601 |
| Category of review: | |
| Funding: | None |
| Grant Title: | None |
| Grant ID: | None |
| Documents Reviewed: | • End of Year Advisor Interview Spring 2020-2021.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);<br>• Faculty Advisory PLC Survey.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);<br>• M Strong IRB protocol April 21 2020.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;<br>• Melissa Strong Fall 2020 Interview Questions for Students, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);<br>• Melissa Strong Recruit Consent Form Faculty Interview Fall 2020 (1).pdf, Category: Consent Form;<br>• Melissa Strong Recruit Consent Form Faculty Interview Spring 2020 (1).pdf, Category: Consent Form; |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Melissa Strong Recruit Consent Form Faculty Interview Spring 2021 (1).pdf, Category: Consent Form;<br>• Melissa Strong School Climate and SEL Surveys for Teachers Recruit Consent 2020-2021.pdf, Category: Consent Form;<br>• Melissa Strong SEL School Climate Parental Permission Letter FOCUS GROUP.pdf, Category: Consent Form;<br>• Melissa Strong SEL School Climate Parental Permission Letter Student Interviews, Category: Consent Form;<br>• Melissa Strong SEL School Climate Written Child Assent Form Interview Fall 2020, Category: Consent Form;<br>• Post-Test Faculty Survey_ Attitudes toward SEL (1).pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);<br>• Pre-Test Faculty Survey_Attitudes toward SEL and recruitment letter, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);<br>• Strong Melissa SEL School Climate Written Child Assent Form Ages 11-14 FOCUS GROUP.pdf, Category: Consent Form;<br>• Student Focus Group Recruitment Email Spring 2020.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;<br>• Student Focus Group Spring 2020.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);<br>• Viewpoint School Consent to Interview Faculty Members, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc);<br>• Viewpoint School Consent to Interview Students, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc);<br>• Viewpoint School Consent to Use Panorama SEL Survey Data, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); |

The IRB approved the protocol effective 4/22/2020. Continuing Review is not required for this study.

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

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc:
Melissa Strong

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

APPROVAL: MODIFICATION

Terri Kurz
Division of Teacher Preparation - Polytechnic Campus
-
Terri.Kurz@asu.edu

Dear Terri Kurz:

On 9/28/2020 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

| | |
|---|---|
| Type of Review: | Modification / Update |
| Title: | Fostering Social Emotional Learning and School Climate in Middle School Grades |
| Investigator: | Terri Kurz |
| IRB ID: | STUDY00011601 |
| Funding: | None |
| Grant Title: | None |
| Grant ID: | None |
| Documents Reviewed: | • Advisor Survey Fall 2020.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);<br>• Advisor Survey Spring 2021.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);<br>• Advisor Survey Winter 2021.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);<br>• Advisory Recruitment and Consent Letter for Surveys, Category: Consent Form;<br>• M Strong Child Assent for Student Surveys Fall 2020, Winter 2021, and Spring 2021 (2).pdf, Category: Consent Form;<br>• M Strong IRB protocol September 24 2020.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;<br>• Melissa Strong Parent Letter for Surveys Sept 22 2020.pdf, Category: Consent Form;<br>• Student Survey Fall 2020 and Recruitment Letter |

| | |
|---|---|
| | (1).pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);<br>• Student Survey Spring 2021 (1).pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);<br>• Student Survey Winter 2021 (1).pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);<br>• Viewpoint School Consent to Administer Surveys and Interviews to Faculty and Students, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); |

The IRB approved the modification.

When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the "Documents" tab in ERA-IRB.

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

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc:
Melissa Strong

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

APPROVAL: MODIFICATION

Terri Kurz
Division of Teacher Preparation - Polytechnic Campus
-
Terri.Kurz@asu.edu

Dear Terri Kurz:

On 10/11/2020 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

| | |
|---|---|
| Type of Review: | Modification / Update |
| Title: | Fostering Social Emotional Learning and School Climate in Middle School Grades |
| Investigator: | Terri Kurz |
| IRB ID: | STUDY00011601 |
| Funding: | None |
| Grant Title: | None |
| Grant ID: | None |
| Documents Reviewed: | • Parental Permission Letter Student Interview Fall 2020, Category: Consent Form;<br>• Student Interview Fall 2020 Written Child Assent Form Ages 11-14 (1) (2) (3).pdf, Category: Consent Form;<br>• Student Interview Questions Fall 2020, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); |

The IRB approved the modification.

When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the "Documents" tab in ERA-IRB.

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

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc:
Melissa Strong

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

APPROVAL: MODIFICATION

Terri Kurz
Division of Teacher Preparation - Polytechnic Campus
-
Terri.Kurz@asu.edu

Dear Terri Kurz:

On 11/16/2020 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

| | |
|---|---|
| Type of Review: | Modification / Update |
| Title: | Fostering Social Emotional Learning and School Climate in Middle School Grades |
| Investigator: | Terri Kurz |
| IRB ID: | STUDY00011601 |
| Funding: | None |
| Grant Title: | None |
| Grant ID: | None |
| Documents Reviewed: | • Advisor Interview Winter 2020.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);<br>• M Strong IRB protocol November 16 2020.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;<br>• Melissa Strong Recruit Consent Form Faculty Interview Winter 2020 (Nov 16 version).pdf, Category: Consent Form; |

The IRB approved the modification.

When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the "Documents" tab in ERA-IRB.

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

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc:
Melissa Strong

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

APPROVAL: MODIFICATION

Terri Kurz
Division of Teacher Preparation - Polytechnic Campus
-
Terri.Kurz@asu.edu

Dear Terri Kurz:

On 4/8/2021 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

| | |
|---|---|
| Type of Review: | Modification / Update |
| Title: | Fostering Social Emotional Learning and School Climate in Middle School Grades |
| Investigator: | Terri Kurz |
| IRB ID: | STUDY00011601 |
| Funding: | None |
| Grant Title: | None |
| Grant ID: | None |
| Documents Reviewed: | • Advisor Interview Spring 2021.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);<br>• End of Year Advisor Interview Spring 2020.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);<br>• M Strong IRB protocol April 7 2021.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;<br>• Recruitment email for students and guardians for Student Interview Spring 2021 VERSION 2.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;<br>• School Climate Parental Permission Letter Student Interviews Spring 2021.pdf, Category: Consent Form;<br>• Student Interview Spring 2021 Written Child Assent Form Ages 11-14.pdf, Category: Consent Form;<br>• Student Interview Spring 2021.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); |

The IRB approved the modification.

When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the "Documents" tab in ERA-IRB.

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

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc:
Melissa Strong

# APPENDIX M

## DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR TEACHER SURVEYS

| Item | Pre-Test Mean | Pre-Test Standard Deviation | Post-Test Mean | Post-Test Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Q1. I am (looking forward to / enjoying) being an advisor this year.* | 3.50 | 0.54 | 3.63 | 0.92 |
| *Q2. I feel confident in my ability as an advisor.* | 4.00 | 0.54 | 4.00 | 0.00 |
| *Q3. I believe that advisory is an essential part of the middle school program.* | 4.38 | 0.52 | 4.38 | 0.74 |
| *Q4. I believe that being an advisor (will be / is) a rewarding experience.* | 3.88 | 0.64 | 3.88 | 0.84 |
| *Q5. I believe that being an advisor (will help me / is helping me) to develop better relationships with my students.* | 4.75 | 0.46 | 4.13 | 1.13 |
| *Q6. I believe that I (will develop / am developing) important skills this year through my experience as an advisor.* | 3.88 | 0.64 | 3.13 | 0.84 |
| *Q7. I believe that being an advisor (will support / supports) my effectiveness as a teacher outside of advisory.* | 4.13 | 0.64 | 3.50 | 0.93 |
| *Q8. It is easy to engage my students in advisory lessons and activities.* | 2.63 | 0.74 | 3.00 | 1.07 |
| *Q9. If an advisory activity isn't working, I am able to successfully adapt it to accomplish the targeted learning goals.* | 3.38 | 0.74 | 3.75 | 0.71 |
| *Q10. I am confident in my ability to adapt my instruction to effectively support students with diverse academic, social, and emotional needs and strengths.* | 3.38 | 0.52 | 3.63 | 0.52 |
| *Q11. I am confident in my ability to help students resolve conflicts with other students or adults.* | 4.13 | 0.35 | 4.13 | 0.35 |
| *Q12. I am confident in my ability to help students be better organized (in terms of time management, notes and materials, etc.).* | 4.13 | 0.64 | 3.88 | 0.35 |
| *Q13. I am confident in my ability to provide instruction and guidance to students in practices to support their social, emotional, and physical health.* | 4.00 | 0.54 | 3.88 | 0.35 |
| *Q14. I am confident in communicating and enforcing expectations for appropriate school conduct (tardies, dress code, academic integrity, etc.) with my students.* | 4.13 | 0.64 | 4.25 | 0.71 |

| Item | Pre-Test Mean | Pre-Test Standard Deviation | Post-Test Mean | Post-Test Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Q15. I am confident in my ability to work effectively with the parents / guardians of my advisees to support student learning.* | 4.13 | 0.64 | 4.13 | 0.35 |
| *Q16. I am confident in my ability to communicate with parents / guardians to address issues of concern (academic, social, and/or disciplinary).* | 4.25 | 0.71 | 4.00 | 0.76 |
| *Q17. I believe that students (will develop / are developing) important skills this year through the advisory program.* | 3.75 | 1.04 | 3.88 | 0.99 |
| *Q18. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important supports for students to stay connected to each other during remote learning.* | 3.63 | 1.06 | 4.25 | 0.71 |
| *Q19. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important supports for students to learn about and participate in school events during remote learning.* | 3.75 | 0.89 | 3.88 | 0.84 |
| *Q20. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important supports for students to be successful in their classes during remote learning.* | 3.25 | 0.89 | 3.25 | 1.04 |
| *Q21. I believe that homeroom and advisory are important supports for student wellness (social, emotional, physical) during remote learning.* | 3.50 | 0.76 | 3.38 | 0.74 |