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Addressing Student Mental Health During COVID-19: The Incredible Endeavors of One Group of Urban Elementary School Teachers

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By

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have been my rock as I crawled across the finish line. I am forever grateful for your unwavering dedication to my success and happiness.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this body of work to the teachers who have selflessly devoted countless hours, days, and months of their lives to nurturing young minds and hearts; your invaluable contributions are deeply appreciated. Your passion and unwavering commitment to education are genuinely inspiring and leave a lasting and profound impact on numerous lives. The world is a better place because of you.

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ABSTRACT

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This case study investigated one urban school district's efforts to address the mental health of its students during COVID-19. Specifically, I examined the protocols established by the district and the daily implementation of social-emotional learning and culturally relevant practices during the 2020–21 school year, focusing on the instructors' perspective. Utilizing a semi-structured qualitative interview approach, I collected data from five teachers and one district personnel and corroborated it with district survey results and the Learning Continuity Plan. Findings indicate that despite teachers not explicitly understanding social-emotional learning (SEL) before COVID-19, they relied on a strong network of support and personal expertise to address the social-emotional needs of their students. Students engaged in activities such as art therapy, journaling, yoga, and community circles. Teachers incorporated culturally relevant lessons into online instructional sessions. The district established protocols to address the mental health of their students; however, teachers perceived them to have little effect on students' mental health. The protocols specified in the Learning Continuity Plan may not have been fully effective, or the student's social-emotional needs might have exceeded the support offered by the district, as further evidenced by the fact that teachers were compelled to advance much further than what was stipulated by the district. These findings indicate the need to be more proactive versus reactive. From teacher credentialing programs to new teacher onboarding at Title I schools,

educators need more training and long-term coaching provided by experienced professionals to effectively support students' mental health needs, particularly within marginalized communities.

Addressing Student Mental Health During COVID-19: The Incredible Endeavors of One Group of Urban Elementary School Teachers

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Executive Summary

On March 13, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, California schools sent students home and shut down in-person learning at the direction of Governor Newsom. From that point forward, the entire landscape of education changed. The quick shift to online learning while combating the illness created a perfect storm within the most vulnerable communities. Jobs, homes, and lives were lost, and all the while, children were trying to attend school on an 11-inch screen. School districts did their best to develop a plan to meet the rising concerns of their community stakeholders, but ultimately, the students and their teachers bore the brunt of the impact.

As society continues to recover from the trauma endured for close to two years, it is essential to evaluate how schools treated mental health throughout this period. Current research continues to reveal increased rates of child depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. While the research focus has primarily been on academic learning loss, it is critical to address the underlying cause of the lack of academic recovery. Thus, this case study investigated one urban district's efforts to address the mental health of its students. Specifically, I examined the protocols established by the district and the daily implementation of social-emotional learning and culturally relevant practices during the 2020–21 school year, focusing on the instructors' perspective.

Key findings from the case study include:

1. The district's plans changed as the situation evolved, resulting in reactive versus proactive measures.
2. The district's 2020 Learning Continuity Plan (LCP), modified based on feedback from important stakeholders to address mental health issues, was seen as either insufficient or not executed with fidelity.
3. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers lacked a clear understanding of social-emotional learning. This concept was first presented in the LCP (Learning Continuity Plan) as a response to the concerns expressed by parents and teachers.
4. Teachers felt a lack of support from the administration and the district and thus relied on their professional expertise and that of their grade-level colleagues.
5. The grade level network shared resources to supplement those provided by the district.
6. All the teachers were experienced professionals who had acquired a wide range of social-emotional capacities for student learning, even though they were not aware they were formally categorized as such.
7. The culturally diverse district had previously integrated some principles of culturally relevant pedagogy, which continued to be implemented during remote learning.
8. Prior to COVID-19, the district surveyed stakeholders about school culture and climate

and added social-emotional learning questions to assess students' feelings, perceptions, and experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

9. Each teacher interviewed encountered personal obstacles yet demonstrated exceptional resilience to support their students and community.
10. All teachers reported dedicating numerous hours after school to developing or acquiring activities and resources tailored to each pupil's needs.
11. All elements of Collaborative, Academic, and Social-Emotional Learning (CASEL) were present in the online classroom of 2020-21 to varying degrees.
12. All teachers employed a culturally relevant instructional method, as they had received prior training from the district.
13. Teachers were the ones to address students' mental health needs.
14. Counselors were allocated to clerical work and crisis response, such as suicidal ideations or following the death of a family member.
15. Counselors were not able to meet with students via Zoom to discuss issues around anxiety and depression, among others, due to the lack of privacy.
16. The cohort of students who were in third grade during the 2020-21 school year and in the fifth grade two years later reported the highest number of referrals for suicidal ideations.
17. Student survey results revealed that students reported feeling significantly safer in their homes than on campus, which teachers attributed to the absence of other students and the occurrence of bullying.
18. Student survey results indicated that returning to school during the 2021-22 school year significantly decreased student's self-efficacy, which was perceived as resulting from the sudden increase in academic expectations, lack of knowledge, and increased accountability.

To address ongoing student mental health needs, I make the following recommendations for teacher credentialing programs, school districts, and teachers:

- Credentialing programs should integrate courses on mental health interventions and crisis management, given the current climate and increased prevalence of traumatic incidents in schools.
- Urban school districts should incorporate a trauma-informed, social-justice approach in new-hire training and implement summer training for current district employees. Trauma-informed pedagogy raises awareness of the effects of poverty and historical marginalization and equips educators with tools to teach affected students more effectively.
- Urban school districts should also establish a two-year mentorship program for new hires who are recent graduates to aid in their assimilation into their unique circumstances. This mentor-mentee relationship would allow for modeling effective teaching practices, adapting strategies to meet current challenges, and offering timely feedback to enhance instruction.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Mindset and Motivation

Over the years, an enormous amount of research has reported that mindset positively correlates to learning (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015; Trei, 2007; Zhang et al., 2017). Researchers in the education field suggest that motivation is critical for student engagement in a lesson. On a good day, half the battle of being a teacher is finding the right key to unlock motivation in each student (Wlodkowski, 1978). School climate, heavily influenced by the physical school environment, relationships with personnel, and the community, is another factor affecting student engagement (Loukas, 2007).

Taking all of that into consideration, good learning days are cherished, especially in an urban elementary classroom where a high percentage of students have preexisting trauma. Families experiencing both poverty and social oppression carry an elevated chance of trauma (e.g., Blitz et al. 2020), which increases their likelihood of mental health challenges (Howell, 2004; McKay et al., 2005). Families with low socioeconomic status are more likely to face eviction, unemployment, loss of life, or hospitalization, among other adverse life events, resulting in financial destitution (Abramovitz & Albrecht, 2013; Wade et al., 2014). In these families, children have to cope with extreme stressors at a young age and bring those challenges with them to school. In urban schools, as in all schools, students need to feel safe, but they also require an environment that supports healing and resiliency due to their higher likelihood of trauma.

Teaching During the Pandemic

In March 2020, the education landscape instantly changed. As a result of COVID-19, schools shut down, and students were sent home for what was initially to be a two-week break. Those two weeks turned into a year and a half. As the enormity of the pandemic became clear, districts, schools, administrators, and teachers scrambled to adapt, and some administrators and teachers resigned entirely after realizing the scope of the situation. As Pak and Ravitch (2021) stated, "Educational leaders are faced with a barrage of questions regarding how they are responding to the ongoing dangers of the pandemic".

As an elementary school teacher in a small rural school with 95% Hispanic students and 78% of students classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged (California Department of Education [CDE], 2019), I witnessed firsthand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent distance learning. With degrees in psychology and education at the time of the pandemic, I questioned whether enough was being done to adequately support students' mental health needs. The struggles that students faced at home included food and housing insecurity (Linton et al., 2021), increased incidences of domestic violence (Piquero et al., 2021), parents who had to continue working despite the health risks, a lack of social interaction, unsupervised access to the internet, and sick and dying family members. Students coped with all that while also being expected to "attend" classes on spotty internet connections and learn content on a tiny screen, with little peer collaboration and with teachers potentially battling mental health issues.

In a country with frequent school tragedies, including mass shootings and natural disasters (Marsh, 2022; National Center for Education Statistics, 2023), a standard protocol had previously been established in times of crisis (National Education Association, 2018). School

response to trauma was formally outlined before the pandemic, including crisis response teams and traumatic incident response protocol (Former Elementary Principal C. Vega-Mota, personal conversation, September 2022). Furthermore, although the Centers for Disease Control (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD] & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2014) and many California districts subscribe to the whole child and social-emotional learning approaches (Allbright & Hough, 2020), the established guidelines for adopting these approaches were not consistently followed, if at all, after the initial shutdown of schools.

Resource Inequities

The division between urban and suburban schools regarding equitable treatment and resources was already prominent before the pandemic (Kozol, 2005; Silverman, 2014; Wright, 2012). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the situation due to inadequate and inconsistent responses from school districts. According to Pak and Ravitch (2021),

> Global pandemics highlight the underfunded, under-resourced, perpetually disadvantaged state of low-income communities struggling to provide equitable stance learning opportunities for all of their students, not just the ones with access to technology, internet connectivity, shelter stability, and parents with the financial means to stay at home to supervise remote instruction. (p. 1)

Some schools immediately jumped to distribute Chromebooks and hotspots, while others could not do so due to a lack of funds. Since equitable access was impossible, a handful of schools stayed shut down for extended periods (Ferguson, personal communication, August 2022).

Dorn et al. (2020) reported inconsistent student and teacher attendance in online classes.

In several instances, teachers opted to quit to focus on their mental health (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Rogers & Spring, 2020). An elementary teacher, Mr. Thomas (pseudonym), explained that an alternate approach was to post minimal online content, such as YouTube tutorials, onto platforms like Google Classrooms (classroom.google.com) while limiting face-to-face student engagement (Thomas, personal communication, 2022). Some teachers quickly learned as much online software as possible to continue teaching where they left off, logging as many on-screen hours as off-screen hours, during which they tried to develop lessons and materials to mitigate the effects of learning loss during distance learning. However, whether any learning occurred under these dire learning conditions and environments is questionable, and post-pandemic educational testing seems to confirm this claim.

Pre-Pandemic Online Learning

Online learning had already been an option within educational practices for many years prior to the shift to Zoom (www.zoom.com), with an established set of protocols to best facilitate remote learning (Milheim, 2012). According to Miron et al. (2018), in 2016–17, 295,518 students attended 429 full-time virtual schools, and 116,716 attended 296 blended schools." Although research-based implementation existed, teachers were often not offered training on this drastic shift in modalities. The issue of grading during distance learning was also inconsistent, if grading took place at all, as it did not always accurately reflect student performance. The author was personally aware of multiple teachers whom their school's administration informally advised to pass all students regardless of academics if they attended at least half of their online classes. The fact that some schools continued to implement state testing online (EdSource, 2022) added to the existing stress for both students and teachers.

Back to Campus

As the transition back to in-person instruction began, school life seemingly returned to a pre-COVID-19 resonance, as if the pandemic had not happened. Testing resumed, and classes were at capacity. Students who initially may have been a year behind were now three years behind and expected to perform at their current grade level (Wakelyn, 2022). Although academics are crucial, due to the pandemic's collective trauma, schools had to first address students' mental health and trauma (Crosby et al., 2020). Exposure to childhood trauma can have long-term consequences, such as social-emotional and neurobiological issues, altering brain function and human development (Danese et al., 2020; Dye, 2018). In a Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) survey of 769 students, the Communities for Los Angeles Student Success Coalition indicated that 42% stated mental well-being as their primary priority. A quarter of those students indicated they were worried about their basic needs not being met. One-third of the Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students stated they did not have an adult at their school with whom they felt comfortable talking (Communities for Los Angeles Student Success Coalition [CLASS], 2021).

Statement of the Problem

The current, in-depth analysis of those who attended elementary school during the COVID-19 shutdown and transitioned back to campus is lacking. Giving a voice to BIPOC students most affected by the pandemic would be immensely valuable for educators who strive to make decisions in their best interest. This study addressed this issue by gathering perspectives from individuals directly involved with students, such as teachers who helped students in

intermediate elementary[1] grades navigate the education shifts in distance, hybrid, and later full-campus learning. To ensure the privacy of the individuals and organizations involved, all names, including those of participants, schools, and districts, were changed to pseudonyms throughout this research study.

Education's predominant focus on accountability and test scores pushes schools to spend most of their resources on addressing academic concerns. However, the focus should be instead on the compounded traumas faced by students who are part of the marginalized community. Historically, research has confirmed collective trauma in the wake of environmental disasters like Hurricane Katrina and now COVID-19, the effects of which can lead to mental health disorders (Conway-Turner et al., 2021; D`Amico et al., 2017; Duane et al., 2020; Loeb et al., 2018; Styck et al., 2021). Both events had a disproportional effect on marginalized communities, exacerbating inequities related to racism and classism. Limited access to resources, such as health care, insurance, and housing, are all dramatically different in urban and suburban areas. Instances such as these illuminated the interconnectedness of physical and mental health, environment, race, and class (Watson et al., 2020).

The effects of these existing inequities were immediately evident as schools transitioned from in-person to online learning through lack of attendance, most notably in schools serving marginalized communities (Carminucci et al., 2020). More recently, the National Center for Education Statistics reported, "Eighty-seven percent of public schools reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted student socio-emotional development during the 2021–22 school year" (2022). It is the onus of the district and school to build a network to address the

[1] The exact grade level has not been provided to ensure the confidentiality of the participants.

mental health needs of students in urban schools (Jaycox, 2006). It falls on teachers to address the immediate needs of their students in the classroom, yet they are only able to implement strategies we were trained in ourselves. Credentialing programs do not include instruction on how to effectively address the needs of students following a mass shooting, a catastrophic wildfire or flood, or a global pandemic. Considering the current education reform of accountability and prescribed testing, it is necessary to determine whether enough value was placed on addressing the mental health needs of students from marginalized communities who were affected by multiple traumas more than anyone else during COVID-19.

Purpose of the Study

This case study aimed to build on the current research by identifying students' emotional and social experiences related to school during the pandemic. Through interviews and an archival review, I explored and analyzed the narratives of those directly affected by the decisions of one urban district. While pursuing a genuine and authentic portrait of the experience these children endured, this data also shed light on the consequences, positive or negative, of the actions taken by that district.

Additionally, this study gathered feedback from teachers, administrators, and the district itself to examine the district and administration's short- and long-term efforts to mitigate the trauma of COVID-19 at an urban K–5 elementary school. The selection of grades three through five, termed throughout this case study as *intermediate* elementary[2], was intentional because a child's social and academic trajectory is heavily determined around this age. Complex

[2] Typically, elementary is lower elementary (K–2) and upper elementary (3-6). However, as this case study used data from students in grades 3-5, the researcher used the term intermediate.

developmental skills, such as social and emotional competence in managing emotions, refining coping skills, recognizing mixed emotions, and understanding moral and social situations, begin to form (Carr, 2017; Malik & Marwaha, 2022). Being around peers and participating in collaborative tasks is necessary to hone social skills and self-regulation. The transition from grades K-2 to 3-5 is one of the most difficult, as students in these grades must learn to read and work independently and prepare for and complete standardized testing (California Department of Education, 2021; Hernandez, 2011). Through triangulating data from teachers, school administration, and districts to illuminate student narratives, this researcher hopes to offer insight into the effects of the school's choices and policy recommendations for future teacher training.

Context of the Study

Understanding the context of any study is essential for both learning and gaining an authentic perspective. Thus, this case study should not be viewed in isolation but as a part of a century-old system, one piece of a much larger puzzle. Pseudonyms are used throughout the study when referencing the district, the school site, participants, and any other identifiable information about the location. The study was conducted in "Pemberton Unified School District" (PUSD), one of the largest districts in the state. They serve over 70,000 students across four cities. Their student body at the time of the study was 59% Hispanic, followed by 12% African American, 12% White, almost 7% Asian, 5.5% other, 3% Filipino, and 1% Pacific Islander. Around 64% of their students were considered socio-economically disadvantaged. However, PUSD has been recognized as one of the highest-performing districts for its achievement, specifically in urban communities. As a leader in the educational field with a "total commitment to continuous improvement" (PUSD.net), this district appeared to have the necessary means to

meet the social-emotional needs of its stakeholders, thus making for a great case study.

An initial review of the district's public website indicated a broad spectrum of post-COVID-19 services, including Transformative Social-Emotional Learning (TSEL), a school-based mental health collaborative, a crisis response team, early intervention and school psychological services, a district social worker, a multi-tiered support system to address students' social-emotional needs, individual and group counseling, high school wellness centers, and family resource centers whose purpose was to provide services for the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students in 32 of the over 80 schools in the district.

A comprehensive examination of the minutes from board meetings and their 2020 Learning Continuity Plan (LCP) revealed the district's difficult circumstances at that time. During a June 2020 board meeting, the district's Chief Business and Financial Officer announced that they faced a 10% decrease in the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and reductions in categorical programs amounting to $70 million. Additionally, they had to manage a 0% cost of living adjustment while dealing with an ongoing 2% enrollment decline. To maintain a degree of maneuverability during uncertain fiscal times, the district held on to a reserve fund of $263 million (PUSD Board of Education, 2020).

In the months leading to the summer of 2020, the district established forums, groups, and surveys to solicit feedback from community members, including students, parents, teachers, and staff. Their efforts yielded close to 50,000 responses focusing on the pandemic and issues surrounding equity within the district. A publicly available survey on the district website revealed that the respondents scored the highest on social-emotional learning (SEL), with comments emphasizing the tremendous need for more counselors. In the parent survey alone,

47% of respondents expressed significant concerns about the emotional well-being of their child, with many indicating they were “quite” or “extremely” concerned. After reviewing their input, the LCP was modified to address their concerns, which, of importance to this case study, included the domain of SEL. Although the district had been developing an SEL initiative over the prior year, the voices of the community emphasized the urgency to meet the needs of their community members going into the 2020–21 school year (PUSD Board of Education, 2020).

After consulting with content experts, licensed therapists, and the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL; Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2024) organization, the district developed a plan to support students’ social and emotional well-being. The PUSD’s 2020 Learning Continuity Plan stated that the district was committed to focusing equally on SEL and academic performance in educating the whole child. Focusing on the Understandings Continuum with the CASEL Core Competencies (CASEL, 2024), the district (a) assigned two teachers to a special assignment involving ongoing implementation and progress monitoring of the initiative, (b) provided professional SEL development training sessions for teachers, (c) embedded social-emotional activities in the online learning experience, (d) implemented in-classroom strategies, such as daily check-ins, social problem solving, and wellness breaks, (e) deployed online resources to address challenges faced by employees.

In addition, the district mentioned mental health interventions that were provided via referrals. These interventions included consulting with the school counselor or psychologist and accessing the district’s Family Resource Center for short-term counseling. In 2020, the Family Resource Center managed four regional sites within the district, serving 26 out of the 85 schools

in PUSD. To access more specialized mental health services, families would be directed to the nearby state university that hosted a trauma recovery center. At the time of the study, the counselor-to-student ratio was 1:458, while the school psychologist-to-student ratio was 1:1,191 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). Examining the effects of the district's actions on the classroom, the current case study investigated the perceived effect of the various measures implemented by the community. The following research questions guided this investigation.

Research Questions

The research questions driving this study were:

1. What were the intermediate elementary students' SEL and culturally responsive instruction experiences during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years?
2. What were teachers' perceptions of students' experiences with school-based SEL support in the intermediate-grade level classrooms conducted via Zoom during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years?
3. What were the teachers' perceptions regarding the efficacy of district-provided pre- and post-pandemic SEL protocols?

Significance of the Study

Evaluating the dataset from the school years during and following COVID-19 is vital. There is much more to consider than learning recovery following the collective trauma inflicted by the pandemic. A school district's pandemic response can help, hinder, nourish, or extinguish a child's mental, emotional, and academic progress. Evidence-based strategies, such as SEL, whole child, and culturally responsive instruction, effectively support our most vulnerable population. Determining the extent of their utilization during quarantine and distance learning

can provide context for the fallout currently occurring in classrooms.

Furthermore, with educational equity being a priority in the United States (United States Department of Education, 2022), hearing from stakeholders is crucial. Given the nature of this case study, student surveys were analyzed retroactively to give students a voice. These student experiences and their ability, or inability, to navigate can provide insight into the public urban education system's approach to crisis management. Reflecting on how policymaking in the public education system directly influences students creates space for constructive changes that align with the nation's objective to promote educational equity.

Conceptual Framework

This study intertwined three educational frameworks: culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1995), whole child education (ASCD, 2007 as cited in Slade & Griffith, 2013; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018), and CASEL (CASEL, 2024), which informed my research, providing a fully holistic approach to schooling by educating a child's mind, body, and spirit. The unifying feature of all three frameworks is the centering of the child, their background, culture, and experiences. Whole-child education initially outlined the rationale for recognizing a student as more than a receptor of knowledge. Simultaneously, CASEL (2024) elaborated on the need to establish and maintain relationships, whereas culturally responsive pedagogy amplified the importance of a student's culture in the classroom. These evidence-based educational frameworks provided a foundation to assess how time in class was handled and identify possible connections to the outcomes educators are observing now. This framework aimed to reveal and acknowledge all the necessary components to fostering the efficacious growth and development of youths in school. The framework provided critical

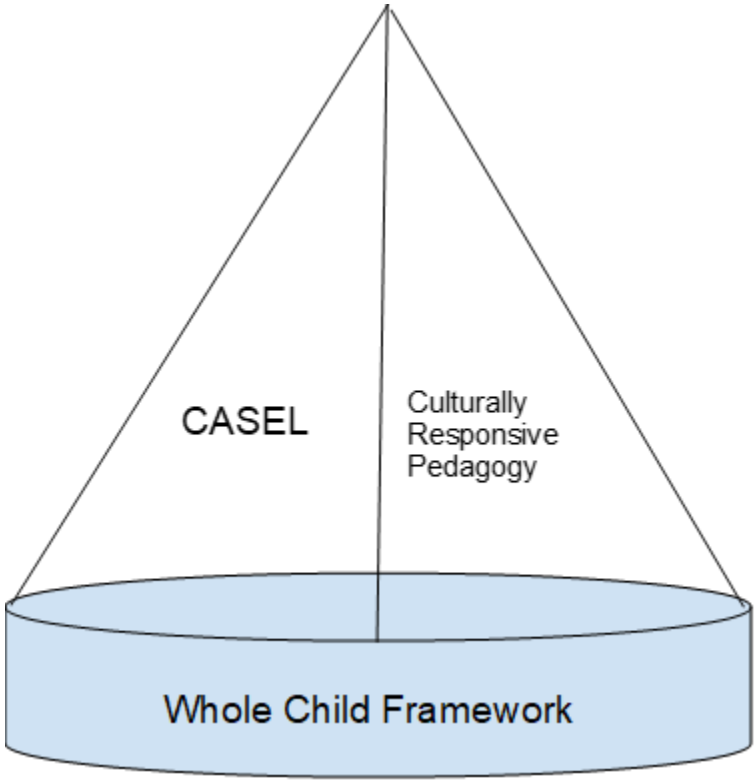
attributes that should be discussed with educators to determine whether the practices of the district, administration, and teachers align with evidence-based methodologies supporting marginalized communities, such as those that the district serves.

The whole-child approach is the foundation of this framework as it directly addresses the idea that one cannot teach academics to a child in isolation. First outlined in 2007 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), whole child education is driven to ensure each child is safe, healthy, supported, engaged and challenged (ASCD, 2007, as cited in Slade & Griffith, 2013). Covering academic and non-academic supports, a whole child education establishes learning environments that include core content areas alongside "psychosocial aspects of the individual and learning" (Slade & Griffith, 2013, p. 23).

The next component of this framework is culturally responsive pedagogy. As reported in Geneva Gay's research, students are more engaged with and find more meaning in lessons situated in their cultural filters (2002). Culturally responsive pedagogy is a transformative framework that has been demonstrated to improve engagement and, thus, learning outcomes by centering ethnically diverse students' cultural knowledge and experiences (Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2015). The most effective teaching includes understanding the context of the students and teachers. Their economic, ethnic, and cultural background contributes to their ability to interact with lesson content. Through culturally responsive pedagogy, students view subject matter "from multiple perspectives, including the lens of the oppressed and disenfranchised groups" (Harmon, 2012, p. 13).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Note: This figure illustrates the conceptual framework, adapted from "What is the CASEL Framework?," 2024, by Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/, copyright 2024 by Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning; "A Whole Child Approach to Student Success", 2013, by S. Slade and D. Griffith, *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy*, 21-35, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sean-Slade/publication/287320346_A_whole_child_approach_to_student_success/links/5baa53dd92851ca9ed25a9f5/A-whole-child-approach-to-student-success.pdf, copyright 2013 by ResearchGate; "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," 1995, by G. Ladson-Billings, *American Educational Research Journal, 32*(3), 465-491, https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465, copyright 1996 by American Educational Research Association.

The final piece of this conceptual framework is comprised of Collaborative, Academic, and SEL (CASEL, 2024). Because of the association between a healthy school climate, positive mental health, and substantial academic achievement, many school districts have adopted SEL strategies (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). SEL practices are evidence-based, and they have been established to enrich and uplift students' school experience (Clarke et al., 2021; Durlak et al.,

2011; Taylor et al., 2017). SEL indicators in the classroom include offering direct instruction on social-emotional skills, such as recognizing and managing emotions, having a growth mindset, and embracing the power of mistakes. These culturally relevant lessons encourage shared perspectives and reflection, creating a space where students can respectfully exchange ideas and the tools to disagree. Success indicators of SEL in the classroom include intentional conversations about culture, community, learning, and support (CASEL, 2019). These three principles, depicted in Figure 1, create a foundation for understanding how children can cope effectively when conditions and the context of support are tailored to their needs, capacities, and experiences.

Definition of Terms

This section provides definitions of terms frequently used throughout the study.

Trauma*:* As defined by the American Psychological Association (2023), trauma is an experience that elicits a harmful emotional response to an accident or natural disaster, such as Ebola, Hurricane Katrina, for example, or, in this case, COVID-19, leading to disruptive feelings.

Collective trauma*:* As Watson et al. (2020) explained, collective trauma is when an entire community experiences a traumatic event that affects society. Through shared experiences of hopelessness, uncertainty, and loss, collective trauma emotionally unites people worldwide.

Interactions**:** Four types of interactions in an online setting are learner-learner, learner-instructor, learner-content, and learner-interface (Hillman et al., 1994; Moore, 1989). Thurmond and Wambach (2004) elaborated that learner-learner interaction includes one-on-one or a collaborative group dynamic. Learner-instructor interaction can also occur one-on-one online

through chat or email or in whole class via a web-based forum. Learner content describes students' interactions with the instructional content, while learner interface is the interaction between the learner and technology, both hardware and software.

***Intermediate elementary*:** This study considered grades three through five intermediate.

***Social-emotional learning*:** Social-emotional learning refers to lessons and strategies to help humans acquire the skills and attitudes to maintain supportive relationships through recognizing and managing emotions, reflecting on growth, and developing empathy for self and others while making responsible decisions (CASEL, 2023).

Limitations

The limitations of this study included data, generalizability, and access. Data were gathered from one urban school in one district and confined to district personnel willing to participate. Limiting study participants to volunteers from one school may have narrowed the perspectives, leading to a potential bias. These restrictions indicated that results may not be generalizable to other populations or settings. Additionally, the answers given in the interviews may have been inaccurate or incomplete due to the pressure of providing socially desirable responses. Any self-reported data was also subject to interpretation and thus open to bias. Finally, the case study was a snapshot in time that could not capture ongoing changes or developments. This limited our ability to conclude the long-term effects of the pandemic on education and student well-being.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Students' re-entry to schools full-time in 2021 led to renewed interest in evidence-based teaching methodologies (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Zhao & Watterston, 2021). District and teacher response to the current academic status and behavioral issues is an increasingly important issue as we move forward in education, especially since the fallout from the shutdown continues across classrooms worldwide. A year and a half after students returned classrooms to either hybrid or full-time classrooms, statistics were still showing significant academic gaps and unprecedented behavior issues (Blad, 2022; Institute of Education Sciences, 2022; König & Frey, 2022; Musa & Dergaa, 2022; Sun et al., 2022). In the author's school, 40% of its students in grades three to five tested two or three grades below grade level in reading, and 49% of students tested two to three grades below grade in math ("Pemberton Unified School District" [PUSD] fall data report, 2022), suggesting hundreds of students completing the fifth grade do not yet know how to read.

Before researching practices implemented post-COVID-19, it was important to clarify the types of classroom approaches that were either in place or recommended before the shutdown. This literature review synthesizes research, some decades old, on the three foundational pedagogical approaches in urban schools: culturally relevant teaching, SEL, and the whole-child model. Urban schools were studied specifically to align with the intended subgroup of research participants. Understanding how these approaches facilitated student growth and development provided a framework to assess potential strengths and deficits of current practices.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) in Urban Schools

A considerable amount of literature has been published on culturally relevant pedagogy. This section of the literature review is not exhaustive but rather provides an overview to clarify the author's working definition of culturally relevant pedagogy. The terms teaching and pedagogy are used interchangeably throughout this paper.

The history of culturally relevant pedagogy dates back over forty years ago, with roots in multicultural education in the 1970s (Gay, 2000). According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant teaching engages learners with instructional content incorporating their experiences and cultural traditions. At its initial conception, Ladson-Billings (1995) explained that Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) incorporates three dimensions: building cultural competence to reshape instruction and materials through building relationships with students, maintaining high expectations while offering scaffolding supports, and facilitating the development of a critical consciousness around power relations. These practices best represent the student's cultural identities, most of which have typically been marginalized or excluded from mainstream education. Numerous studies have indicated that culturally relevant pedagogy is also based on relationships, creating a sense of belonging, and establishing a positive climate of high expectations (Gay, 2000, 2021; Harmon, 2012; Hsiao, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Robinson, 2020). These tactics can help build knowledge and empower students to critically examine educational content, emphasizing academic success and social and cultural success (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Similarly, Gay (2000, 2021) referred to this approach as a "multidimensional methodological enterprise" (Gay, 2021, p. 212). She reported that culturally relevant teaching,

being asset-based, has the power to "help reverse achievement trends" of students of color (Gay, 2000, p. 25). Gay (2021) expanded the CRP concept, adding that "key components include cultural affirmation, socio-emotional well-being, interpersonal relations and political efficacy on individual and institutional levels" (Gay, 2021, p. 212). In her overview of CRP regarding educating Black students, Harmon (2012) explained, "Many teachers are not prepared or qualified to teach African American students. Best practices are often not congruent with the needs of African American students. Yet, culturally responsive pedagogy has proven its worth and effectiveness over history" (p. 20).

Furthermore, despite pedagogy typically being thought of as being limited to delivering instruction, CRP can and should include a curriculum that represents the students of the urban community (Gay, 2000; Hsiao, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2012) and particularly people of color as foundational contributors to history instead of just as victims (Epstein et al., 2011; Gay, 2002, 2021). As Gay (2021) stated, "The idea here is that the cultures of African, Asian, Latinx and Native Americans have their inherent merit and that students have the right to learn about them as such, whether or not they are members of any of these particular groups" (p. 219).

Several qualitative studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of culturally relevant pedagogy within urban spaces, creating a sense of belonging while meeting the learning needs of diverse students (Epstein et al., 2011; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2022; Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). In one such study on teaching about race in an urban history class using CRP, Epstein et al. (2011) revealed exactly how impactful this pedagogy can be. They found that students' views and ability to critically analyze race and racial topics changed drastically from the beginning of

the year to the end. Initially, when asked about the historical experiences of people of color, most referred only to slavery, segregation, and the struggles for the freedom of African Americans. At the end of the study, "students included a diverse set of racial groups in the explanations of the historical experiences of people of color" (Epstein et al., 2011, p. 12). Moreover, they "portrayed people of color as resilient and having had agency" (Epstein et al., 2011, p. 12) and articulated how people of color made significant contributions to history and society.

Finally, the data from a quantitative study by Yun-Ju Hsiao (2015) led to developing a preparedness scale for CRT to be utilized in teacher education programs. This is important to note because his initial research compiled specific teaching competencies from the literature that can be implemented to align with culturally responsive practices. His work provides actionable behaviors, strategies to improve learning for diverse students, and a "multidimensional scale to examine preservice teachers' sense of preparedness" (p. 242). Exploratory factor analysis of survey data collected from 187 preservice teachers yielded three factors: curriculum and instruction, relationship and expectation establishment, and group belonging formation. Within those three factors, 32 competencies were identified, such as utilizing non-traditional communication methods, assessing curricula for multicultural strengths and weaknesses, using various assessment techniques, and employing diverse instructional methods.

Social-Emotional Learning in Urban Schools

The first study of SEL was conducted in the sixties at the Comer School Development Program (CSDP) by James Comer at Yale (Comer, 1992, 1993; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Comer et al., 1996 as cited in Lunenburg, 2011). He intended to improve relationships and experiences between schools, teachers, and minority students, in turn promoting better school culture and

higher levels of achievement. CSDP promoted a holistic approach to education, linking "children's academic growth with their emotional wellness and social and moral development" (p. 3). The program was successfully field-tested in two schools in New Haven, Connecticut, over the following decade. Subsequently, the New Haven Public Schools superintendent introduced it in K-12 classrooms district-wide. The CSDP was then rebranded the New Haven Social Development Program led by Timothy Shriver and Dr. Roger P. Weissberg (Beaty, 2018; CASEL, 2021a). Following its continued success, other leading experts joined the program to form a multidisciplinary collaboration, establishing both the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) network and the term social-emotional learning (CASEL, 2021a).

Urban schools have additional needs to meet when addressing SEL due to their unique context characterized by increased stress and trauma (Comer & Maholmes, 1999; Foster et al., 2005). Interventions must be adapted to potential problems within the urban climate and carried out consistently and continuously (CASEL, 2021b; Payton et al., 2008; Romasz et al., 2004). Varying levels of teaching experience and high turnover rates must be considered when attempting to implement an SEL program with fidelity. Other concerns, such as school mobility, can also be devastating to any progress, especially if the new school does not follow the same protocols.

Multiple studies have indicated that when implemented correctly, SEL programs are effective in improving emotional distress, low self-esteem, positive social behaviors, and academic performance (CASEL, 2021b; Clarke et al., 2021; Durlak et al., 2011; Lunenburg, 2011; Payton et al., 2008; Reicher, 2010). All students participate in an SEL program, partially in

response to students' needs within the school and as a preventative measure to help those who are struggling but have not yet developed an emotional or behavioral disorder requiring intensive psychological intervention (Poulou, 2005; Reicher, 2010). The literature has emphasized the importance of identifying strengths and addressing the needs of students in each particular locale to get them the help they need (CASEL, 2021b; McCallops et al., 2019; Payton et al., 2008; Poulou, 2005; Reicher, 2010; Romasz et al., 2004).

As previously described, the effect size of SEL depends on continuity and the level of integration. SEL skills work better when they are part of daily lessons and routines because they help with social problems (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Ongoing SEL includes daily wellness checks, weekly community circles, instruction in prosocial skills, emotion regulation, and education interventions like bullying prevention. Teachers may overhear poorly worded conversations or address students' concerns during everyday interactions. In addition, during frequently occurring classroom conversations, SEL instruction provides sentence frames that allow students with differing opinions to enter the conversation without ostracizing or alienating their peers. These weekly lessons and ongoing daily interactions build on one another and progress over time, from kindergarten through grade twelve, imparting age-appropriate and situationally necessary skill sets.

Virtual Social-Emotional Learning

School closures led to a cessation of any ongoing mental health services students received on campus and increased anxiety or depression due to the isolation, economic concerns, and public health crises (Golberstein et al., 2020; Hamilton et al., 2021; Leeb et al., 2020). Prior to COVID-19, close to 10% of school-aged children had anxiety (5.8 million), and a little over

4% had depression (2.7 million) (CDC, 2022a). During COVID-19, in 2021, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reported that 42% of 17,232 high school students surveyed had persistent feelings of hopelessness and sadness, a 20% increase from 2017 (CDC, 2022b). An analysis of visits to the emergency room during the pandemic revealed higher rates of suicide attempts among school-age children and a 24% increase in mental health-related visits for children ages five to eleven (Hamilton et al., 2021; Leeb et al., 2020). The nonprofit group YouthTruth (2021) conducted surveys of 22,174 upper elementary students and found that their number one obstacle to learning through distance education was mental health, particularly anxiety, stress, and depression.

Districts asked teachers to do their best to keep students' spirits high and use any resources they could to help students manage their emotions while still attending to their academics online. Recent literature on the exact strategies implemented by classroom teachers during distance learning is limited, although it has revealed that teachers failed to utilize school crisis strategies and lacked resources to track and address students' well-being, especially in rural areas or areas serving a large number of stakeholders (Hamilton et al., 2021; Former Elementary Principal C. Vega-Mota, personal conversation, 2023). During a publicly broadcasted school board meeting in one Southern California school district, 25-year veteran teacher "Jessica Ladelle" stated:

> When we went into the shutdown and had to teach online, the biggest and most significant change in education in probably the last 100 years, we had five days of "training" where teachers had to largely figure things out on their own. Because everything was so new, even the trainers did not know what to do. (PUSD, 2023)

Additionally, although districts may have provided programs and services to address mental and emotional health, they may not have been able to maintain adequate staffing to communicate with children (YouthTruth, 2021). When students were asked if they had even a single adult that they felt would assist them with a personal issue, 51% of students said no, up from 36% in the pre-COVID-19 era (YouthTruth, 2021).

The Center for Reinventing Public Education (crpe.org) tracked remote learning trends starting in March 2020, analyzing school districts through public online information to determine trends nationwide (DeArmond et al., 2021). The subsequent report by DeArmond et al. (2021) explains how district pronouncements were reviewed to clarify how some school districts addressed social-emotional needs during COVID-19. They found that a little more than half of schools nationwide included mental health supports (54%) during distance learning, although others mentioned they did have plans to begin implementing support. These services encompassed counseling and clinical support.

After reviewing 477 school districts, DeArmond et al. found that 7% of districts were "taking a systemwide approach to collecting data on how their students were doing" (2021, p. 2). With 66% of schools mentioning social-emotional needs as a part of their distance learning plan, most (47%) maintained their focus on creating a safe online environment. The district plans posted online indicated that 31% of schools included direct instruction on social-emotional skills, such as how to cope and manage emotions. The formal curriculum adopted the Second Step (Committee for Children, 2002 as cited in Fitzgerald & Edstrom, 2006), Calm Classroom (Luster Learning Institute, 2007), MindUP (Hawn Foundation, 2008 as cited in Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015), and School-Connect (Douglass & Beland, 2006) programs to address SEL, such as

teaching coping skills or conflict resolution in distance learning (DeArmond et al., 2021).

DeArmond et al. (2021) discussed morning meetings and advisories as examples of SEL approaches. Morning meetings consist of brief whole-class check-ins before teaching, using hand gestures or emojis to represent the student's current mood or emotion. Teachers could then follow up with a conversation, either privately in a direct Zoom chat or during the class. Advisories are 30-to 60-minute classes dedicated to SEL or community-building exercises, ranging from one to every day of the week (Cook-Deegan, 2017).

Additional SEL tactics that could be employed during in-person instruction involve allocating the first three weeks of the school year to fostering relationships, with less focus on academics, to cultivate a nurturing and supportive atmosphere. Once academic instruction begins, lessons are modified to include SEL competencies such as post-lesson reflection.

Online SEL Intervention Programs

Challenges to online SEL support range from personal to digital to varying degrees, depending on the availability of staffing and financial resources. The availability and management of technological infrastructure (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020), limited resources (Kim et al., 2021), educator compassion fatigue (Yang, 2021), and inadequate or nonexistent training in SEL, online learning modalities, or trauma-informed instruction (Mahmud, 2022; Rosen & Bloom, 2020) further affect SEL support. Beard et al. (2021) interviewed teachers about SEL interventions during COVID-19. They discovered that teachers began relying on social media and other external online sources for support in the absence of district resources.

A 2022 study on teacher-student relationships in online learning indicated that handling stress during COVID-19-era schooling with mindfulness, community circles, and proper training

in SEL and trauma-informed practices improved student outcomes (Mahmud, 2022). Although the case study was conducted at a charter school, student demographics mirrored those of an urban school, with a majority being Latinx. The entire study was conducted in the midst of COVID-19 during school closures, and all six teachers were already incorporating SEL to the best of their ability, albeit to a lesser degree. Following an intervention of teacher training on trauma-informed practices, such as mindfulness and community circles, all teachers reported some positive results. Four teachers indicated improved communication with students and an increased ability to self-regulate, leading to reduced stress and better classroom management. One teacher claimed no change in classroom relationships, as they have always been strong. Two teachers saw no change in self-reported discomfort administering SEL lessons in the classroom and did not increase the number of lessons after the start of the intervention.

In addition to Zoom and Google Meet becoming the central platforms for school and work activities, Harriott and Kamei (2021) highlighted the need for SEL intervention strategies in a digital space. As previously described, an effective SEL approach is multifaceted and requires direct instruction, integrating practices into the academic curriculum, and the development of a supportive classroom environment (CASEL, 2021b). Using a wide range of online tools, teachers can remotely connect with students and overcome the divide between physical and digital environments.

Harriott and Kamei (2021) employed programs to provide strategies that align with each element of SEL instruction. When developing lessons for explicit instruction in cognitive regulation, teachers can use collaborative tools like the Atlassian app Trello® (2016), or Toggl® (toggl.com), which enable users to construct and share to-do lists (Harriot & Kamei, 2021). The

website Nearpod (nearpod.com) permits teachers to crowdsource out to students to find potential solutions to class issues, allowing them to post their ideas on a shared board and stimulating discussions. Everyday Speech (everydayspeech.com) (Everyday Speech, LLC © 2023) program contains SEL videos and activities pertaining to SEL Skills, such as developing a growth mindset. For more ongoing, embedded SEL practices, Harriott and Kamei (2021) claimed that online apps, such as Flipgrid (info.flip.com) and I-Connect (iconnect.ku.edu), let users express themselves and create a space for reflection to encourage self-awareness. Lastly, sites like Kahoot (kahoot.com) or Blooket (www.blooket.com) are great for game-style reviews of academic content, encouraging teamwork and positive morale.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Following the COVID-19 shutdown, the critical relationship between student and teacher became much more apparent as teachers became impromptu first responders. It is crucial to understand what methods worked and what methods need to change so that in the next crisis, leaders can effectively handle the fallout with less detriment to all involved, especially children, the most vulnerable stakeholders. This case study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of students' social and emotional experiences associated with distance learning in one district during the COVID-19 quarantine and shutdowns. Simultaneously, this research investigated strategies, programs, and protocols the district and its teachers implemented to address student mental health and wellness. Feedback from decision-makers and those closest to the children most affected by the pandemic allowed for data triangulation to evaluate the effects of their decisions on student mental health. This chapter reviews the research questions guiding the study and approaches that were chosen to answer these questions.

Research Design

Qualitative

The literature review identified many quantitative studies that have utilized student/teacher surveys (Carminucci et al., 2021; Sofianidis et al., 2021; Styck et al., 2021); however, qualitative works employing teacher interviews are rare. This study utilized a qualitative approach to gain a clearer perspective on all stakeholders involved in deciding post-COVID-19 policies. A qualitative approach allowed for a more in-depth investigation of the

chosen topic through discussion with participants. The interviews included a review of survey data (Appendix C) that the district administered during and following distance learning. Qualitative interviews and an analysis of district-administered surveys authentically highlighted and elevated children's experiences within a district serving a large urban population (Almalki, 2016).

Case study design. This study applied a case study design that enabled the researcher to thoroughly investigate one organization (Patten & Newhart, 2018). To better understand what occurs in any given setting, Patten and Newhart (2018) conducted detailed case studies to reveal a possible connection between factors in real-life situations. A case study design was the best framework for closely examining district decisions and student experiences during COVID-19.

Research Questions

The following questions were posed to gather information on the district's decisions and support while accentuating the voices of its stakeholders.

1. What were the intermediate elementary students' SEL and culturally responsive instruction experiences during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years?
2. What were teachers' perceptions of students' experiences with school-based SEL support in the intermediate-grade level classrooms conducted via Zoom during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years?
3. What were the teachers' perceptions regarding the efficacy of district-provided pre- and post-pandemic SEL protocols?

Research Setting

The elementary school site location for this study was “Rockwell Elementary”, which opened in the city of “Pemberton” over one hundred years ago. At the time of data collection, around 800 students across seven grades, transitional kindergarten (TK) through fifth grade, attended Rockwell Elementary. Most students were from minority groups, with 68% being Latinx, 14% Asian, and 11% Black, and 88% are socioeconomically disadvantaged. The school had 24 credentialed teachers, 20 female and four male, leading classrooms and ten educational support specialists, such as literacy intervention or science program specialists, of which six are female and four are male. Most staff had over a decade of experience, and approximately half were fluent in Spanish.

The school’s website shared its vision of a positive and collaborative learning environment, character development, equal access to the curriculum, and differentiated instruction. Rockwell also ran a Gifted And Talented Education (GATE) program, allowing qualifying students to enroll in advanced courses. The school had a full-time principal, an assistant principal, and a counselor, with part-time nurse access and library services for students. The school’s website did not provide details about social-emotional supports, specific programs, or the curriculum utilized for instruction. It contained a link to social, emotional, and behavioral support, which was, however, unavailable at the time of this writing.

Participants and Sampling Criteria

The participants in this case study were teachers teaching intermediate elementary grades at the time of distance learning during the 2020–21 school year and who then continued in-person instruction the following academic year. Additionally, the researcher recruited a principal

and other district personnel to participate. The sampling in this case study was purposive and convenient as the researcher was familiar with the district, and the school was within driving distance. The researcher approached the current principal, who agreed to provide names and contact information for teachers who met the inclusion criteria, which consisted of teaching elementary school during the 2020–21 school year at a school that caters to a population requiring significant academic and financial support. To reduce bias, the researcher called and emailed all teachers at Rockwell Elementary who matched the criteria for selection, requesting their participation (Yin, 2016). The researcher attempted to recruit the district's crisis response team leader, who referred the researcher to the district's Strategic Data Project Analyst. The analyst, in turn, approved research within the district with the contingency that they decide which district personnel were interviewed. The final decision was to interview the district's head of counseling instead of those directly responsible for changes made in response to shutting down and transitioning to distance learning.

Data Collection

To answer the posed research questions, multiple instruments and methods of data collection were required. Therefore, semi-structured qualitative interviews (Yin, 2016) were conducted, and district-wide policies related to distance learning, as well as archival records on culture and climate, were reviewed to obtain a more complete account of district implementations and student experiences. The data was collected between March and April of 2024. Data provided by the district and school administration pertaining to training, support, and materials was cross-referenced with teacher interviews. Interview data was triangulated and integrated to identify supporting statements or inconsistencies. Furthermore, the perceived

efficacy data from the teachers was then compared to the culture and climate data polled by the district.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative data was collected to acquire a more holistic view of the decisions, choices, and ramifications concerning students' social-emotional well-being during distance learning. Additionally, the insights about student experiences gleaned from the interviews provided a deeper understanding of their lived experiences that were directly affected by the calls the district made on their behalf. Prior to the teacher interviews, a simplified version of the CASEL assessment (CASEL, 2019) for SEL was shared with the participants to provide reference points during the interview. The CASEL (2019) assessment was closely in line with the researcher's conceptual framework since it addressed fundamental concepts within the whole child framework, culturally responsive pedagogy, and SEL.

Interviews

The research entailed semi-structured, qualitative (Yin, 2016) interviews (Appendix B) with district personnel to determine the training and support provided to schools and teachers. The researcher developed open-ended questions allowing participants to share the steps taken immediately following the shutdown and the reasons for taking these steps. Five intermediate-grade teachers and one district representative were interviewed in this research.

Two interviews were conducted in person and four via the Zoom online platform. The district personnel interviews incorporated open-ended questions such as:

1. How did you and your team determine the best course of action to meet the needs of

the diverse student population after the shutdown?

2. What sort of SEL-related training was provided immediately and shortly after the transition to online learning?
3. What crisis protocols were implemented?

The teacher and district administrator's interviews combined with archival data retrieval facilitated data triangulation (Yin, 2016) to enhance the validity of this qualitative case study.

Data Analysis

Interviews. The researcher recorded four interviews via Zoom and later transcribed the data verbatim. During the two in-person interviews, the researchers took detailed notes, which the participants reviewed and approved immediately following the interview. The researcher generated initial codes or themes after becoming familiar with the data. She refined and redeveloped these themes to connect them to the literature and quantitative results. The researcher evaluated the consistency between the datasets and developed a write-up.

Archival Data. Pemberton Unified School District administered a survey developed and processed by Panorama Education (panoramaed.com). Administered multiple times throughout the year, students respond to prompts regarding school environment and SEL competencies. They answered questions such as "Do other kids at school ever tease you about what your body looks like?" on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "almost never" to "almost all the time". The researcher collected survey data spanning up to five years to analyze trends and either corroborate or repudiate the teachers' accounts.

Apart from this, the researcher reviewed publicly accessible district documents and recordings of board meetings with accompanying minutes as part of triangulation (Yin, 2016). In

the board meetings preceding the 2020-21 school year, the district's Learning Continuity Plan was discussed, which included input from teachers, parents, and community members. These artifacts were then examined and compared to interview data.

Limitations

The sample size was convenient and limited to one school, so it may not be generalizable to all teachers and students or other urban school districts. Given that this was a case study, the number of participants was limited, and the results should be interpreted cautiously. A larger sample is needed to make the results generalizable. Threats to validity included recall bias due to the passage of time since participants were in a distance learning setting. It must be noted here that the veteran status of participating teachers significantly influenced the students' experiences during distance learning. This further restricted the relevance of the findings when comparing them to other schools that have similar demographics.

The school district's research approval process spanned four months. This significantly constrained the timeframe available for data collection and processing. In addition, the district approved the research with the condition that they would select the individual with whom I would communicate at the district level. This restricted my access and potential data acquisition.

Positionality

A fundamental component of qualitative research is the positionality of the researcher and the researched, as it contextualizes the observations and analysis. Recognizing and acknowledging positionality helps to "understand how knowledge and experience are situated, co-constructed, and historically and socially located" (Reich, 2021, p. 575). Although not in the classroom during the 2020–21 school year, the researcher was present during the following

academic year.

While the researcher acknowledged the advantages of working on this project from the internal member's perspective, she was aware of her positionality and connection to individuals or participants. The researcher was an educator in the same urban district at the time of the study, which may present as personal bias. Personal experiences and observations within the affected community and classroom were the sole catalysts for the development of an interest in the present line of inquiry. To become a more critically conscious practitioner, the researcher's objective as an education leader was to identify areas for improvement.

The strengths of this specific positionality resided in the insights gained through ongoing interactions with the students who provided the data for this study. Being an active practitioner provided a level of comprehension inaccessible to a layperson. Personal relationships with participating teachers that were formed before the study, and more significantly, the children, could have biased the findings. The level of interconnectedness with the children may have encouraged the researcher to focus excessively on seeing things from their perspective as opposed to adopting a neutral stance. To mitigate this potential bias, the researcher examined and analyzed the data in a recursive process, making a concerted effort to view the data with an objective lens. She also reviewed district board meeting notes to understand the district's perspective and carefully considered input from dissertation committee members with expertise in various fields, particularly those with experience at the district level.

Ethics

Before collecting data, the researcher obtained informed consent from all participants, including district personnel, current school site principals, and teachers. The form detailed the

study participation process, benefits, incentives, and methods of maintaining confidentiality. The researcher ensured confidentiality by using pseudonyms for the district, school, and participants and protected individual information by replacing names with unique alphanumeric identifiers in the transcripts. The research data was stored on a personal drive not connected to Loyola Marymount University (LMU) or the researcher's place of employment. The researcher informed participants that their data would be destroyed five years following the publication.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This case study first aimed to identify the student's social and emotional experiences through district survey results as well as teachers' perspectives and second to examine an urban district's attempts to mitigate the trauma of COVID-19. Chapter 4 summarizes the findings gathered through archival data and semi-structured interviews with teachers and district personnel. Research has demonstrated that students benefit when schools implement with fidelity an evidence-based SEL program that addresses their needs and facilitates the development of social and emotional competencies. The conceptual framework guided the analysis aimed at evaluating the extent to which this case aligns with the existing literature and to evaluate the comprehensive nature of the district's wellness approach before and during distance learning. The conceptual framework combined the CASEL (CASEL, 2024), culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1995), and the whole child approach (Slade & Griffith, 2013), guiding the review of artifacts and the interview responses.

In light of the considerable endeavors undertaken by the district to incorporate community feedback into the Learning Continuity Plan, the educator interviews clarified the effects of the implemented measures on the classroom environment through the lens of experienced professionals. The perspectives of the educators regarding the efforts of the school district offer valuable insights regarding the effective execution of policy modifications. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What were the intermediate elementary students' SEL and culturally responsive instruction experiences during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years?

2. What were teacher perceptions of students' experiences with school-based SEL support in the intermediate-grade level classrooms conducted via Zoom grades during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years?
3. What were the teachers' perceptions regarding the efficacy of district-provided pre- and post-pandemic SEL protocols?

Contrary to expectations, this study revealed that students did not experience a deficiency in social-emotional support while engaging in distance learning. As the study progressed, the extent to which educators had been dedicated to their students, their families, and the community became apparent. The findings revealed that the teachers' efforts and extensive professional experience resulted in the inclusion of all three components of an effective Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) approach (CASEL, 2021b).

The findings in this paper are presented in the order of the research questions. Given that teacher perspectives were the central focus of research questions 2 and 3, they were examined and categorized together. Before interpreting the results, it is noteworthy to mention that a significant discovery derived from the interview analysis was the potential for a breakdown in either policy implementation or communication when executing the strategies detailed in the district's LCP. This topic was further investigated in research question 3. However, it is crucial to provide context for the actions of educators as they discuss the exceptional efforts made to meet their students' needs.

Sample

The research sample consisted of seven participants from the same school district. I conducted interviews with five veteran elementary teachers, one male and four female, who

taught the same grade level and had been employed at the same educational institution for multiple years before, during, and after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, I interviewed the head counselor at the district level, also referred to as the district representative. Multiple attempts were made to communicate with the principal; however, due to time limitations, that interview could not be conducted but will be considered for future study.

Data and Analysis

For the initial data processing, I used descriptive coding to organize the qualitative data by category to align with my research questions. Subsequently, I followed up with inductive coding (Yin, 2016) using a constant comparison approach to search for commonalities between teacher responses. Finally, I used in vivo coding (Yin, 2016) to derive themes and patterns directly from the participants' responses. Significant themes that emerged from the data were labeled as (a) Against All Odds, (b) Teacher Struggles, and (c) Student Survey and Teacher Takeaways.

Research Question 1

Theme 1: Against All Odds

Teachers' Adaptive Strategies

When faced with the challenge of adapting their pedagogy to an online format and incorporating support for their students' mental health, these participants opted to confront the issue straight away. Accordingly, they collaborated with colleagues to establish a grade-level network to acquire or create appropriate strategies and materials. All the interviewed teachers elaborated on intentionally crafting activities promoting active and positive student engagement. These interactions fostered a sense of community while involving the students in enjoyable

activities. Teachers facilitated activities, such as art therapy, mindful meditation, and dancing, in addition to the required common core math and reading assignments. Two out of five educators described their utilization of online software, Kami (www.kamiapp.com), which enabled them to upload coloring pages for children to engage in digital coloring activities due to the unavailability of physical resources.

Other efforts to engage students included playing online games, such as Blooket or Kahoot. Research Participant (RP) 1 coordinated virtual excursions to destinations such as Hearst Castle, a castle built by George Hearst that is a tourist destination four hours north of Los Angeles (hearstcastle.org), which some of these students would never have a chance to visit otherwise. They also visited the beach and the zoo and observed baby chicks live-streamed from a farm. Even something as straightforward as Show and Tell encouraged them to connect through the exchange of personal stories about their sentimental objects. One of the classes put on a talent show, showcasing hidden artists through drawing and singing.

Finally, all interviewed educators indicated they included their adaptation of counseling into their everyday schedules. RP1 had individual breakout rooms to facilitate semi-private talks with students, providing an avenue for teachers to gain more genuine insights into their day-to-day realities. After school hours ceased, RP2 stayed online to offer daily consultations to students, allowing them to either socialize or seek emotional support from her. RPs 3 and 4 facilitated weekly online community circles, while RP 5 established written and video journaling platforms for students, fostering a safe place for them to freely express their concerns.

Through these outlets, students felt comfortable enough to open up, helping teachers understand their true predicaments. Some students shared, for example, that their families had

moved in with them due to loss of employment, meaning that in one particular household, six kids were sharing one bedroom. Another student spent school days under a table in a corner, while another took refuge in a closet because these were the only somewhat secluded and quiet places they could find. Other students attended class while their family members battled COVID-19. Three of the five teachers disclosed that personally witnessing the lives of their students was emotionally challenging. RP2 confessed that although she knew the students who attended her school struggled a lot during that time, seeing it herself through the camera of their Chromebook for hours a day changed who she was as a teacher.

> I had a student who was [. . .] really sweet, but she was just an emotional wreck on a good day […] after COVID. I feel like I have become more empathetic for the kids because of what I have seen behind the scenes. I have grown professionally AND emotionally after seeing that. I've become more patient and understanding. (RP 2)

Student Reception of Adaptive Strategies

When questioned about tactics RPs believe students received well, all interviewed teachers indicated that students preferred the activities they had personally organized and implemented as opposed to those that the district provided. As students were not required to take part in anything online, teachers clarified that student engagement was assessed based on voluntary participation. Students would also often directly express to teachers the activities they preferred, requesting ongoing weekly sessions of their favorites, such as Show and Tell or scavenger hunts.

Some teachers actively sought student input. In an effort to increase student participation, a few educators would conduct informal surveys among the students to evaluate their degree of

interest in a specific plan or activity. “I’m not afraid to ask kids, ‘Do you guys like this? You want to change it? How can we make it better?’” (RP1). The talent show mentioned above, for example, was organized in response to a student’s request. The interventions that provided the greatest support, according to the teachers, were those that facilitated shared positive experiences, such as virtual field trips, games, or physical movement activities like dancing. They were able to listen to music and have fun, seeing their friends be silly and dance along.

Theme 2: Teacher Struggles

The pandemic placed immense strain on teachers, who were often in survival mode while maintaining an intent focus on being present for their students and performing other extraordinary measures. Another theme emerging from the research related to the methodology used to create materials and activities for students in an online classroom.

Creativity in the Development of Materials/Activities

A significant portion of the supplementary materials employed in the online classroom were sourced from teachers who conducted independent research and planning and then shared them with their colleagues**.** The teachers emphasized that they were not compensated for this research, which required many additional online hours. As they were all veteran teachers, they relied heavily on their decades of experience in and out of the classroom for inspiration. One example is RP2’s art therapy, which emerged as a result of one teacher being an art major in her undergraduate years.

RP1 elaborated on her contribution, explaining that in her specialized role as a teacher liaison, she attended training through a Summer Enrichment Program[3] (SEP). Although SEP may be connected to the district, she specified that it is not under its direction.

> SEP was more involved in the SEL business than the district was [. . .] SEP is not [the district]. It's a grant from the federal government to provide additional resources for after school programs to help parents with daycare and stuff. It wasn't the school district saying we needed to do these things. (RP1)

Following the summer training program, she volunteered to develop an entire calendar of lessons, complete with grade-appropriate videos and interactive online activities centered on the cultures represented in her school's demographic profile. Three other research participants reported utilizing the materials created by RP1.

RP6 summarized:

> We had to go outside the curriculum. And so, you know, I found a lot of good stuff that allowed me to connect to what was happening or connect to maybe something culturally. But all that stuff was on my own time. We had long days, and I remember even going hours, hours after just kind of like preparing [. . .] Although I was working for free, right? (RP6)

Narratives of Adversity

Rockwell Elementary teachers acknowledged experiencing considerable strain as a result of grappling with their trauma in addition to their online responsibilities. All participants experienced long hours, screen fatigue, and feelings of hopelessness. They indicated that the

[3] Pseudonym used as the name of program is linked to the city where the study took place

constant technology-related issues were a tremendous stress factor. Reiterating much of what current literature says, some struggled to regulate their emotions while supporting their students. Teachers agreed that, at times, they lacked control and despaired over their inability to influence students despite their massive efforts. They reflected,

> RP2: It was so crazy to manage it. I hated it. There were days that I cried because I was like, I am not reaching these kids. I cannot even get them on Zoom. I had no control. That's when I was just, like, totally freaking out, and I seriously would cry. I'm working so hard and getting zero results [. . .] everything went wrong every day. But we survived. That's my thing, like [. . .] man, we survived that.
>
> RP1: Then that group of only onliners [students who started the school year online as opposed to those who started the previous school year on campus] came on, and then it was kind of like, oh my god! Oh my God! It didn't feel the same. When we transitioned to getting that group [students who started the year online], that first day of school online, and you're like, "Oh my God, I am not ready for this. I don't know who's supposed to be ready for this. You look around yourself, and I'm not ready for this!
>
> RP6: I think for me it was pretty stressful. And then [. . .] at the beginning, it was, you know, hard to tell yourself to stay positive, be positive. And you know they're kids, so they're going to read you.

However, once the teachers realized that they must afford themselves the same compassion as they extended to their students, they were able to establish a more constructive and positive mindset. To achieve this attitude, they relied solely on each other while maintaining the time and space needed to be present for their students.

Theme 3: Student Survey and Teacher Takeaways

PUSD conducted a biannual parent and student survey in grades 4-12 to ensure that its environment supports personal and academic success in alignment with its mission. The self-report style survey evaluated school culture and climate, and in the 2019-20 school year, it added additional sections to evaluate SEL to assess the core competencies outlined in CASEL (2024): social awareness, growth mindset, relationship skills, self-awareness, self-management, self-efficacy, and responsible decision-making. The district's ongoing monitoring of student mental health was unusual compared to most public school districts, as evidenced in the previously mentioned 2021 study, where only 7% of the districts collected data on student well-being (DeArmond et al., 2021).

As interviewing students directly was not suitable, I analyzed the data trends from student surveys to better understand students' perceptions of school support during distance learning. In addition, I distributed surveys to the teachers in the case study to acquire further perspectives on potential factors contributing to the differences in scores from prior years. As their students were the ones who took the district-administered survey, they possessed firsthand knowledge of what may have influenced the scores. The most notable disparities occurring in either the 2020-21 or 2021-22 school years, in comparison to adjacent years, were observed in the following three competencies: (a) Safety, (b) Self-Efficacy, and (c) Knowledge and Fairness of Discipline, Rules, and Norms.

Safety

Both physical and emotional safety, free from physical assault and harassment or bullying, was assessed with questions such as (1) Do other kids hit or push you at school when

they are not just playing around? and (2) Do other kids at this school ever tease you about what your body looks like? Reports showed a significant 15% increase in favorable responses to distance learning during the 2020-21 school year compared to in-person, on-campus learning. This increase did not carry over to subsequent years once students returned to in-person learning. When broken down by question, the survey administered to students when they returned to campus revealed the largest decrease of 18% in favorable responses regarding teasing about physical appearance.

When teachers were asked what they thought caused this shift in responses, all five participants believed the lack of other students was the biggest contributing factor to the perceived increase in students' sense of safety during online instruction. Although they acknowledged the existence of cyberbullying, they all noted it was not observed in their online classrooms. Furthermore, despite the chaos in some students' homes, it was familiar to these students and, thus, not as problematic as in-person bullying from classmates. The safety perceptions changed upon returning to physical school. RP4 added, "It's sad to see such a strong dip in safety after returning, but it makes sense since when they were home, they didn't have to deal with other students or bullies." One teacher (RP1) believed the fear of catching COVID-19 outside the home was a contributing factor, whereas at home, they did not need to wear a mask and thus were generally safer.

Knowledge and Fairness of Discipline, Rules, and Norms

This domain was measured by assessing students' perceptions of whether rules pertaining to harassment, either physical or verbal, along with intervention and enforcement, and expectations for both student and adult behavior were clearly communicated. The 2020-21 online

classroom dynamic showed the highest number of favorable responses across five years, with a 16% drop upon returning to campus. Based on my findings, students exhibited a heightened understanding of the regulations and responsibilities associated with remote learning.

Teachers attributed the remarkable decrease in favorable responses to the sudden presence of accountability and students losing their sense of control over their surroundings. While in an online classroom, students had very few behavioral and academic expectations and had become accustomed to this lack of accountability and control. Upon returning to campus, the shift back to the status quo required a severe adjustment. They had to conform to social norms and learn to communicate with one another again.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy was quantified as self-confidence and belief in self when working toward goals and managing one's behavior, environment, and motivation. Students were asked to determine the frequency with which they could do the following: (a) I can do well on all my tests, even when they are difficult, and (b) I can master the hardest topics in my classes. Student results showed the greatest drop in favorable responses upon resuming in-person learning rather than during the period of online learning. During online learning, around 65% of responses were favorable, which then dropped by 8% in the 2021-22 school year.

All educators acknowledged that this drop resulted from the resurgence of testing and grading upon returning to campus. During distance learning, there were no tests or accountability for their learning. Their focus remained on survival. Upon returning, they faced new content standards for which they were unprepared. The interviewed teachers believed that students had

lost some of their confidence in their ability to succeed because they knew they lacked the necessary knowledge to master the content.

Upon examining the data from all survey questionnaires, it can be deduced that students experienced a greater sense of well-being while engaged in online learning from home compared to their time on campus. This suggested that the lack of testing and accountability, combined with these teachers' greater focus on mental health over academics, yielded a favorable outcome.

Research Question 2

The second research question aimed to investigate student's experiences with SEL and culturally responsive instruction in distance learning. To answer this question, teachers were presented with a series of CASEL (2019) strategies and instruction tools for the classroom (see Appendix A). During the interview, they were asked to discuss which strategies they implemented before distance learning that they could adapt to the online classroom. Two themes became apparent following data collection and in vivo coding: (a) Just Good Teaching and (b) Getting To Know Your Customer.

Theme 1: "Just Good Teaching"

The participants were unfamiliar with the concept of SEL, so instead, they were asked to determine whether they employed similar tactics, even if they were not explicitly defined as social-emotional practices. It became evident that all the interviewed teachers had amassed substantial expertise throughout their decades of service and had implemented a wide range of instructional tools, although not expressly classified as SEL, to support the social-emotional needs of their students. Instead, RP1 mentioned that these approaches came to her as a teacher "naturally" or, as RP2 put it, just part of "good teaching." It is important to note that all of these

educators belonged to racial and ethnic minority groups and served their urban district for most or all of their careers. They were deeply connected to the students, their families, and the neighborhood. Some of the teachers had taught generations of students from the same families. They may refer to it as merely good teaching, but I see it as a dedication to the community they serve.

It is important to note that the district explicitly stated its commitment to the whole-child approach in its 2020 Learning Continuity Plan, and many of the classroom practices attested to by these teachers coincided closely with a whole-child framework. Therefore, it can be inferred that the instructors had been exposed to certain practices mentioned in this context over time, regardless of an SEL label. At one point, RP2 suggested that she likely acquired a few ideas from the mandatory staff meetings. This aligned with the observation that, in general, all teachers interviewed in this study seemed to be employing similar techniques in their classrooms. A remarkable confluence of exceptional teaching aptitude and efficacious pedagogy was present in this group of teachers.

Explicit Instruction

In relation to explicit instruction in the context of distance learning, all educators reported having taught students various social and emotional skills prior to the 2020-21 school year. Those related primarily to conflict resolution and getting along with classmates from varied backgrounds. Due to minimal or nonexistent online conflict, they did not feel it was necessary to teach these skills in the 2020–21 school year but did reintroduce such lessons in the 2021-22 school year when everyone returned to campus. Every instructor mentioned that during distance learning, they created opportunities for students to express their viewpoints, and two out of the

five teachers mentioned that they allocated time for intentional reflection, either through written or video submissions. RP1 remarked that as soon as she came to understand the substantive nature of SEL, she began searching for supplementary materials beyond those provided by the district. She then purchased a comprehensive set of lessons that included videos and supplementary materials from an online marketplace known as Teachers Pay Teachers.

Integration Into Academic Instruction

Concerning the core content instruction during distance learning, every instructor indicated that they cultivated a growth mindset in their students by embracing errors, setting goals, and prioritizing progress over perfection. In addition, aiming to advance problem-solving, all the teachers implemented a collaborative framework, requiring students to improve their interpersonal communication skills to learn to agree and disagree with others more effectively. An integral aspect of the collaborative approach involves balancing time to facilitate teacher-led instruction, student discussion and interaction, and independent work time within the online classroom. To encourage discussion, a few teachers opted to use the breakout room feature on Zoom, moving between rooms to monitor conversations. This tactic was successful for some, whereas others found it too challenging to monitor adequately and resumed whole class discussions.

Supportive Classroom Climate

Normally, the participants' school year starts with developing a shared agreement with students and establishing expectations for the classroom. Throughout the 2020-21 school year, however, all teachers shared that they encountered numerous challenges getting students to log in to class, as well as turning on their cameras and participating in the lesson. As a result, all

teachers had to adapt to a more teacher-led approach that consisted of making every effort to get students to log in again the following day. Two of the five teachers told their students and parents they would be showing up at their door if they did not report to class the next day. RP2 elaborated,

> During COVID, it wasn't so much, "Let's agree on this". It was more like, "This is what's gonna go on". You don't get to decide in the midst of this madness. And so it was basically, "We will turn on our cameras" or "You will put yourself on mute", "You will sit up in class." (RP2)

Other measures they employed to foster a supportive classroom environment during distance learning involved daily check-ins, both digital (such as thumbs-up and thumbs-down) and more personal, one-on-one dynamic. As previously mentioned, teachers also facilitated activities such as yoga, art, talent shows, and community circles. Another strategy they continued in remote learning was using "I" statements and modeling communication strategies to navigate difficult conversations.

Theme 2: "Getting to Know Your Customer"

The research participants interviewed in this study were asked how they were able to uphold a level of culturally responsive instruction while in a distance learning setting. RP2 acknowledged the district's influence by explaining that since PUSD is so multicultural, it does a "pretty good" job of providing strategies to affirm student identities, or as she called it, "getting to know your customer." Each individual dedicated great effort to designing lessons relevant to their student's lives and cultures. RP1 asserted that the initial two weeks of school are devoted to gathering as much information about students as possible to better ascertain their academic,

cultural, and social background knowledge to establish a solid foundation for developing lesson content. RP6 elaborated that he went beyond the school-provided text to locate stories that would better connect with students and better reflect who they were.

Summer Enrichment Program

Teachers also came to rely on colleagues and pooled resources to supplement their lessons, with two of five teachers emphasizing that the district did not initiate the collaboration and aimed to establish a stronger connection with students and their families. RP1 described her participation in the Summer Enrichment Program (SEP), which served as a valuable source of support. She functioned as a teacher liaison for the summer school program given by the district and thus attended training on enriching the curriculum to better support the students. The program provided her with access to culturally relevant lessons and resources. She offered to create a pacing calendar, complete with hyperlinks and accompanying materials, to distribute to other educators beyond the summer program, emphasizing the various cultures present in the school.

> I did it (created cultural lessons) not because the district said, but because my SEP people said we needed to do this. We have all these different wonderful cultures in our community, and we're not highlighting them enough [. . .] Yes, the district paid me for this position, for being a SEP Teacher Liaison, but it didn't give me the training [. . .] SEP is not (the district), it's a grant provided by the federal government on providing additional resources for after school programs to help parents with daycare and stuff. (RP 1)

Three additional teachers mentioned RP1's calendar and its remarkable effect in the remote classroom. They commented that the lessons fostered a collective appreciation of the cultural origins of each student. Further, the students exhibited an increased level of attentiveness towards the distinctive characteristics of each other's cultures and actively participated in a more positive exchange with peers on the topic. RP4 shared, "Students really loved it. They started noticing things [. . .] and getting excited [. . .] and correcting other students when they confused cultures like Chinese for Vietnamese".

Research Question 3

The final research question aimed to discover teachers' perceptions of the efficacy of pre- and post-pandemic SEL protocols provided by the district. An examination of archival board meeting minutes and teacher interviews revealed that SEL increased in response to concerns raised by parents and educators regarding the psychological well-being of their children in the midst of ongoing pandemic-related challenges and social isolation. It is worth repeating that the district had already devised a plan to incorporate some element of SEL into the classroom before the introduction of distance learning, although the precise scope of this implementation remains uncertain. Thus, the emphasis changed from pre- and post-COVID-19 SEL protocols to the perceived effectiveness of measures implemented in response to COVID-19.

Theme 1: Lacking Explicitness

Identified Gaps in District Support

All participating teachers widely acknowledged that before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, formal training or specialized curriculum dedicated to social-emotional development was lacking, although stand-alone professional development presentations, which were neither

obligatory nor explicitly designated as SEL, were available. One such lesson instructed on the use of the children's book "How Full Is Your Bucket" which emphasizes the significance of kind words and behaviors. Moreover, teachers were at some point presented with a Sanford Harmony Kit (harmony-academy.org), which included a box of books and discussion prompts. However, no implementation methodology or training on the kit's utilization was given.

Furthermore, the kits were distributed at different time points, mostly before the shutdown. When asked about SEL training prior to COVID-19, RP1 shared, "Never heard of SEL, did not know what it was. I might have done practices that I didn't know were SEL, like 'Hi, how are you?' and actually listening. But I wouldn't have called it SEL."

After the school closure in the March 2019-20 academic year, the focus was on supporting students and addressing their emotional needs. By the second week, however, instructors stated they were mandated to develop a comprehensive schedule of lessons focused on core subjects that would cover the entire duration of their regular school day. During the following summer, before the start of the 2020-21 academic year, which was conducted almost exclusively online, RPs 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 felt that the district's primary goal was to train teachers on a digital learning platform known as Canvas (instructure.com/canvas; Daley & Whitmer, 2011). The new software facilitated the creation and dissemination of class courses with greater consistency while potentially enhancing engagement with lesson material through discussion boards, assignment pages, and even a video management platform. The LCP provided the training schedule referenced here, which supported this finding. Canvas training was referenced six times, and SEL was not represented in the training titles provided. There was, however,

elective, self-paced training, along with 'Curriculum Training' that may have included components of SEL. RP2 shared:

> We got this crazy ass training during the summer, and it was how we got introduced to Canvas. And I will never forget the training [. . .] these poor trainers that were training us on Zoom, were also learning on the go. So, we all learned as we went along, you know? With some of the techier people at our school, we all relied on [RP6] or [other teachers]. (RP2)

Additionally, they reported that during the 2020-21 school year, the district indicated the need to allocate the initial 10-15 minutes of each class session to SEL. They all mentioned that the district provided slides prepared by their SEL coach. They included daily digital check-ins, opportunities to express opinions, and embedded videos aligned with the LCP. The respondents indicated that one drawback of the slides was that the SEL lessons were not categorized or distinguished by grade level. The Sanford Harmony kit was also mentioned as a viable choice during that period but with no additional training or direction provided.

In the interview conducted with the district representative, a similar comment was made regarding the distribution of SEL mini-lessons and slides to instructors. Training that the head counselor but not the teachers mentioned comprised a professional development session centered on trauma, with a specific focus on leveraging COVID-19 as a collective experience. Materials or accompanying support provided for implementation were not mentioned.

Three out of the five instructors stated that the district's primary recommendation to teachers was to show students some grace. As part of this, the district skipped the annual SBAC testing and instructed teachers to issue passing grades to all enrolled students regardless of their

attendance or mastery of content. Archival data supported this as well, explaining that this measure was implemented in response to parent input through discussion forums and surveys. RP6 shared, “What was the term they kept throwing at us? Grace.” RP2 elaborated,

> There was no standardized testing, so that took some pressure off. So, you know, just taking the testing pressures off the teachers and the students. That was helpful, but was that our district? Who knows. Some of the leniencies were more prevalent at that time. Alleviating some of that stress from the teacher and then giving ourselves grace again. That was so freaking sick. The next person who said that I was going to knock him in the head. (RP2)

The district representative, who continued to serve as head counselor, clarified that the district faced significant constraints in terms of available options. While all decisions were made in-house, meaning they did not consult the National Education Association’s (2018) “School Crisis Guide,” the district followed the lead of the health department and local county office of education. Ultimately, it tended to be reactive rather than proactive. The representative explained,

> Initially, there wasn’t a plan for many things around, you know, the shutdown. It definitely was an evolution. [. . .] Counselors who would normally interact with students, perhaps on a daily basis, or at least, you know, in the school setting, now were removed because they weren’t physically around the children. So, in order to support any mental health needs, it was definitely more on a need-to-know basis, like if, let’s say, a parent died or something else happened, what we would call a crisis, right? Or a family member

died, then usually the teacher would find out and share that information with the counselor, and the counselor might follow up with the student. (RP5)

The Zoom platform limited counselors' abilities to perform their customary duties, as it lacked privacy protection during online interactions with pupils. While daily counseling services had to cease, RP5 stated they were replaced with crisis management and clerical duties. She also shared that counselor and school psychologist services were tracking down students who had yet to log in to classes online or passing out equipment and school lunches as needed. In the LCP, students who failed to log in were referenced as 'disengaged' and determined to be the most at-risk. According to RP5, the act of parents or teachers reporting either suicidal ideations or a familial death was the triggering event that led to counselors potentially reaching out and providing the support resources outlined in Chapter 1's Context of the Study.

Teachers were asked about the extent to which the district's resources met the students' needs. Reviews were mixed. Two out of the five teachers responded with "Not much" or "Not at all." Another two teachers conveyed that it was difficult to assess but noted that students did acquire the valuable skill of self-expression. RP2 expressed, "I think they did okay. I don't think it was poor, but I don't know. I mean, everybody was going on the fly."

Due to the participants' perception that the provided supports were insufficient, they subsequently felt a responsibility to compensate. As a result, a recurring sentiment in all the teacher interviews was the growing notion that the district excessively depended on the teachers to adapt or enhance their pedagogy to cater to the social-emotional needs of their students. RP1 stated, "They [the district] didn't know what they were doing." RP2 added, "There wasn't anything officially in place. I think it was just at a teacher's discretion." RPs 3 and 4 affirmed

this notion as well, and RP6 shared, “It was more like, on us, you know?” The apparent discrepancy between the district’s stated plans in the LCP and the teachers’ observations during their training necessitates additional investigation into the breakdown of communication between the board, administration, and teachers, and the failure to implement policies effectively.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to investigate an urban district's approach to addressing the mental health needs of students during and following the COVID-19 lockdown while identifying students' social and emotional experiences through teacher perspectives. Research has revealed the importance of considering much more than intellectual development within the school setting. Social-emotional and academic competencies are best developed in tandem and integrated throughout the core content, classroom, and school culture (CASEL, 2021b). This approach, along with direct instruction that is both age-appropriate and culturally responsive, creates an inclusive learning environment where children facing a cross-section of inequities and marginalization can develop skills to recognize and disrupt long-standing, unjust practices (CASEL, 2021b).

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent shutdown of schools led to a cessation of many SEL supports, resulting in unprecedented levels of behavior issues in the classroom, along with a significantly higher number of youths with mental health disorders (Mazrekaj & De Witte, 2023; Musa & Dergaa, 2022; Panchal et al., 2023). The districts that focused predominantly on academics during and immediately after the lockdown did not adequately prioritize the collective trauma their students experienced. Giving a voice to the stakeholders is necessary to elevate both students' and stakeholders' traumatic experiences and to improve protocols to align more with the whole child framework, identified as a core value of the district in this case study.

To gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences, this case study examined both district-provided and teacher-led interventions and analyzed the trends in data collected from the district's social-emotional survey administered to elementary students before, during, and after the school shutdown.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What were the intermediate-grade students' SEL and culturally responsive instruction experiences during the 2021-22 and 2021-22 school years?
2. What were teachers' perceptions of students' experiences with school-based SEL support in the intermediate-grade level classrooms conducted via Zoom during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years?
3. What were the teachers' perceptions regarding the efficacy of district-provided pre- and post-pandemic SEL protocols?

I utilized a qualitative case-study approach to investigate the experiences and perspectives on SEL and cultural relevance within the online classroom setting and upon returning to campus. I collected data for the study through semi-structured in-person and Zoom interviews to reduce the burden of the time commitment on participants as they were in the middle of the school year at the time of the case study. I used descriptive coding to categorize the qualitative data and answer my research questions. Utilizing inductive analysis, I searched for similarities in teacher responses through continual comparison. Finally, I extracted themes and patterns using in vivo coding. Additionally, to offer a more comprehensive understanding of student experiences, I analyzed student survey data collected over three to six years. I then requested the teachers to validate and elaborate on the patterns seen in the data.

Summary of Findings

The three findings are summarized in the following order: (a) Culturally Responsive Instruction (Gay, 2000, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and SEL (CASEL, 2024) Experiences during Distance Learning, (b) Teacher Perceptions of Student Experiences, and (c) Teacher Perceptions of District Support.

Culturally Responsive Instruction and SEL Experiences During Distance Learning

Before COVID-19, instructors reported receiving limited instruction and believed that the district-supplied resources and materials required substantial supplementation. In light of this discovery, their application of suitable SEL methodologies was remarkable. Based on their extensive expertise and minimal insights gained from staff meetings, all five teacher participants unknowingly implemented several social-emotional strategies to support student mental health. Elements of each of the five CASEL (2024) competencies were present during distance learning in the 2020-21 school year, as demonstrated through student survey results and teacher self-reports. Students exhibited self-awareness through (a) learning to identify and articulate their emotions, (b) having self-efficacy, (c) possessing a growth mindset, (d) expanding interests, and (e) developing a knowledge of and appreciation for other cultures and identities. They demonstrated self-management by (a) utilizing stress management strategies and (b) goal setting. Social awareness was expressed through (a) showing empathy and (b) expressing concern for other people's feelings. Furthermore, they displayed relationship skills through (a) communicating effectively, (b) facilitating positive relationships, (c) advancing cultural competency, (d) engaging in collaborative exercises, and (e) seeking help when needed. Finally,

the responsible decision-making element of the CASEL (2024) competency was present in the student's open-mindedness and sense of curiosity.

The participants facilitated activities including art therapy, journaling, practicing "I" statements, yoga, show-and-tell, team-building games, guided dancing, talent shows, and community circles. Students learned to express themselves even in the most trying of times, shared their lives with their peers, danced, and were silly with friends. Through it all, they established profound connections with their teachers and peers.

Consistent with the SEL approach (CASEL, 2024), teachers incorporated a sequence of culturally relevant lessons that highlighted and informed about the various cultures within the school's demographics derived from a summer program that RP1 attended just prior to the 2020-21 school year. This participant subsequently enhanced and broadened its integration to ensure its availability to other educators at Rockwell who were open to incorporating the lessons into their online instructional sessions. Four out of the five educators who were interviewed explicitly referenced these resources, emphasizing their effects on the students.

The district representative highlighted the long-term negative effects of students' experiences on their mental health, showing that PUSD elementary students surveyed in the third and fourth grades during the 2020–21 and 2021–22 academic years were the same group of students who two years later, in grade five, received the highest number of referrals for suicidal ideations. The teachers and students at Rockwell Elementary who participated in this case study provided small but valuable insights into the pandemic's effects on education.

Teachers' Perceptions of Student SEL Experiences

Cumulatively, the district-implemented protocols did not have a substantial observable effect on the students. Thus, my focus transitioned to evaluating the efficacy of the teacher-implemented supports on the mental health of their students, particularly the participants' proficiency in effective pedagogical techniques and their ability to effectively engage with their students during a traumatic event. These educators were responsible for instructing children experiencing hardships, including but not limited to illness of close family members, parental unemployment, overcrowded living conditions, and food insecurity. Ultimately, the primary objective became to get through the day intact. "But we survived. That's my thing, like, man . . . we survived that . . . and we did ok" (RP2).

To determine the efficacy of teacher support, I evaluated the teachers' perceptions of SEL approaches that the kids received most positively. Based on student involvement, which refers to the number of students who willingly elected to participate and the frequency with which they requested the repetition of a particular activity, teachers uniformly considered activities designed for purposes of community building as the most effective. When they participated, teachers stated that their students demonstrated enthusiasm and even joy, as indicated by smiles and laughter. All teacher participants then implemented various extracurricular activities to the best of their abilities in response to the favorable reaction they received from the students.

Teacher Perceptions of District SEL Support

By the 2019–20 school year, Pemberton Unified School District did not provide teachers and support staff with explicit training or professional development on SEL when COVID-19 forced them to transition to remote learning. The limited resources the teachers reported included

a box of Sanford Harmony booklets and handouts without implementation protocols, and a collection of slides with mini lessons and accompanying videos. The slides and videos were designed to fill the first 10–15 minutes of each class day. To alleviate pressure, PUSD also decided to forgo state testing, and teachers were instructed to extend grace to themselves and their students and ensure the passing of all enrolled students, irrespective of their attendance or level of content mastery.

Beyond the scope of what took place in the day-to-day classroom, district-provided measures, as they directly pertained to the mental health needs of the students, included crisis response upon teacher or parent request. The two most common occurrences that prompted a crisis response were the death of a family member and suicidal ideations. Additional counseling interventions were lacking due to privacy concerns in the Zoom dynamic. Counselors were limited to hosting Zoom spaces where students could log in and engage in non-academic interactions, such as sharing a meal, provided they refrained from addressing mental health issues. Occasionally, the superintendent and head of the district's counseling department sent encouraging video messages via text or email to raise morale. The district representative and the teachers agreed these attempts were ill-received as recipients felt they were tone-deaf. When discussing these measures with teachers, there seemed to be a nuanced understanding of the perceived effect on students' SEL during distance learning.

Discussion

A thorough analysis and data triangulation indicated that the implementation of the protocols specified in the Learning Continuity Plan may not have been fully effective, or the student's social-emotional needs might have exceeded the support offered by the district, as

further evidenced by the fact that teachers were compelled to advance much farther than what was stipulated by the district. Consequently, teachers were saddled with the immense task of sourcing or creating supplementary measures.

Teachers extended their efforts beyond regular school hours to create activities that would engage students and foster a sense of community in an online territory previously foreign to them. They depended exclusively on their or their colleagues' expertise to determine the most appropriate course of action for their students. They taught themselves new programs and searched for stories and virtual experiences on their dime while grappling with trauma, anxiety, social isolation, and intense screen fatigue.

Some surprising findings pertained to the teachers' varied evaluations of the support offered by the district. Given that the teachers were all long-time colleagues from the same school and district, I expected a greater consensus among them. My analysis of the interview data revealed that the teachers' low expectations of the district could have contributed to these varied opinions. Between the high turnover of administrators and the teachers' negative perception of program implementation, these teachers believed they could not rely on institutional support. RP1 explained, "Sometimes I feel they'll have an idea or program, and then it gets pushed to the side after the hype of it is gone, or the novelty of it wears off." When discussing classroom management, RP2 similarly shared, "At the helm, we had no support." Instead, the teachers learned to navigate challenges on their own or with the help of colleagues. Thus, the district's minimal response was expected and not met with a widespread harsh review.

Moreover, PUSD evidently played a role in shaping the knowledge and skills of these educators as the district had employed them since the beginning of their careers. The district had

provided them with instructional tools despite those tools lacking any direct correlation with SEL and mental health. Nevertheless, all the mental and emotional labor fell on the teachers. They utilized a blend of collective knowledge obtained from staff meetings, professional development, colleagues, and their research to construct a roadmap for students to navigate a traumatic time in their lives. The instructors at Rockwell Elementary dealt with the social-emotional needs of their students effectively due to their rich network of support. If they had not been veteran teachers or did not have a network upon which to lean, the narratives of their students would be much darker. With these findings, I formulated my practice recommendations.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on my findings, the incidence of recurring traumatic school situations, and the recent studies on long-term trauma effects of COVID-19 and school closures, I propose separate practice recommendations for teacher credentialing programs, school districts, and teachers. Adopting a proactive rather than reactive approach is imperative, which can be achieved by applying a range of interrelated initiatives across all facets of education.

For Teacher Credentialing Programs

All participants indicated limited prior training or support in either SEL or crisis response protocol. Moving forward, the additional effort and emotional labor of these educators should not become the norm. Therefore, teacher credentialing programs should adopt a more proactive approach to crisis management by incorporating an intense course of study in mental health interventions and crisis management.

Given my findings, high rates of teacher burnout, and an increased number of educators leaving the profession, teacher credentialing programs are not adequately preparing their students

for the realities of the American classroom. In a longitudinal study, Papay et al. (2015) found that 55% of novice teachers within 16 urban school districts quit before COVID-19, exacerbating classroom issues and resulting in mass teacher burnout (Pressley & Ha., 2022). Teachers, particularly in high-poverty and high-minority schools, are expected to be educators, counselors, intervention specialists, entertainers, and providers. That workload and perceived lack of support can be crippling.

Currently, guidelines and protocols are already established and ready for implementation. With the increasing prevalence of traumatic events in school settings, the National Education Association developed a guide in 2018 that outlines what to do in a crisis. It provides input guidance on how to prevent incidents and implement harm-reduction strategies. I propose the inclusion of this guide or comparable material in the curriculum of educator preparation programs. In addition, aspiring educators should receive training in mental health interventions. Although teachers would not be trained to diagnose psychological disorders, it is still important to identify potential issues, understand when to refer students to mental health professionals, and acquire techniques to promote their students' day-to-day mental and emotional well-being.

For School Districts

The findings of this case study support the existing literature regarding the extent of trauma endured by marginalized populations, often in urban elementary schools, which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants acknowledged increased concerns about the mental well-being of their students after directly observing their students' circumstances during remote learning. Expecting all students to flourish and succeed under such

difficult conditions is inevitably leading to the sharp rise of mental health problems among the younger generations we are presently witnessing (Panchal et al., 2023).

Therefore, my initial recommendation for public school districts is to adopt a trauma-informed, social justice approach to new-hire training. School districts are uniquely positioned to understand the specific needs of their stakeholders and thus adequately prepare new hires to support their students. There has been a new emergence of research on trauma-informed pedagogy (TIP) (Cramer, 2018). TIP aims to raise awareness of the effects of poverty and historical marginalization and equip educators with tools to teach at-risk students more effectively. By recognizing and addressing the mental health of children who deal with chronic stress in these conditions, educators can foster stronger relationships and establish a safer learning environment. (Cramer, 2018)

Current research indicates that the implementation of a Trauma-Informed Approach or the Trauma-Informed Positive Education model has a favorable influence on elementary students (Brunzell et al., 2019; Wall, 2021). By training teachers in these models, they can learn to recognize when a student is not advancing academically due to trauma or when they are struggling to connect socially with peers, and they will have the tools to address these student issues (Brunzell et al., 2019). Moreover, using these approaches, students can cultivate strong self-regulation abilities, acquire self-advocacy skills, and grow self-confidence (Wall, 2021).

A secondary suggestion I have for school districts is to establish a structured two-year mentorship program for new hires to help them assimilate into the unique circumstances of an urban school district with greater ease. This would be an on-site supplement to the induction program that state credentialing programs may occasionally mandate. By demonstrating effective

teaching practices, adapting strategies to address the mentee's current challenges, and offering timely feedback to enhance any facet of instruction—including but not limited to classroom management, pedagogy, and the school environment—mentors are perfectly positioned to assist novice educators.

The final district recommendation is to provide regular networking opportunities to teacher practitioners. Considering the effects of the collegial support of veteran teachers identified in this case study, other Title I schools (CDE, 2023) should try to build similar support networks. One potential approach is to facilitate grade-level forums according to inquiries submitted by the teachers themselves to create space for the formation of a district-wide network of seasoned educators and establish a foundation for mutual support among peers.

Future Study Recommendations

Considering the constraints and limitations of this case study, further research is warranted. It would be beneficial to conduct interviews directly with the affected children to obtain more comprehensive data. Additionally, questioning administrators to ascertain their involvement in the process would contribute to the current data. Furthermore, given that experts continue to assert that the effects of COVID-19 and school closures will persist for an extended period, it would be beneficial to conduct a longitudinal study that compares children who attended online school during the later years of high school with children in grades two through five. Lastly, given the disparity between the Learning Continuity Plan at the district level and its implementation in the classroom, additional investigation is required to evaluate the execution of the plan. Gaining an understanding of the transition from the boardroom to the classroom would offer insights into effectively executing policies in similar settings.

Reflection

As the disciplines of education and psychology progress, it becomes increasingly evident that they share a substantial amount of common ground. As a graduate of an urban school and currently working at another, I know that many students are grappling with unimaginable challenges. The school closures and the effects of COVID-19 only worsened the situation, highlighting the urgent need for us to confront a looming issue directly, especially since particular groups of children require additional support and attention from us. Equity does not revolve around achieving equality but rather focuses on providing resources that enhance individuals' chances of achieving success. One key realization I have made during this dissertation process is that the execution of an idea is more important than the strength or quality of one's conviction, ensuring that actions align with words.

One striking reminder from my research is the profound and transformative effect an excellent educator can have. Teaching is commonly regarded as a calling rather than a career. This suggests that teaching, which involves a significant amount of responsibility, requires a specific kind of individual, and not everyone possesses the determination or capacity to endure it. This outcome is the culmination of numerous contributing factors; however, ultimately, it should not be the case at all. Students are teachers' priority, and as the nature of their job evolves, their access to suitable resources must evolve accordingly. Just like a merchant evaluates a task and selects the appropriate tool, a teacher should be able to do the same. Individuals with extensive knowledge and expertise in their field should be acknowledged and consulted when making decisions related to their profession.

APPENDIX A

Collaborative, Academic, Social and Emotional Learning classroom strategy checklist

To be discussed in the interview:

- Which of the following evidence-based SEL strategies did you utilize on a regular basis pre-COVID?
- Which did you implement to address the needs of your students once the shift to online learning occurred?

SEL in the Classroom	Pre-COVID	During COVID
I use evidence-based approach to teach social and emotional skills in a sequenced, active, focused and explicit way on a regular schedule.		
I teach SEL in a way that is developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive for my students.		
My students lead routines, share their perspectives, and reflect on their experiences during SEL instruction.		
SEL standards or goals are embedded into my academic lessons.		
Students make connections between SEL and what we're learning and initiate reflection and discussion.		
I foster academic mindsets by helping students set goals, commending academic risk-taking and incremental progress, showing students how to correct mistakes, and framing struggle as a key part of the process of learning.		
I select content and plan instruction that links to students' lived experiences and frames of reference and by anticipating support that individuals may need to access content and participate fully.		
I design learning activities that allow students to explore issues that are important to them and co-create solutions to improve the classroom, school, or community.		
Class time is balanced with periods of teacher-led instruction, student talk and interaction, and time to work/reflect alone.		
I prepare students to engage in classroom discussions by actively listening to their peers, affirming and respectfully challenging each other's ideas, and formulating questions.		
I ask open-ended questions to surface student thinking and probe students to elaborate on their response.		
I use collaborative structures that require students to communicate, cooperate, share responsibility, monitor that all ideas are heard, and problem-solve.		
Students reflect on what made their collective work successful and or challenging and plan for their improvement.		
My class has co-developed shared agreements for how we will treat one another, and we check in regularly about how we are living by our shared agreements.		

Students know, follow, initiate, and provide input and feedback on our regular classroom routines and procedures.		
I communicate that I appreciate each student as an individual and am interested in knowing them.		
I check in and follow up with students about their perspectives and concerns.		
I facilitate class meetings, circles, or other intentional community-building activities to cultivate a culture of personal connection, mutual support, and belonging.		
I vary student grouping so that each student gets to know and work with everyone else.		
My classroom environment, activities, and interactions affirm students' diverse identities and cultures. We share and learn about each other's lives and backgrounds.		
I teach, model, and reinforce language and strategies that help students to express empathy, resolve conflicts, repair harm, self-reflect, and self-regulate.		
When classroom agreements are breached, I respond in a way that is discreet, developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and restorative (such as using empathetic listening "I" statements, and open-ended questions).		

APPENDIX B

Interview Question Matrix

Interview Question for TEACHERS who taught full time during distance learning	**Research Question 1** What were the teachers' perceptions regarding the efficacy of district-provided pre- and post-pandemic SEL protocols?	**Research Question 2** What were the SEL and culturally responsive instruction experiences of intermediate-grade students during the 2020–21 and 2021–22 school years?	**Research Question 3** What were the teacher perceptions of student experiences of school SEL supports in the Zoom classroom dynamic of intermediate grades during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years?
What types of SEL programs did the District provide training and materials on prior to the pandemic?	X		
What types of additional supports were implemented in response to COVID-19?	X	X	
What types of additional supports were implemented in response to the shift to distance learning?			
To what degree do you feel the district provided SEL protocols supported the needs of the students?	X		

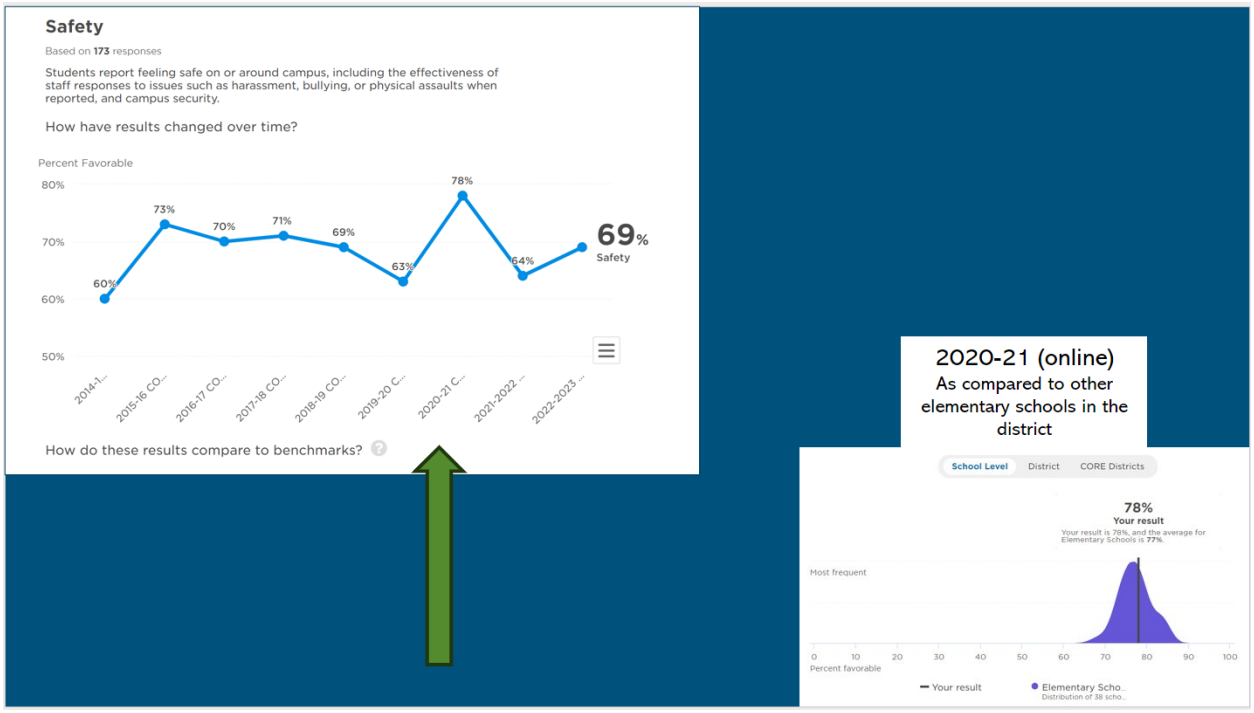
From the list of evidence based SEL markers previously provided, which approaches were you utilizing during distance learning? Where did you learn about these approaches?		X	
In your opinion, which approaches were most well received by the students? How did you come to this determination?			X
Being a teacher in a diverse community, it has become common practice to utilize culturally responsive instructional approaches. How were you able to maintain them while teaching over zoom?		X	
After reviewing the CORE survey data from the years prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, please share your perspective on the findings regarding Section X. What's your take away?			X

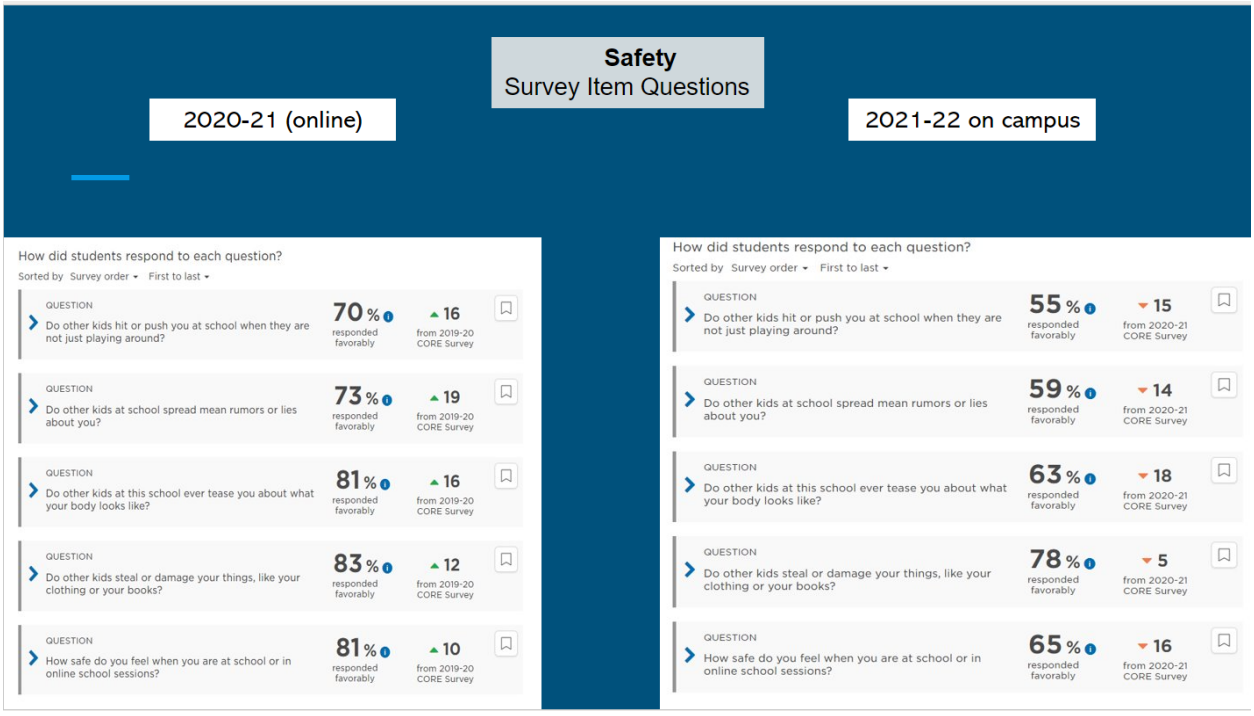
Interview questions for a PRINCIPAL at a public school during the shut down			
Can you describe the steps taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at your school? How did the guidelines provided by National Education Association affect these actions your school took?	References for Background Information		
To what degree were you able to make decisions regarding how to address the mental health needs of your students?			
Interview questions for DISTRICT PERSONNEL of the public school during the shut down			
Describe how you and your team determined the best course of action to meet the needs of the diverse student body within your district upon being informed schools were being shut down.			

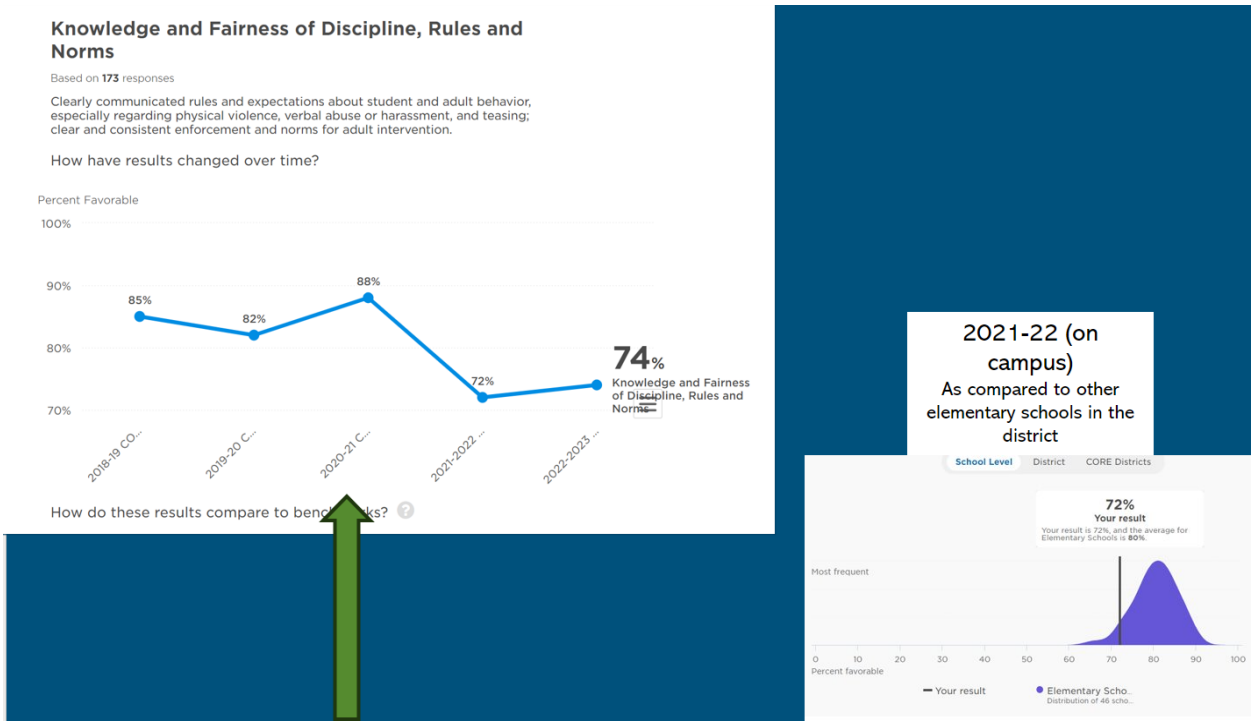
How did the guidelines provided by National Education Association affect these actions your school took?			
Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently?			

APPENDIX C

District's Student Survey Data Trends (used with permission)

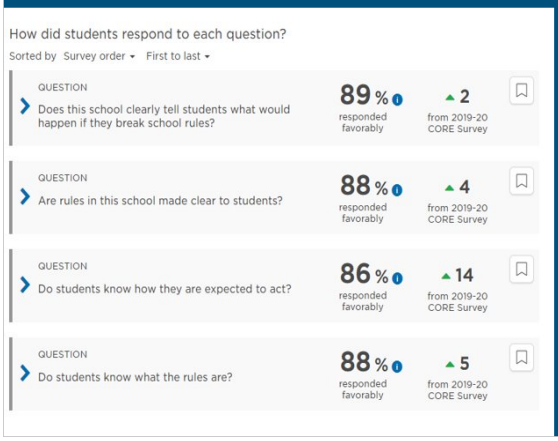




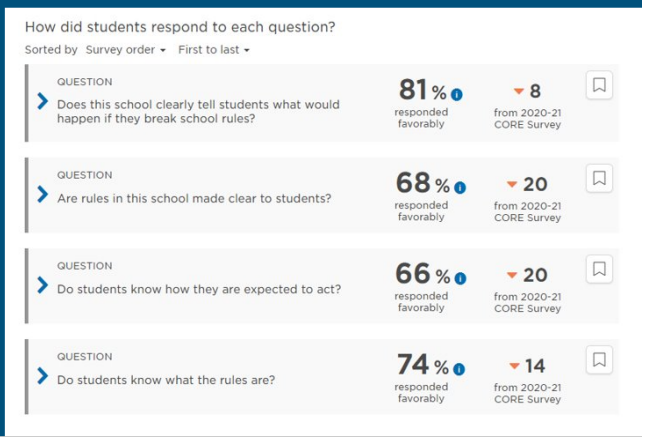


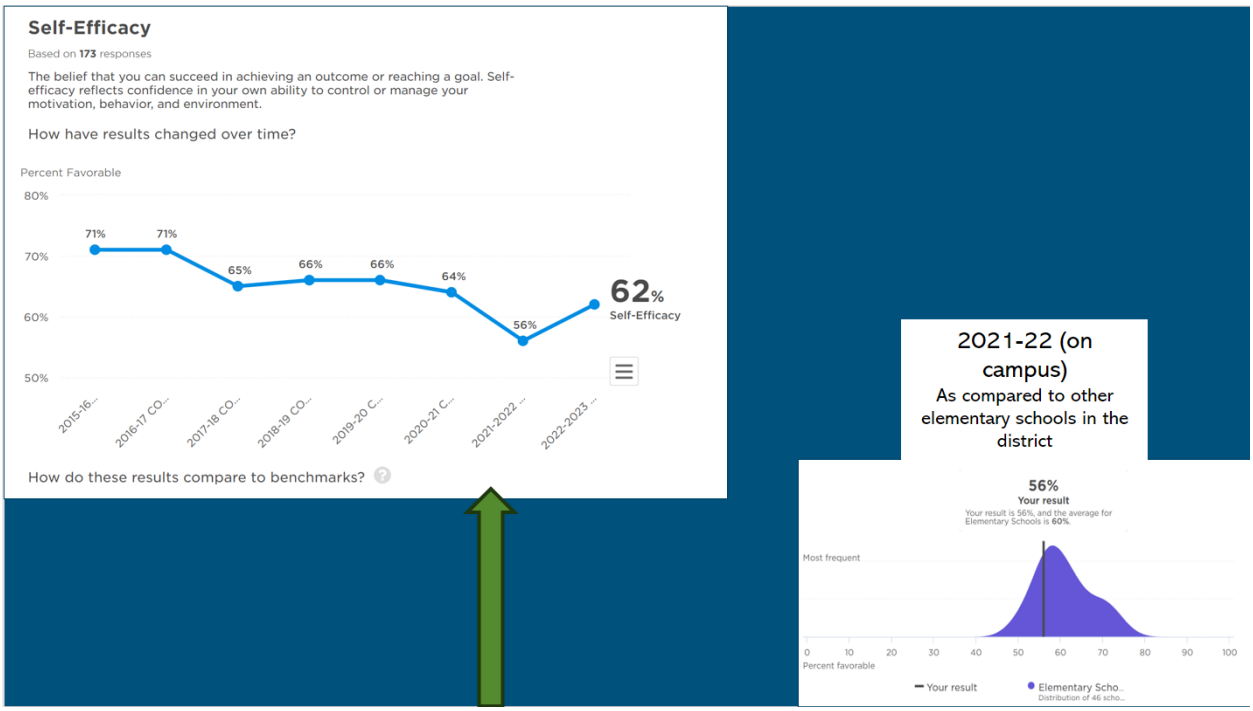
Knowledge and Fairness
Survey Item Questions

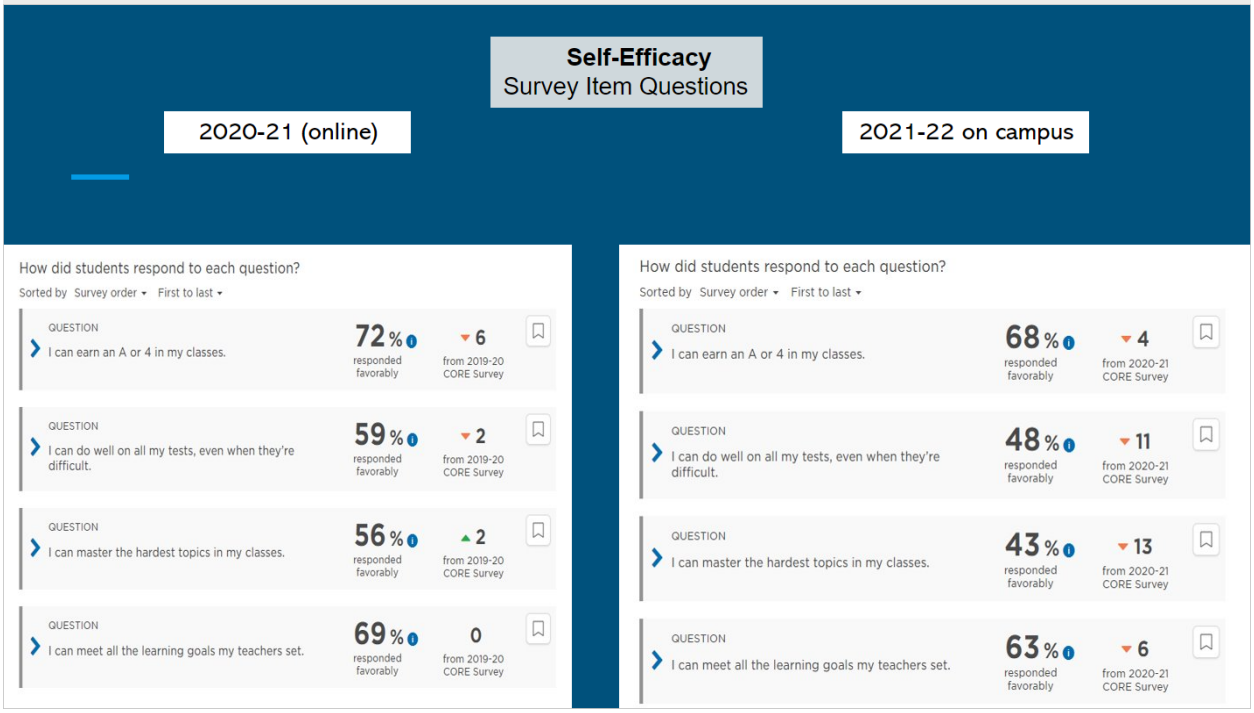
2020-21 (online)



2021-22 on campus




Self-Efficacy
Based on 173 responses
The belief that you can succeed in achieving an outcome or reaching a goal. Self-efficacy reflects confidence in your own ability to control or manage your motivation, behavior, and environment.
How have results changed over time?
Percent Favorable
80%
70%
60%
50%
71%
71%
65%
66%
66%
64%
56%
62%
Self-Efficacy
2015-16...
2016-17 CO...
2017-18 CO...
2018-19 CO...
2019-20 C...
2020-21 C...
2021-2022 ...
2022-2023 ...
How do these results compare to benchmarks?
2021-22 (on campus)
As compared to other elementary schools in the district
56%
Your result
Your result is 56%, and the average for Elementary Schools is 60%.
Most frequent
0
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
80
90
100
Percent favorable
Your result
Elementary Scho...
Distribution of 46 scho...


Self-Efficacy
Survey Item Questions
2020-21 (online)
2021-22 on campus
How did students respond to each question?
Sorted by Survey order First to last
QUESTION
I can earn an A or 4 in my classes.
72% responded favorably
6 from 2019-20 CORE Survey
QUESTION
I can do well on all my tests, even when they're difficult.
59% responded favorably
2 from 2019-20 CORE Survey
QUESTION
I can master the hardest topics in my classes.
56% responded favorably
2 from 2019-20 CORE Survey
QUESTION
I can meet all the learning goals my teachers set.
69% responded favorably
0 from 2019-20 CORE Survey
How did students respond to each question?
Sorted by Survey order First to last
QUESTION
I can earn an A or 4 in my classes.
68% responded favorably
4 from 2020-21 CORE Survey
QUESTION
I can do well on all my tests, even when they're difficult.
48% responded favorably
11 from 2020-21 CORE Survey
QUESTION
I can master the hardest topics in my classes.
43% responded favorably
13 from 2020-21 CORE Survey
QUESTION
I can meet all the learning goals my teachers set.
63% responded favorably
6 from 2020-21 CORE Survey

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