Peabody College Capstone Project

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How Teacher Perceptions Influence Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Program Implementation

About the Authors

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Executive Summary

In 2018, an urban district in the Southeastern United States, identified for this study as Manchester City Schools (MCS), developed a strategic plan under the newly hired superintendent. This strategic plan established a district road map centered around four pillars: Student Success, Team Excellence, Stakeholder Trust, and Effective Systems and Planning. A key strategy of the new superintendent's vision for Student Success included the development of district-wide Social Emotional Learning (SEL) supports, for which there is an expanding body of research establishing it as a vital component of academic achievement and later success in life (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, & Schellinger, 2011). MCS partnered with our project team in a quest to discern how implementation factors vary across contexts and how these variations influence the implementation of an SEL initiative. We investigated the conditions within MCS in relation to a conceptual framework that focused on the features of SEL, extant literature on program implementation, and existing research on SEL program implementation more specifically. The thread throughout this research is undergirded by Firestone's (1989) widely cited research around *will* and *capacity* and their impact on program implementation and Brackett et al.'s (2012) work around the role of teachers' perceptions of *comfort*, *commitment*, and *culture* on SEL program implementation in particular. In response, we developed the following project question to guide our work:

> How do teacher perceptions of instructional contexts and organizational capacity influence readiness for SEL program implementation?

To address this project question, our team conducted a qualitative study involving semi-structured interviews of teachers and administrators in six elementary schools and four high schools. We interviewed district staff

in the newly created SEL Department, conducted observations across the district, and performed a document analysis of relevant district and school policies, reports, and communications. Through a rigorous method of data analysis and coding, themes and patterns emerged. After integrating all elements of this qualitative study, our project team identified the following findings consistent with Brackett et al.'s work around SEL program implementation and teachers' perceptions of *comfort*, *commitment* and *culture*:

Finding 1

MCS educators are *committed* to implementing an SEL initiative, in order to support their students, though their levels of *comfort* vary. There was a resounding message of *commitment* to the students and the community evident across the schools studied. Additionally, there was a pervasive sense of hope communicated when educators referred to the newly appointed superintendent. MCS educators recognize the significant obstacles their students face and believe there is an urgency for addressing SEL. Taken together, these beliefs demonstrate a *commitment* to implement an SEL initiative. *Commitment* is an essential element in both initiating and sustaining

initiatives (Firestone, 1989; Brackett et al., 2012).

Finding 2

Manchester educators vary with respect to their *comfort* with SEL and SEL initiatives. Educators interviewed described SEL in a variety of ways that did not demonstrate a singular definition of or conceptual framework for SEL in MCS. Additionally, the majority of educators reported having minimal to no training in the components of SEL or how to integrate SEL into current classroom practices. Teachers emphasized the need for professional development to be intentional, well-planned, and led by individuals with a vested interest in the school district and SEL.

Finding 3

Elementary educators have a greater level of *comfort* with SEL and implementation of SEL initiatives than secondary educators. Elementary educators and high school educators alike communicated an urgency to address SEL early in a student's school career. High school teachers and administrators communicated a concern with the organizational structures at the high school level (i.e.,

focus on graduation requirements, areas of teacher certification, etc.) and suggested that SEL would instead be better addressed by outside counselors rather than high school teachers. Conversely, many elementary educators suggested that SEL falls within the scope of their role but simultaneously questioned their *capacity* to assume this responsibility amidst other priorities.

Finding 4

The *culture* of churn of Manchester City Schools presents a challenge for educators who are *committed* to taking on an SEL initiative, though there are some bright spots. Responses from MCS educators illustrated a perception of ongoing changes in district priorities and initiatives. This churn has had a negative impact on the *culture* of MCS and educator's trust in MCS leaders and potential new initiatives. Notably, many educators expressed hope in the new superintendent and her strategic plan and it seems that MCS is poised to form a more stable environment that could promote the roll-out of an SEL initiative. MCS educators suggested that SEL programming could best be implemented by integrating into existing initiatives.

Finding 5

MCS educators are invested in shaping SEL initiatives at the school and district levels. MCS educators expressed a clear interest in having a voice in decisions that shape district initiatives. Their input could be used to tailor the SEL work to the unique conditions of their respective schools. The insights gained through this study offer a blueprint to inform and guide district leaders in next steps.

Based on these findings, we make the following recommendations to MCS.

Recommendation 1

Administer the survey designed as a product of this study as a means to gain input from stakeholders and generate support for the SEL initiative.
Because change begins at the smallest unit (a teacher within a school), it is crucial for MCS to begin implementation of initiatives by understanding educators' perspectives on the pending changes. The proposed survey in Appendix F was designed with Brackett et al.'s (2012) research on *commitment*, *comfort* and *culture* at the fore. MCS may use the data from the survey to determine where educators stand in

relation to each of the 3 C's that form the foundation for successful implementation of a new initiative.

Recommendation 2

Begin implementation of an SEL initiative at the elementary school level. Based on teacher perceptions in MCS, existing organizational structures at the elementary and high school levels, and literature around SEL outcomes, it is recommended that MCS prioritize and target elementary schools for the initial phases of SEL implementation.

Recommendation 3

Ground the definition of SEL and the vision for SEL implementation in existing district priorities and initiatives. MCS can tap into educators' *commitment* to implement SEL programming by supporting their *capacity* to do so. SEL can best be implemented when integrated into existing initiatives (e.g., PBIS, character education) rather than presented as a separate stand-alone approach. Implementation will be enhanced by communicating the purpose of SEL and the connection between SEL and current district priorities addressing academic achievement and chronic absenteeism.

Recommendation 4

Follow the steps of the Quality Implementation Tool (QIT) to support a successful implementation of the SEL initiative. Across many fields of study there are similar steps in the implementation process. Awareness of and adherence to a process such as the QIT (Meyers et al., 2012) shifts the perception and function of initiative implementation from being random and chaotic to a series of steps that can be enacted. Within the context of this study, The QIT was selected because it is grounded in a distributed leadership model that is likely to leverage MCS educators' *commitment* to an SEL initiative. Additionally, the QIT models extant research that finds initiatives are more likely to succeed and to sustain when those directly involved in implementing them build capacity through engagement in the design process (McLaughlin, 1990). It is recommended that MCS follow the six ordered steps the QIT to support the complex and dynamic nature of implementation: assemble an implementation team, work to create collaborative conditions to generate broad support for the initiative, develop an implementation plan, receive technical training and assistance, foster practitioner and developer collaboration, and evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation.

Introduction

Attending to the non-cognitive factors of student development is crucial to the success of all students. Educators inherently know that it will take more than the ability to read, write, and compute for students to succeed personally, intellectually, and professionally. An expanding body of evidence demonstrates that students who receive social and emotional programming exhibit improved academic performance, social and emotional skills, attitudes, and behavior (Belfield, Bowden, Klapp, Levin, Shand, & Zander, 2015; Boncu, Costea, & Minulescu, 2017; Durlak et al., 2011). At the turn of the 21st century, school districts across the country are increasingly seeking techniques to serve the broader purpose of education to better prepare students to meet the intensifying demands for succeeding in work, life, and citizenship (OECD, 2018).

Notably, in the complex system of education, new initiatives are not easily implemented with success. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) initiatives are no different. For school districts, having an interest in implementing an SEL initiative is insufficient. The extant research suggests that SEL programming must be well-planned and well-implemented in order to improve the educational and life outcomes of students (Bierman, Coie, Dodge, Greenberg, Lochman, McMahon, Pinderhughes, 2010; Durlak et al., 2011). Therefore, we pivot our attention towards the literature surrounding SEL and the implementation factors that lead to optimum effectiveness (Firestone, 1989; McLaughlin, 1990; Meyers, Durlak, & Wandersman, 2012). By shining a spotlight on structural and organizational elements that will affect implementation, we seek to highlight how Manchester City Schools can work to shape the policies and culture to support educators in the successful roll-out of the SEL initiative in Manchester City Schools.

Request for Assistance and Project Question

In a Request for Assistance to Vanderbilt's Peabody College, Manchester City Schools desired insight into the status of implementation of its new SEL initiative—their new Superintendent's first major initiative. In their strategic plan, the district names Student Success as one of its four pillars, alongside Team Excellence, Stakeholder Trust, and Systems and Planning. Social Emotional Learning is one of five components of the district's School Support Framework, which is one of MCS's five strategies for achieving the Student Success pillar. Through our partnership on this project, MCS hoped to learn lessons that would guide their next steps with SEL program implementation.

Specifically, MCS initially hoped to learn about early-stage program implementation, including teacher perceptions of the SEL initiative, the effectiveness of professional development, and fidelity of implementation of new policies and practices around SEL. However, initial engagement with MCS around their needs for this project revealed that their implementation was in the earliest of stages. At the time of our study, their Department of Social Emotional Learning and its leader were so new that professional development and the development of policies and practices had not yet occurred to the extent originally hoped at the time of the request for assistance.

Thus, MCS and our project team ultimately decided that exploration of teacher perceptions, organizational capacity, and their relationship to readiness for SEL program implementation would provide useful information as MCS prepared for full implementation. Our project question evolved into the following:

> How do teacher perceptions of instructional contexts and organizational capacity influence readiness for SEL program implementation?

Conceptual Framework

Program Implementation

Converging evidence suggests that program implementation matters-- it increases the chance of program effectiveness and improved outcomes for participants (Durlak and Dupree, 2008). Most research frameworks on program implementation describe the various facets of implementation in terms of slight variations on Rogers' (2003) classic model that includes: dissemination (conveying information about the existence of an innovation to potentially interested parties); adoption (an explicit decision by a local unit or organization to try the innovation); implementation (executing the innovation effectively when it is put in place); evaluation (assessing how well the innovation achieved its intended goals); and institutionalization (the unit incorporates the innovation into its continuing practices). Finally, a meta-analysis of program implementation finds that in order to be successful, innovations must be clearly designed, continuously monitored and evaluated, and modified or adapted to fit the host setting (Meyers et al., 2012).

Our inquiry was concerned with both program implementation (of any program) and implementation of Social Emotional Learning specifically. We regard program implementation as being dependent on both the *willingness* and the *capacity* of individuals and organizations to undertake the successful enactment of an initiative (Firestone, 1989). When planning for implementation, organizations should consider both the will of the dominant coalition as well as the perspective they are likely to take on the reform. Whereas *will* is based on *commitment*, *capacity* refers to the ability of an organization to carry out an innovation or a reform. *Capacity* includes several dimensions such as the mobilization of personnel, the alignment of resources, and the establishment of linkages with schools (Firestone, 1989). Because schools are often loosely-coupled organizations where teachers work in isolation from each other and often work in separate buildings from district officials, establishing relational ties within schools and between schools and the district is paramount. McLaughlin (1990) adds that change happens at the smallest unit (teachers within each school) and that will for change must extend

to the district and state levels. In her RAND study, McLaughlin (1990) finds that educational methods that involve and build the capacity of teachers, project scope and structure are crucial elements of capacity that affect the success of implementation. Teachers are more likely to engage productively and to implement an initiative with fidelity when they have been involved in designing the scope and structure of the initiative and when their capacity is built directly to implement it.

Meyers and his colleagues (2012) leveraged a meta-analysis of 25 implementation frameworks rooted in implementation research to design a Quality Implementation Tool (QIT). See Figure 1. The QIT posits that successful implementation has six ordered steps that an organization should consider when implementing a new initiative. First, decide on an implementation team. Second, work to create collaborative conditions that engender community-wide support for the new initiative or innovation. Third, develop an implementation plan. Fourth, receive technical training and assistance. Fifth, foster practitioner and developer collaboration. Sixth, evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation.

Quality Implementation Tool
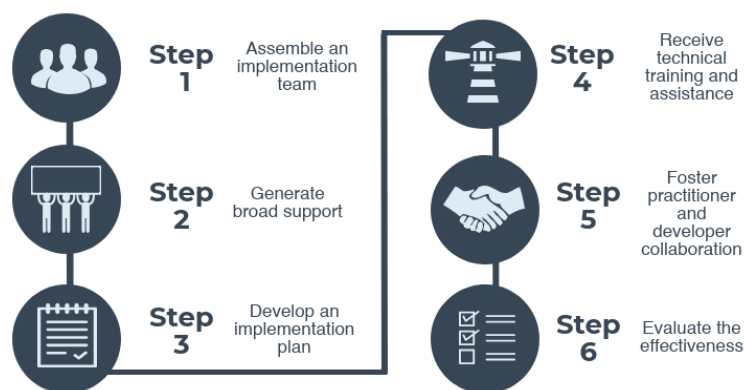
Meyers, D. C., Durlak, J. A., & Wandersman, A. (2012)

Figure 1

Social Emotional Learning

What is Social Emotional Learning (SEL)?

While there is no singular definition of social emotional learning or the associated social emotional skills in the literature, there is considerable conceptual overlay in defining the skills. The framework defining social emotional skills achieved by the OECD
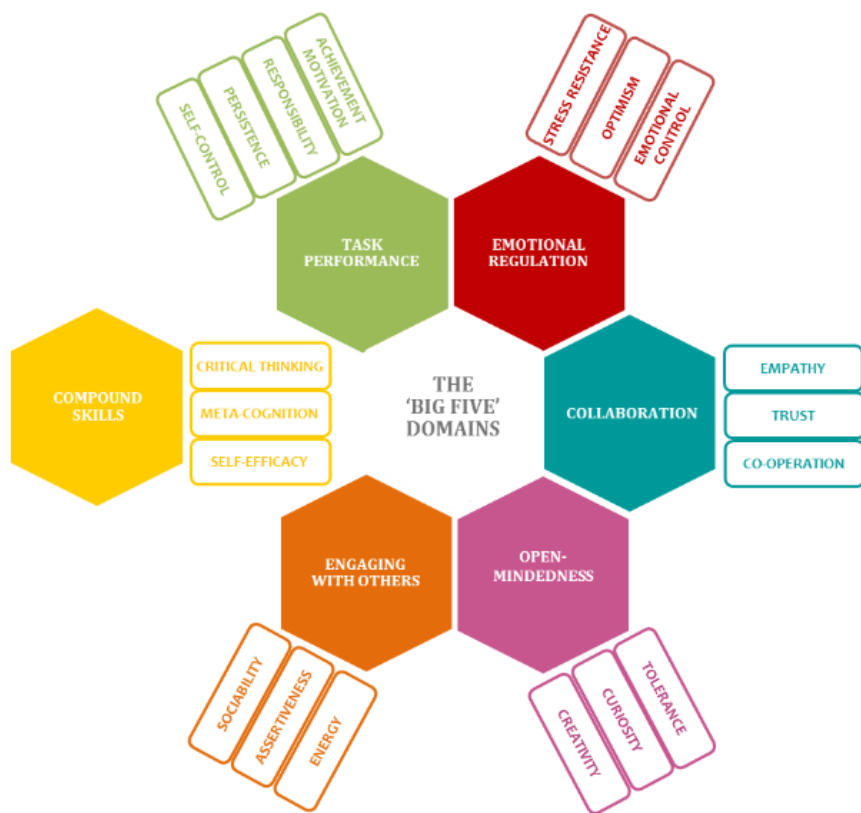
Figure 2

has achieved general acceptance. See Figure 2 and Table 1 (Appendix A) taken from the 2018 OECD Social and Emotional Skills Report for an overview of the "Big Five" domains and three compound skills. The "Big Five" domains of social emotional skills are task performance (achievement motivation, responsibility, self-control, and persistence); emotional regulation (stress, resistance, optimism, and emotional control); collaboration (empathy, trust, and cooperation);

open-mindedness (curiosity, trust, and creativity); and engaging with others (sociability, assertiveness, and energy). The three compound skills are critical thinking, meta-cognition, and self efficacy. Scholars agree that social emotional skills are learnable and that SEL is comprised of the development of these social emotional skills (OECD, 2018).

What are the benefits of SEL?

Child development professionals across disciplines emphasize the importance of the development of social and emotional skills to the well being of children (Darling-Churchill and Lipman, 2016).

In fact, the development of social emotional skills in youth is associated with several positive life outcomes beyond childhood. (OECD, 2018)

When young children are able to develop prosocial relationships, feel confident in themselves, and express and manage their emotions, they are more likely to be prepared to learn and succeed in school. Scholars also

note that prolonged exposure to SEL can have notable "preventive effects on the population-level rates of aggression, social competence, and academic engagement" (Bierman, et al., 2010) as well as behavior problems in general. Further, SEL can enhance school climate by making it feel more caring to students, thereby working to lessen high rates of chronic absenteeism (Schanzenbach, Bauer, and Mumford, 2016). In addition, mental and physical health as well as gains in subjective well-being are associated with social emotional skill development. Mental health issues of interest here include psychological problems faced by youth due to family-related concerns (i.e., cohesion, communication, or parental practices), school environment, and personal resources (Boncu, 2017). See Figure 3.

Specfically, the brains of children who are raised in poverty develop differently than their more affluent peers and SEL programming is instrumental in closing this gap (Sowell and Noble, 2015). Other benefits include an estimation that the benefits of SEL exceed the cost 11 to 1 on average (Durlak, Weissberg, et al., 2011). Finally, in a world where "the rolling processes of automation, hollowing out jobs, particularly for routine tasks,

Belfield, Bowden, Klapp, Levin, Shand & Zander, 2015; Bierman, Dodge, Greenberg, Lochman, McMahon, & Pinderhughes, 2010; Boncu, Costea, and Minulescu, 2017; Brackett, Rivers, Reyes & Salovey, 2012; Darling-Churchill and Lippman, 2016; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor &Shellinger, 2011; Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredericks & Resnik, 2003; Raver, 2002

Figure 3

have radically altered the nature of work and life and thus the skills that are needed for success" (OECD, 2018), the development of social emotional skills is a necessary component of preparing students to lead successful lives that are filled with human interaction, whether locally or globally.

Implementation of SEL

Social emotional learning has been implemented successfully in multiple

educational settings, including urban, suburban, and rural settings (Durlak et al., 2011). As a prominent prevention program, SEL can be a viable factor in decreasing mental health challenges among students. Programs included in the core curriculum tend to be more successful than add-ons or after-school programs (Boncu et al., 2017), and integrating SEL into the curriculum with academic standards can be an effective approach for addressing the need to uphold both standards-based accountability and social emotional skill development (Jones, Brown, Hoglund, Aber, and La Greca, 2010). Notably, some SEL literature identifies elementary schools as representing an optimum age to target SEL programming (Boncu et al., 2017).

Teacher Perceptions and Implementation of SEL

Teacher perceptions of SEL matter in implementation of SEL initiatives. The portion of our conceptual framework around teacher perceptions and implementation of SEL is rooted in research around teacher beliefs and social emotional learning (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, and Salovey, 2012). As the leaders in the classroom, teacher beliefs about SEL can have an impact on student outcomes, including those associated with the benefits of SEL described earlier. Specifically, teachers'

perceptions of *comfort, commitment*, and *culture* are important (Brackett et al., 2012). *Comfort* is used to describe a teacher's sense of confidence in teaching SEL, and it is linked to fidelity factors such as teachers' adherence to program protocol, classroom management during lessons, continued usage of a program, and teacher attitudes about the importance and difficulty associated with implementation of new programs. *Commitment* describes teachers' desires to participate in SEL training and teaching. This *commitment* includes their willingness to learn through professional development. Professional development related to new programs is linked to increased likelihood of implementation. (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, and Salovey, 2012).

Further, programmatic success relies on collective *commitment* to professional development, including a shared vision. Teacher *commitment* to learning about SEL likely also plays a role in the teacher's ability to model SEL skills for children. *Culture* is school wide support for SEL. It is influenced by a core component of school *culture*—the school leader. Both adoption of programs and their continuation is influenced by the

leader, and the effects of the intervention are strongest when the leader is supportive and implementation quality is high.

These three domains, or three C's, can influence implementation of SEL, specifically program delivery and thus, outcomes for students. In a study (Brackett et al., 2012) of teachers' *comfort*, *commitment*, and perceptions of school *culture*, these three domains were linked to teacher perceptions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization of students, personal accomplishment, adaptive self-efficacy (i.e., modification of teaching practices to better meet the needs of students), and support of administration for teachers. In the same study (Brackett et al., 2012), *comfort*, *commitment* and *culture* were linked to teacher perceptions associated with implementation of *The RULER Approach*, an evidence-based SEL program. The RULER Approach integrates SEL into core subject areas and teaches kids to *recognize* emotions, *understand* their causes and consequences, *label* emotions, *express* them appropriately, and *regulate* them effectively. *Comfort*, *commitment*, and *culture* were linked to program buy-in, goodness of fit, openness to programming, confidence, principal support of program, program

effectiveness, teacher enjoyment, student enjoyment, and implementation quality with The RULER Approach.

The Brackett et al. (2012) study also found that greater *comfort* and *commitment* were associated with a greater sense of teacher accomplishment. Higher *comfort* was associated with lower depersonalization of students. Higher *culture* scores were linked to lower emotional exhaustion and higher administrative support for teachers. Key findings around the implementation of The RULER Approach were that *comfort* was positively correlated with program buy-in, year-end confidence in teaching the program, perceived program effectiveness, and teacher openness to the program. *Commitment* had positive correlations with, buy-in, goodness of fit, and program effectiveness. *Culture* correlated positively with principal support of the program.

In another study (Collie, Shapka, and Perry, 2012), teachers' level of *comfort* with implementation of SEL had the most powerful impact on teachers' levels of stress, sense of efficacy, and job satisfaction.

In essence, teacher perceptions of SEL can influence their implementation of SEL due to varying levels of comfort, commitment, and perceptions of school culture. *(Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, and Salovey, 2012)*

School leaders and program developers can use measures of teacher perceptions to assess readiness for implementation of SEL programming and then determine timing, type and dosage of training needed for successful implementation (Collie, Martin, Nassar, and Roberts, 2018).

Linking Program Implementation with Implementation of SEL

Firestone's (1989) *will* and *capacity* and Brackett et al.'s (2012) *comfort*, *commitment*, and *culture* are related. Firestone's assertion that *will* and *capacity* matter is supported and expounded upon by Brackett et al.'s research on *comfort*, *commitment*, and *culture*.

Professional development emerges as an important link between *will* and *capacity* with the desire (*will*) to engage in professional development having the ability to influence the *comfort* of the teachers in implementing the initiative, *culture* in the form of the development of the school leader, and thus *capacity* (the wherewithal to carry the initiative out).

Contextual Analysis

Manchester: City and Suburbs by the numbers

Manchester, a pseudonym for a large city in the southeast United States, has a population of 210,710 (US Census Bureau, 2013). The Manchester-Hoister Metro Statistical Area has a population of 1,313,105, includes ¼ of the population of the state and is the 49th most populous area in the United States (US Census Bureau, 2013). Hoister, the largest of the surrounding suburbs, has a population of 84,920. Seventy-two percent of the population of Hoister identifies as White, 17.6% is African American, 5.8% is recorded as Latino and other population groups, such as American Indian and Asian make up less than 1% each of its population (US Census Bureau). The median household income in Hoister is $81,038 and 6.5% of the population reports incomes below the poverty line (US Census Bureau, 2013). Conversely, in Manchester City, 24.3% of residents are White, 72.0% identify as African American, 3.4% are Latino and less than 1% of residents identify as American Indian or Asian (US Census Bureau, 2013). Median household income in Manchester City is $33,770. Twenty-four percent of the

population reported incomes below the poverty line, including 41.9% of those under the age of 18 (US Census Bureau, 2013). Ninety-five percent of students served by Manchester City Schools (MCS) are African American, 4% are Latino and 1% are White. Eighty-eight percent of students served qualify for free or reduced lunch. When compared with the surrounding suburbs, students served by Manchester City Schools are overwhelmingly more likely to identify as students of color and to live in poverty.

The mission of Manchester City Schools (MCS) is to "guide all students to achieve excellence in a safe and secure environment". Although MCS was founded in 1874 with the opening of the city's first free school, today it serves approximately 24,000 students in 18 elementary schools, 8 kindergarten through 8th grade schools, 7 high schools and 1 alternative school. Manchester City Schools is governed by 9 board members, operates on a budget of $280 million and employs 3,000 certified and classified workers. "MCS takes pride in maintaining modern facilities, providing standards-aligned curriculum, providing highly-rated pre-kindergarten classes, and offering

International Baccalaureate programs" (School District Website Referenced February 1, 2019).

Manchester City Schools welcomed a new superintendent in May of 2017. Under this newly formed leadership, the district has reorganized around four key pillars including: Student Success, Team Excellence, Stakeholder Trust, and Systems and Planning. Each of the pillars encompassess specific stratgies and metrics. For example, a new Director of Social Emotional Learning was hired in summer 2018 to lead the Department of Social Emotional Learning for MCS Schools, which employs 16 people from administrative assistants to intervention specialists, to coordinators and mental health professionals . The district's focus on "safe and secure environment" along with the creation of a Department of Social Emotional Learning aligns with

research by Lipina and Colombo (2009) that links childhood poverty to profound, negative impacts on children's cognitive and socio-economic development. When combined, increased enrichment, nurturing environments and minimizing stress have potential to mitigate some portion of poverty's effects (Sowell and Noble, 2015).

This section describes the context in which our team sought to answer the following project question:

> How do teacher perceptions of instructional contexts and organizational capacity influence readiness for SEL program implementation?

Methods

Through methods of disciplined inquiry, qualitative researchers seek to move beyond mere observation or speculation (Shulman, 1981). In this spirit, our project team employed rigorous qualitative research techniques with the aim of providing an in-depth investigation into the current conditions in MCS from the perspectives of its educators.

Upon building a partnership with MCS directors, it was evident that complex shifts were occurring within the district including the creation of the Department of Social and Emotional Learning and the corresponding appointment of a new director of the department. With such consequential transitions taking place, the project evolved from an analysis of the implementation of an SEL initiative to an exploration of the conditions in place that would allow for a successful roll-out in the near future. To address our project question,

> **How do teacher perceptions of instructional contexts and organizational capacity influence readiness for SEL program implementation?**

we identified program implementation, SEL, and SEL implementation as the constructs of our conceptual framework. Our project team collaborated with MCS directors to determine that document analysis, interviews, and observations would be the most constructive and dynamic tools for identifying themes, patterns, insights, and understandings around these constructs (Patton, 2015). In addition, a survey was created as a deliverable for MCS to utilize in the upcoming school year to obtain quantitative data to enrich this narrative.

School selection

Our project team used a purposive sample of six elementary schools and four high schools. Per our request, MCS selected schools that reflected the demographics of race, ethnicity,

and socio-economic status of the district as a whole. Since SEL literature identifies elementary schools as representing an optimum age to target SEL programming (Boncu, Costea, & Minulescu, 2017), we school, such as how differing school cultures (e.g., content-specialized teachers, focus on College and Career Readiness), and structures (e.g., credit requirements), might influence teacher perceptions of SEL and SEL implementation. As evidenced in the

determined that it was important to target elementary schools in our sample. Additionally, we examined teacher perceptions in high schools as a means to gain insight into how varying conditions related to high descriptive statistics below, the schools that participated in this study reflected these key, core characteristics - with demographics that were representative of the district as a whole.

School	Total Student Population	% African American	% Hispanic	% Caucasian	% Other	% of Students with Special Needs	% of English Learners
District	23,723	91.5	6.70	1.30	.5	11.60	4.63
Elementary Schools							
Anderson	719	68.99	27.40	2.50	1.11	10.20	15.86
Barnes	495	86.67	10.91	1.82	.61	8.09	7.47
Bell	621	95.65	3.22	.64	.48	8.98	.32
Bennett	860	87.34	8.87	3.79	0	10.10	5.81
Canter	505	96.83	2.38	0	.79	11.06	.79
Chester	448	97.54	2.23	.22	0	9.60	.22
Derby	246	97.97	.81	.81	.41	2.85	0
Ford	628	97.46	1.59	.64	.32	11.87	.32
Henderson	443	88.71	9.93	1.35	0	11.50	7.22
Jenkins	405	94.07	4.20	1.23	.49	21.47	2.71

Johnson	564	82.45	40.80	11.52	1.95	9.40	3.55
Lancaster	304	94.08	4.28	.99	.66	12.03	3.29
Lincoln	533	74.30	24.77	.75	.19	12.76	13.88
Morgan	526	93.16	3.80	2.47	.57	7.44	1.71
Murphy	437	96.34	3.43	.22	0	10.86	2.06
Scott	525	82.10	15.05	1.71	1.14	9.80	10.67
Smith	404	98.02	1.24	.25	.50	6.30	.25
Wilson	451	92.46	6.65	.67	.22	13.81	3.55
High Schools							
Baker	789	97.33	1.01	1.01	0	1.52	.25
Coleman	679	94.40	4.42	.74	.44	13.60	3.24
North Manchester	738	92.41	5.96	.68	.95	15.16	2.44
Preston	768	84.11	12.76	1.95	1.18	12.94	7.94
South Manchester	1309	84.11	12.76	1.95	1.18	14.51	2.12
Sterling	835	97.37	1.08	.72	.84	17.10	1.32
Stewart	689	96.95	2.47	.44	.15	16.20	1.31

** Schools (pseudonyms) that participated in the study are highlighted

Our project team sought to include schools in the study that also were reflective of the district as a whole in regards to academic achievement. According to the State Data Technical Guide (2018), the State Report Card Grade is calculated by combining Academic Achievement (40%), Academic Growth (50%), and Chronic Absenteeism (10%) for elementary schools and Academic Achievement (20%), Academic Growth (30%), Chronic Absenteeism (10%), College and Career Readiness (10%), and Graduation Rate (30%) for high

schools. Academic Achievement scores are based on the percent of students scoring proficient in reading and math. The Academic Growth score is determined by the individual students who demonstrate improvement in reading and math from one year to the next. Graduation Rate hinges on the percent of high school students within 4 or 5 years of first entering the 9th grade. College and Career Readiness is based on the percent of students in the 4-year cohort who met at least one of the College and Career readiness indicators. The Chronic Absenteeism score represents the percent of students who were present and *not* chronically absent. The following table provides relevant school achievement data. With the exception of Derby Elementary, schools that participated in the study were similar in nature based on factors such as the State Report Card Grade, Graduation Rate, and Chronic Absenteeism. Derby Elementary is one of the district's magnet schools. Academic achievement, growth, and attendance were all higher at Derby Elementary.

School	State Report Card Grade	Points	Academic Achievement	Academic Growth	Chronic Absenteeism	CCR	Graduation Rate
Elementary Schools							
Anderson	D	65	41.63	79.10	15.50	-	-
Barnes	F	58	37.69	68.81	17.49	-	-
Bell	F	55	34.50	65.51	19.37	-	-
Bennett	F	56	38.93	66.08	24.09	-	-
Canter	F	47	29.97	54.51	21.56	-	-
Chester	F	57	34.06	71.67	28.91	-	-
Derby	B	89	84.19	92.72	84.19	-	-
Ford	C	73	50.64	88.33	18.62	-	-
Henderson	F	58	41.12	65.78	15.84	-	-
Jenkins	B	85	70.01	89.32	10.08	-	-

Johnson	D	63	44.75	74.79	20.21	-	-
Lancaster	D	65	42.04	82.47	30.06	-	-
Lincoln	D	64	46.21	74.45	17.61	-	-
Morgan	F	56	34.51	69.44	22.17	-	-
Murphy	F	58	41.25	72.09	41.61	-	-
Scott	D	69	50.60	80.00	17.11	-	-
Smith	F	89	29.76	67.67	17.87	-	-
Wilson	F	47	26.98	56.30	24.36	-	-
High Schools							
Baker	A	90	66.27	100	24.66	94	99.20
Coleman	D	64	20.54	79.12	42.66	49	80.00
North Manchester	D	60	16.04	87.94	84.19	36	69.40
Preston	D	63	19.59	85.50	47.45	54	75.80
South Manchester	D	62	16.29	79.12	42.66	48	80.00
Sterling	D	63	18.00	91.88	49.28	54	76.80
Stewart	F	58	12.23	77.42	38.43	30	77.60

** Schools that participated in the study are highlighted

Data collection: Interviews, observations, and document analysis

Interviews

To gain insight into the underlying beliefs and perceptions of Manchester Schools' educators, our project team designed interview protocols around the following constructs of our conceptual framework: 1) SEL, 2) program implementation, and 3) SEL implementation. We developed

separate, but similar, protocols for each intended interview group: teacher, counselor, principal/assistant principal, and district personnel. We followed a semi-structured model of responsive interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Project team members studied interview protocols to ensure they had a deep understanding of how each concept was being examined before conducting the interviews.

Interviews took place during site visits at each of the ten schools. At the preference of the school district and to increase the number of participants with the limited amount of time available at each school, we conducted the interviews with focus groups of teachers and administrators. We requested and were granted access to a group of educators from various grade levels and positions within schools to offer a variety of perspectives. To increase their comfort level and promote honest responses, we interviewed administrators and teachers separately. Our project team interviewed district administrators individually which provided privacy and an opportunity to share authentic reflections. We conducted interviews in conference rooms on school property to provide a familiar yet private environment for those being interviewed. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was digitally recorded and digitally transcribed. See Appendix C for interview protocols.

The table below summarizes the interview participants.

School	Administrators/ Others Interviewed	Number of Teachers Interviewed
District	Director of Social Emotional Learning District Social Worker District Instructional Coordinator	-
Elementary Schools		
Chester	Principal	6
Canter	Special Education Team Leader Curriculum/Instructional Coach Reading Coach Title One Parent Coordinator	1
Derby	Principal Counselor	4

Ford	Principal Assistant Principal	6
Lancaster	Principal	4
Lincoln	Principal Counselor Parent Engagement Coordinator	5
High Schools		
North Manchester	Principal	6
Preston	Assistant Principal Assistant Principal Counselor	4
South Manchester	Assistant Principal	4
Sterling	Principal Assistant Principal Assistant Principal Assistant Principal Assistant Principal	12

Observations

During site visits, our project team completed observations in each of the ten schools. These observations consisted of school tours led by the school leader. As observers, we moved through the schools in an attempt to experience the environment from the eyes of the educators and the students who spend many hours of their days at each school site. We noted relevant symbolic themes and rituals and the images and messages that were communicated both directly and indirectly. We took pictures of signs on the walls, listened to what was celebrated during announcements, and noted the conditions and organization of physical structures such as stairwells, hallways, display cases, furniture distributed and staff stationed throughout the school. From our observations of the varied aspects of the organization, we gained a deeper understanding of the organizational culture and context to assist in interpreting our findings.

Document review and analysis

In order to examine the connections between educator perceptions and the specific context of Manchester City Schools, our project team conducted an extensive review and analysis of pertinent documents. This involved an investigation into student and teacher demographic data for the school and district, high school graduation rates, academic proficiency data, office referral statistics, reports on behavior resolution practices (i.e., the use of exclusionary practices such as in-school suspension and out-of-school suspensions). We reviewed social media messages, press releases, policy reports, and the Manchester City Schools website to explore the information being shared with stakeholders regarding the district's vision and priorities. Our project team integrated analysis from these documents with the observations and interviews to generate our findings.

Data analysis and coding

Our project team began the process of data analysis by completing a listening overview of each of the digitally recorded and digitally transcribed interviews to develop a familiarity with the content of each interview. We listened a second time with a particular focus on the elements of our conceptual framework-- implementation, SEL, and SEL implementation explicated through the extant literature. Through an additional round of listening, our project team began to identify illustrative quotes that exemplified emerging themes.

To begin synthesizing our findings, we constructed "concept-clustered" matrices by pattern coding across and within stakeholder interviews. This coding process was strengthened by the observations and document analyses (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). By building matrices, narratives began to emerge that elucidated the complex system of Manchester City Schools with theoretical implications. Through iterative and theory-driven discussions, we inductively generated a master matrix with key themes and findings, developing a rich and vivid contextual description.

Survey development

This study was designed to explore and examine the constructs of SEL implementation in an urban school district that anticipates fully implementing this strategy in the near term. The knowledge gained from such qualitative inquiry could be enriched with a quantitative component. Therefore, as part of this project, we sought to develop a survey that could be administered to Manchester Schools' educators. This survey will provide a voice to all stakeholders and give MCS an opportunity to demonstrate that

district leadership values and is responsive to feedback given by the community of educators.

During survey development, attention focused on gathering depth, detail and nuance around educators' perceptions of SEL, how the Manchester City Schools system functions, and the impact that school and district contexts have on educators' perceptions of their readiness and ability to implement an SEL initiative.

As a foundation for this survey, the Social and Emotional Learning Scale for Teachers (Brackett et al., 2012) was utilized. As demonstrated through rigorous analyses, this scale is a reliable and valid measure of teachers' beliefs around SEL. Although this scale effectively examines teacher's perceptions of SEL, we augmented the survey to incorporate items geared specifically towards school and district factors with theoretical underpinnings associated with program implementation. These additional questions incorporated guidance resources from CASEL (2012) and followed the conceptual framework of necessary organizational factors for effective implementation proposed by McLaughlin (1990). All efforts were made to create an educator-friendly survey that was succinct, theory-driven, and yet comprehensive enough to be informative to the district.

During our visit to the schools, our project team sought feedback from MCS educators on the drafted survey. See Appendix E for additional information on the efforts to improve the quality of this survey.

This improved survey is being provided to Manchester City Schools as a project deliverable. Due to the timing of the SEL policy rollout and other factors (e.g., survey fatigue), our project team and Manchester Schools' directors determined that the survey should be administered during the following school year. Recommendations from this qualitative study will help to ensure that conditions are ripe to support the roll out of the survey in order to obtain stakeholder perceptional and experiential data to complement this qualitative study. See Appendix F for the finalized survey.

A summary of the limitations of this study can be found in Appendix G.

Findings

Finding 1

Manchester City educators are *committed* to implementing an SEL initiative in order to support their students, though their levels of *comfort* vary.

Manchester Pride

A recurring theme in our interviews was a deep pride and investment in the Manchester community. Many teachers we interviewed decided to return to Manchester to teach because of their own positive experiences in the school system and their desire to pay this investment forward to MCS students. One school leader we interviewed told us,

"I'm a product of Manchester City Schools and I started my career here... My experience in MCS as a student was fantastic! From kindergarten to 12th grade, it was excellent. I'm a graduate of Primrose High. Expectations of you were high. You knew you were going to be successful. That experience along with the experience I got in a career track helped me to know I would succeed. I was in college and I knew I wanted to do something to give back."

Another educator shared that, "The best thing about Manchester is the sense of community. As educators, we are working together to support all our students as one community, and the broader community around us wants to see us succeed, too." As our team toured schools, evidence of this pride and community could be observed in various forms, as teachers enjoyed each other's company over lunches or shared about collaboration with colleagues during interviews. Community members engaged directly with children in various forms, from sponsoring student internships in high school Career Technical Education courses to mentoring students in elementary settings.

In addition to pride in the school system and in the community, educators we interviewed overwhelmingly held the

superintendent in high regard. When asked about the greatest strengths of MCS, one teacher said,

"The greatest strengths are the leaders driving the force in terms of the superintendent and her cabinet. I think that overall, we have a lot of capacity in terms of leadership and knowledge. I think that the superintendent is focused on the right work and rolling out the right initiatives that should have been done a long time ago. So I think that's a strength for us. We're finally moving in that right direction."

Whatever it Takes

Beyond esteem for the school system, one another and district leadership, it was clear that MCS educators care deeply for their students. Among those we interviewed, there was consensus around the necessity of supporting children emotionally as well as academically. One school

leader added, "(It's important that we are) meeting students' emotional needs first and not going straight to academics." At a different campus, a teacher expressed,

"We need to know our students as people and know why they feel the way they do and support them to express themselves and to communicate in a way so that the learning environment is better so that they can get what they need."

Other educators framed the need for Social Emotional Learning as a necessity to mitigate challenges students face outside of school. For example, one teacher said, "Let me tell you why it's (SEL) important. We have these communities and I keep mentioning these housing projects. We have kids that come from about five different housing communities. And if I have shooting going on around me all day long and all night…if I got drugs roaming around my house all day and all night, that's almost like PTSD, you know, because if I don't feel safe, then how am I going to learn because my priority is - I want

to be safe." Educators' desires to support students holistically extended beyond identification of need to the desire to take action on behalf of students. Though one teacher stated she often felt overwhelmed by her workload and by the needs of her students, when asked if she would be willing to take on an initiative related to Social Emotional Learning, she responded without hesitation, "Like I tell my students, you have to learn something every day or your day is wasted. Sometimes the things we're doing aren't working, and we have to try new things. Willing, I'm a 10 all day long [on a scale of 1-10]. If it's going to help my kids, I will try anything." We observed this dedication in action as teachers gave up planning periods to speak to us, and as educators asked for business cards to continue the conversation beyond our time at their school.

Finding **2**

Manchester educators vary with respect to their *comfort* with Social Emotional Learning and Social Emotional Learning initiatives.

Does That Mean....?

As a starting point in gauging educators' knowledge and *comfort* with Social Emotional Learning, we asked school leaders, counselors, teachers, and district officials how they would define SEL. Though most could identify that Social Emotional Learning has something to do with students' social skills and needs outside academic curricula, the answers we got to our question varied widely across teachers, counselors, and academic coaches. This quote from a counselor best encompasses the central idea,

"I don't know what the broad, correct definition is, but I would say it has to do with impactful learning, and how individuals learn based on their background and social skills. That looks different for everybody."

Other educators responded with uncertainty, "I actually don't know how to define it" and " I know that our teachers know the buzzword, but I don't know if they really know what what that means and all that it encompasses." Some educators recognized the breadth of SEL in

responses such as, "It encompasses the entire child-background, education-wide, home environment, the whole child."

Classroom Management Conundrum

Another source of discomfort for teachers was their perceived abilities to balance Social Emotional Learning with behavioral challenges. When describing the behavioral challenges in her building, one principal said,

"It's hard to try and figure out what is going on. They [students] will tear my office up. But when we get them calm, and then ready to go back to class and have a good day. But the challenge is that there are 4 or 5 of these students in each of my classrooms."

MCS teachers gave many examples of the behavioral challenges seen in their classrooms. One educator stated, "We have a lot of students who have a lot of needs and a lot of social problems and we have to find something to help them because they explode when they come to school." Another educator explained, "Some of the things these kids go through - it is the simple things that we take for granted every day. This is really hard on them and they just have no way of expressing it other than to act out."

A Balancing Act and a Tightrope to Walk

While teachers understood, by and large, that SEL implementation could improve classroom climate and instruction, they were also very clear-eyed about challenges. Many educators wondered how they would balance SEL implementation and expectations to increase performance on standardized measures. Specifically, teachers expressed a tension between what they believed would support children's development and what the school, district and state hold them accountable for. One teacher observed,

"When children come to us who can't read we teach them how to read. But when children come to us and don't have these emotions, we punish them instead of

teaching them how to acquire these emotions. I blame, a lot of this has to do with policy because we get pretty much rewarded for how well we do on standardized tests. We don't get rewarded for how well we teach our kids how to acquire these emotions."

One of her colleagues chimed in and added, "I know at the end of the year I'm not getting kudos for helping Michael socially and emotionally. That's not policy. That's not what policy is looking for. That's not what he's being assessed for." This concern around the permissibility of addressing SEL in the classroom was brought up multiple times. As one educator summarized, "Teachers need to feel like they have permission to spend time on this (SEL). It seems like they feel pressure to be doing exactly what is on the lesson plan."

Purposeful Preparation Precedes Excellent Execution

Many of the educators with whom we spoke advocated for professional development in Social Emotional Learning in order to increase the fidelity of implementation. As one high school teacher noted, "I'm not [comfortable]. I would want to but I don't have the training or the professional development skills at this time to say that I could implement that with fidelity. It would be something that I would love and want to do though." Educators we spoke to were adamant about the need for pre-planning as the prologue and platform for full implementation. Though these sentiments were expressed in every conversation we had, one elementary school teacher said it best when he pointed out:

"One word. Planning. When you don't adequately plan, you are stressed. Your kids aren't gonna get it. When you plan, you have time to step back. You have time to reflect. You have time to relax. I would prefer if they started professional development this spring and we could wrap our minds about how we would integrate this meaningfully into our classrooms before, as we plan over the summer.

This would be way better than having PD in the summer right before school starts. "

Another leader underscored the need for investing early and with intentionality, nothing that she would spend her own Title I funds to begin training immediately in order to give her staff time to best prepare for implementation in fall 2019. Additionally, a principal advised that sharing the vision for SEL implementation is crucial.

"Present the information. What is SEL? What does it look like and why are we doing this? What's the effect that it's going to have on children. You have to make sure that they [teachers] know that it's a need."

Context Knowledge Matters

Another suggestion we heard frequently was that professional development should be delivered by insiders who know Manchester City Schools well. One educator summed it up well when he shared "I have one

suggestion - make sure you hire people (to train) from within... competent educated people from within who know this district. Stop bringing in people from the outside who don't care, who don't have a vested interest in our kids, in our community, all the stakeholders."

Finding 3

Elementary educators have a greater level of *comfort* with SEL and implementation of SEL initiatives than secondary educators.

It's Elementary

Whereas we did not encounter a single elementary educator who believed that SEL initiatives were outside of the scope of their role, we did not hear the same from those we interviewed at the high school level. As one high school assistant principal stated, "There's no way you can teach the curriculum and teach what you need to know and deal with [SEL]. We have to have other people to deal with that. Everyone has to be accountable for their field. If social emotional learning is a problem, which it is in urban schools, we need more counselors. You can't expect an

English teacher to solve social emotional problems. It doesn't matter how much PD (professional development) you give them."

This concern appeared to be related to the pressure educators feel to help students reach high levels of academic achievement; many could not connect SEL and academic achievement. An assistant principal asked, "At what point does she stop being an English teacher and start being a counselor? She can't wear both hats. She's not going to be successful."

Many school leaders expressed concerns about high school teachers' understanding and preparation for integrating SEL into the classroom. This perception was frequently referenced at the high school level, in reference to the nature of high school organizational structures (i.e., areas of teacher certification, credit requirements for graduation) and the expectation that high school teachers must be content experts. One high school principal asserted, "They (teachers) aren't trained. They are trained in their particular area, their content area. So to have them facilitate any type of instruction dealing with that social emotional piece, it's kind of unfair to the teacher."

High school teachers concurred with this sentiment and articulated their logic for focusing SEL programming at the elementary level. When asked what role should SEL play in MCS schools, one high school teacher explained,

"I think it varies depending on the level, whether you are on an elementary level or middle school level or high school level. When you start talking about formative years in elementary school, there has to be something put in place to help mold the students before they get to us. Because by the time we get them, they already have all these ideas about what their beliefs are. It's kind of hard to change them once they are in high school if you haven't started off at an early age."

Finding 4

The culture of churn of Manchester City Schools presents a challenge for educators who are *committed* to taking on a SEL Initiative, though there are some bright spots.

Churn, Change and Capacity

Educators cited a great deal of churn in district-level leadership at MCS. One leader shared that changes in leadership was one of the greatest challenges of working in Manchester. She said, "Challenges? I would say inconsistency from the top. We have been through a lot of people. A lot of changes. And with that comes a lot of new initiatives. And I know the work is ever-changing, but give something time to work."

While secondary educators were more vocal on this point, there was near unanimous agreement that constant change in district and school leadership was a critical barrier to educators' capacities to implement new initiatives. One educator observed,

"[On a scale of 1-10] capacity to take on another initiative is zero - below the scale. We need to perfect what we have. Because it's all changing. They just layer initiatives on top of initiatives without following through any of it. So they start it, but its like every year we get dumped with more stuff."

Across town, another group of educators discussed the frustration they felt about the constant changes, and about the impact frequent change had on their abilities to serve students well. Based on nods and knowing glances during his reply, one teacher appeared to speak for his colleagues when he said, with emphasis,

"The best way that I have heard it summed up is – we build the plane as we fly it. I've heard that starting from July to now. That is really the case right now. We are flying along. Might get a wing. Might put some duct tape on it. Might put some glue on the other side and that's

working. Might get a spark plug. And we're just coasting along."

Integrate to Initiate

Teachers, leaders and counselors we spoke with, especially on the elementary level, advocated for Social Emotional Learning initiatives to be integrated into the work they are doing already and were able to name connections between SEL and academics. For example, when speaking about students, one educator explained, "I think about when students don't have knowledge of how to regulate those emotions, and what that means, and how it impacts their learning, because if you get upset about something and you don't know how to process and you don't know what to do with your anger, then you can't move forward with your day and move on and learn. If they don't have those skills, it could really impact them." Another teacher said, "I don't have a problem with implementing another initiative. If we integrate it as far as it relates to something that I am currently doing instead of it just being something extra. If we can synergize and figure out how can I bring it into my classroom and make it a part of what

I'm already doing, then I think that it would be better for it to be adopted." A principal added,

"[Let's] sit down with the curriculum coordinators and say, okay, let's tie some SEL standards into what you're doing here. And then give some sample lesson plans and come up with some themed units around SEL competencies that tie into instruction."

According to data collected during our qualitative interviews and the extant research, the idea of integrating SEL with other aspects of schooling holds promise as a long-term investment.

Finding 5

Manchester educators are invested in shaping Social Emotional Learning initiatives at the school and district levels.

Teacher Voice = Teacher Buy In

Manchester educators expressed an eagerness to share their ideas with district officials and to have a voice in shaping initiatives at the district level. Educators want district officials to know that there are key assets for successful professional development on Social Emotional Learning initiatives. Many educators thought that the survey instrument we prepared for the district could be utilized to develop SEL programming and roll out. One counselor stated,

"I think a survey could be a huge help. Like if you could get consensus and then make a plan, that would be helpful."

Another teacher shared, "Another thing I think they could improve on would be that they could get teacher feedback. Like we're supposed to come back and go to a workshop and they don't ask us."

During our cognitive interviews (Appendix E) on the survey itself, educators went so far as to ask for the inclusion of an open response option in order to share their thoughts.

Cookie Cutter No No

The MCS educators with whom we spoke extended their pride in the district and their schools into a desire to be a part of shaping initiatives at their own school sites. One of the themes we heard frequently in our interviews was that it is important for SEL initiatives to be adapted for a good "fit" with each individual school site. Specifically, teachers and leaders wanted some autonomy to select their programs and to shape the rollout at their school sites. One educator shared, "It has to be for our school and for our kids. I was at this PD where the presenter said that the program was only for kids on grade level. You're talking to an MCS teacher with MCS students who struggle. I was just turned off and then I had to stay there for 3 days."

Discussion

In response to Manchester City Schools' request for assistance, we sought to understand how teacher perceptions influenced readiness for SEL program implementation. We aimed to assist MCS, and potentially other similarly situated districts, in policy development and next steps with early implementation. We will now discuss our interpretations of the findings in the context of the extant literature presented earlier in our conceptual framework.

Overall, our findings provide evidence of the assertion within the extant research that implementation matters. In fact, our findings confirm that teacher perceptions of *comfort*, *commitment*, and *culture* are relevant indicators of readiness for SEL program implementation (Brackett et al., 2012).

Takeaway 1

MCS has made some progress in the implementation process, but the bulk of the implementation work remains.

Our findings reveal that MCS has begun implementation of Rogers' (2003) first two facets of implementation— dissemination and adoption. Recall our earlier discussion of Rogers' classic model for program implementation that includes: dissemination (conveying information about the existence of an innovation to potentially interested parties); adoption (an explicit decision by a local unit or organization to try the innovation); implementation (executing the innovation effectively when it is put in place); evaluation (assessing how well the innovation achieved its intended goals); and institutionalization (the unit incorporates the innovation into its continuing practices). Within MCS, dissemination has already partially occurred since information on the

existence of SEL as an innovation has been provided to decision-making district officials and some stakeholders within MCS. Also, an explicit decision to try the innovation has been made by the school district, so adoption is underway. Along Rogers' continuum of implementation, MCS thus lands within the explicit implementation phase since MCS is primarily concerned with executing the innovation effectively now that adoption is underway. Although MCS is in the early stages, the school district has made small but mentionable progress along Roger's continuum and is appropriately focused on an inquiry into successful program implementation. Frameworks for executing step-by-step high-quality implementation are abundant in the literature, and we suggest using Meyers et al.'s (2012) research-based Quality Implementation Tool (QIT) in the recommendations section of this report.

Takeaway 2

Commitment amongst MCS's elementary educators offers MCS an opportunity for successful implementation on the elementary level.

Successful implementation requires *will* (Firestone, 1989)—the *commitment* of the dominant coalition and their *willingness* to take on a new reform. Brackett et al. (2012) further explicate *will,* referring to it as *commitment* and describing it as a teacher's desire to participate in SEL training and teaching. In Manchester City Schools, the dominant coalition is comprised of the educators who will make the reform happen, that is, teachers, counselors, and principals, with the largest and most prominent group being teachers. MCS teachers, counselors, and principals exhibit their deep *commitment*, first and foremost, to their school district, to which many of them have deep and personal ties. They are also *committed* to their new superintendent whom they believe is leading them in the right direction. Lastly, they are deeply *committed* to their students and intensely care about them. With these deep *commitments* undergirding them and

their invaluable knowledge of the difficulties faced by their students beyond the classroom, we saw evidence amongst educators, specifically on the elementary level that they are willing to take on a reform that addresses their students' social and emotional well-being. In fact, they are specifically interested in participating in SEL training and teaching, and they care about the details of the rollout, timing, and content of their training.

Beyond the survey our project team created as a deliverable for usage in MCS's early implementation, additional research is needed on the most productive ways of harnessing *commitment* and translating it into effective implementation in districts like MCS where the level of *commitment* is high amongst certain stakeholder groups.

Takeaway 3

Varying levels of *comfort* amongst educators underscores the need for a shared definition of SEL and professional development for MCS educators.

In the midst of their *commitment*, we found evidence of varying levels of *comfort*—a teacher's sense of confidence in teaching SEL—among MCS teachers. Some of this variation was due to uncertainty about *what* SEL is. Mirroring the lack of an explicit definition of SEL in the extant literature, MCS educators were unable to furnish a clear and consistent definition of SEL. Nonetheless, just as conceptual overlap exists in the literature, MCS educators had a sense that SEL was related to students' skill development. Some educators had less of this sense of definition than others, which underscores the importance of the OECD's work in adopting a global definition of social emotional skill building and learning (OECD, 2018). This lack of clarity also underscores the need for the development of increased coherence amongst researchers as key concepts regarding SEL continue to emerge.

In addition to the lack of clarity around *what* SEL is, many MCS teachers reported variations in *comfort* because they were also uncertain of *how* to implement SEL within their classrooms. These teachers offered evidence of Jones et al.'s (2010) note of the tension between implementing SEL and standards-based instruction felt

amongst educators as they wondered how to accomplish the important task of SEL program implementation while also focusing on instruction that would lead to strong student achievement on standardized tests while yielding high teacher evaluation scores. They also wondered how to accomplish SEL effectively with several students needing intense support in this area within one classroom. These concerns offer evidence of MCS teachers' lack of *comfort* with teaching SEL and highlight the need for professional development.

According to Brackett et al. (2012), improved *comfort* with SEL is linked to both classroom management during lessons and teacher attitudes about the importance and difficulty associated with implementation of new SEL programs. Also, determining how to increase teachers' *comfort* levels through professional development could lead to lower depersonalization of students, a greater sense of teacher personal accomplishment within MCS, and increased buy-in, goodness of fit, and program effectiveness down the line (Brackett et al., 2012). Additional research on increasing teacher *comfort*, especially within contexts similar to that of MCS, is warranted as

school districts increasingly implement SEL initiatives.

Takeaway 4

Increased *capacity* building will help to promote the positive life outcomes associated with SEL among MCS's students.

Teachers' varying levels of *comfort* and related concerns raised questions around *capacity*. While MCS shows some evidence of capacity, or wherewithal to carry out a new SEL initiative, other elements will benefit from continued development as implementation progresses (Firestone, 1989). Already, MCS has mobilized personnel in a new Department of Social Emotional Learning with a devoted director and supporting team. The district's focus on "safe and secure environment" along with the creation of a Department of Social Emotional Learning aligns with research by Lipina and Colombo (2009) that links childhood poverty to profound, negative impacts on children's cognitive and socio-economic development. When combined, increased enrichment, nurturing environments, and

minimizing stress have potential to mitigate some portion of poverty's effects (Sowell and Noble, 2015). MCS has also aligned resources to the initiative with funds designated for usage on SEL. In an effort to combat the loose coupling across organizational levels that occurs in many schools nationally, members of MCS's social emotional learning team visit multiple schools and are able to serve as important links between schools and the district's central office, a connection that is vital to effective implementation (Firestone, 1989).

MCS's educators' *commitment* to SEL was notable amongst elementary educators, but their *capacity* to do so was a consistent concern. McLaughlin (1990) notes that change happens at the smallest unit (i.e., teachers within a school), so teachers' perceptions of their capacity for implementation matters and is likely related to their level of *comfort* with implementing a new SEL initiative. We find that the level of churn and change within MCS district leadership and the number of initiatives educators have encountered in the recent past have yielded teachers, specifically on the elementary level who are *committed* but overwhelmed. MCS educators are asking district officials and school leaders to find a way to integrate new

initiatives into current ones so that change is more palatable and feasible. High school principals and teachers felt the burden of change acutely, with high school administrators questioning how subject area specialists would have the expertise or time to accomplish SEL implementation and with high school teachers unknowingly agreeing with a push within some extant research for SEL to be focused in the lower grades for earlier impact (Boncu et al., 2017). More research is needed into whether or not SEL is beneficial at the secondary level and whether or not it is only best placed within elementary schools.

In alignment with McLaughlin's (1990) RAND study, the area that will likely benefit most from enhanced focus within MCS is the development of educational methods that involve teachers and build their capacity. McLaughlin noted this approach as one of the crucial elements of *capacity* that affects the success of implementation. Our findings corroborate McLaughlin's work, with teachers not only requesting the existence of professional development around SEL but also making suggestions on the timing and strategy around professional development on SEL, including the

time of year it should happen, who should conduct it, and the need to adapt it according to context. Teachers also supported the development of a survey gathering feedback from educators. Brackett et al.'s (2012) work suggests that professional development related to SEL will increase the likelihood of implementation of MCS's new SEL initiative and that the resulting collective commitment to implementing the initiative along with the shared vision noted in MCS's strategic plan will increase the likelihood of programmatic success.

Culture, as defined by Brackett et al. (2012), is school wide support for SEL and is largely related to teacher perceptions of a core component of school *culture*—the school leader's support for the initiative. Being so closely tied to the school leader, *culture* is related to the mobilization of personnel associated with capacity. Despite change fatigue within MCS, perceptions of *culture* as strong were prevalent among the teachers we interviewed since they highly esteem the new superintendent and her priorities. MCS can find encouragement in the fact that according to Brackett et al.'s research, the continuation of their SEL programs is likely to be influenced positively by the superintendent's support as long as implementation quality is high. The caution to MCS is that the influence of the leader is also prevalent on the school level and will be strongly tied to the principal's support of the SEL initiative. Training and professional development of principals could help to cultivate principals' abilities to be strong influencers of SEL implementation in their schools, which could lead to lower emotional exhaustion and perceptions of higher administrative support for teachers (Brackett et al., 2012). Additional research into the most effective means of training principals on new initiatives and specifically SEL initiatives could be helpful as school districts and individual schools increasingly implement SEL programs.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Administer the survey designed as a product of this study as a means to gain input from stakeholders and generate support for the initiative.

The survey developed by our project team maps closely to Brackett et al's (2012) critical elements for effective SEL implementation: teachers' perceptions of *comfort*, *commitment*, and *culture*. As noted earlier, increased levels of these three elements are linked to successful SEL program implementation, including both fidelity and quality of implementation. The Quality Implementation Tool (QIT) (Meyers, 2012), suggests that creating the conditions for collaboration sets the stage for successful implementation of an initiative. During our study, educators asked to have a voice in the design and implementation of SEL initiatives in MCS. We propose that MCS honor their request by asking for their feedback directly. Once the survey results have been tallied, MCS Leadership can continue to build trust and momentum by sharing the results publicly and by using the results to guide the design and implementation of SEL initiatives.

Recommendation 2

Begin implementation of Social Emotional Learning Initiatives at the Elementary School Level.

Based on the sample selected, this study revealed greater support for Social Emotional Learning and implementation of initiatives related to SEL among elementary school educators. As our team observed school environments, we found that many elementary settings had elements in place that could be built upon to create more robust Social Emotional Learning programming, such as Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS), character trait celebrations and scheduled morning meetings. While these elements alone are insufficient to be considered true

implementation of SEL, they nevertheless demonstrate an openness to the subject matter as well as an attempt to address and to support students' social and emotional development in a systemic manner. Interviews with elementary educators supported these observations as each of the elementary educators we spoke with were quick to draw a connection between children's social emotional and academic development.

In addition, the structure of the elementary school day and the resulting function of elementary school staffing best lends itself to the implementation of SEL initiatives. Whereas secondary schools are arranged around Carnegie Units of discreet content taught by certified content teachers in a structure that compels students to move through many distinct periods with equally distinct teachers each day, elementary schools, including those we visited, are often arranged around grade levels where teachers instruct one group of students at one grade level for the entire day. Although elementary teachers are required to teach core content for a minimum number of minutes per day, they often experience more flexibility in creating their schedules, including the order of

instructional routines and are more likely to be able to seamlessly integrate SEL.

Finally, SEL literature identifies elementary schools as representing an optimum age to target Social Emotional Learning programming (Boncu et al., 2017). Popular and increasing support for explicit instruction in Social Emotional Learning skills for early grades students in the United States has resulted in the development of many resources that MCS may consult when developing their own model, including standards identified by the Collaborative for Academic and Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) in 24 states. Of these 24, it is worth noting that seven specifically focus on either pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade or kindergarten through 3rd grade (https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/K-12-Learning-Goals-for-SEL-Feb-2018.pdf, visited February 18th, 2019) .

Our qualitative interviews demonstrated that while many educators felt overwhelmed by the number of priorities in their work days, they were willing to implement initiatives that they perceive to be related to the work that they are already doing and to implement initiatives that will improve student outcomes. Because educators are so invested in Manchester City Schools, in relationships with one another, in MCS leadership, and in their students' success, Manchester City Schools has a tremendous opportunity to build on the work they have already done to develop the 2018-2023 Strategic Plan. Specifically, the district is poised to demonstrate how implementation of an SEL initiative ties directly to the Student Success pillar in their strategic plan and to tie existing priorities and initiatives to SEL program implementation.

One way to connect Social Emotional Learning within the existing Manchester City Schools' Strategic Plan pillar of Student Success and its target to "increase percentage of students attending school with less than 15 excused/unexcused absences from 77% to 85%" would be for the Department of Social Emotional Learning to partner with the Department of Attendance, whose webpage proclaims "GREAT ATTENDANCE = GREAT SCHOOLS = GREAT COMMUNITIES" (School District Website referenced March 1, 2019).

Many of the schools we visited listed student attendance as a top district and school priority based on chronic absenteeism. School report card data substantiated these concerns. Research points to Social Emotional Learning as improving student outcomes in on several measures, including attendance. For example, Schanzenbach, Bauer and Mumford (2016) found that schools are less likely to have high rates of chronic absenteeism when students feel that the school climate is caring and supportive. The authors noted that "SEL plays an integral part in improving school climate and culture, which in turn can reduce chronic absences" (Schanzenbacck et al., 2016).

Another connection to draw could be between implementation of Social Emotional Learning and Manchester City Schools' Student Success pillar goals to increase student proficiencies in early literacy, English Language Arts and mathematics. Integrating SEL into the curriculum with academic standards can be an effective approach for addressing the need to uphold both standards-based accountability and social emotional skill development (Jones et al., 2010). Suggestions made by educators during our interviews were to integrate Social Emotional Learning skills into lessons created by Manchester curriculum developers and to integrate SEL into the district's lesson planning format in an intentional manner. In doing so, MCS leaders can communicate their belief that both SEL and academic skill development are crucial for students' success and can begin to alleviate educators' fears about whether or not teaching Social Emotional Learning skills is appropriate or valued.

Recommendation 4

Follow the steps of the Quality Implementation Tool to support a successful implementation of the Social Emotional Learning initiative.

Recall from our conceptual framework that Meyers and his colleagues (2012) leveraged a meta-analysis of 25 implementation frameworks rooted in implementation research to design a Quality Implementation Tool (QIT). Refer back to Figure 1. Our team selected the QIT because of its emphasis on distributed leadership methods and because of its ability to build a bridge between scholarship and practice. This framework is congruent with the tenets of school improvement, which include the principle that reform should not be entirely top down or uniformly pre-packaged but should instead reflect the DNA, or essence, of the reform while simultaneously involving stakeholders and considering context (Murphy and Torre, 2014).

The steps in the Quality Implementation Tool (Meyers et al., 2012) align closely with many of the

themes we heard in our interviews as well as best practice for implementation of new initiatives. The QIT posits that successful implementation has six ordered steps that an organization should consider when implementing a new initiative. First, decide on an implementation team. Second, work to create collaborative conditions that engender community-wide support for the new initiative or innovation. Third, develop an implementation plan. Fourth, receive technical training and assistance. Fifth, foster practitioner and developer collaboration. Sixth, evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation.

First, Meyers et al. (2012) and his colleagues recommend that an implementation team be created. This could include members of the Department of Social and Emotional Learning, but could also be inclusive of teachers, principals, counselors, community members, and students, per the Stakeholder Trust pillar of the Manchester City Schools 2018-2023 Strategic Plan (School District Website referenced March 1, 2019). One way to identify educators who are interested in participating in the implementation team would be to administer the survey we created as a product of this study. The final question prompts participants to share their names if they are interested in joining the implementation team and is not linked to the rest of the individual's responses in order to ensure anonymity.

Next, the QIT (Meyers et al., 2012) recommends that implementers of new initiatives should work to create collaborative conditions that engender community-wide support for the new initiative. Manchester City could accomplish this in several ways, such as sharing the results of the data and the names and roles of the implementation team, providing contacts throughout the school system for educators to contact with reactions, comments, or suggestions. Next, implementation team members could visit schools to gather qualitative data that would round out the qualitative data gleaned from survey administration. Many sections of the interview protocol we used would lend themselves well to these visits (See Appendix C). Additionally, implementation team members could hold town halls at strategic times and locations in order to get parent and community feedback on proposed Social Emotional Learning implementation.

Third, Meyers and his colleagues (2012) recommend creating an implementation plan. This plan should be based on the information gathered from both the survey and implementation team visits. As the plan is shared, Manchester City Schools officials and implementation team members should share how the plan was developed and the efforts they undertook to engage stakeholders in the creation of the plan.

Fourth, the QIT (Meyers et al., 2012) recommends providing technical training and assistance. Throughout our research, educators asked for professional development to explicate the "what" of the initiative, or to explain what was to be expected of them as well as the "why", or the predicted impact on student success. Educators also asked for professional development to occur well in advance of expected implementation in order to be able to plan for effective execution of new initiatives. Finally, Manchester City Schools' educators asked for professional development to be conducted by those familiar with the unique assets and challenges possessed and faced by the Manchester community.

Fifth, Meyers and his colleagues (2012) recommend fostering practitioner development and collaboration. Preferably before implementation begins and certainly once it is underway, Department of Social Emotional Learning team members (and implementation team members where appropriate and feasible) should plan to spend a great deal of time in schools, working directly with teachers and leaders to plan implementation, observing lessons where possible and appropriate, and making adjustments based on educator feedback. It is possible the Manchester City Schools will choose to pilot implementation in a few schools in order to be able to support more frequent, routine practitioner collaboration and to be able to compile learning and reflection to better support and develop future development by practitioners.

Finally, the QIT (Meyers et al., 2012) recommends monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of implementation. While this is a recommendation of the QIT (Meyers et al., 2012) it is worth noting that implementation research converges on the idea of monitoring being a key element of all successful implementation (Rogers, 2003). Much research on program implementation

and implementation of Social Emotional Learning also aligns along the idea that SEL programming does not need to be implemented with complete fidelity at each site and that site-based adaptations work to support educator investment in and longevity of initiatives. This was a prominent theme in our qualitative interviews; educators wanted to ensure that programs not be "cookie cutter", but could instead be adapted to best fit their distinctive school sites. During the course of ongoing evaluation, members of the Manchester City Schools Department of Social and Emotional Learning and implementation team will have an opportunity to observe and to codify elements of SEL programming that are essential to follow with fidelity as well as to note adaptations that have served school communities well.

Collectively, these recommendations should serve to harness educator commitment and to enhance both educator comfort and district wide culture for implementation (Brackett et al.. 2012). Educator *commitment* can be built by tying implementation of SEL to other district priorities, among other actions. Educator *comfort* can be built by providing educators with the support and development requested by participants in our qualitative interviews outlined above. A *culture* of collaboration that will allow for lasting and genuine SEL initiatives can begin to be built by following the steps called for in the QIT (Meyers et al., 2012).

Conclusion

State departments of education and school districts across the nation are increasingly viewing Social Emotional Learning as an essential means of increasing the academic and life outcomes of students. This study's examination of the ways that teacher perceptions, specifically *commitment*, *comfort*, and *culture* (Brackett et al, 2012), influence readiness for SEL program implementation will provide a useful tool as they consider, implement, and evaluate district wide SEL initiatives.

In MCS, we find that educators demonstrate deep *commitment* (Brackett et al., 2012) to their school district and to the children they serve and are willing, specifically on the elementary level, to take up a Social Emotional Learning initiative. However, we find that educators vary with respect to *comfort* (Brackett et al., 2012) with SEL, identifying professional development as a key lever in addressing their capacity to do so. They also name the *culture* of churn with respect to leadership as a barrier to successful implementation. Still, MCS educators were invested in the district's new leadership and

interested in helping to shape the upcoming Social Emotional Learning initiative, offering suggestions on both the timing and strategy around professional development on SEL, including the time of year it should happen, who should conduct it, and the need to adapt it according to context.

With newly allocated resources in the form of new hires, new funding, and strategic alignment between the central office and schools in place, MCS has made some progress toward successful implementation, but the bulk of the work remains. The survey created as a project deliverable will provide specific data for MCS to analyze alongside this report to help MCS, and perhaps other similarly situated school districts, to harness educator feedback, which is a key desire amongst MCS educators and an important component of program implementation (Rogers, 2003; Meyers et al., 2012). Close attention to the recommendations presented in this report will likely further enhance MCS's readiness for successful SEL program implementation and help guide MCS into important next steps

as the district aims to secure the desired positive life outcomes for students.

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Appendix A
Overview of the "Big Five" domains and Three Compound Skills
2018 OECD Social and Emotional Skills Report

"BIG FIVE" DOMAINS	SKILLS	DESCRIPTION	BEHAVIOURAL EXAMPLES
TASK PERFORMANCE (Conscientiousness)	ACHIEVEMENT ORIENTATION	Setting high standards for oneself and working hard to meet them.	Enjoys reaching a high level of mastery in some activity. Opposite: uninterested in career development.
	RESPONSIBILITY	Able to honour commitments, and be punctual and reliable.	Arrives on time for appointments, gets chores done right away. Opposite: doesn't follow through on agreements/promises.
	SELF-CONTROL	Able to avoid distractions and focus attention on the current task in order to achieve personal goals.	Doesn't rush into things, is cautious and risk averse. Opposite: is prone to impulsive shopping or binge drinking.
	PERSISTENCE	Persevering in tasks and activities until they get done.	Finishes homework projects or work once started. Opposite: Gives up easily when confronted with obstacles/distractions.
EMOTION REGULATION (Emotional stability)	STRESS RESISTANCE	Effectiveness in modulating anxiety and able to calmly solve problems (is relaxed, handles stress well).	Is relaxed most of the time, performs well in high-pressure situations. Opposite: worries about things, difficulties sleeping.
	OPTIMISM	Positive and optimistic expectations for self and life in general.	Generally in good mood. Opposite: often feels sad, tends to feel insecure.
	EMOTIONAL CONTROL	Effective strategies for regulating temper, anger and irritation in the face of frustrations.	Controls emotions in situations of conflict. Opposite: gets upset easily; is moody.
COLLABORATION (Agreeableness)	EMPATHY	Kindness and caring for others and their well-being that leads to valuing and investing in close relationships.	Consoles a friend who is upset, sympathises with the homeless. Opposite: Tends to disregard other person's feelings.
	TRUST	Assuming that others generally have good intentions and forgiving those who have done wrong.	Lends things to people, avoids being harsh or judgmental. Opposite: is suspicious of people's intentions.
	COOPERATION	Living in harmony with others and valuing interconnectedness among all people.	Finds it easy to get along with people, respects decisions made by a group. Opposite: Has a sharp tongue, is not prone to compromises.

"BIG FIVE" DOMAINS	SKILLS	DESCRIPTION	BEHAVIOURAL EXAMPLES
OPEN-MINDEDNESS (Openness to Experience)	CURIOSITY	Interest in ideas and love of learning, understanding and intellectual exploration; an inquisitive mindset.	Likes to read books, to travel to new destinations. Opposite: dislikes change, is not interested in exploring new products.
	TOLERANCE	Is open to different points of view, values diversity, is appreciative of foreign people and cultures.	Have friends from different backgrounds. Opposite: dislikes foreigners.
	CREATIVITY	Generating novel ways to do or think about things through exploring, learning from failure, insight and vision.	Has original insights, is good at the arts. Opposite: seldom daydreams, dresses conventionally.
ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHERS (Extraversion)	SOCIABILITY	Able to approach others, both friends and strangers, initiating and maintaining social connections.	Skilled at teamwork, good at public speaking. Opposite: avoids large groups, prefers one-to-one communication.
	ASSERTIVENESS	Able to confidently voice opinions, needs, and feelings, and exert social influence.	Takes charge in a class or team. Opposite: waits for others to lead the way, keeps quiet when disagrees with others.
	ENERGY	Approaching daily life with energy, excitement and spontaneity.	Is always busy; works long hours. Opposite: gets tired easily.
COMPOUND SKILLS	SELF-EFFICACY	The strength of individuals' beliefs in their ability to execute tasks and achieve goals.	Remains calm when facing unexpected events. Opposite: avoids challenging situations.
	CRITICAL THINKING/ INDEPENDENCE	The ability to evaluate information and interpret it through independent and unconstrained analysis.	Good at solving problems, at ease in new and unknown situations. Opposite: dependent on others' guidance.
	SELF-REFLECTION/ META-COGNITION	Awareness of inner processes and subjective experiences, such as thoughts and feelings, and the ability to reflect on and articulate such experiences.	Good exam preparation strategies, able to master skills more effectively. Opposite: over- or under-estimates time needed for exam preparation or project completion.

Appendix B
Manchester City Schools
Request for Assistance: Peabody College Capstone Program
June 1, 2018

Manchester City Schools serves approximately 24,000 students across 43 schools in an urban area -- eighteen elementary schools, ten K-8 schools, eight middle schools, and seven high schools. District-wide, 64.6% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch and the student population is 93% black, 5% Hispanic, 1% white, and 1% multiracial or Asian.

Starting in the 2018-2019 school year, district administration will roll out a series of initiatives around social-emotional learning throughout the district. We would like to take this opportunity to look at the early stage implementation, specifically analyzing the effectiveness of professional development and fidelity of implementation of this new set of practices and policies. Potential capstone project questions include:

- How do teachers perceive social-emotional needs of MCS students? What is the basis of these perceptions?
- How do teachers perceive the new social-emotional learning initiatives?
- How are schools across MCS implementing this new initiative? How do PD practices differ?
- What is the relationship between PD practices and program fidelity?
- How do schools of varying size, grade levels, academic performance, student (e.g., SES) and teacher (e.g., experience levels) profiles vary in terms of early implementation patterns?
- What factors account for these implementation differences? What are critical challenges to fully implementing this new initiative?
- How do factors of organizational capacity influence early adoption patterns and instructional integration of this new initiative?

This will be the first major new initiative of the current superintendent, and lessons learned from this capstone project will help inform future endeavors.

MCS anticipates a mixed-methods data collection design that utilizes interviews with multiple stakeholders, including district leaders, classroom teachers, and program specialists. We also anticipate a systematic review (and observation) and evaluation of the social-emotional program materials, training components, as well as relevant district (trend) data sets on student performance and growth. MCS will provide school demographic and student data, including attendance, behavioral, and economic status statistics. These data can identify schools varying social, academic, and behavioral contexts for comparative purposes.

Appendix C

Interview Protocols
Manchester City Schools
In Partnership with the Vanderbilt Peabody Capstone Team
NeShante Brown
Christy Bryce
Erin Mack Trapanese

<u>Manchester City Schools Interview Protocols</u>

Research question: How do educators perceptions of instructional contexts and organizational capacity influence readiness for SEL program implementation?

Protocol:
● Interviews (ideally) to include from each campus: principal, assistant principal, counselor, 1 teacher per grade, 1 specialist (i.e. reading coordinator, physical educator, etc.) for a total of 10 at elementary and a similar number at secondary (i.e. teachers of upperclassmen, lowerclassmen, a variety of content levels)
● Document Review to include: school website, school code of conduct, school schedule, examination of physical space (walls, common spaces, exterior, etc), yearbooks (where available), school newsletters (where available), list of school programs (where available). etc.

Intended Audience:
● 6 Elementary Schools
● 3 Secondary Schools
● Principals
● Assistant Principals
● Counselors
● Teachers

Introduction: Hello, my name is _____ and I am a doctoral candidate at Vanderbilt University. I really appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to talk to me about your thoughts and ideas about social emotional learning (SEL) and about how it might be implemented in Manchester City Schools . The information you share today will not be attributed to you or to your school directly. Instead, our team will look for themes and trends across our conversations. Your contributions will help to inform planning and roll out of future MCS initiatives. Before we begin our interview, I would like to read you a paragraph about informed consent.

IRB Language (to be used with every participant): This interview is being conducted as a needs assessment for Manchester City Schools in partnership with Vanderbilt University Peabody College. Your participation is completely voluntary. The purpose of this interview is to gain information about school and district perceptions of Social Emotional Learning. The interview should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Your feedback will guide the district in determining next steps for supporting Social Emotional Learning for students in Manchester City Schools. No risks would be reasonably expected as a result of participation in this interview. Your responses to this interview will be kept anonymous. No other personal identifying information will be collected. Do you have any questions related to what I have shared before we begin?

Teacher Interview Protocol

Ice Breaker and Professional Background
How much time will you get off for Thanksgiving? What are you most looking forward to about that time?
How long have you been at [school]?
Where did you teach before [school]? With Manchester City Schools (MCS)?
What attracted you to [school]? MCS?
What are the greatest strengths of MCS? Its greatest challenges?
What classes/subject(s) do you teach? Grade level?
How did you prepare to teach those subjects? (Where did you go to teacher's college? What is your background/degree in?)

Teacher Perceptions of **SEL**:
How would you define social emotional learning (SEL)?
Have you attended any SEL training or professional development? Describe it.
What role might SEL play in schools, if any? In classrooms?
How comfortable are you with implementing SEL in your classroom? What would make you more comfortable?

Personal and School Level Capacity/Readiness for **Implementation**:
What initiatives are taking place in your building this year? How do they relate to each other? To district priorities?
Which is the most important initiative? The least?
On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being very ready and 1 being not at all ready), what is your capacity for taking on another initiative of any kind?
If you were to take on an initiative related to SEL, what would it look like?
If you were to take another initiative on related to SEL, what support would you need (time, professional development, resources)?

Organizational Capacity/Readiness for **SEL Implementation**:

What have you been told about Manchester City Schools' plan for SEL? What are the expected outcomes?

Have any staff or staff time that has been committed to SEL at (name of school)? In MCS? (If yes) what/which/how many staff are devoted SEL implementation?

What resources are needed in order to ensure successful implementation of SEL initiatives?What culture leadership roles or staff positions are needed in order to ensure successful implementation of SEL initiatives?

Has your school implemented any programs related to SEL? Has MCS? (If yes) what program(s) have been implemented?

What model or program would best support successful implementation of SEL?

Has (name of school) or district received any grants or funds related to SEL? (If yes) what funds or grants?

Are you aware of any SEL-focused professional development? (If yes) what programs or topics has/will the professional development focus on?

How is professional development "practiced" within MCS? What professional development would best support the implementation of SEL?

What are the expectations of faculty/staff for SEL at your school? In MCS?

Have there been any changes related to time for SEL implementation (e.g., schedules, meeting structures, time for collaboration, etc.)? If so, what changes?

What impact, if any, might current climate and culture in MCS have on MCS's capacity for implementation of SEL?

Closing
Is there anything else I need to learn or understand about MCS before we depart today?

Principal/Assistant Principal Protocol

Ice Breaker and Professional Background
How much time will you get off for Thanksgiving? What are you most looking forward to about that time?
Where did you start your career in education? What year?
How long have you been a principal/assistant principal? At [school]?
Where did you work before you came [school]? What was your role there?
What attracted you to [school]? Manchester City Schools (MCS)?
What are the greatest strengths of MCS? Its greatest challenges?
How did you prepare to be a school leader? (Where did you go to teacher's college? What is your background/degree in? What positions have you held before?)

Principal Perceptions of **SEL**:
How would you define social emotional learning (SEL)?
What has been your exposure to SEL? Your teachers? Your counselor?
How did you hear about it?
In your view, what role can SEL play in schools? Classrooms?
Have you experienced any SEL training or professional development? Describe it. How effective was it? Why? What about your teachers and counselors?
How comfortable are you with implementing SEL in your school? Your staff? What would make you or your staff more comfortable?

Personal and School Level Capacity/Readiness for **Implementation**:
What initiatives are taking place in your building this year?
How do the initiatives that are taking place in your building relate to each other?
How do these initiatives relate to district priorities?
What messages have you shared with staff about the priority each initiative should receive. Which is the most important? The least?
On a scale of 1-10(with 10 being very ready and 1 being not at all ready), what is your capacity for taking on another initiative of any kind?
If you were to take on an initiative related to SEL, what would it look like?

If you were to take another initiative on related to SEL, what support would you need (time, professional development, resources)?

Organizational Capacity/Readiness for **SEL Implementation**:

What have you been told about Manchester City Schools' plan for SEL? What are the expected outcomes?

Have any staff or staff time that has been committed to SEL at (name of school)? In MCS? (If yes) what/which/how many staff are devoted SEL implementation?

What resources are needed in order to ensure successful implementation of SEL initiatives?What leadership roles or staff positions are needed in order to ensure successful implementation of SEL initiatives?

Has your school implemented any programs related to SEL? Has MCS? (If yes) what program(s) have been implemented?

What model or program would best support successful implementation of SEL?

Has (name of school) or district received any grants or funds related to SEL? (If yes) what funds or grants?

Are you aware of any SEL-focused professional development? (If yes) what programs or topics has/will the professional development focus on?

How is professional development "practiced" within MCS? What professional development would best support the implementation of SEL?

What are the expectations of faculty/staff for SEL at your school? In MCS?

Have there been any changes related to time for SEL implementation (e.g., schedules, meeting structures, time for collaboration, etc.)? If so, what changes?

What impact, if any, might current climate and culture in MCS have on MCS's capacity for implementation of SEL?

Closing

Is there anything else I need to learn or understand about MCS before we depart today?

Counselor Interview Protocol

Ice Breaker and Professional Background
How much time will you get off for Thanksgiving? What are you most looking forward to about that time?
How long have you been at [school]?
Where did you work before [school]? With Manchester City Schools (MCS)?
What attracted you to [school]? MCS?
What are the greatest strengths of MCS? Its greatest challenges?
How did you prepare to be a school counselor? (Where did you go to teacher's college? What is your background/degree in? What positions have you held before?)

Counselor Perceptions of **SEL**:
How would you define social emotional learning (SEL)?
Have you attended any SEL training or professional development? Describe it.
What role might SEL play in schools, if any? In classrooms?
How comfortable are you with implementing SEL in your school? What would make you more comfortable?

Personal and School Level Capacity/Readiness for **Implementation**:
What initiatives are taking place in your building this year?
How do the initiatives that are taking place in your building relate to each other?
How do these initiatives relate to district priorities?
What messages have you shared with staff about the priority each initiative should receive.
Which is the most important? The least?
How do these initiatives support students' SEL (or well-being)?
On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being very ready and 1 being not at all ready), what is your capacity for taking on another initiative of any kind? Related to SEL?
On a scale of 1-10, what is your school community's capacity for taking on another initiative?
In your view, would your school faculty and staff support an SEL initiative? If so, who?
If you were to take on an initiative related to SEL, what would it look like?
If you were to take another initiative on related to SEL, what support would you need (time, professional development, resources)?

Organizational Capacity/Readiness for **SEL Implementation**:

What have you been told about Manchester City Schools' plan for SEL? What are the expected outcomes?

Have any staff or staff time that has been committed to SEL at (name of school)? In MCS? (If yes) what/which/how many staff are devoted SEL implementation?

What resources are needed in order to ensure successful implementation of SEL initiatives?What leadership roles or staff positions are needed in order to ensure successful implementation of SEL initiatives?

Has your school implemented any programs related to SEL? Has MCS? (If yes) what program(s) have been implemented?

What model or program would best support successful implementation of SEL?

Has (name of school) or district received any grants or funds related to SEL? (If yes) what funds or grants?

Are you aware of any SEL-focused professional development? (If yes) what programs or topics has/will the professional development focus on?

How is professional development "practiced" within MCS? What professional development would best support the implementation of SEL?

What are the expectations of faculty/staff for SEL at your school? In MCS?

Have there been any changes related to time for SEL implementation (e.g., schedules, meeting structures, time for collaboration, etc.)? If so, what changes?

What impact, if any, might current climate and culture in MCS have on MCS's capacity for implementation of SEL?

Closing

Is there anything else I need to learn or understand about MCS before we depart today?

District Personnel Protocol

<u>Ice Breaker and Professional Background</u>
How much time will you get off for Thanksgiving? What are you most looking forward to about that time?
How long have you been a district official?
Where did you work before you came central office? What was your role there? Previous locations and roles?
What attracted you to Manchester City Schools (MCS)?
What are the greatest strengths of MCS? Its greatest challenges?
How did you prepare to for your current role? (Where did you go to teacher's college? What is your background/degree in? What positions have you held before?)

<u>District Perceptions of **SEL**</u>:
How would you define social emotional learning (SEL)?
Have you attended any SEL training or professional development? Describe it.
What role might SEL play in schools, if any? In classrooms?
How comfortable are you with implementing SEL in your district? Your colleagues (principals, teachers, counselors)?
What would make you more comfortable? Your colleagues (principals, teachers, counselors)?

<u>Organizational capacity/readiness for **implementation**</u>:
What initiatives are taking place in your district this year?
How do the initiatives that are taking place relate to each other?
How do these initiatives relate to building priorities?
Which is the most important? The least?
On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being very ready and 1 being not at all ready), what is your capacity for taking on another initiative of any kind? Your colleagues' (principals, teachers, counselors)?
If you were to take on an initiative related to SEL, what would it look like?
If you were to take another initiative on related to SEL, what support would you need (time, professional development, resources)? Your colleagues (principals, teachers, counselors)?

Organizational Capacity/Readiness for **SEL implementation**:

What have you been told about Manchester City Schools' plan for SEL? What are the expected outcomes?

Have any staff or staff time that has been committed to SEL at the district level? At the school level? (If yes) what/which/how many staff are devoted SEL implementation?

What resources are needed in order to ensure successful implementation of SEL initiatives?What leadership roles or staff positions are needed in order to ensure successful implementation of SEL initiatives?

Has your district implemented any programs related to SEL? Have specific schools? (If yes) what program(s) have been implemented?

What model or program would best support successful implementation of SEL?

Has MCS received any grants or funds related to SEL? (If yes) what funds or grants?

Are you aware of any SEL-focused professional development offered by the district? By specific schools? (If yes) what programs or topics has/will the professional development focus on?

How is professional development "practiced" within MCS? What professional development would best support the implementation of SEL?

What are the expectations of faculty/staff for SEL in MCS? At specific schools?

Have there been any changes related to time for SEL implementation (e.g., schedules, meeting structures, time for collaboration, etc.)? If so, what changes?

What impact, if any, might current climate and culture in MCS have on MCS's capacity for implementation of SEL?

Closing

 Is there anything else I need to learn or understand about MCS before we depart today?

Appendix D
Master Matrix

Master Matrix
1. This doc includes matrices for each type of interview (teacher, counselor, admin, district personnel).
2. We record key quotes and pithy headlines that jump out while relistening/rereading.
3. We note any documents/observations from each setting that are pertinent to the buckets.
4. Copy and paste additional matrices per category as needed.
5. Note the section for themes at the bottom of the document.
6. Key: P - Principal, O - Other Administrators, C - Counselors, T - Teachers

Master Matrix
Pseudonym: Manchester City Schools (MCS)

Bin/Concepts	Theme: pithy headlines	Key Quote(s): Name (if applicable): **ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**	Key Quote(s): Name (if applicable): **HIGH SCHOOLS**	Documents	Observations
Teacher Perceptions of SEL 1. Definition	1. Isn't That When: Although there is some knowledge of SEL, many lack understanding, and there is no consensus of what it is.	T: I think about when students don't have knowledge of how to regulate those emotions, and what that means, and how it impacts their learning, because if you get upset about something and you don't' know how to process and you don't know what to do with your anger, then you can't move forward with your day and move on and learn. If they don't have those skills, it could really impact them.	P: I don't know what the broad, correct definition is, but I would say it has to do with impactful learning, and how individuals learn based on their background and social skills. That looks different for everybody. T: It encompasses the entire child-background, education-wide, home environment-the whole child. P: Catering to the students' needs. Allowing them to open up and express their feelings. Getting input from		Preston High - Building filled with art. Unique architecture. Police car parked in front of the school. Lots of parents in cars picking up students during dismissal.

		T:That'd be group work, collaboration, partner work… T:I actually don't know how to define it. P: I know that our teachers know the buzzword, but I don't know if they know what really what that means and all that it encompasses. C: I think that SEL is trying to get student to learn as they block out some of the barriers that may hinder them from learning.	students about what they want. This year we're doing a gender based forum, but we need more small groups.		
	Students' Struggles are Real/Students Need Support: Across the board, the BCS community was aware of students' struggles.	T: I look at kids like knots in a shoestring. You've got to untangle each not. You can't just take out 2 knots and say,' I'm good right?' If there is one not in your shoe it ain't going to work right. We got kids with 30 knots in their shoes. P: It's hard to try and figure out what is	P:We are good at implementing programs that will help student succeed regardless of students' socio -economic backgrounds. We have high socio economic and low. It's a range. We have to support students through that adversity. We have a plan and we work to ensure that all students, regardless of	Observations of the community around the schools Announcement over the intercom by the principal at the end of the day, "Have a great evening. I love	

		going on. They will tear my office up. But when we get them calm, and then ready to go back to class and have a good day…. Like three times a day…. We have about 4 to 5 in every classroom in this school. That's a lot. You have to think, if that's a room of 20, you got 5 students that at any moment could blow up. T: You're not dealing with just poverty. You're dealing with generational poverty.	where they come from can succeed. It plays a major role. The classroom is the most important place. Everything outside the classroom should be done to support the classroom. And in the classroom, in addition to academics, students learn how to deal with different people and situations. Supporting SEL should be a priority. P: I'd be very open to implementing. I do believe our staff would be open. The major thing would be to make sure everyone has an understanding about why we're doing what we're doing and what they're responsible for. We also need to know how we'll work together so all kids can succeed. If we do that, people won't feel like they have another thing on their plate. P: I want it to service the students who really need it. Even if it's all students, maybe we could start with a	you and I look forward to seeing you tomorrow."	

			small group and get recommendations from teachers. We would want to be very strategic and deliberate about what the goal of the program is so that we can select the right students, so we can find out exactly what we want to do, and so that we can get buy in from students, teachers and parents about what we're going to do. T: When people know why they're doing things, they're bought in. When it's thrown at them or they're just told to do it, it's likely to be set aside. I've seen that throughout my career. We also need to track data and get feedback, maybe from people inside the program. T: The role of SEL could be more prominent if we had professional development on it. It would help us understand our kids better. We need to realize that children don't live here. They go home to an environment every day that either helps them grow or doesn't. These children		

			carry so much. Sometimes we'll say "Oh, he said this to me.", but we don't know what the root of the issue is. P: We have a high poverty area. We serve a lot of housing projects. We know our role. Some kids come here for love. It would be great to expand on what we're already doing. Our kids need that. It would be a plus for our student body.		
	3. SEL is important but content teachers shouldn't be expected to teach it.		T: There's no way you can teach the curriculum and teach what you need to know and deal with that. We have to have other people to deal with that. Everyone has to be accountable for their field. If social emotional learning is a problem, which it is in urban schools, we need more counselors. You can't expect an English teacher to solve social emotional problems. It doesn't matter how much PD you give them….. At what point does she stop being an English teacher and start being a counselor. She can't wear	Teacher schedules, graduation requirements	

			both hats. She's not going to be successful. T: Our kids are severely, they are emotionally challenged and there is nothing that math and science can do about it. T: They aren't trained. They are trained in their particular area, their content area. So to have them facilitate any type of instruction dealing with that social emotional piece, it's kind of unfair to the teacher….		
	SEL focus should take place in elementary schools		O:What role should SEL play in your school? I think it varies depending on the level, whether you are on an elementary level or middle school level or high school level. When you start talking about formative years in elementary school, there has to be something put in place to help mold the students before they get to us. Because by the time we get them, they already have all these ideas and		

			what their beliefs are. It's kind of hard to change them once they are in high school if you haven't started off at an early age.		
	4. Teachers as Champions for Kids: Teachers and leaders were willing to support students' SEL skill development if they had the time and the resources to do so.	P: It's something we need. We have a lot of students who have a lot of needs and a lot of social problems and we have to find something to help them because they explode when they come to school and we have to make this space a safe haven. P: (It's important that we are) Meeting students' emotional needs first and not going straight to academics. T: We need to know our students as people and know why they feel the way they do and support them to express themselves and to communicate in a way so that the			

		learning environment is better so that they can get what they need. P: If we can see where we can integrate that and infuse it with what we are doing, we don't mind. T: It's [about] the training. I would be happy to implement some of that stuff because the students really need it.			
2. Exposure to SEL					
3. Role of SEL in classrooms/schools; level of importance					
4. Level of comfort with implementation in their classroom	Level of comfort varies, but willingness is prevalent.	P: I'm not [comfortable]. I would want to but I don't have the training or the professional development skills at this time to say that I could implement that with fidelity. It would be something that I			

		would love and want to do though.			
Personal and School- Level Capacity/ Readiness for Implementation 1. Current initiatives; relationship between initiatives; which most important	1. Can I Really Do This? Many educators expressed that they are not sure how to balance the demands of instructional expectations and accountability while supporting students' socio-emotional needs.	1.P:Test scores, test scores, test scores, curriculum, instruction, curriculum, instruction. There are so many other things that factor into that … causes stress. It's the same way for a classroom teacher. There are so many stressors on the teachers that managing that, there is a tipping point. So morale gets low. Bad habits get brought in…. It's easy to lose focus on, you know, on what the mission of the work is.		District Strategic Plan District and Superintendent social media Student Code of Conduct School discipline data School academic data	CHAMPS posters on the wall

		T: I know at the end of the year (I'm)not getting no kudos for helping Michael socially and emotionally. That's not policy. That's not what policy is looking for. That's not what he's being assessed for. T: What keeps me from moving forward is that I don't know how to address it without stopping teaching. I don't know how to set my classroom up so that the learning doesn't stop. I also wouldn't know if I did stop and there was an observation, would that go against me? T: On one end, I have this problem in my classroom with behavior. On another end, I'm trying to get my kids ready for the next level, so where do I stand?... I'm stuck.			

2. Capacity to take on another initiative (scale of 1-10)	2. Preparation precedes execution	P: The earlier that Chappel can begin these trainings, the better. I am more than open. I would use my Title funds. I prefer in house. T: The capacity depends on how you lay it out. If you say we're going to go gradually, and we're going to start here...but the district doesn't work that way. T: One word. Planning. When you adequately plan, you are not stressed. Your kids aren't gonna get it. When you plan, you have time to step back. You have time to reflect. You have time to relax.			
3. How would a new SEL initiative look?	Innovations Must Be Adapted to Context		O: We need to make sure that the people at the top truly understands what is happening on the ground in schools. Every school has its own unique personality.		

			No school is the same. One school's needs is different than the other. We need to make sure we're making the right moves and adjusting for every school… Not just paining a broad brush for every school…Take the time to listen to principals, teachers, students and parents…That is a must to ensure we are truly meeting the needs of our schools and their communities. T: It has to be for our school and for our kids. I was at this PD where the presenter said that the program was only for kids on grade level. You're talking to BCS teacher with BCS students who struggle. I was just turned off and then I had to stay there for 3 days.		
4. What support would you need for a new SEL initiative?					

Organizational Capacity /Readiness for SEL Implemen-tation 1. Knowledge of BCS's plan for SEL and expected outcomes 2. Knowledge/type of already allocated resources to SEL (staff, time, funding) 3. Type/level of resources needed 4. School SEL programs already in place; Suggested model/program for use by BCS				SEL Department website, SEL Department staff list	

5. Nature of existing professional development on SEL 6. Nature of PD in BCS in general 7. How PD in general should look 8. How PD on SEL should look 9. Impact of current climate/culture on BCS's capacity to implement	9. Churn, Churn, Churn/Change Fatigue: One of the most prevalent themes in interviews was fatigue, both change and initiative fatigue.	9. P: Challenges? I would say inconsistency from the top. We have been through a lot of people. A lot of changes. And with that comes a lot of new initiatives. And I know the work is ever-changing, but give something time to work. T: The best way that I have heard it summed up is – we build the plane as we fly. I've heard that from starting from July to now. That is really the case right now. We	O: Our biggest changes are stability. I think we're on a roll toward having stability. We've had a lot of changes, whether it be at the top and changes in our school system. Leadership, principals….With new people coming comes new people and new ideas they want to do. T: Right now we're transitioning with everything coming in and the new implementation. Everyone is frustrated. It kind of makes the environment tense…I can't	District PD Plan	

		are flying along. Might get a wing. Might put some duct tape on it. Might put some glue on the other side and that's working. Might get a spark plug. And we just coasting along. Like she said, we take it in stride. O: There are so many things to focus on you are pulled in so many directions. P: Everything is the most important. T: Just listening to people talk, everybody is waiting to see what's going to happen next. We know change always happens, but it's like what's next, what's next, so you're almost scared to do what you're doing now because something else is coming next. O: Finding time for SEL or student support services to be on a school's agenda is just not happening yet. There's no time for it. There are a lot of initiatives that have	tell you about everything, like SREB…I don't know. It's just like they throw things at you on top of all the other things. It can feel like the initiatives are clashing and that everyone wants their piece of the pie. T: Willing always. Like I tell my students, you have to learn something every day or your day is wasted. Sometimes the things we're doing aren't working, and we have to try new things that do. Willing, I'm a 10 all day long. If it's going to help my kids, I will try anything. Capacity or ready, maybe 1.5. I'm scared. It's like we try new things and they're good and then they go away. I'm not ready. Maybe a 1. T: Whatever it is, it has to be done on a consistent basis, and it has to be school-wide to get everyone on board. It also has to be consistent. We have to talk about it every day. We've had some good programs, but then they come and go. It is hard		

		come out in the past year and a half and a lot of District changes and the right things again, but all at once. And so [SEL is] kind of a priority, but kind of on the back burner right now.	for us to get excited or even knee deep in an issue or a program and then it changes. We have had 5 different lesson plan templates in 3 years. Why? Is that what really drives instruction? Are we focusing on the wrong things? T: The biggest challenge is just consistency. Lots of changes.		
	Show Me the Vision: A majority of interview participants felt that initiatives were rolled out hastily.	T: I feel like we work so hard to do one thing and there is another thing to do another. I'm okay with introducing something new, but I don't always know where it comes from. T: Give us PD. There are so many other things going on and so many other initiatives. We need to see how it fits in.			

		O: Before they even start the PD, I want them to have a clear plan.		
	Feedback Fail or Golden Opportunity?/Teachers Want to Be Heard: Their voices were not considered as implementation occurred.	T: Another thing I think they could improve on would be that they could get teacher feedback. Like we're supposed to come back and go to a workshop and they don't ask us. T: We get surveys after the fact. T: I think a survey could be a huge help. Like if you could get consensus and then make a plan, that would be helpful.	T: We've maybe lost our spark, or maybe some are frustrated with the different initiatives that are being added. It's like no one hears us. But we're all still here because we love our kids. It's okay if they want to tell us what's wrong, but sometimes we don't feel appreciated. They want us to bend over backward to make sure students are successful, and I will do it. But those same courtesies aren't extended to us. Listen to us. T: It would be helpful if they would do professional development that teachers actually need. It would be helpful to have a variety. Sometimes we go to PD that we already know. One of the best PD events I went	

			to was an unconference. It was so great to get to choose which sessions to go and to get feedback from professionals in your own field. We were just bouncing ideas off each other and I was so energized!		
10. What attracted to BCS? Greatest strengths/challenges?	10. BCS Is Where the Heart Is/Birmingham Pride: The majority of the educators we spoke to made an intentional choice to work in BCS.	T: My Mom was a BCS teacher and I was inspired by her to teach. I went to BCS. I believe I am able to make an impact here. C: One of the positives are community. Birmingham feels like a big small town. People that work at schools often went to them. Every weekend it seems like there is a reunion or a party for a graduating class. Everyone keeps up with everyone. T: I graduated from BCS. As a matter of fact, I went to Northwest. Also, my Mom was an educator. I knew that	O: I'm a product of Birmingham City Schools and I started my career here in middle school science. My experience in BCS as a student was fantastic. From kindergarten to 12th grade, it was excellent. I'm a graduate of Parker High. Expectations of you were high. You knew you were going to be successful. That experience along with the experience I got in a career track helped me to know I would succeed. I was in college and I knew I wanted to do something to give back. I'm from a family of educators. They told me that you needed to bring passion. You know you're		Preston High - Building filled with art. Unique architecture. Police car parked in front of the school. Lots of parents in cars picking up students during dismissal. Flower arrangement in the front hall. Everyone who walks in says "Good morning" in the front office. Well lit entrance.

		was what I wanted to do and that BCS is where I wanted to be. P: The community… those of us who serve the community. We've just got a strong feeling that we can make a difference.	not going to get paid a lot, so you have to have a lot of passion. O: My principal is very compassionate, has good experience and is a good people person. He's given me good guidance and direction. He's a great example of what an administrator should look like. He's given me a chance to develop skills and experiences I need. P: Majority of the staff members have been graduates of BCS. A lot of our officials have also gone through BCS. We have a lot of success stories. School board members, council members, and even our former mayor. T: I fell in love with Birmingham. I've grown technically and professionally just from being here in this district. I have nothing but glows. It's a great place.		

	Charismatic C-Suite: Many of the staff we spoke to at all levels were motivated by the superintendent.	P: Our greatest strengths is that we have a leader who has designed a trajectory that children should have. She has high expectations. We've had several leaders where we've been able to wing it. I think people have been comfortable winging it. T: Our superintendent is a strong leader and she is very motivating. I feel very empowered to go and do when I listen to her. O: I think that overall, we have a lot of capacity in terms of leadership and the knowledge and I think that the superintendent is focused on the right work and rolling out the right initiatives… P: I think that the morale is growing. When (the) Superintendent speaks, we listen.	T: We have so many people here who really care deeply about kids and who walk their talk in doing what is best for kids. It also really feels like a family. I left and came back because I missed it so much. I love it here.		

Appendix E
Cognitive Interview

Given the unique and meaningful role that stakeholder surveys can play in gauging perceptions, providing contextual information, and guiding effective reform, we sought to provide a reliable and valid instrument. By improving the quality and scope of the data collected, we aimed to provide a solid basis for policy decisions within Manchester City Schools.

Pre-testing surveys is one method recommended to address potential weaknesses of a survey (Desimone & Le Floch, 2004). Educational terminology can often be ambiguous. By investigating if educators interpret seemingly straightforward constructs as they were intended by the interviewers, researchers can improve the rigor and objectivity of the survey. Following Desimone and Le Floch's (2004) cognitive interviewing model, we conducted a "think aloud interview" in which participants talked through their thoughts as they responded to each item on the survey. The following questions were asked at the conclusion of this think aloud time:

- Which question or questions are most straightforward? What made this question or questions easy to answer?
- Which question or questions are least straightforward? What made this question or questions most difficult to answer?
- What do you most hope those who review this survey will get out of the data? Do you believe this survey is sufficient to get this point across?
- What questions would you add to the survey if you were designing it? Why would you add these questions?

At the conclusion of interviews in Manchester City Schools, cognitive interviews were conducted with five educators. These five educators were selected based on their availability and therefore this was a sample of convenience which has its limitations. These interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Our project team followed a careful procedure of

reviewing the cognitive interviews for each item. A sample transcription of an interview can be found below:

Interviewee: We use the State Course of Study for our standards, so I don't think people who take this survey will understand what that means.

Interviewer: Thank you. That is helpful.

Interviewee: What is this…how do you say it case-case-el?

Interviewer: Thank you for catching that we used an acronym that might be confusing. That is the abbreviation for the Collaborative for Social, Academic and Emotional Learning, an organization that compiles and leads work related to SEL across the United States.

Interviewee: (upon completion, 12 minutes and 33 seconds from start): Yeah, that pretty much hits the basics.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you might add?

Interviewee: Well, this survey should give them a lot of information. I'm glad you asked for the differences between if we think it's important and if we can actually do it with everything else on our plate. The only thing I might want would be a space to add my own thoughts.

Through the process of conducting cognitive interviews, we discovered some technical and perceptual issues. The cognitive interviews helped to unpack complex constructs such as SEL and implementation to ensure that respondents interpreted the questions as intended. Our project team used feedback from the cognitive interviews to ensure that there were shared meanings and interpretations in surveyed constructs. For example in all five cognitive interviews, the educators we spoke with did not understand the CASEL acronym, which we expanded to its full name, the Collaborative for Social, Academic and Emotional Learning, to make the item more clear. In 3 interviews, educators expressed a desire to have an open-ended response item in order to leave comments for those reviewing the survey. We revised items based on feedback and suggestions from the respondents and created an improved survey. Additionally, we found that our estimate of 15 minutes or less for survey completion was accurate.

Appendix F
Social Emotional Learning Survey

Social Emotional Learning Survey

This survey is being conducted as a needs assessment for Manchester City Schools in partnership with Vanderbilt University Peabody College. Your participation in completing this survey is completely voluntary.

The purpose of this survey is to gain information about school and district perceptions of Social Emotional Learning. The survey should take less than 10-15 minutes to complete. Your feedback will guide the district in determining next steps for supporting Social Emotional Learning for students in Manchester City Schools. No risks would be reasonably expected as a result of participation in this survey. No personally identifying information will be collected. All responses will remain anonymous and will not be tied to an individual or school.

If you should have any questions about this survey, please contact the Director of Social Emotional Learning for MCS at xxx-xxx-xxxx or Christy Bryce, Vanderbilt University graduate student at (859) 955-0809. For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, to discuss problems, concerns, and questions, or to offer input, please feel free to contact the Vanderbilt Institutional Review Board Office at (615) 322-2918 or toll free at (866) 224-8273.

By clicking yes, you are stating that you have read this informed consent document, all of your questions have been answered, and you freely and voluntarily choose to participate. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. Thank you!

○ Yes, I voluntarily choose to participate in this survey. (1)

Social and emotional learning (SEL) refers to the development of skills related to recognizing and managing emotions, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.Keeping this in mind, read the following statements and rate the extent to which you agree or disagree.

Items on Self Perceptions

Read the following statements thinking about your beliefs on social and emotional learning and rate the extent to which you agree with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I want to improve my ability to teach social and emotional skills to students.	○	○	○	○	○
I would like to attend a workshop to develop my own social and emotional skills.	○	○	○	○	○
I would like to attend a workshop to learn how to develop my students' social and emotional skills.	○	○	○	○	○
I am comfortable providing instruction on social and emotional skills to my students.	○	○	○	○	○
Informal lessons in social and emotional learning are part of my regular teaching practice.	○	○	○	○	○

	○	○	○	○	○
I am confident in my ability to provide instruction on the five competencies of social and emotional learning (self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, relationship skills).	○	○	○	○	○
Taking care of my students' social and emotional needs comes naturally to me.	○	○	○	○	○
All teachers should receive training on how to teach social and emotional skills to students.	○	○	○	○	○

Items on School Based Perceptions

My school has a social and emotional learning program in place.

○ Yes

○ No

○ Unsure

My school has social and emotional learning standards in place for each grade level.

○ Yes

○ No

○ Unsure

Read the following statements thinking about your specific school context and rate the extent to which you agree with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
My school has an explicit long-term vision and plan for social and emotional learning.	○	○	○	○	○
My school has a process for involving parents in the development of our social and emotional learning plan.	○	○	○	○	○
At my school, all staff members are offered professional development on how to teach social and emotional skills to students.	○	○	○	○	○
My school has a system in place to monitor the effectiveness of the social and emotional instructional model.	○	○	○	○	○
My principal encourages the teaching	○	○	○	○	○

of social and emotional skills to students.

The culture in my school supports the development of children's social and emotional needs.

⭘ ⭘ ⭘ ⭘ ⭘

My school expects teachers to address children's social and emotional needs.

⭘ ⭘ ⭘ ⭘ ⭘

My principal creates an environment that promotes social and emotional learning for our students.

⭘ ⭘ ⭘ ⭘ ⭘

Items on District-wide Perceptions

Read the following statements thinking about Manchester City Schools (BCS) at-large and rate the extent to which you agree with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
MCS has a strategic plan and explicit vision for social and emotional learning.	○	○	○	○	○
MCS has a process for involving all stakeholders in developing the vision and long-term plan for social and emotional learning.	○	○	○	○	○
MCS offers professional development opportunities related to social and emotional instructional practices.	○	○	○	○	○
MCS offers ongoing embedded support to staff in the area of social and emotional learning.	○	○	○	○	○
MCS has dedicated human and financial resources to support the implementation of social and emotional	○	○	○	○	○

learning
district-wide.

MCS has Pre-K-12 social and emotional learning standards in place.

○ Yes

○ No

○ Unsure

MCS has a system in place to monitor the effectiveness of the social and emotional learning model.

○ Yes

○ No

○ Unsure

Open Feedback
Please provide any additional comments or suggestions related to social and emotional learning.

What role do you believe social and emotional learning could play in your district, your school or your classroom?

_____

List any social and emotional learning programs or resources you are familiar with and would like for the district to consider.

_____

It is important to recognize other work taking place in the schools before ushering in a new initiative. List 3-5 initiatives that are being implemented in your school this year.

_____

How do the initiatives you listed above relate to one another?

_____

Rate how you feel about your readiness (capacity, willingness) for the following.

	Not ready at all							Very ready		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	6	7	8	9	10

Rate your readiness for taking on another initiative of any kind.	
Rate your readiness for taking on a social and emotional learning initiative.	

If you were to take another initiative on related to social and emotional learning, what support would you need (time, professional development, resources)?

_____

Other Comments or Suggestions:

_____

Demographic information

I have been in my current position for...

○ 0-5 years

○ 6-10 years

○ 11-15 years

○ 16-20 years

○ Over 20 years

I have been with MCS for...

○ 0-5 years

○ 6-10 years

○ 11-15 years

○ 16-20 years

○ Over 20 years

I identify as...

○ Hispanic or Latinx

○ American Indian or Alaska Native

○ Asian

○ Black or African American

○ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

○ White

○ Other

- -

If you are interested in joining the Social Emotional Learning district implementation team, please list your name in the box below. To ensure anonymity, your name will not be linked with the rest of your individual responses.

_____

End of Block: Default Question Block

Limitations

Our project focused on how teacher perceptions of instructional contexts and organizational capacity influence readiness for SEL program implementation in an urban school district in the southeastern U.S. In this section, we will address the limitations of our project with respect to its external and internal reliability and validity.

Reliability

With a qualitative approach like ours, there are constraints on the reliability of our project, which we will explicate here (Patton, 2015). First, we are concerned with a naturally occurring event—readiness for SEL program implementation in an urban school district in the southern U.S.—as compared to a strictly controlled experimental study. Our approach naturally appears more challenging to replicate due to issues related to uniqueness of context or other factors and idiosyncrasies. Also, our qualitative approach necessitated the application of artistry (Patton, 2015) to

the way we presented data as opposed to the codified techniques typical of more quantitative approaches. In the face of these constraints, we realized that we were in the field and not in the lab and utilized descriptive, anchored concepts: we went into the field with an open mind but not empty-headed. We had consumed the extant literature and were prepared to consume and process what we observed.

External

Here, we address five major problems associated with external reliability and how they relate our project—research status position, informant choices, social situations and conditions, analytic constructs and premises, and methods of data collection and analysis. First, we addressed the potential problem of research status position by primarily presenting ourselves as graduate students and not as our other social roles, thereby limiting the potential of our conclusions to be qualified by our

social roles in relation to the research site. We also selected informants that were neutral and had a lot of information. We centered the social situations and conditions around our interviewees' comfort in order to mitigate the impact of setting on their responses. With our analytic constructs and premises we were sensitive in the way that ordered our questions, from less intense to more, and were sensitive, for example, to varying perceptions of capacity in the way we phrased questions. Our methods of data collection and analysis are detailed in the methods section and our interview protocols are in Appendix C.

Internal

With regard to internal reliability, we will discuss our approach to low inference descriptors, peer examination, and mechanically recorded data, three strategies typically employed to reduce threats to internal reliability in qualitative approaches. With low inference descriptors, we recorded digitally and utilized a recording application for digital transcription. A clear limitation is that our study has not been subjected to peer examination, which under other circumstances would afford corroboration of findings by other researchers and support the prospect of publication. However, we did mechanically record data in an effort to reduce threat to internal reliability as opposed to just taking notes.

Validity

Here, we will discuss the limitations around our study's validity and will discuss the issue of comparability as a function of external validity (Patton, 2015). We will share how we addressed four issues related to internal validity—process and change, observer effects, selection, and spurious conclusions. On the external validity front, our most significant question was about comparability and how typical and generalizable our findings are. Our findings are limited here and are only potentially generalizable to other similarly situated settings and conditions like the ones in which our study took place.

With regard to internal validity, we did not encounter any significant process or change issues. Although there has been a great deal of changes in leadership prior to this study being conducted, no consequential changes were observed during the study. We addressed observer effects by

establishing trust and rapport with interviewees through icebreaker questions. We also looked at the language we used in our interview protocol and made sure that it reflected cultural understanding. Our most significant limitation with internal validity was with selection. Ideally, we would have been working with a random stratified sample, but instead we are working with a purposive sample, which can substantially limit our internal validity if those schools that are selected and those whom we interview are not representative of the greater population of MCS employees (in terms of race, gender, socioeconomic status and other factors). However, per our request, Manchester City Schools selected schools that reflected the demographics of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status of the district as a whole in an effort to lessen this threat to internal validity. In addition, we must be aware that those who chose to participate may have common characteristics that are not representative of the general population. For example, perhaps they are more conscientious or likely to display deference to authority or institutions. Please note that we were also careful not to make assumptions in the absence of evidence. (C. Smrekar, class lecture, Spring 2017)

Despite these limitations, the project team does not believe that findings, or key themes, are impacted in any substantial way. The project team adhered to the tenets of qualitative research and have identified findings in which MCS will find key insights to illuminate the current status of SEL program implementation and readiness for the next phase.