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Responsive Classroom: A Mixed Methods Study of the Impact on Academic Achievement and Social Skills

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RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM: A MIXED METHODS STUDY OF THE IMPACT ON
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND SOCIAL SKILLS

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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Amy Hildenbrand under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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Abstract

RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM: A MIXED METHODS STUDY OF THE IMPACT ON

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In a single-year mixed methods explanatory study, the researcher sought to determine the impact

the Responsive Classroom approach had on student achievement and social skills. The

participating elementary school had 14 teachers and two administrators voluntarily participate in

the 4-day Responsive Classroom training. The school used the train-the-trainer model, and the

participating teachers and administrators brought the training to all other staff for the school-

wide implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach. At the end of the year, the

researcher analyzed student achievement data to look for any statistically significant changes as

measured from the non-implementation year to the year with implementation. A pre/posttest

analysis was conducted for discipline for the implementation year and non-implementation year.

A teacher survey and a semi-structured interview of the administrative team were conducted

post-quantitative data review in an explanatory manner. The academic growth was not

statistically significant at the school level; however, the administrators attested that they

observed great academic growth when there was fidelity to the approach. There was a

significant decrease in discipline events. Overall, the Responsive Classroom was effective for

enhancing the social behaviors of the kindergarten through fifth-grade students as evidenced by

the discipline data, teacher surveys, and administrative interviews.

   Keywords: responsive classroom, academic achievement, SEL, social and emotional

learning, intervention

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Nature of the Problem

Businesses are clamoring for high school and college graduates who bring a basic competency level of social skills in order to be successful employees. Schools are clamoring for better school climates that reduce bullying and peer pressure in order to promote greater levels of engagement for the higher levels of rigor within the cognitive subjects. McClelland and Morrison (2003) contended that the development of social skills lays a critical foundation for later academic success as well as work-related skills.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) has been a component in educational settings for many years but has taken on a greater importance with the current rash of school shootings, $5 billion cuts to mental health services from 2009-2014 (How Budget Cuts are Affecting Mental Health Costs, 2016), and an even greater awareness of the mental health issues that are facing students. Early on, SELs took the form of stand-alone, add-on programs that focused on topics such as substance abuse prevention, violence prevention, sexuality, and character education that were meant to address a single specific area of concern in isolation (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2005). Leffert, Brady, and Siperstein (2009) noted that the current climate calls for a different approach and suggested that SEL lessons should be embedded within the day and curricula in schools. Proponents of SEL programs believe that these programs foster youth adjustment by the promotion of positive cognitions, behaviors, and effective characteristics (Abry, Rimm-Kaufman, & Curby, 2017; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). CASEL (2013) provided a compendium for many of the evidence-based programs.

The popularity and importance of SEL programs grew with the passage of No Child Left

Behind (NCLB) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) legislation due to the focus on safe and effective schools coupled with evidenced-based practices. This interest has also been furthered with the number of school shootings and violence that is reported in America's schools on a seemingly daily basis.

Proponents have recently linked the implementation of SEL programs to an increase in student achievement as measured by standardized test scores (Rimm-Kaufman, 2006). The studies completed by Rimm-Kaufman from 2001-2004 with the SALS (Social and Academic Learning Study) team made up of Brock, Chiu. Decker, La Paro, Planta, and Sawyer (Center for Responsive Schools, n.d.b) attributed the increase in standardized test scores to more time on task, more time focused on teaching and learning due to the reduction of discipline issues. They espoused that the students had more ownership of their learning due to feeling safe. Durlak et al. (2011) completed a meta-analysis of 213 studies and found that students performed on average 11 percentile points higher than students who did not receive SEL instruction/programming.

Impact of the Problem

Many students are entering schools without the prerequisite skills for success due to several at-risk factors such as poverty, English as a second language, single-parent households, and inadequate medical attention. School districts are faced with shifting student demographics and increased challenges while simultaneously facing strict scrutiny that demands high levels of performance for all students or schools and districts will be deemed ineffective. A 2015 study from Johns Hopkins University conducted with 3,000 Baltimore students entering kindergarten found that nearly 20% of students entered kindergarten without the prerequisite academic skills for success, yet the most alarming finding was that 31% of students entered school without the necessary social and emotional skills linked to academic success (Bettencourt, Gross, Ho, &

Perrin, 2018). If those deficits are not addressed, those students are at risk for grade retentions and being placed in special education and are more likely to be suspended or face expulsions. All of these outcomes have a negative impact on a student's opportunity for on-time graduation and are linked to earning potential as an adult (Grob-Zakhary, 2015).

Many states have adopted the terminology of providing a "World Class 21st Century Education." The Partnership for 21st Century Learning (2019) described this type of education as one that maintains rigorous cognitive standards in language arts; mathematics; multiple languages; science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM); arts; and social sciences, while also providing an environment that supports creativity and innovation, critical thinking, and problem-solving, collaboration and teamwork, and communication. The definition is not enough to determine the specific steps and procedures required to teach and develop the "prosocial behaviors" that will be required for academic success, workplace success, and success in life. Curriculum guides have been developed for math, English, language arts, science, and social studies, yet many schools and districts have not adopted SEL curriculums or they are not implementing them with fidelity and to the degree of urgency as the content-specific curricula.

Background of the Problem

Setting of the problem. One rural prekindergarten through fifth grade elementary school in the southeast provides the setting for this study. This school has been a part of the community for over 40 years. A new building was constructed roughly 10 years ago to offer an upgraded facility that focuses on safety and a new technology infrastructure. The school is located in a Title 1 district and does receive Title 1 funding and support. The district's overall poverty index is 82%. Despite having successful results on state testing, the school was also identified as having an achievement gap in regard to gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

The elementary school serves 584 students from preschool (ages 3 and 4) through fifth grade.

SEL background. SEL has been a component in educational settings for more than 3 decades. Proponents of SEL programs believe that the programs "foster youth adjustment through the promotion of positive cognitions, behaviors and affective characteristics" (Abry et al., 2017, p. 193; Durlak et al., 2011, p. 406). CASEL provides a compendium for many of the evidence-based programs (CASEL, 2013).

The popularity and importance of SEL programs grew with the passage of NCLB and ESSA legislation due to the focus on safe and effective schools coupled with evidenced-based practices. This interest has also been furthered with the number of school shootings and violence that is reported in America's schools on a seemingly daily basis.

Responsive Classroom. The Responsive Classroom approach is an instructional delivery and social-emotional learning intervention strategy designed to provide teachers with skills needed to create caring, well-managed classroom environments that are conducive to learning (Baroody, Rimm-Kaufman, Larsen, & Curby, 2014). The Responsive Classroom approach is built on four domains of teaching: engaging academics, positive community, effective management, and developmentally responsive teaching. By improving the competencies across these four domains, research that was published in the American Education Research Journal has shown students scoring significantly higher on reading and math tests and the gains were equally strong across all socioeconomic backgrounds (Center for Responsive Schools, n.d.d). Further benefits from the approach include improved social skills in children and improved teacher-student interactions. Additionally, students felt more positive toward school, and teachers felt more effective and positive about teaching. A vital component of this program includes teaching the tools needed for students to become more intrinsically motivated

for their own success.

The four domains are broken down further to explain how the Responsive Classroom is able to have positive impacts on student achievement and school culture (Center for Responsive Schools, n.d.a). The component of "engaging academics" includes providing meaningful academic choices, teaching the language of learning and providing interactive modeling. Positive community translates into knowing all students individually, culturally, and developmentally, using positive teacher language and daily morning meetings to build classroom community and set the tone for the day. The effective management domain begins with creating meaningful rules, responding to behavior mistakes in fair and nonpunitive ways, and establishing clear routines and expectations.

Significance of the Problem

Based on the Bettencourt et al. (2018) study in Baltimore and the recently published Analysis of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) Results (2018), many students lack the prerequisite social and emotional skills needed to be successful in schools. Due to this lack of skills, many schools are looking for ways to provide relevant instruction in order to remediate and improve the current levels through a tiered system of support (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009; Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013). A systematic program or framework to address the social deficits is needed along with the academics. RTI acknowledges the need for tiered interventions for academics and behaviors (Buffum et al., 2009).

In the past NCLB era and the current ESSA era, standardized tests have taken center stage to determine the effectiveness of programs within schools due to the mandates of measurable outcomes (Rushton & Juola-Rushton, 2008). Schools have been drilling down into data to identify discrete strengths and weaknesses in every math and English language arts

(ELA) standard and individual skill. Educators have attempted to disassemble the art of teaching in an attempt to find the science of teaching in order to effectively meet the needs of all students. NCLB and ESSA were crafted with the best of intentions of helping all students to be strong readers, thinkers, and problem solvers. The intention has been to close the achievement gap while simultaneously raising the level of achievement for all students. Despite the implementation of these researched-based practices, the gap still persists especially among students who are identified as at risk due to poverty, race, and gender. Schools have rigorous standards and expectations, coupled with strict pacing guides of when and how to teach all students, with the hopes of better results. Despite the coordinated efforts to create an assembly line of skills and knowledge, many students are not able to access those standards and fall far short of those expectations.

Through the Response to Intervention (RTI) and the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), teachers, administrators, school psychologists, and parents are finding an alarming trend. Students are failing but not due to their aptitude or abilities. Students are failing due to a lack of social skills, lack of persistence, lack of cooperation/ teamwork, lack of communication (language skills), underdeveloped problem-solving skills, and attention disorders (self-regulation). Charney (2002) found that "many students enter school not knowing how to behave" (p. 4). The deficits in social skills are having a negative impact on the academic progress for these students. According to Bettencourt et al. (2018), as many as 10% of kindergarten students enter school with behaviors problems, such as lack of self-control, that disrupt the class and their own learning. Bettencourt et al. went on to state that the number triples for at-risk students. Johns Hopkins School of Nursing (2016) recently published results of a study conducted with 3,000 Baltimore students entering kindergarten. The study found that

nearly 20% of students entered kindergarten without the prerequisite academic skills for success; however, the most alarming finding was that 31% of students entered school without the necessary social and emotional skills linked to academic success. The study indicated that if the deficits are not addressed, those students are at risk for grade retentions and being placed in special education and are more likely to be suspended or face expulsions. All of these outcomes have a negative impact on a student's opportunity for on-time graduation and are linked to earning potential as an adult (Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Tough, 2013). Many educators and policy makers agree that many students are entering schools without the prerequisite skills for success and thus are already behind.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are relevant to this study.

SEL. **S**EL (social and emotional learning) involves acquiring and effectively applying the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions CASEL (2013).

Self-awareness. Recognizing one's emotions and values as well as one's strengths and limitations (Dymnicki, Sambolt, & Kidron, 2013).

Self-management. Managing emotions and behaviors to achieve one's goals (Dymnicki et al., 2013). Self-management is often referred to as self-regulatory behaviors.

Social awareness. Understanding and empathy for others (Dymnicki et al., 2013).

Relationship skills. Forming positive relationships, working in teams, and dealing directly with conflict (Dymnicki et al., 2013).

Responsible decision-making. Making ethical, constructive choices about personal and

social behavior (Dymnicki et al., 2013). Responsible decision-making is often referred to as problem-solving.

      Responsive Classroom approach. An educational framework comprised of six guiding principles and 10 educational practices at the elementary level that support the core belief that in order to be successful in and out of school, students need to learn a set of social and emotional competencies—cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control—and a set of academic competencies—academic mindset, perseverance, learning strategies, and academic behaviors (Center for Responsive Schools, n.d.c). The six guiding principles are (a) teaching social and emotional skills is as important as teaching academic content; (b) how we teach is as important as what we teach; (c) great cognitive growth occurs through social interactions; (d) what we know and believe about our students—individually, culturally, developmentally— informs our expectations, reactions, and attitudes about those students; (e) how we work together as adults to create a safe, joyful, and inclusive environment is as important as our individual contribution or competence; (f) partnering with families because knowing them and valuing their contributions is as important as knowing the children we teach (Center for Responsive Schools, n.d.c).

      The 10 Responsive Classroom practices are

1. **Interactive modeling.** An explicit practice for teaching procedures and routines as well as academic and social skills.

2. **Teacher language.** The intentional use of language to enable students to engage in their learning and develop the academic, social, and emotional skills they need to be successful in and out of school.

3. **Logical consequences.** Nonpunitive responses to misbehavior that allows teachers to

set clear limits and students to fix and learn from their mistakes while maintaining
their dignity.

4. **Interactive learning structures**. Purposeful activities that give students
   opportunities to engage with content in active (hands-on) and interactive (social)
   ways.

5. **Morning meeting**. Everyone in the classroom gathers in a circle for 20-30 minutes
   at the beginning of each school day and proceeds through four sequential
   components: greeting, sharing, group activity, and morning message.

6. **Establishing rules**. The teacher and students work together to name individual goals
   for the year and establish rules that will help everyone reach those goals.

7. **Energizers.** Short, playful, whole-group activities that are used as breaks in lessons.

8. **Brain breaks**. Purposeful short breaks that are included in lessons to increase focus,
   motivation, learning, and memory.

9. **Quiet time**. A brief, purposeful, and relaxed time of transition that takes place after
   lunch and recess, before the rest of the school day continues.

10. **Closing circle**. A 5- to 10-minute gathering at the end of the day that promotes
    reflection and celebration through participation in a brief activity or two (Center for
    Responsive Schools, n.d.c).

First Six Weeks. A comprehensive guidebook that has been published by the Center for
Responsive Schools (2015). It offers a day-by-day and week-by-week overview of how a
teacher can set up his or her classroom to reflect the six guiding principles and the 10 educational
strategies that comprise the RC approach.

   Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). MAP is a nationally norm-referenced

computer-adaptive assessment that is designed to measure what students know and what they are ready to learn next (NWEA Normative Data and RIT Scores, n.d.).

RTI. RTI is a tertiary system of instruction and intervention. Tier 1 is the core program, Tier 2 is supplementary interventions, and Tier 3 is intensive interventions (Buffum et al., 2009, p. 6).

Logic Model. This study employed the use of the Stufflebeam CIPP Model as a means to evaluate the effectiveness of the Responsive Classroom approach.

Context. The school needed to lower discipline and increase academic scores. There is also an achievement gap between African-American students and Caucasian students as well as between nondisabled students and students with special needs. The district does not report the individual free and reduced lunch status of students due to participating in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP; United States Department of Agriculture, 2017); but prior to that change, the school also experienced an achievement gap in this area.

Input. How should it be done? The school opted to bring in Responsive Classroom training for 4 days during the summer. The administration team consisting of the principal and assistant principal, and eight key teachers attended the training. The expectation is that those eight teachers and administrators will share elements from the training and begin implementing school wide. The principal purchased "The First 6 Weeks of School" for all staff members to have as a resource.

Process. Is it being done as designed? The study consulted on the process of the implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach with the administration of the treatment school. The researcher relied on the leadership team to report any issues in this area. The measures selected for this study did not measure this area. This is a potential area for further

study.

Product. Was the Responsive Classroom approach successful? MAP data were compared from fall 2017 to spring 2018 and analyzed for growth as well as a review of the discipline data from 2016-2017 compared to the results of 2017-2018.

Research Questions

This evaluation project attempted to answer the following: How does the use of the Responsive Classroom approach contribute to the academic and social-emotional growth of students?

1. In a school that used the Responsive Classroom approach, what is the academic growth as measured by pretest/posttest of MAP scores in reading and math as measured from fall to spring, grades kindergarten through fifth grade?

2. In a school that used the Responsive Classroom approach, what impact did Responsive Classroom have on SEL as measured by office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions as compared from 1 year to the next?

3. What impact do teachers believe the Responsive Classroom approach had on academics and SEL (discipline)?

4. What impact do administrators believe the Responsive Classroom approach had on academics and SEL (discipline)?

The hypothesis for the first question was that high teacher implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach would show higher prosocial behaviors with a decrease in problem behaviors, thus providing an increase in the academic levels of performance for the students. The hypothesis is constructed from the synthesis of past research. The evaluation compared pre and posttest scores from MAP testing in the non-implementation year and the

implementation year.

Research Question 2 was answered through the analysis and disaggregated data for the discipline from 1 school year compared to the school year with the intervention.

Research Questions 3 and 4 were answered through surveys and interviews after the quantitative data were analyzed. The teachers and administrators provided input on their perceptions and the results that were yielded from the study. This study deviated from the previous studies in that it took place in a small, rural southern school district. Durlak et al. (2011) concluded through 213 case study meta-analysis, that rural schools had less participation in past studies. The results may be similar, but the difference in setting may contribute to differences in anticipated results. This evaluation program will contribute to the potential generalizability of the approach across various settings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

SEL refers to the explicit teaching of the social skills that are the prerequisites for academic success and, ultimately, success in the workforce and in life. Social skills are also the noncognitive skills that have been identified as essential for the profile of 21st century graduates (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2011; "Profile of the South Carolina Graduate," n.d.) such as creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem-solving, collaboration and teamwork, communication, knowing how to learn, integrity, self-direction, and perseverance. These are the skills that are not easily measured by a standardized test score but are critical for success in academics, the workplace, and in life.

Theoretical Framework

This research is rooted in the constructivists' theory of learning; however, it broadens its scope by delving into the theory of human motivation as expressed as a natural extension with the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) of Deci and Ryan (2008) as well as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The theory of human motivation grew out of Vygotsky's work and was the catalyst of Maslow and SDT. SDT began its roots in the 1970s, with Ryan and Deci furthering the work in 1985. Deci and Ryan continued their work with SDT through the 1990s and into 2008.

Aristotle stated that "man is by nature social," and this statement has been used as the basis of the constructivists' theory wherein learning and development are based on the interactions with and between others. The constructivist approach to learning puts the learner at the center of their own learning and thus controls their learning (Brooks & Brooks, 1999; Garmston & Wellman, 1994). Creating the optimal climate for cooperation and learning is at the heart of the constructivists' approach and is mirrored with the Responsive Classroom approach

to have a safe environment that supports collaboration (Center for Responsive Schools, n.d.a).

Maslow's theory centers on human motivation. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs began with the five levels of physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs (Aanstoos, 2013; Maslow, 1943). In an expanded model of Maslow's original hierarchy to include seven levels, cognitive needs are part of the growth needs within the original theory. This is the basis that explains that basic skills and facts cannot be taught until the basic physiological, belongingness, and esteem needs are met. Classrooms must meet the need for physical and emotional safety to promote self-esteem if cognitive growth is to occur at higher rates (McLeod, 2017). Responsive Classroom uses this belief as it builds in safety and belonging with the components of the morning meeting (Center for Responsive Schools, n.d.c). The SDT, which began in the 1970s with the work of Deci and Ryan (2008), is a theory of motivation that posits that people have three basic psychological needs of competence (effectiveness), relatedness (close relationships), and autonomy (control of one's life); and they meet these needs by continuously and actively seeking challenges and experiences and then by seeking to master them (Link, 2008). Academic choice and purposeful feedback are two elements of the Responsive Classroom approach that are rooted in SDT. Students are able to have meaningful engagement by having a choice in activities that are challenging and relevant to the learning (Center for Responsive Schools, n.d.c).

The relevance of these theories is echoed throughout schools across the country as school officials clamor for engagement, rigor, and safety for their students. Schools are social places, and learning is a social activity. While these concepts are easily grasped, they have been largely ignored over the past 20 years due to NCLB with the rise of standardized testing and the myopic focus on cognitive-based standards to the exclusion of social and emotional skills. Education as

a whole has shifted from autonomy, choice, and creativity to being compliant and prepared. The standards-driven mantra has launched us into an extrinsic locus of control, which, according to both Maslow and SDT, leads to a reduction in motivation and overall success with academics as well as postsecondary opportunities (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Social Skills Defined

Social skills are the necessary skills and behaviors that are beneficial in academia, careers, and life in general (Deming, 2015; Lippman, Ryberg, Carney, & Moore, 2015; Lynch & Simpson, 2010; Walker, Schwarz, Nippold, Irvin, & Noell, 1994). Each setting (academic, career, and life) has differences in the definition that are related to the setting.

Academic social skills are those skills that allow students to access the curriculum and grow cognitively (Lynch & Simpson 2010; Walker et al., 1994). Social skills are behaviors that promote positive interaction with others and the environment. Empathy, participation in group activities, generosity, helpfulness, communicating with others, negotiating, and problem-solving are noted as some of the most important skills needed for academic success (Lynch & Simpson, 2010; Walker et al., 1994). Walker (1983) defined social skills as "a set of competencies that allow an individual to initiate and maintain positive social relationships, contribute to peer acceptance and to a satisfactory school adjustment, and allow an individual to cope effectively within the larger social environment" (p. 27).

Lippman et al. (2015) provided a broad definition that provides a bridge between academia and workforce outcomes. Lippman et al. defined soft skills as a broad set of skills, competencies, behaviors, attitudes, and personal qualities that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals. Lippman et al. determined that these soft skills enhance and complement technical, vocational,

and academic skills. A working or operational definition for social skills is situational and dependent on the context or environment for which it is applied. To compound the confusion, misinterpretations, and misunderstanding, the term "social skills" is often used interchangeably with terms such as soft skills; emotional intelligence; personal qualities; 21st century skills; and most recently, noncognitive skills. Claxton, Costa, and Kallick (2016) warned that these words and phrases often belie the importance of the skills they reference.

For the purpose of this research, social skills were defined as "the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and made responsible decisions" (Domitrovich, Durlak, Staley, & Weissberg, 2017, p. 408). CASEL(2013) broke this definition into five subcategories or competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. This will remain across the settings of academia, career, and life.

SEL Defined

To further complicate the basic understanding of the term soft skills is the emergence of the term SEL. SEL has become predominant in the educational setting and has been defined as "the process through which children enhance their ability to integrate thinking, feeling and behaving to achieve important life tasks" (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004, p. 6). SEL became a common term when schools began to take steps to address the increase in reported bullying incidents on campuses across the country as well as schools attempting to address character education and provide information for avoiding drugs and alcohol consumption (Zins et al., 2004).

The Importance of Social Skills

Social skills are the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and made responsible decisions (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 406). These skills help individuals to interact both verbally and nonverbally through gestures, body language, and even personal appearance (Durlak et al., 2011; Lippman et al., 2015; Lynch & Simpson, 2010; SkillsYouNeed, 2015; Walker et al., 1994). Human beings are social creatures, and it has been said that humans are "wired to interact." Social skills are the necessary tools that provide for positive interactions that help individuals in academics, in the workplace, and in life.

The impact of social skills on life. Having prosocial skills has been linked to having lifetime success around the capability of achieving goals, working well with others, and managing one's emotions (Grob-Zakhary, 2015). Individuals who have higher levels of socioemotional skills are more effective in learning and applying more socio-emotional skills; they are also more effective in growing more cognitive skills, but the reverse was not found to be

true (Grob-Zakhary, 2015; Heckman & Kautz, 2012). Great cognitive ability did not translate into learning and acquiring greater socioemotional skills. Macmillan Education (2019) posited that life skills have multiple benefits for everyday life: help individuals find new ways of thinking and problem-solving, help individuals take responsibility for their actions, and build confidence along with collaboration and cooperation as well as help individuals gain and use flexibility in life and in employment scenarios. Those with prosocial skills are linked with higher high school graduation rates, more likely to be employed at age 27, more likely to be earning more than $25,000 a year at 40, less likely to have ever been arrested, and less likely to have spent time on welfare (Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Tough, 2013).

  The impact of social skills in the workplace. Social skills have an impact on the workplace. Employers are needing individuals who can work in teams. These team-based environments require the ability to communicate effectively, collaborate with peers, and problem solve to meet the growing needs of businesses. Team-based solutions are often stronger than ones derived by individuals, thus making social skills of great importance. Success with communication, collaboration, and problem-solving leads to employment, better job performance, potential greater income and wages, and entrepreneurial success (Lippman et al., 2015; Marsh, 2012; Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Rothstein, 2004).

  Lippman et al. (2015) completed a multifaceted compilation of research focusing on soft skills (social skills) and determined that soft skills are "centrally important for human capital development, and workforce success" (p. 4). It has also been determined that there is a growing evidence base that shows that social skills rival academic or technical skills in their ability to predict employment and earnings (Kautz, Heckman, Diris, Weel, & Borghans, 2014; Rothstein, 2004). Lippman et al. also concluded that there was a "soft skills gap" noted by employers

around the world. A report published by ManpowerGroup (2013) indicated that job candidates lacked the soft skills that were required for many of the available positions.

Deming (2015) concluded that the labor market has been increasingly rewarding social skills. Deming reported that jobs that require a high degree of social adeptness have experienced greater relative growth. Deming concluded that the greatest growth occurs in jobs requiring high cognitive ability coupled with strong social skills because these are the jobs that are not easily automated by computers and technology. Goleman (1995) summarized from data from hundreds of companies that emotional competencies were twice as important for professional success as IQ plus technical skills combined, and this is true for every job from salesperson to CEO. Social skills are critical for success, and these skills can be taught and/or enhanced.

The impact of social skills in academic settings. Multiple studies have linked prosocial behaviors, having positive social skills, to greater student achievement, higher grades, more persistence, and a greater sense of well-being (Arnold, Kupersmidt, Voegler-Lee, & Marshall, 2012; Claxton et al., 2016; Levin, 2012; Shallcross, 2015; Tough, 2013).

Duke University researchers went as far as to report that these soft skills are essential to help prevent an individual from experiencing harder problems such as criminal trouble (Shallcross, 2015). They backed up this claim with their research of two randomized groups of first graders who were identified as having academic and social skill deficits with half taking part in the Fast Track program, which addressed academic and social skills deficits, and the other half not receiving the intervention. This trial resulted in showing that students who were involved in teacher-led interventions, parent training groups, academic tutoring, and specific lessons in self-control and social skills experienced a reduction in delinquency, arrests, and the use of health and mental health services (Shallcross, 2015). A second trial was conducted to try and determine

why the results from the first trial occurred. The researchers determined that the positive results correlated to the increased acquisition of prosocial skills that were explicitly taught in the Fast Track program.

Levin (2012) began to look at schools and businesses and made some generalizations that help to bridge between school success and workforce success. Levin referenced the need for a "world class education" (p. 269) that tends to focus on economic viability instead of "civic behaviors or cultural leadership" (p. 269). Currently, solely cognitive test scores judge the success of schools regarding the attainment of a "world-class" education. Levin stated that "individuals must develop interpersonal skills that enable them to relate to others in many different societal situations … and develop the intrapersonal skills that include good judgment and strategies for meeting their own needs in effective ways" (p. 270).

Social skills are also needed for students to experience higher levels of success in schools. There are the "4 C's" of 21st century skills (National Education Association, 2012; Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2011), which are critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, and collaboration. These 4 C's reflect the social skills that must be instilled in students for their success. Claxton et al. (2016) espoused that social skills are as cognitively demanding as technical skills and that these skills undergird the acquisition of those technical skills.

Arnold et al. (2012) completed a study that examined the association between preschool children's social functioning and their emergent academic skills. They were continuing the studies by having a greater sampling and by having more differentiated assessments for both academic and social functioning. The results supported the notion that social and academic development are "interconnected from early in development" (Arnold et al., 2012, p. 388).

Arnold et al. also suggested that broader interventions which "include pro-social components may help address the risk of academic failure" (p. 389). An additional point was stressed that if students feel positive about school, the positive feelings may help to lead to greater persistence and limit the negative impact of co-occurring social and academic difficulties.

Students need to cultivate the capacity to formulate and solve problems and to develop the interpersonal behaviors such as collaboration, listening, and the ability to communicate in order to be successful in schools and in postsecondary scenarios, as defined by a world-class education (Levin, 2012). Levin (2012) also stressed the need for time management and impulse controls. Levin cited the studies on reduced class size by Finn and Achilles (1990) and Mosteller (1995) in which students were randomly assigned to smaller class sizes of less than 18. There were advantages in math and reading achievement for the smaller classes, but there was a significant difference in high school graduation rates. The study concluded that the noncognitive effects of learning more about [social] behaviors produced the higher graduation rates.

Tough (2013) proposed that persistence, self-control, conscientiousness, grit, and self-confidence are the qualities that must be developed in children in order for them to succeed. Tough drew upon the work of James Heckman in 2008 when Heckman worked with economists and psychologists to find answers to the questions of which skills and traits lead to success, how do they develop in childhood, and what interventions may help students to do better? Heckman went back and reviewed the data collected in the Perry Preschool Project and analyzed data that had not been previously reviewed. The Perry Preschool Project was initially considered a failure due to the IQ gains not being found to be lasting by third grade. Heckman's analysis of the data showed that the students who participated in the project gained competencies in curiosity, self-control, and fluidity. The project may not have increased IQ scores, but it did help to improve

behavior and social skills.

Social skills and their development are the foundation for success and lead to academic achievement. Social skills are behaviors that promote positive interaction with others and the environment (Lynch & Simpson, 2010). Showing empathy, participation in group activities, generosity, helpfulness, communicating with others, negotiating, and problem-solving are a list of specific skills that Lynch and Simpson (2010) said lead to academic success for children. Lynch and Simpson noted that the passage of IDEA (2004) has resulted in a greater number of students with disabilities being included in typical classrooms. They contended that many of these children lack social skills or demonstrate problem behaviors and need to have explicit interventions to address these deficits. Walker et al. (1994) confirmed this assumption by saying, "the professional literature consistently indicates that children and youth with disabilities often do not have the necessary social skills to meet the minimal behavioral demands and expectations of the less-restrictive setting" (p. 71). Walker et al. went on to state that systematic social skills training can help these children and the training also has a benefit for the nondisabled students. Walker et al. also stated that social skills and social competence are "important long-term correlates of school success and play an important role in non-school social-behavioral adjustments that can influence school performance" (p. 75).

Use of SEL (Why Invest)

"Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all," is a quote from Aristotle. Though Aristotle did not directly comment on social skills, this quote sums up the importance of incorporating SEL in our schools. The recent advancements in technology are changing the ways the world operates and functions in terms of business and academics. Schools are now preparing students for jobs that may not even exist yet. Torres (2015) stated through her

research that technology is only making social skills more important. The premise is that as technology continues to improve in the area of artificial intelligences, the more easily automated jobs will be replaced with the technology, thus leaving the harder to automate jobs to be filled with high school and college graduates. Deming (2015) argued that the hard to automate positions will require a great deal of social adeptness. With the prospect of easily automated, less complex jobs being replaced with technologies, the schools are now responding with an increased level of rigor and expectation within content areas but are also including the soft skills, 21st century skills, that companies and higher paying jobs are now coveting.

The term social skills has been used within the world of academia as well as the business world. Businesses are clamoring for high school and college graduates who bring a basic competency level of social skills in order to be successful employees. Schools are clamoring for better school climates that reduce bullying and peer pressure in order to promote greater levels of engagement for the higher levels of rigor within the cognitive subjects. McClelland and Morrison (2003) argued that the development of social skills lays a critical foundation for later academic success as well as work-related skills. Social skills are of critical importance in both schools and in the workplace. More emphasis and research on social skills are needed to address the concerns and requirements.

Social skills, also called soft skills, life skills, and noncognitive skills, are a part of a growing body of research in the field of education as school districts and states seek to raise graduation rates and achievement scores, while simultaneously closing achievement gaps. States and local education agencies have faced tremendous pressure for improvements in standards, content, and the overall levels of rigor within content subjects. A buzz phrase in the field espouses providing all students a "world class education." States claim to have "rigorous

standards in language arts and math for career and college readiness along with multiple

languages, science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM), arts and social sciences"

("Profile of the South Carolina Graduate, n.d., para. 4). These cognitive components are often

accompanied by a list of noncognitive social skills that are expected to be developed along with

cognitively challenging standards in order for the student to be college and career ready. The

measure of success for the "world class education" is still the standardized test score, which

reflects cognitive skills attainment but cannot accurately measure the attainment of the social

skills. When Heckman and Rubinstein (2001) concluded their study of the GED, they stated,

> We gave established the quantitative importance of non-cognitive skills without identifying
>
> any specific non-cognitive skill. Research in the field is in its infancy. Too little is
>
> understood about the formation of these skills or about the separate effects of all of these
>
> diverse traits currently subsumed under the rubric of non-cognitive skills. (p. 149)

More research has now flooded the field, but even Levin (2012) concluded his study on "More

than test scores" by calling for more research on a few noncognitive skill areas and measures that

can be incorporated into research on academic achievement.

Researchers may not agree on the best way to measure these skills, but it is clear that the

attainment of these skills is critical for academic success, work-related success, and success in

life. Just as it is difficult to determine a clear quantitative measure for social skills, it is equally

difficult to find a single operational definition. The causality of the increase of standardized test

scores is also debated among the researchers, but they do agree that the explicit infusion of social

skill teaching does lead to an increase in student achievement (Abry, Rimm-Kaufman, Hulleman,

Thomas, & Ko, 2012; Elliott, 1995; Elliott & Gresham, 1993; Elliott, Malecki, & Demaray,

2001; Rimm-Kaufman, 2006; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014).

Principals and teachers agree that SELs offer a benefit to their students (Bridgeland et al., 2013; DePaoli, Atwell, & Bridgeland, 2017). Both principals and teachers cite time and training as critical elements needed for the success of the approach.

Research on Responsive Classroom

The Responsive Classroom approach is an SEL that can be implemented school wide or within individual classrooms. CASEL (2013) recognized Responsive Classroom as one of the top 22 SEL programs. CASEL (2013) initially examined 242 health, prevention, and positive youth development programs; but then the review was limited to multi-year programs that targeted the general population, a Tier 1 intervention. The CASEL guide provides program information on 85 different SEL programs with contact information. This was created to allow practitioners to select a program that is best aligned with their particular needs.

Responsive Classroom was identified by CASEL as one of the top 22 SEL programs available because there was evidence of being "especially effective and comprehensive in their SEL coverage, documented impacts, and the staff development they provide" (CASEL, 2005, p. 46). Responsive Classroom has been in existence since 1981. The cofounders, Marlynn Clayton, Ruth Sidney Charney, and Chip Wood created the framework along with other practitioners to meet the needs of their students. Responsive Classroom began as a small laboratory school and consulting group.

Responsive Classroom is an integrated approach that is built around four domains: engaging academics, effective management, positive community, and developmental awareness. The founders of Responsive Classroom did not want the Responsive Classroom approach to be an "add-on" program that was done 2 days a week. The approach is designed to offer continuous support of SEL learning within the scope of educational best practices. Responsive Classroom is

a framework and not a step-by-step curriculum.

The approach has been at the center of several research projects and longitudinal studies. Many of the researchers had been studying the impact of SELs in general and found that SEL programs that enhance social and emotional growth hold promise for improving classroom social processes, peer interactions, and academic learning (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007). Elliott and Gresham (1993) determined that SELs enhance social skills; Abbott et al. (1998) drew a link between SELs and bonding toward school; and Schaps, Battistich, and Solomon (2004) linked SELs to improved academic success. Despite its long-time existence and wide-spread use, there have been relatively few studies on the impact of Responsive Classroom specifically.

The research on the Responsive Classroom approach can be divided into three segments spanning the past 25 years. Each segment consisted of multiple longitudinal studies. Responsive Classroom has been linked to increased student achievement, decreases in negative behaviors, and greater prosocial skills (Abry et al., 2012; Elliot, 1995; Elliott & Gresham, 1993; Rimm-Kaufman, 2006).

Elliott began the first segment, Social Skills Studies, in 1993 when he and Gresham conducted a longitudinal study with a basic pre/posttest analysis of the impact of the Responsive Classroom approach for special needs students as well as minority demographics. Elliott et al. (2001) repeated the study in 1995 with a more diverse sample group and then again in 2001. It should be noted that the participants were either teacher nominated or random selection, but parents had to sign permission. His population breakdown of the 212 students was 41% Caucasian, 43% African-American, 10.4% Hispanic, and 3.8% were reported as other. It should be noted that this group did not mirror the district which reported 4% Caucasian, 88% African-American, 6.2% Hispanic, and 1.5% reported as other. The studies did not report on the

percentage of children receiving free and/or reduced lunch.

Elliott's findings indicated that classrooms with Responsive Classroom showed gains in social skills as reported by teachers as well as slightly improved academic gains (Elliott, 1995, 1999; Elliott & Gresham, 1993). Increases in social skills have an indirect impact on improving academic functioning and decreasing problem behaviors. Elliott (1995) concluded that there was a strong interrelationship among social skills, academic functioning, and social support and that SELs must be considered when working with elementary and middle school students.

Sara Rimm-Kaufman led a team consisting of Pianta, LaParo, and Sawyer in a quasi-experiment longitudinal study at the University of Virginia on the second segment of the research; Social and Academic Learning Study (Rimm-Kaufmann, 2006). These studies focused on the overall program as well as fidelity of its implementation. The demographics for this study were also more limited despite the attempt for more diversity. The studies took place in an urban school district in the northeast. The demographics were 50% minority, 30% English Language Learner (ELL), and 30% were identified as poverty.

Rimm-Kaufman (2006) reported the following findings: (a) students showed greater increase in reading and math test scores; (b) teachers reported feeling more effective and more positive about teaching; (c) students had better prosocial skills and were able to establish closer relationships with teachers and peers; (d) teachers offered high-quality instruction; (e) students felt more positive about schools, teachers, and peers; and (f) teachers engaged in and placed higher values on collaboration with peers. These studies show an association but not a causation.

The third segment of research, The Responsive Classroom Efficacy Study, is focused on the subcomponents of the Responsive Classroom approach with an attempt to determine which elements were more successful in increasing student achievement and improving the social and

emotional competencies for the students. The subcomponents that fostered motivation and belonging had the most immediate (proximal) impact on student achievement. Morning meeting, academic choice, and interactive modeling were the three components cited across multiple studies (Baroody et al., 2014; McTigue & Rimm-Kaufman, 2011; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014; Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2015). The demographics for this study were also more limited despite the attempt for more diversity. The studies took place in Washington D.C. public schools with free and/or reduced lunch rates between 2-72% with a mean of 26%. The minority populations range between 17-86% with a mean of 55%. McTigue and Rimm-Kaufman (2011), Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2014), Rimm-Kaufman and Hulleman (2015), and Abry et al. (2017) conducted several smaller studies in this area, but the populations did not mirror the demographics of the district. Instead, the additional studies' participants consisted of between 44-74% Caucasian, 8-17% Asian, 5-11% African-American, participants classified as low socioeconomic status (SES) from 20-34%, and those identified as ELL from 4-30%.

There was a study conducted by Solomon (2011) in western Massachusetts. Solomon chose seven public schools, one private school, and one urban charter school. The demographics ranged from 17% (urban charter school) to 85% (private school) Caucasian with a range of SES from 17% (public school) to 60% (urban charter school). The results of his year-long study did not have the same overwhelming successes of those completed at the University of Virginia by Rimm-Kaufman et al., which made up the SALS (Social and Academic Learning Study) from 2001-2004 (Rimm-Kaufman, 2006). Solomon may not have duplicated the results but notable to the study was the success in the cultural shifts and enhanced teacher-student closeness with modest/minimal impact on academic achievement.

Responsive Classroom helps to build a positive social environment by establishing a

sense of connection between the teacher and students as well as student-to-student peer relationships. The connection has fostered feelings of safety and belonging. The approach has also helped increase a student's intrinsic motivation through academic choice and interactive learning structures. The approach contributed to greater teacher and student closeness which in turn equated to motivation that positively influenced student engagement (Baroody et al., 2014). The research over 3 decades has found consistent positive proximal and distal results between an increase in SEL competency and improving academic skills (Baroody et al., 2014; McTigue & Rimm-Kaufman, 2011; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014; Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2015) with using the Responsive Classroom approach.

Rationale and Purpose

The research explored the impact of SEL instruction on academic achievement and the reduction of discipline as defined as office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. CASEL (2013) has conducted studies of SEL programs in large, urban school districts. The Responsive Classroom approach has been studied since 1993, and research has shown that it has had success in large, urban districts. This study focused on a small, rural district to see if the practices translate to the varied setting. CASEL (2013) found that systematic teaching of SEL leads to positive gains for students while in school and into young adulthood (Hanson, Wolcott, & Baumer, 2016).

This research diverged from previous studies in that it was a 1-year mixed-methods explanatory study with equal emphasis on the quantitative and qualitative data. The previous studies of Rimm-Kaufman (2006), Rimm-Kaufmann et al. (2014), Elliott and Gresham (1993), and Elliott(1999) mainly have been 3-year longitudinal program evaluations with some quantitative data but have primarily relied on qualitative measures of surveys or interview

groups.

This study focused on one SEL approach/program, the Responsive Classroom approach. The school identified a need for a school-wide SEL due to an achievement gap between majority and minority students, socioeconomic status students, and special needs as compared to nondisabled peers. The administration also reported an increase in office referrals linked to suspensions and time out of the classroom. Based on the guide from CASEL (2013), the Responsive Classroom approach was selected because leadership believed it aligned with the current PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Systems) approach and the school's vision and mission and would augment the current academic practices of guided reading and guided math. The demographics of the selected school vary from previous research projects.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This research began with training key teachers and administrators at an elementary school in the Responsive Classroom approach. The administrators followed the implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach within the classrooms and school. The study involved pre and posttest scores from MAP data coupled with discipline data that compared the office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions as measured from the year prior to the intervention and then after the use of the Responsive Classroom approach.

This evaluation project answered the following: How does the use of the Responsive Classroom approach contribute to the academic and social-emotional growth of students?

1. In a school that used the Responsive Classroom approach, what is the academic growth as measured by pretest/posttest of MAP scores in reading and math as measured from fall to spring, grades kindergarten through fifth grade?

2. In a school that used the Responsive Classroom approach, what impact did

Responsive Classroom have on SEL as measured by office referrals, suspensions, and

expulsions as compared from 1 year to the next?

3. What impact do teachers believe the Responsive Classroom approach had on

academics and SEL (discipline)?

4. What impact do administrators believe the Responsive Classroom approach had on

academics and SEL (discipline)?

The hypothesis for the first question was that high teacher implementation of the

Responsive Classroom approach would show higher prosocial behaviors with a decrease in

problem behaviors and thus providing an increase in the academic levels of performance for the

students. The hypothesis was constructed from the synthesis of past research. The evaluation

compared pre and posttest scores from MAP testing in the non-implementation year and the

implementation year.

Research Question 2 was answered through the analysis and disaggregated data for the

discipline from 1 school year compared to the school year with the intervention.

Research Questions 3 and 4 were answered through surveys and interviews after the

quantitative data were analyzed. The teachers and administrators provided input on their

perceptions and the results that were yielded from the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The literature review in Chapter 2 clarified that there was a relationship between the implementation of an SEL program such as the Responsive Classroom approach and academic and behavioral gains. This chapter includes a review of the methodology used, the type of study, and data collection processes. Four research questions guided this study.

1. In a school that used the Responsive Classroom approach, what is the academic growth as measured by pretest/posttest of MAP scores in reading and math as measured from fall to spring, grades kindergarten through fifth grade? (Quantitative)

2. In a school that used the Responsive Classroom approach, what impact did Responsive Classroom have on SEL as measured by office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions as compared from 1 year to the next? (Quantitative)

3. What impact do teachers believe the Responsive Classroom approach had on academics and SEL (discipline)? (Qualitative)

4. What impact do administrators believe the Responsive Classroom approach had on academics and SEL (discipline)? (Qualitative)

Restatement of the Problem

SEL is a critical element needed in schools. No longer can the noncognitive skills (affective and behavioral domains) be ignored for the sake of the academics (cognitive domain). Educational best practice now requires teachers to educate the "head, the heart, and the hand" if a 21st century education is to be effectively provided (Wangaard, Elias, & Fink, 2014). Students are entering kindergarten without the prerequisite prosocial skills needed for success in schools (Bettencourt et al., 2018; Charney, 2002; Graham, & Prigmore, 2009).

One rural elementary school in a southeastern state implemented the Responsive Classroom approach to address the social and emotional needs of its students. The administrators offered the 4-day training to the staff after explaining the research behind the approach. The teachers who voluntarily chose to participate in the training represented all grade levels of kindergarten through fifth grade. Special education teachers were also among the participants. The administrative team attended all four days of the training with the teachers. All participants in the training received teaching and modeling of the Responsive Classroom practices of interactive modeling, teacher language, logical consequences, interactive learning structures, morning meeting, establishing rules, energizers, brain breaks, quiet time, and closing circle.

The administrative team employed the train-the-trainer model and had the participants share their professional learning with grade-level colleagues. To ensure access to the training materials, all teachers at the school were provided two resources: *First Six Weeks* and *Morning Meeting* guide books that are published by the Center of Responsive Schools.

Research Design and Approach

This study employed a mixed-methods explanatory approach to complete an intervention study of the Responsive Classroom approach. This approach offered insights that go beyond the separate results of the quantitative and qualitative research that is greater than the sum of the two parts (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018).

It should be noted that any quantitative results show an association not a causation, due to the inability to completely control for the use of the Responsive Classroom approach alone. The approach was a two-way between-subjects ANOVA test with follow-up *t*-tests as needed with regard to the achievement data from the MAP testing for the year prior to the Responsive

Classroom intervention and the year of the Responsive Classroom intervention. The two factors

were the year and grade level.

The study compared the numbers related to discipline for the 2016-2017 term with the

2017-2018 term when the intervention of the Responsive Classroom approach occurred. No

inferential statistics were required to compare the nature of the referrals, the quantity of the

referrals, and the level of the referrals (office referral, in-school suspension [ISS], out-of-school

suspension [OSS], and expulsion).

The researcher employed the use of qualitative measures of the surveys for the teachers

and an interview with administrators to help better understand the results of the quantitative

component of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Participants

The staff at the school was comprised of a leadership team made up of the principal and

assistant principal. The guidance counselor was classified as an advisor to the administrative

team. There were 36 full-time teachers and one part-time teacher: two special education

preschool teachers, four kindergarten teachers, four first-grade teachers, four second-grade

teachers, four third-grade teachers, four fourth-grade teachers, four fifth-grade teachers, three

multi-aged self-contained special education teachers, one special education inclusion teacher,

one full-time and one part-time speech therapist, one media specialist, one reading coach, and

three interventionists. Itinerant teachers for physical education, art, music, and gifted and

talented who serve students at multiple schools were not included in the survey since they were

only at the intervention site on a part-time basis and did not directly teach in the core academic

areas being measured. These teachers were provided an overview of the Responsive Classroom

approach and were made aware of some of the strategies in order to support the school-wide

implementation. The 36 full-time teachers' years of experience had a range of 0-41 years with a mean of 14 years.

The school had a student population of 572 students in grades preschool (ages 3 and 4) through the fifth grade. The demographics of the school were 3% Asian, 45% African-American, 41% Caucasian, 9% Hispanic, and 3% Other. This closely resembled the demographics across the district with 1% Asian, 44% African-American, 37% Caucasian, 14% Hispanic, and 3% Other. Both the school and the district had a minority-majority. The school served 99 students (17%) with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The school had 21 students in the preschool classrooms and 23 students who received an alternate curriculum and did not participate in the MAP testing during the implementation year. The study focused on the remaining 528 students.

The district participates in the CEP federal program. CEP is a non-pricing meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017). CEP allows the nation's highest poverty schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications. Instead, schools that adopt CEP are reimbursed using a formula based on the percentage of students categorically eligible for free meals based on their participation in other specific means-tested programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

The treatment school was selected due to multiple factors. First, the demographics of the school have changed dramatically over the past 5 years. There is greater poverty represented in its student population and it is now a minority-majority school. The school had maintained a level of success as measured on state testing; but an achievement gap was noted between

subgroups based on race, gender, and socioeconomic factors in the previous year. Discipline issues had increased as noted with ISS and OSS, and there was also a change in leadership at the school level with a new principal and assistant principal. The new leadership was receptive to a new approach to try to improve the academic achievement for the students as well as to positively impact the social and emotional skills of the students, thus making the school a more positive learning environment and improving the overall climate of the building.

Data Sources

The study has four different data sources. Each source was analyzed separately for results and then combined for a culminating report.

Measure 1. The study used a pre/posttest percentile comparison of scores for MAP. Each grade level was reported along with a total school report that reflects all grade levels. The total school report was disaggregated based on grade levels to determine if there was a greater impact dependent on age/grade.

Measure 2. Discipline data from the 2016-2017 school year were compared to the 2017-2018 school year. The data were broken down into office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. The data were intended to be disaggregated based on grade level; however, the researcher was not able to do this without jeopardizing the potential identification of individuals. The researcher was able to add another category (bus referrals) to the analysis.

The data sources are currently kept by the school/district and no additional identifiable data were shared. The identities and specific individual information were not known to the researcher and were not reported within the scope of the study.

Measure 3. The full-time teachers (36) at the intervention school were sent a survey relating to their perceptions and implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach. The

survey entitled The Responsive Classroom Evaluation Project Teacher Questionnaire was developed by Elliott (1995) and was first used during a preliminary study relating to academic and SEL growth in an urban setting. Dr. Elliott granted permission to use the survey for this study. No identifiable information was published. The identity of the teachers was protected and only summary data were shared.

Measure 4. The leadership team at the intervention school participated in a semi-structured interview regarding their roles during the implementation of the intervention; their perceptions of the implementation; and their interpretation of the results from the analysis of the academic achievement of their school, social skills (discipline), and teacher perceptions of the intervention. The interview was recorded with audiotape and transcribed to look for themes and trends.

Data Collection

The researcher was provided access to the discipline data from the 2016-2017 school year to disaggregate and analyze for number of referrals, number of students suspended or expelled, and number of days of suspension for the overall school. This was limited to the treatment school since the question sought to see if the Responsive Classroom approach impacted SEL as measured by office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. The data from the treatment school alone were required. The same analysis was completed for the 2017-2018 school year when the Responsive Classroom approach was used to determine if any differences were detected.

All students in kindergarten through fifth grade take part in the district assessment of MAP three times each school year unless they are enrolled in an alternate curriculum supported by an IEP. The first administration was in August/September, the second administration was in December, and the final administration was in April. The data from the administrations were

reviewed for academic progress and growth in RIT (Rasch Unit) scores. These RIT scales are stable, equal-interval scales that use individual item difficulty values to measure student achievement independent of grade level (that is, across grades). "Equal interval" means that the difference between scores is the same regardless of whether a student is at the top, bottom, or middle of the RIT scale. "Stable" means that the scores on the same scale from different students or from the same students at different times can be directly compared, even though different sets of test items are administered. An RIT score also has the same meaning regardless of the grade or age of the student (NWEA Normative Data and RIT Scores, n.d.).

The researcher was given access to the MAP scores. To establish a baseline, the researcher analyzed the scores for RIT score gains from fall to spring for the 2016-2017 school year. The data were disaggregated based on the grade level of the students. The same analysis was performed on the data for the 2017-2018 school year when the intervention of the Responsive Classroom approach was used.

Data Analysis

The achievement data were analyzed using a two-way between-subjects ANOVA. The two factors were year and grade level. A two-way ANOVA was initially planned in order to test for an interaction; however, the data turned out to be very unbalanced, with 55 students in the smallest cell and 117 in the largest. To conduct a two-way ANOVA from summary data, the ANOVA cells need to have similar numbers of students (Cohen, 2013). As a fallback, interaction plots for each subject were examined. *T*-tests were used to help verify the results. The researcher established the mean RIT and percentile for fall 2016 and then compared those scores with the spring 2017 RIT and percentile scores for reading and math. The researcher looked at the overall for each grade level as well as the entire school. This analysis established a

baseline for typical growth in a single year for grade levels and the school. The researcher duplicated the same analysis for fall 2017 (when the intervention was applied) to spring 2018 for the intervention school.

The researcher disaggregated the data to also determine the mean and growth for each grade level. A baseline from the 2016-2017 school year was determined and then compared to results from the 2017-2018 school year. The researcher looked for potential interactions between years and grades.

The researcher established a baseline for discipline for the intervention school. The researcher analyzed the raw data to determine the number of unduplicated discipline events and analyze the reason for the referral and the result (disciplinary action). A baseline was established for the 2016-2017 school year for the school with the intervention. The researcher then compared the data from the 2017-2018 school year to determine if there was a change in the number of referrals and/or amount of time removed from the classroom.

The researcher sent a survey to all full-time teachers at the school. The survey (Appendix A) was first used by Elliott (1995) when he was researching the impact of the Responsive Classroom on academics and behaviors. Permission was obtained by the researcher to use the survey. The answers were tabulated to look for trends and themes.

The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with the administration for the intervention school after the analysis of the quantitative data for academics and discipline as well as the results from the teacher survey.

Ethical Considerations

For the purpose of this study, no identifiable information for students, teachers, or administrators will be released. The researcher used school-level data in order to protect student

identifiable information, and the teacher survey and administrator interview did not reveal any identifiable information. It is noted that the researcher is an employee of the same school district but does not have any ethical conflicts at the treatment school.

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

The limitation of the study was that it only involved school-level data. Student-level data potentially would have allowed for more in-depth disaggregation between subgroups in addition to grade levels. Also, the study was limited to the results in a single year of the treatment, rather than a longitudinal study over 3-5 years. This limitation is mitigated by using a mixed-methods explanatory model. The qualitative survey and interview provided a more robust study component for the qualitative measures.

Summary

The study of SEL has been taking place for over 3 decades. This study focused on the implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach and served to inform the school district if there was a significant impact of Responsive Classroom on social and emotional growth (behavior) and academic achievement scores. The methods looked comprehensively at the impact of Responsive Classroom as defined by the four research questions. The results served to inform and create recommendations of stakeholders.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to examine the implementation of the SEL program, the Responsive Classroom approach, and its impact on academic achievement and social and emotional skills as evidenced through behavior and discipline data. This chapter presents the significant findings of the study. The findings included the analysis of the data from standardized testing from MAP and the analysis of the discipline data. Teachers at the intervention site were surveyed to gain insight into the implementation and results of the intervention at the classroom level. Administrators were interviewed to gain insight into the implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach and results at the school level. This chapter includes a description of the participants, research tools used, data analysis for each stage of the research, and a summary of the findings.

Participants

The staff at the school was comprised of a leadership team made up of the principal and assistant principal, with the guidance counselor serving as an intermittent advising member of the team. There were 36 full-time teachers and one part-time teacher: two special education preschool teachers, four kindergarten teachers, four first-grade teachers, four second-grade teachers, four third-grade teachers, four fourth-grade teachers, four fifth-grade teachers, three multi-aged self-contained special education teachers, one special education inclusion teacher, one full-time and one part-time speech therapist, one media specialist, one reading coach, and three interventionists. There were itinerant teachers for physical education, art, music, and gifted and talented who served students at multiple schools and were not included in the survey. They were only at the intervention site on a part-time basis, and they did not directly teach in the core

academic areas being measured. The administration provided an overview of the Responsive Classroom approach with strategies that could be used by the itinerant teachers. The 36 full-time teachers' years of experience had a range of 0-41 years within the profession with a mean of 14 years.

The school had a student population of 572 students in grades preschool (ages 3 and 4) through the fifth grade. The demographics of the school at the time of the intervention were 3% Asian, 45% African-American, 41% Caucasian, 9% Hispanic, and 3% Other. The school's population closely resembled the demographics across the district, with 1% Asian, 44% African-American, 37% Caucasian, 14% Hispanic, and 3% Other. Both the school and the district are a minority-majority. The school served 99 students (17%) with an IEP. The school had 21 students in the preschool classrooms and 23 students who received an alternate curriculum who did not participate in the MAP testing during the implementation of the intervention. The study focused on the remaining 528 students in regard to academic progress; however, all students were included in the discipline analysis and all full-time teachers were included for the survey.

Academic Results

For the academic results, the study looked at the MAP scores for the school by grade level in both reading and math. MAP is a nationally norm-referenced computer-adaptive assessment that is designed to measure what students know and what they are ready to learn next (Thum & Hauser, 2015). The study focused on the amount of growth (positive/ negative) the students experienced in the areas of reading and math during the intervention year and compared it to the amount of growth (positive/negative) in the preceding year. Summary data were used as opposed to individual scores to protect the identity of the students.

The mean mathematics and reading growth scores for Grades K-5 for the 2016-2017 and

2017-2018 school years are in Table 1. The mean growth scores, standard errors, and student counts (*n*) were obtained from MAP Student Growth Summary Reports. These mean growth scores only included students who had MAP scores for both the fall and spring tests (Thum & Hauser, 2015). The standard errors were based on paired differences, so standard deviations were calculated from these data using

$$SD = SE \cdot \sqrt{n}. \tag{1}$$

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Mathematics and Reading Growth

Grade	2016–2017 growth				2017–2018 growth			
	Mean	*SE*	*n*	*SD*	Mean	*SE*	*n*	*SD*
				Mathematics				
K	18.4	0.9	82	8.1	19.1	1.1	55	8.2
1	19.1	0.7	89	6.6	20.8	1.0	91	9.5
2	17.5	0.8	85	7.4	14.5	0.7	86	6.5
3	9.5	0.7	74	6.0	10.8	0.7	84	6.4
4	11.0	0.6	117	6.5	10.4	0.8	76	7.0
5	14.9	1.0	68	8.2	9.1	0.8	102	8.1
				Reading				
K	14.6	0.9	83	8.2	16.3	1.0	55	7.4
1	16.7	1.0	89	9.4	20.1	0.9	91	8.6
2	17.2	0.9	85	8.3	17.5	1.0	86	9.3
3	12.0	0.9	74	7.7	8.0	1.0	84	9.2
4	9.3	0.9	117	9.7	8.9	0.9	77	7.9
5	8.9	1.1	68	9.1	7.0	0.8	102	8.1

Before analyzing the differences in growth scores between years, the data were analyzed for interaction between school year and grade level. With an interaction, the differences would need to be analyzed separately at each grade level, resulting in six tests per subject. Without an interaction, the main effect of school year could be analyzed, so only one test would need to be performed per subject. A two-way ANOVA was initially planned in order to test for an interaction; however, the data turned out to be very unbalanced, with 55 students in the smallest

cell and 117 in the largest. To conduct a two-way ANOVA from summary data, the ANOVA

cells need to have similar numbers of students (Cohen, 2013). As a fallback, interaction plots for

each subject were examined. Figure 1 shows the changes in growth for mathematics, and Figure

2 shows the changes for reading. In both plots, there are enough differences in the slopes that an

interaction is likely. The difference is especially apparent in Figure 1 when comparing Grade 1
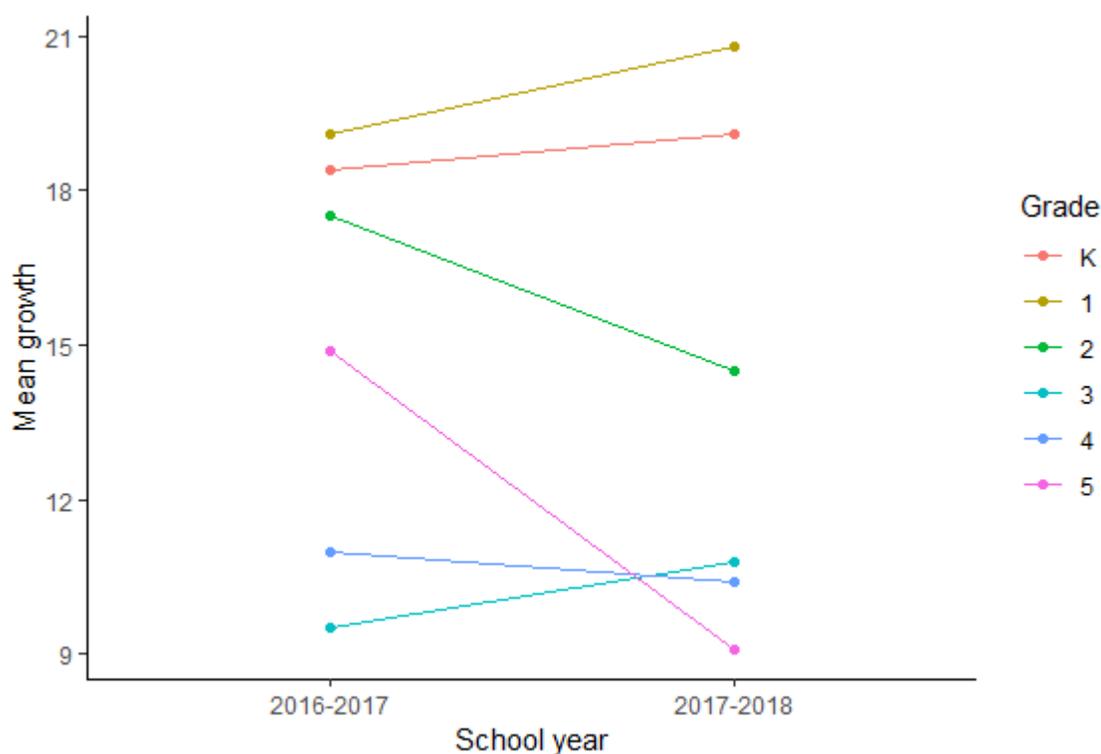
to Grade 5.

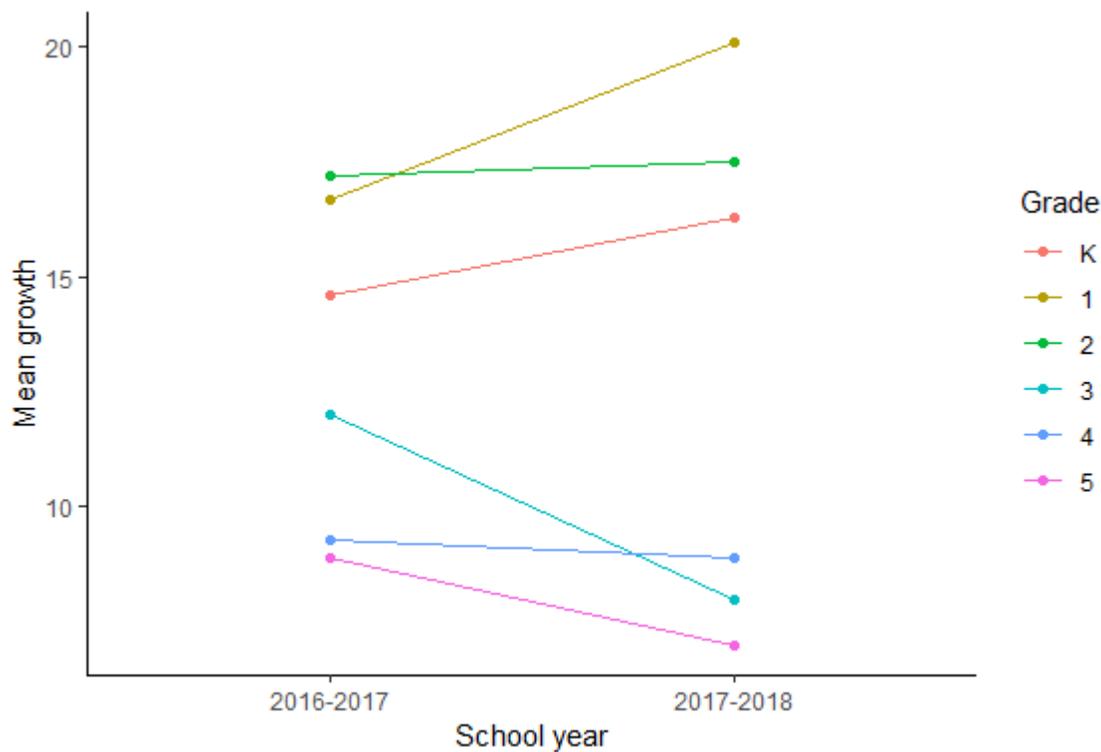*Figure 1*. Interaction Plot for Mathematics Growth Scores.

Figure 2. Interaction Plot for Reading Growth Scores.

Due to the likely presence of an interaction, 12 two-tailed, separate-variances *t*-tests were conducted to compare the changes in growth at each grade level for each subject. The pooled-variances *t*-test that is most commonly used includes an assumption that the variances of each group are equal in the population, and the separate-variances *t*-test was selected because there is a reason to believe this assumption is not valid for these data. Cohen (2013) recommended using the separate-variances test when the larger variance is more than twice the smaller variance, and this is the case for Grade 1 mathematics. To be safe, the separate-variances test was used for all comparisons, and the degrees of freedom were adjusted using Welch's method. The formula for the separate-variances *t*-test is

$$t = \frac{\bar{x}_2 - \bar{x}_1}{\sqrt{SE_1^2 + SE_2^2}}, \qquad (2),$$

and the formula for Welch's degrees of freedom is

$$df_{Welch} = \frac{(SE_1^2 + SE_2^2)^2}{\dfrac{SE_1^2}{(n_1 - 1)} + \dfrac{SE_2^2}{(n_2 - 1)}}.$$
(3).

These equations were modified from their usual forms to be based on standard errors rather than variances.

The mean differences and results are presented in Table 2. Each test was performed at α=.05 with no control of the Type I error rate. For mathematics, there were significant differences between school years for Grades 2 and 5, but the differences were negative. For reading, there were significant differences between school years for Grades 1 and 3, with an increase in growth for Grade 1 and a decrease for Grade 3. Measures of effect size other than the observed increase in growth are not reported because there are no other known measures that make sense when using the separate-variances *t*-test.

Table 2

Changes in Growth from 2016-2017 to 2017-2018 and Separate-Variances t-Test Results

Grade	Growth increase	Welch-adjusted *df*	*t*	*p*
		Mathematics		
K	0.7	125.91	0.49	.623
1	1.7	133.11	1.39	.166
2	-3.0	95.41	-2.82	.006*
3	1.3	76.13	1.31	.193
4	-0.6	85.93	-0.60	.550
5	-5.8	126.50	-4.53	.000*
		Reading		
K	1.7	115.37	1.26	.209
1	3.4	160.88	2.53	.012*
2	0.3	153.03	0.22	.824
3	-4.0	141.55	-2.97	.003*
4	-0.4	148.77	-0.31	.754
5	-1.9	140.29	-1.40	.165

* $p < .05$.
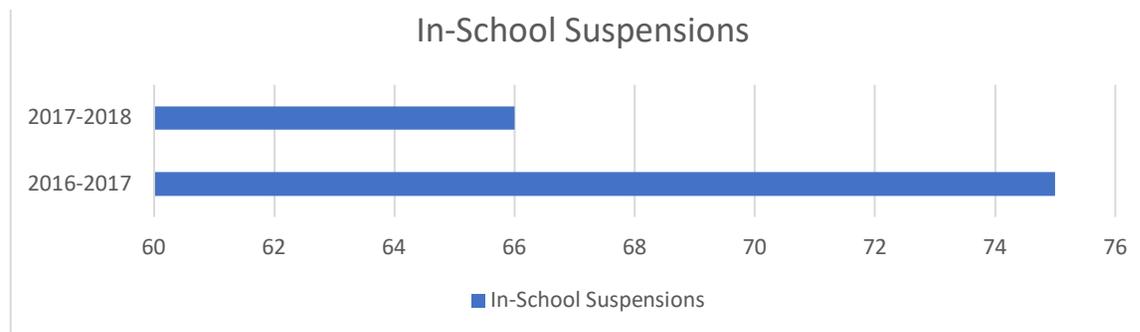
Discipline Results

The discipline data were compared from the 2016-2017 school year (non-implementation year) with the data from the 2017-2018 school year that had the school-wide implementation of the intervention. Table 3 reflects the number of incidents and the percentage of change.

Table 3

Discipline Compared from 2016-2017 to 2017-2018

| Type of Discipline	2016-2017	2018-2019	% of Change
In-School Suspensions	75	66	-12%
Out-of-School Suspension	206	97	-53%
Bus Discipline	331	299	-10%
Total Discipline Infractions	879	630	-28%

Figure 3. In-School Suspensions.

The first area of discipline which was analyzed involved incidents resulting in ISS or removal from the regular classroom but remaining at the school. Sometimes, the removal was to another classroom, but many times it was in a separate room away from any direct instruction. In the year preceding the intervention, there were a total of 576 students, with 75 incidents of ISS. Thirteen percent of the population experienced ISS during the nonintervention year. In 2017-2018 there were 572 students at the school and 66 incidents resulting in ISS or 11.5% of the student population. When comparing the 2 years, the intervention year resulted in a 12% reduction in ISS incidents.
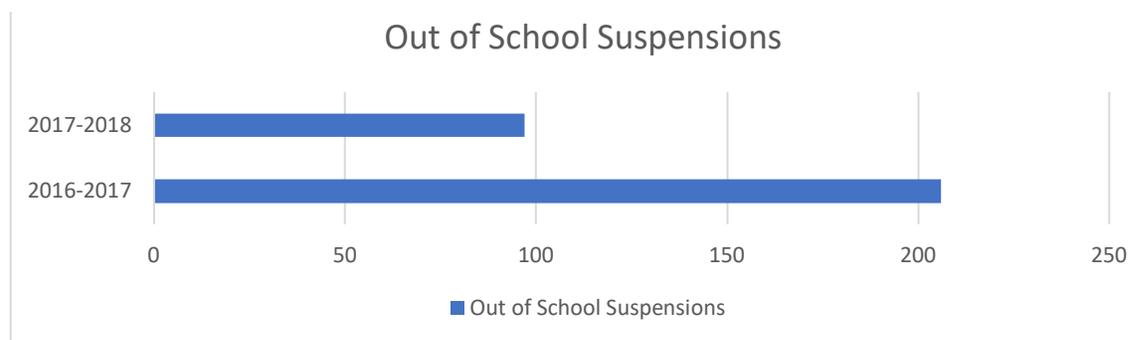

Figure 4. Out-of-School Suspensions.

The second type of discipline analyzed was behaviors that resulted in OSS. In these

cases, students were sent home for a minimum of 1 day to a maximum of 5 consecutive days. In

2016-2017, there were 206 incidents resulting in OSS, with a total population of 572. The

percentage of OSS incidents compared with total students was 36%. The data were reported by

incident and not by individual student. During 2017-2018 when the intervention of the

Responsive Classroom approach was applied, there were 97 OSS incidents for the student

population of 576, or 16.8%. There was a reduction of 53% from the year without the

intervention compared with the year with the intervention.
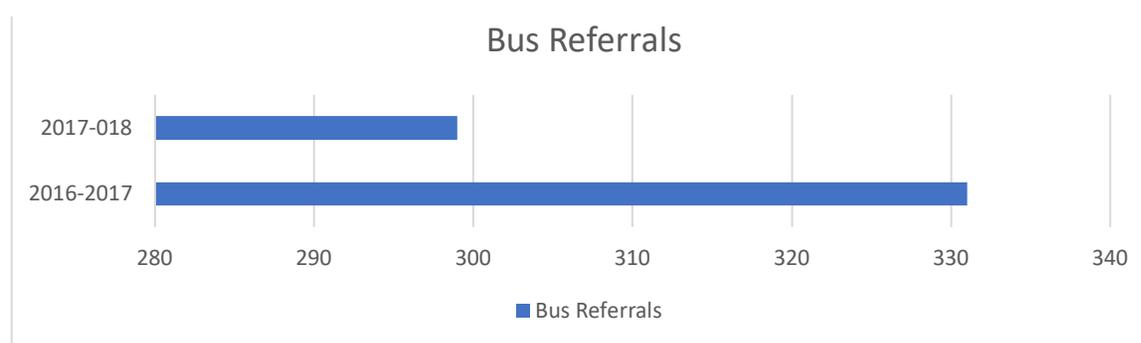
Figure 5. Bus Referrals.

The next type of discipline incident looked at discipline resulting from incidents on the

bus either to or from school. In 2016-2017, there were 331 or 57.4% of the total school

population who experienced an incident on the bus. The year with the Responsive Classroom

approach saw a decrease in bus incidents, dropping to 299 for the total school population of 572.

In other words, 52.2% of the total population could have potentially experienced a referral and

marked a 10% reduction.

Total Discipline Issues
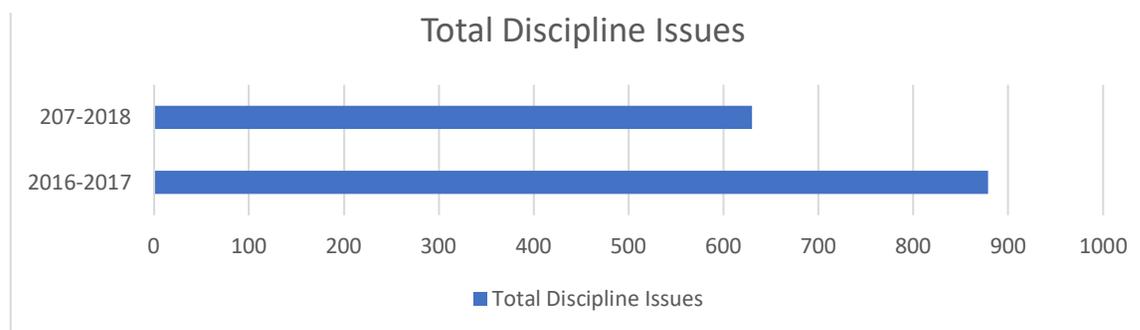
Figure 6. Total Discipline Issues.

The researcher considered OSS, ISS, and bus referrals to be significant incidents but also looked at the total number of discipline incidents that required administrative attention. There was a total of 879 total incidents compared to 630 during the intervention year, a 28% reduction.

All the main areas of types of discipline infractions experienced a decrease during the year with the intervention of the Responsive Classroom approach. The most noticeable change occurred with OSS. ISS and bus discipline also reported decreases but were not as significant as OSS. The intervention site reported having a student population of 576 in 2016-2017 and 572 in 2017-2018. The total population remained relatively unchanged, resulting in an accurate comparison between the 2 years.

Survey Phase

This phase of the study was conducted concurrently with the analysis of the academic and discipline data. Teachers completed a questionnaire designed to assess their perceptions of student social behavior, the use of the Responsive Classroom Approach to instruction, and the types of changes needed to implement instructional approaches such as Responsive Classroom.

Thirty-six teachers from the intervention site were sent the survey that consisted of 18 questions. Twenty-five teachers responded with full participation in the survey, and two teachers

began the survey but declined to participate in the study. There was a 69% participation rate for the questionnaire/survey. When questioned if they had been trained to use the Responsive Classroom approach, 72%, or 18 of those surveyed, responded that they had been trained, and 28%, or seven, indicated that they did not have formal training.

The first section of the survey asked the teachers to respond regarding their class during the intervention year. When the teachers were asked about their students' interpersonal or social skills with peers, 4% (1) responded that the skills were "Exceptional," 16% (4) responded "Very Good," 56% (14) responded "Good" and 24% (6) responded that they were "Poor."


Figure 7. Interpersonal or Social Skills with Peers.

When asked about their students' abilities to solve problems with other people in general, 16% (4) responded "Very Good," 52% (13) responded "Good," while 28% (7) responded that they were "Poor" and 4% (1) indicated "Very Poor."
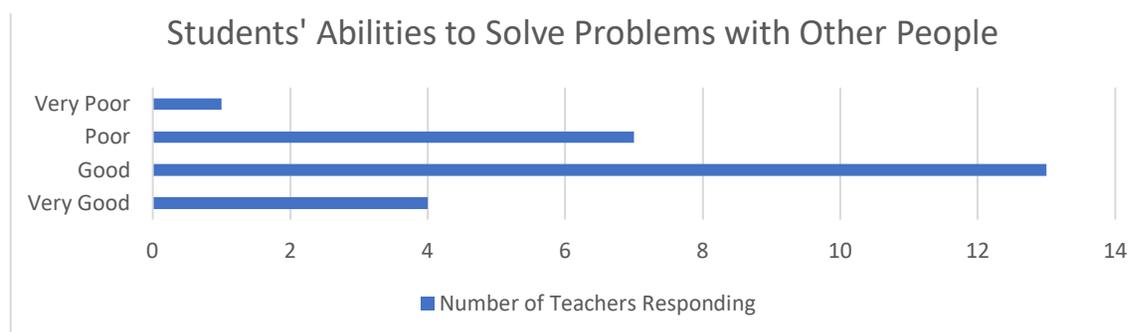
Figure 8. Student Abilities to Solve Problems with Other People.

When the respondents were asked if the interpersonal or social skills of the students improved during the intervention, 92% (23) saw improvement in social skills, with 24% (6) responses of "Improved Significantly," 68% (17) responses of "Improved Slightly," and 8% (2) responses of "Did Not Improve."

Improvement in Social Skills with Intervention
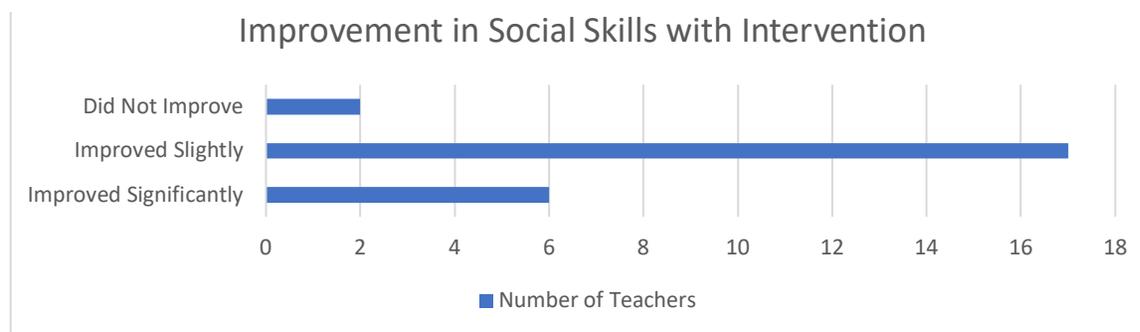
Figure 9. Improvement in Social Skills with Intervention.

Almost all the respondents expressed academic achievement during the intervention year as favorable, by 16 (64%) selecting "Good," seven (28%) selecting "Very Good," and one (4%) responding with "Exceptional." One respondent indicated "Poor" for academic achievement.

Teacher Impression of Academic Growth with Intervention
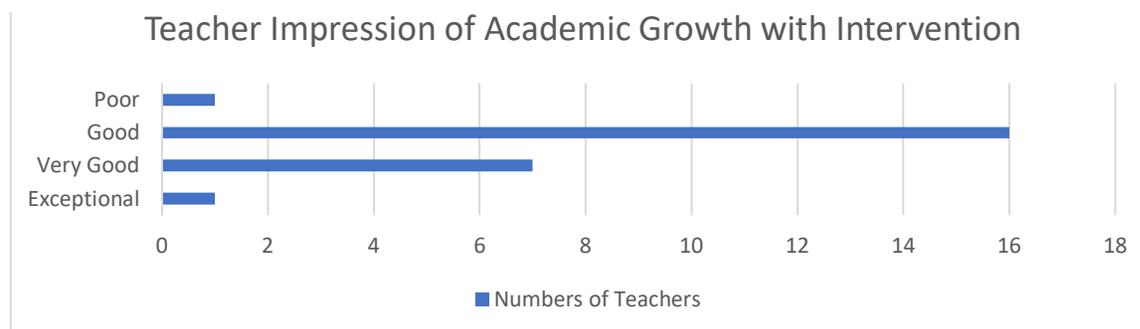
Figure 10. Teacher Impressions of Academic Growth with Intervention.

When asked about their students' reactions to school, four (16%) responded with "Very Positive," 14 (56%) responded with "Positive," six (24%) reported a "Neutral" reaction, and one (4%) indicated "Slightly Negative."
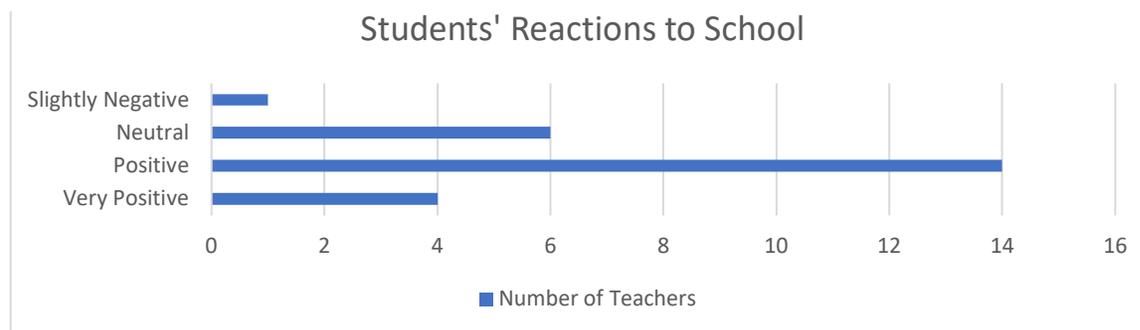
Figure 11. Student Reactions to School.

The responses related to parental involvement were represented across all the Likert ratings. One respondent (4%) indicated "Very High" involvement, and one respondent (4%) indicated "High" parental involvement. Fourteen of the respondents (56%) indicated a moderate level of parental involvement. Seven (28%) responded with the Likert rating of "Low," and one (8%) responded with "Very Low" for parental involvement.
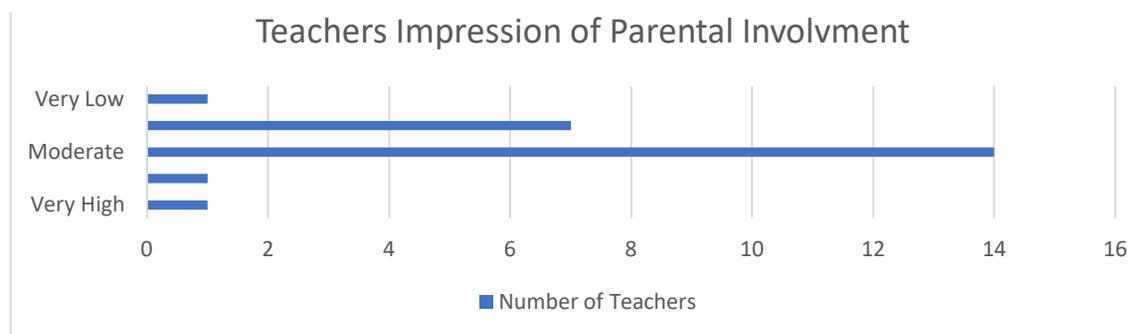
Figure 12. Teacher Impressions of Parental Involvement.

The second section of the survey asked teachers to respond to "Reactions to the

Responsive Classroom Framework." This section was comprised of five items requiring ratings and two open-ended items. The first question in this section asked about their prior knowledge and had they heard of Responsive Classroom prior to the survey. The majority of respondents (20 or 80%) indicated "Yes" that they had heard of the Responsive Classroom approach. Two of the respondents (8%) responded "Maybe," and three (12%) indicated "No" for prior knowledge of the intervention. These responses aligned with the earlier demographic section in which 18 of the teachers (72%) reported having some training in the Responsive Classroom framework, and seven (28%) indicated they had not had training.
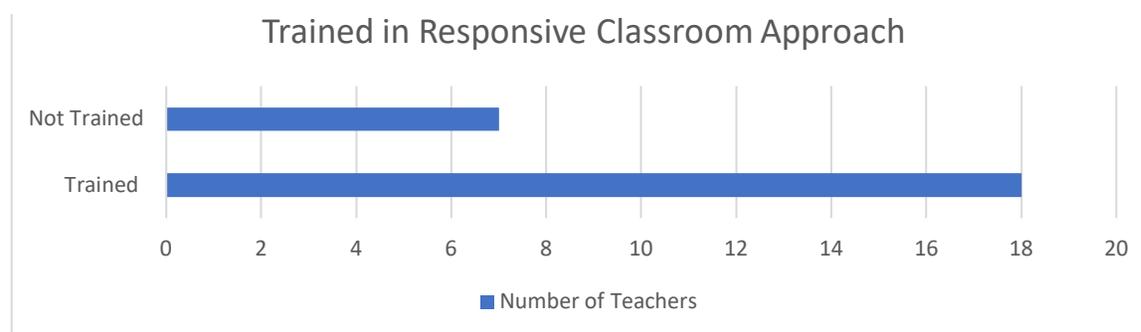
Figure 13. Teachers Trained in Responsive Classroom Approach.

The teachers were then surveyed on their reaction to the Responsive Classroom approach. The responses indicated that 15 (60%) of the respondents "Strongly Like It" and eight (32%) "Slightly Like It." Two respondents (8%) indicated that they "Slightly Dislike It."
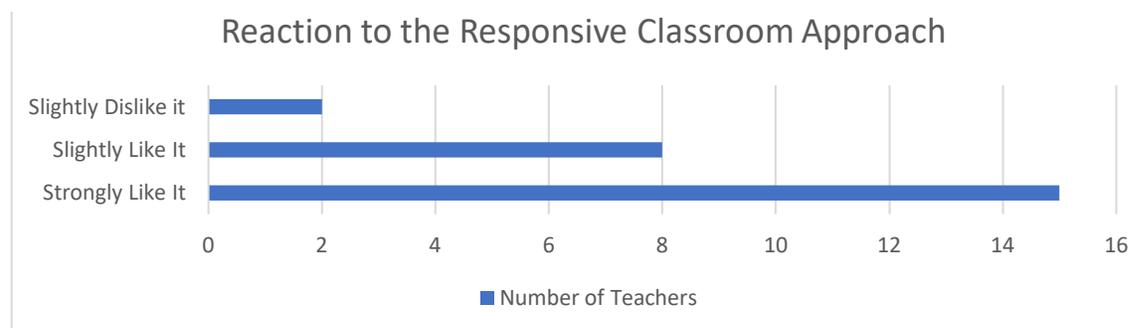
Figure 14. Teacher Reactions to the Responsive Classroom Approach.

The teachers were then asked to indicate how effective they believed the Responsive Classroom approach was for improving student social behavior. Seven (28%) found it to be "Very Effective," nine (36%) found it to be "Effective," and eight (32%) found it to be "A Little Effective." Only one respondent (4%) indicated that the intervention was "Not Effective."
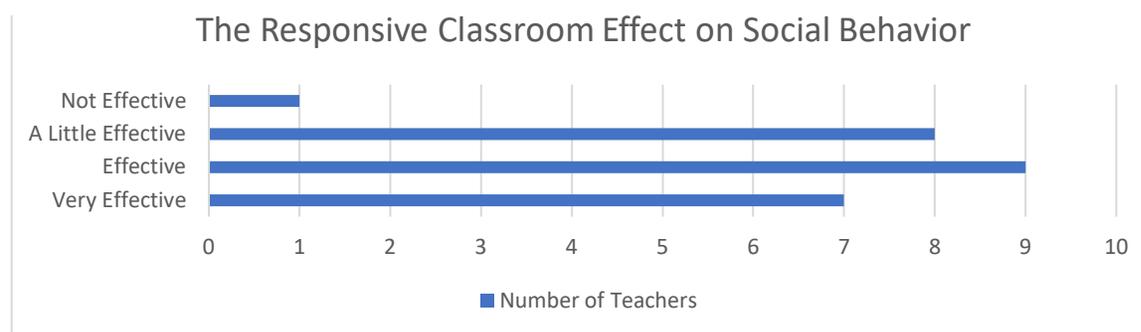
Figure 15. Teacher Perceptions of the Responsive Classroom Effect on Social Behavior.

The teachers were also questioned regarding their interest in using the Responsive Classroom framework. Six (24%) had "Very High" interest, six (24%) had "High" interest, and 10 (40%) had moderate interest. Three respondents (12%) indicated that they had "Very Low" interest in the intervention.
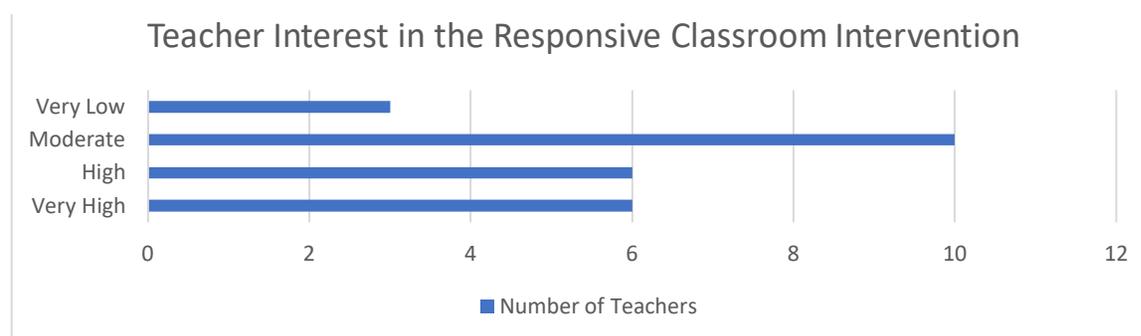
Figure 16. Teacher Interests in the Responsive Classroom Intervention.

When questioned about the ease of implementation, the teachers expressed a range of responses across the Likert scale. Four (16%) found it to be "Very Easy," and 14 (56%) found it to be "Easy." The survey discovered that two (8%) of the teachers responded with "Difficult" and one (4%) responded that it was "Very Difficult" to implement. There were four teachers (16%) who were unsure about the level of ease or difficulty for implementation.

Teachers' Impression of the Ease of Implementation
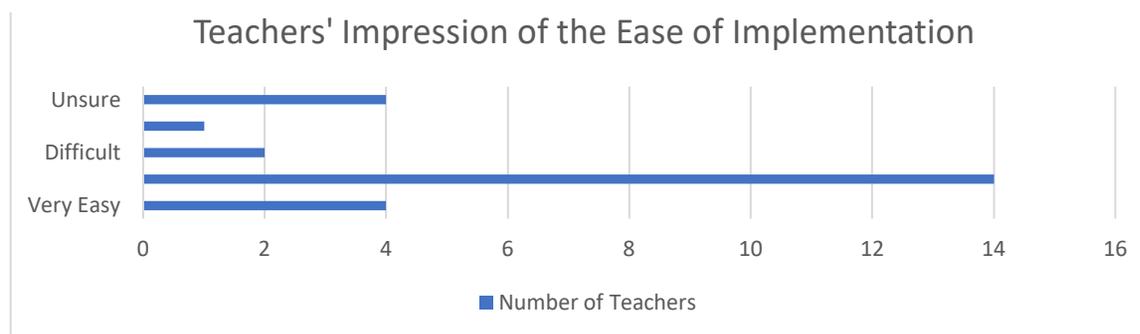
Figure 17. Teacher Impressions of the Ease of Implementation.

The responses from the teachers to the open-ended responses were wide and varied; however, a few trends or themes emerged for each question. The teachers were asked which aspects of the Responsive Classroom approach they liked most and which aspect or aspects of the Responsive Classroom approach they liked least. The entire list of teacher responses to the two questions is included in Appendix B.

When asked what aspect of the Responsive Classroom framework teachers liked the most, the themes that emerged were creating positive classroom communities or specific subcomponents of the intervention. It should be noted that four of the 25 respondents of the survey did not respond to this question.

The first theme that emerged involved creating positive classroom communities with references to building and enhancing relationships. Creating positive classroom communities and building relationships are critical elements of a successful SEL program (CASEL, 2013).

One teacher stated,

> I enjoy implementing each aspect of the Responsive Classroom framework into our daily routine because it allows the students to build relationships with one another, become better problem solvers, and it assists me in creating a positive learning community among/with my students and their peers.

This sentiment was echoed by the other teachers when they commented, "It encourages a close community within my classroom" and "It allows my students to build positive relationships with each other." Finally, "I like the fact that it encourages a close community within my classroom. Students have respect for their teacher and classmates." Another teacher commented that the Responsive Classroom Approach helps her students to build positive relationships and enhances their overall social skills.

The secondary trend of the responses was for teachers to name one of the specific components of the Responsive Classroom approach. The top selection centered on the morning meeting with the second choice of logical consequences. The morning meeting was cited as the framework to build the aforementioned positive communities, and logical consequences are used in order to create a safe and predictable environment, which is an ingredient for creating positive learning communities (Abry et al., 2017). A respondent stated, "If I had to choose, share time during morning meeting would be my favorite aspect of the Responsive Classroom framework because it allows us all to share our personal thoughts, ideas, traits/skills, and experiences with each other."

When asked what aspect of the Responsive Classroom framework they liked least, two main themes emerged from the teacher responses; six of the 25 responders omitted this question entirely, and another nine (45% of those who responded) stated "nothing" or that they liked it all.

With the remaining responses, the central theme of time as a deterrent emerged: time for planning, time for implementation, time during the school year for ongoing training, and taking time away from instruction.

There were a few outlier responses that need to be considered. The component of the Responsive Classroom framework "logical consequences" was also mentioned as being difficult to implement. One respondent also indicated that there was a concern for how the Responsive Classroom approach could be implemented with students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities.

Interview Phase

A semi-structured interview was conducted with the principal and assistant principal at the intervention school. The purpose of the interviews was to address the research question, "What impact do administrators believe the Responsive Classroom approach had on academics and social and emotional learning (discipline)?" The administrative team was asked five main questions to address the research question:

1. How would you describe teachers' implementation of Responsive Classroom approach at your school?

2. How would you describe your role with the implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach at your school?

3. What helped your teachers with implementing the intervention of the Responsive Classroom approach at your school?

4. What is your reaction to the student achievement data? Discipline data? Teacher opinions? (The researcher will share the data obtained from the academic analysis, teacher survey, and discipline analysis before this question.) Are the results reflective

of what you expected? (How/Why/Why not?)

5.   What is the implication of this data on your future use of the Responsive Classroom approach at your school?

After an analysis of the administration's interview, the researcher was able to identify several themes. The themes that emerged were self-determination/empowerment, training and support, and creating a positive learning community.

Self-Determination

The administrators expressed the benefits of having teachers to volunteer to participate in the Responsive Classroom approach training. The administrators noted the initiative was better received due to being perceived as a teacher-led initiative and would lead to greater success because of the power of choice and empowering teachers as leaders. The perceptions of the administrator align with Deci and Ryan's (2008) SDT. The SDT posits that people have three basic psychological needs of competence (effectiveness), relatedness (close relationships), and autonomy (control of one's life); and they meet these needs by continuously and actively seeking challenges and experiences and then by seeking to master them (Link, 2008). The principal expressed this when responding to the question of "how would you describe teachers' implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach at your school." He responded,

> We started the summer PD (professional development), and it was a smaller group [of volunteers], and that group started the year excited. When the [other] teachers saw that that group was excited about what was happening, then the excitement started to feed throughout the faculty. I think that it helped having it come from their peers or co-workers instead of coming from the administration. That helped to spark the excitement of faculty and staff.

The administrative team discussed the importance of teachers attending the training because they wanted to be at the training and not because they were forced. The SDT would classify this as having autonomy, control over one's life; and autonomy is one of the three basic psychological needs according to the theory (Link, 2008). This autonomy, coupled with relationships that were fostered by being in the training with their peers and the support of the administration, created the conditions to support their empowerment and allowed them to bring excitement back to the other teachers. The administrators wanted this to be a teacher-led and administration-supported initiative. The team wanted to empower the teachers as leaders. The assistant principal commented that he believed that this approach would also foster the conditions that will have more teachers volunteering for the training next summer.

Training and Support

The theme of training and support was another consistent element within the administration's interview. Training and support were elements identified by Wanless, Patton, Rimm-Kaufman, and Deutsch (2013) as essential for the successful implementation of school initiatives. The training took on the form of the formal 4-day intensive training from a certified Responsive Classroom teacher during the summer, ongoing teacher- and administrator-led training during faculty meetings, and grade-level professional learning communities. The support continued in the form of the leadership team providing access to various articles, newsletters, and a resource library that addressed the elements of the Responsive Classroom approach. When the administrative team was questioned about their role with the implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach, the principal responded,

> I think that having both of us attend the trainings with teachers was important. We both
>
> participated in summer training with them. We were in the sessions, so it wasn't like it

was something we signed them up for and didn't attend. We were there with them. We

went to the PD [professional development] with them, so we were a part of the group

with the teachers. We were the support for them if they needed things.

Having administrators attend training helps to set the tone that the initiative is important and that

it is worthy of the time needed to learn the components.

Due to attending the training sessions with the teachers, administrative support took on

the form of dedicated time, the purchasing of the resources needed for the implementation,

administrative observations during implementation with constructive feedback, and having the

administration attend the intensive training with the teachers. The principal shared that he

ensured that the teachers had all the resources and tools that were presented during the 4-day

training. The principal commented that by providing the materials, the excitement around the

initiative remained high. The assistant principal addressed this theme when he responded to

"what was your role in the implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach?" He stated,

The principal and I always would go in and do observations for Morning Meeting. At

least 3 or 4 times a week, it was part of our observations. We would go in for Morning

Meeting. We set up unencumbered time for them every day from first block in the

morning was designated for Responsive Classroom.

Time is often cited as a deterrent to the successful implementation of school initiatives. The

administrators provided the support of time by attending the 4-day training with the teachers.

Their time in the training sent the message that the initiative was important. The administrators

continued with support in the form of time by ensuring that there was teacher-led as well as

administrator-led ongoing training sessions in faculty meetings and monthly grade-level

meetings. The administrators set up unencumbered time every day. The first part of every day

was dedicated to Responsive Classroom. The principal shared,

> Nothing occurred until 8:40 every morning, so there was nothing happening, such as
>
> related art and no pullouts. There was nothing until 8:40, so the kids weren't going
>
> anywhere. There was no excuse for the Morning Meeting not to happen in any
>
> classroom.

Time is a valuable resource that indicates support. Teachers need support from school

leaders to implement SEL programs successfully (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). DePaoli et al. (2017)

found that both teachers and administrators site time and training as the critical elements needed

for success with implementing an SEL approach.

Building Positive Learning Communities

The final theme to emerge from the coding of the interview centered on creating positive

learning communities. The administrative team was presented with quantitative data from the

analysis of the MAP growth in reading and math by grade level as well as the discipline data in

regard to office referrals, ISS, OSS, and bus referrals. After a review of the academic and

discipline data, administrators indicated a lack of surprise. The administrative team noted that

they had been conducting monthly reviews of discipline data and at least quarterly reviews of

academic growth as measured by classroom grades and other summative and formative

assessments at the school.

They attributed the noted successes for the discipline data to the teachers building

stronger classroom learning communities. The principal shared that he was not surprised by the

decrease in discipline referrals and infractions because he reflected that the teachers focused a lot

on building a positive classroom community. This observation aligned with teacher open-ended

responses in which a majority indicated they believed the Responsive Classroom approach

helped them create positive learning communities, primarily through the use of the morning meeting structure. The assistant principal shared that the students enjoy the morning meeting and expect it every day. He wanted to emphasize the students]talk with their parents about it because their parents come into the school wanting to know what the morning meeting is and that allows the administration to spread the positive learning community beyond the school and reach the homes of the students.

Missed opportunities of incorporating the academics into the morning meeting, using peer observations to help struggling teachers, and focusing on the other components of the Responsive Classroom framework to go beyond the morning meeting were mentioned as potential factors for the lack of anticipated academic gains. The principal reflected,

> I wish I had taken advantage of taking other teachers and putting them in those classrooms in the morning to watch just to see how seamless it was to incorporate all those pieces and how those things worked. I think that what they are not tapping into, what they didn't take advantage of the most was the academic component, that could have been there with Responsive Classroom.

Abry et al. (2017) found that the morning meeting had the most significant impact on SEL due to higher levels of emotional and instructional support and positively impacted teacher and student interactions; however, the research found that the morning meeting had a more significant impact on student achievement when it was closely coupled with providing academic choice and the infusing of academics within the morning meeting structure. Both administrators indicated that they were pleased with the results from 1 year of implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach. Each noted that they were expecting more academic growth in year two due to the establishment of strong classroom communities and a better understanding of the Responsive

Classroom framework and strategies.

The administrative team indicated a commitment to continue the implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach. Administrators intend to attend the summer professional development with the teachers in order to continue to build their personal skills with the approach as well as to gain insights to help support the teachers with continued implementation. Value in the approach was noted, and the administrative team indicated the desire to provide a greater focus on the academic components of the Responsive Classroom approach such as academic choice and interactive modeling. The administrators reported that the shift towards academic strategies could occur because the foundation of the positive learning communities has been established through the morning meeting. The administrators are planning to help teachers infuse more academics into the morning meeting by being strategic with peer observations. These next steps align with the recommendations from multiple studies (Baroody et al., 2014; McTigue & Rimm-Kaufmann, 2011; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014; Rimm-Kaufmann & Hulleman, 2015) that found morning meeting, academic choice, and interactive modeling as having the most significant impact on academic growth.

Summary of Findings

Two significant findings have emerged from the analyses of data. The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the Responsive Classroom approach on the SEL competencies (prosocial behaviors) and academic achievement. Even though there were few statistically relevant differences in academics, the data showed gains in reading for kindergarten, first grade, and second grade and gains in math for kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and third grade. The interview with the administrators supported these findings. The administration cited they observed a high degree of implementation fidelity by the teachers.

The behavioral measures of office referrals, OSS, ISS, and bus discipline showed improvement, as evidenced by a decrease in problem behaviors that resulted in office referrals. The most significant area of decrease was the number of OSSs. These findings were supported by the results of the teacher surveys when 76% of teachers indicated that their students showed "very good" or "exceptional" interpersonal or social skills with peers and 72% indicated that their students were "positive" or "very positive" about their students' reaction to school.

Even though the academic gains were not statistically significant in all grade levels, the administration discussed positive growth in most individual classrooms as well as increases in classroom grades and performance. For this reason, the administrative team and teachers believe that the achievement scores will improve with more time using the Responsive Classroom approach and additional training. The teachers and administrators had positive attitudes to support the continued implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach at their school.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The study focused on an elementary school in a small southeastern rural school district that had experienced a change in demographics coupled with increased behavior issues and concerns for academic achievement. The researcher used a mixed-method explanatory approach to study the impact of the intervention of the Responsive Classroom approach on academic achievement and social skills (behavior). The researcher began with the quantitative analysis of academic achievement data and the analysis of discipline data. For the purpose of this research, the researcher used the summary growth data obtained from MAP testing for reading and mathematics. For the purpose of this research, discipline data refers to office referrals, bus referrals, ISSs, and OSSs. The second phase of the study involved providing a survey to the teachers and conducting semi-structured interviews with the administrators at the intervention site on their perceptions of the effectiveness of the intervention in regard to academic achievement and improvements with social skills. Aside from the quantitative data, the teacher survey and administration interview provided a unique perspective to contribute to a more robust understanding of the implications of the implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach.

Restatement of the Problem

SEL is a critical element needed in schools. No longer can noncognitive skills (affective and behavioral domains) be ignored for the sake of academics (cognitive domain). Educational best practice now requires teachers to educate the "head, the heart, and the hand" if a 21st century education is to be adequately provided (Wangaard et al., 2014). Students are entering kindergarten without the prerequisite prosocial skills needed for success in schools (Bettencourt et al., 2018; Charney, 2002).

The Responsive Classroom approach is an instructional delivery with SEL intervention strategies designed to provide teachers with skills needed to create caring, well-managed classroom environments that are conducive to learning (Baroody et al., 2014). The Responsive Classroom approach is built on four domains of teaching: engaging academics, positive community, effective management, and developmental awareness. Engaging academics includes providing meaningful academic choices, teaching the language of learning, and providing interactive modeling. Positive community translates into knowing all students individually, culturally, and developmentally, using positive teacher language and daily morning meetings to build classroom community and set the tone for the day. The effective management domain begins with creating meaningful rules, responding to behavior mistakes in fair and nonpunitive ways, and establishing clear routines and expectations.

By improving the competencies across these domains, research by Rimm-Kaufman and Chui (2007) showed students scoring significantly higher on reading and math tests across all social-economic backgrounds. Further benefits from the approach include improved social skills in children and improved teacher-student interactions. Additionally, students felt more positive toward school, and teachers felt more effective and positive about teaching.

The researcher was interested to see if this approach would produce measurable gains academically as well as behaviorally within the first year of implementation. The majority of the previous studies had been longitudinal, spanning 3-5 years. The researcher was also interested in comparing the quantitative data of standardized test scores and discipline numbers with the qualitative results from a teacher survey and a semi-structured interview with the administrators at the intervention site. The researcher wanted to bring in the perspective of the teachers and administrators regarding the implementation and the results of the Responsive Classroom

approach intervention.

Interpretation of the Findings

In several of the case studies related to SEL, the data are limited to test scores and discipline data. The qualitative aspect of the survey and interview provided a more robust analysis of the Responsive Classroom approach.

The intervention site was a school comprised of a student population of 572 students in grades preschool (ages 3 and 4) through the fifth grade. The demographics of the school at the time of the intervention were 3% Asian, 45% African-American, 41% Caucasian, 9% Hispanic, and 3% Other. This closely resembled the demographics across the district. Both the school and the district are a minority-majority. The school served 99 students (17%) with an IEP. The school had 21 students in the preschool classrooms and 23 students who received an alternate curriculum and who did not participate in MAP testing during the implementation of the intervention. The study focused on the remaining 528 students in regard to academic progress, but all students were included in the discipline analysis. The district participates in the CEP federal program. CEP is a non-pricing meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas (U.S. Department of Food and Nutrition, n.d.).

The treatment school was selected due to multiple factors. First, the demographics of the school have changed dramatically over the past 5 years. There is greater poverty represented in its student population, and it is now a minority-majority school. The school maintained a level of success as measured on state testing; however, an achievement gap existed between subgroups based on race, gender, and socioeconomic factors in the previous year. Discipline issues increased with the number of student incidents resulting in ISS and OSS. A change in leadership at the school level with a new principal and assistant principal also occurred. The new

administration was receptive to a new approach to try to improve the academic achievement for the students as well as to positively impact the social and emotional skills of the students, thus making the school a more positive learning environment and improving the overall climate of the building.

Summary of Results

The 1-year study was conducted as designed and incorporated quantitative and qualitative data to investigate the impact of the Responsive Classroom approach when implemented in a rural elementary school. The study addressed four questions:

1. In a school that used the Responsive Classroom approach, what is the academic growth as measured by pretest/posttest of MAP scores in reading and math as measured from fall to spring, grades kindergarten through fifth grade?

2. In a school that used the Responsive Classroom approach, what impact did Responsive Classroom have on SEL as measured by office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions as compared from one year to the next?

3. What impact do teachers believe the Responsive Classroom approach had on academics and social and emotional learning (discipline)?

4. What impact do administrators believe the Responsive Classroom approach had on academics and social and emotional learning (discipline)?

In regard to academic achievement, the results were not aligned to previous longitudinal studies but did align with other 1-year studies. Even though there were few statistically relevant differences in academics, the data showed gains in reading for kindergarten, first grade, and second grade and gains in math for kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and third grade. The interview with the administrators supported the findings when they cited a high degree of

implementation fidelity by the teachers in those grades. The teacher survey also showed that the teachers saw an increase in academic achievement in their classrooms even though the results were not mirrored with the standardized testing.

The study analyzed the implementation site's discipline data to begin to address the second question to determine the impact of the Responsive Classroom approach on SEL. All the behavior measures showed improvement, as evidenced by a decrease in problem behaviors that resulted in office referrals. The most significant area of decrease was the number of OSSs. These findings were supported by the results of the teacher surveys when 76% of teachers indicated that their students showed "very good" or "exceptional" interpersonal or social skills with peers and 72% reported that their students were "positive" or "very positive" about their students' reaction to school.

The teacher surveys indicated that the Responsive Classroom approach was a positive experience for the majority of the teachers. The teachers indicated that they observed academic growth as well as SEL with their students during the implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach.

The administrators also indicated that the Responsive Classroom approach had a positive impact on both academic achievement and social and emotional growth. The interviews pointed to the positive change in the school and classroom cultures. The summary data for academics did not show gains that did not meet the threshold to be considered statistically significant; the administrators were able to observe growth in individual students and classroom growth through their day-to-day duties.

Implications for Teacher Training

A recent survey of principals found that principals want more SEL training for their

teachers (DePaoli et al., 2017). Of the principals who participated in the survey, 60% indicated

that the training was a big challenge. The principals did not believe that their teachers were

prepared to teach SEL successfully, and they felt that additional professional development was

needed. That survey revealed the critical need for teachers and administrators to have access to

"effective SEL programming and training in how to effectively integrate SEL into academic

instruction and school climate improvement initiatives" (DePaoli et al., 2017, p. 6). The current

study of the implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach yielded results that could

impact future professional development opportunities for teachers.

      The researcher acknowledges the training and support were present at the intervention

site during the study. An interesting theme emerged from the analysis of results from research at

the intervention site that could have an impact on future teacher training. The theme of self-

determination crossed over from the students to the adults. When the study began, the researcher

anticipated growth in self-efficacy for the students based on the results of previous studies. The

SDT and Maslow's Hierarchy are the theoretical undergirding to the research. The researcher

hypothesized that by establishing the safe and predictable environments, building strong

relationships and a sense of belonging, and providing choice (autonomy), and due to persistence

with their work, the students would demonstrate growth in academic achievement. These are the

same tenets of the Responsive Classroom approach. It is interesting to note that the teachers also

experienced a greater sense of self-efficacy. The teachers demonstrated the positive impact of

having choices. The initial teachers were voluntary participants. The administration established

this group as the leaders of the initiative and empowered them. These teachers, in turn,

motivated and excited the rest of the faculty and staff regarding the implementation. The

assistant principal anticipates that due to the empowerment and excitement that was created after

the first summer training, more teachers will choose to be part of the next training. Research is also clear that teachers are also in need of support with social and emotional skills due to the heightened levels of stress in their jobs (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). These factors must be considered by administrators to ensure more effective implementation of an SEL program.

There is a teacher shortage across much of the United States, with more teachers leaving the profession every year and fewer college students entering teaching programs. The teachers are leaving for several reasons, including emotional exhaustion, stress, burnout, not enough support or respect, student behavior, and even the overemphasis on high stakes testing (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). College preparation does not provide the novice teacher with the skills and resources to be highly effective, which could be leading to 11% of new teachers leaving the profession within the first year and 39% of teachers leaving within the first 5 years. DePaoli et al. (2017) found that teachers and principals acknowledged the need for SEL, yet, only a small percentage believed that they had any training while enrolled in college teacher preparatory classes. Teachers need to have their own SEL needs met; and like the students, those skills can be learned and developed (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013). The Responsive Classroom approach builds teacher self-efficacy and provides teachers with research-based classroom management skills (Rimm-Kaufmann et al. 2014). The professional development and ongoing coaching involving the Responsive Classroom framework could prove to be beneficial for teacher retention and hiring.

The researcher recommends that the principles and practices of the Responsive Classroom approach also be a component of the training for nontraditional certification programs for teachers. Most alternative credential teachers have extensive professional development within the first 2 years of teaching. The framework would provide a foundation to assist

individuals who are masters in their content to become responsive to the needs of their students. Teachers who have entered the profession through alternative certification have a higher rate of turnover than those of graduates from standard college teacher preparation programs (Redding & Smith, 2016). The Responsive Classroom framework would provide the basis for the building of strong, positive relationships with their students and providing a foundation for positive classroom management. The researcher hypothesizes that the framework and support would help promote the retention of these individuals within the profession and increase their success in the classroom.

Implications for Leadership

Administrators (school leaders) participated in the training alongside the teachers to demonstrate support (physically) as well as through time and resources. Wanless et al. (2013) found that principal buy-in, coupled with ongoing coaching, helped with the fidelity and implementation of the intervention. The research indicated that the participation of the principal helped to create a psychologically safe environment in which the teachers reported that they felt safe to take risks and attempt the new approach due to support and encouragement. The principals' commitment must go beyond words of support and must manifest in actions of support with sharing in the implementation, resources for the teachers, and allocating the time needed for the implementation. Jones et al. (2013) advocated for coaching, which stems from the conclusion that not all teachers are at the same level regarding their own SEL. Their skills can be developed, but some teachers may require more significant support. Understanding that teachers are at different starting points and have different needs is vital for school leaders to consider as they plan differentiated staff development to ensure high-quality implementation of an intervention.

The research found that the implementation yielded more positive results when the intervention was school-wide as opposed to isolated classrooms, and Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, and Salovey (2012) found that the fidelity to the intervention was critical beyond the initial training alone. School-wide implementation has more considerable implications beyond this study.

The researcher hypothesized that the leadership team's support and attendance at the training allowed for the school-wide implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach despite not having every teacher attend. The administrators at the implementation site for this study were adamant with their assertion that principals and leaders need to attend and actively participate in the training with their teachers. This theory could also be applied to any intervention being introduced in the schools.

School leaders are faced with ESSA standards and the expectation to meet the needs of students through MTSS. Students are entering school with academic and social and emotional needs that manifest differently with each child (Bettencourt et al., 2018). Responsive Classroom addresses whole class, small group, and individual needs to allow for multiple levels of support for prosocial behaviors and academics. Responsive Classroom is rooted in constructivism and child development stages. It has practical strategies to address all three tiers of universal prevention (all); targeted prevention (some); and intensive, individualized prevention (few; PBIS OSEP Technical Assistance Center, n.d.).

Systematic school-wide implementation of SEL practices and programs have seen greater success (DePaoli et al., 2017). School-wide implementation is a critical implication for school and district leaders. The school-wide approach involves more people and helps to foster a positive learning community in the classroom and throughout the building. Those principals

who had high levels of school-wide implementation of SEL reported greater academic success and believe that SEL can improve school climate and students' in-school experiences (DePaoli et al., 2017). To achieve this level, leaders must help teachers and staff with more training to provide access to research-based strategies to support SEL.

Implications for Academic Achievement

The researcher was interested in analyzing the impact of the Responsive Classroom approach on academic achievement. The hypothesis was that improving the prosocial behaviors would reduce the discipline rates, thus creating more time and space for the teachers to provide quality lessons without disruptions. The quantitative results did not show much statistical relevance to a change in standardized test scores when summary data were compared from the year with the intervention to the preceding year. The previous longitudinal studies of Elliott (1999), Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2014), Rimm-Kaufmann (2006), and Baroody et al. (2014), whose implementation of the approach was for 3 or more years, did demonstrate growth in academic achievement. Solomon (2011) was a single year study of the approach. That study's results were very similar to this study with no statistical growth in academic achievement as measured by standardized test scores but significant changes in prosocial behaviors.

Teachers at the intervention site of this study indicated that they perceived their students' academic achievement to be positive. At first analysis, the researcher wondered what data the teachers had relied on to form that determination. Did the teachers notice more incremental growth through their analysis of individual students on standardized testing since they were not limited to summary data? Did the teachers base their findings on classroom performance through formative as well as summative findings? Since the other studies were longitudinal and results were only reported at the end of the final year, did they first notice the growth in

classroom performance prior to seeing that growth reflected on standardized testing? These would be areas for future studies to explore.

Previous research found that morning meeting and academic choice had the most significant impact on student achievement (Abry et al., 2017). The findings are supported by the theories of Maslow's Hierarchy and the SDT. Morning meeting provided higher levels of emotional and intuitional support, and academic choice provided opportunities for achieving learning objectives with reflection and choice. Both practices help support teacher and student interactions, thus creating positive learning communities within the classrooms. The administration at the intervention site is aligned with the research as they plan to incorporate academic choice and more academics into the morning meeting for the next year. Understanding the impact of each of the Responsive Classroom practices is critical as other schools begin to look at the elements of the Responsive Classroom approach and the identified needs for their students. If gains in academic achievement are paramount, the two elements of morning meeting and academic choice must be the cornerstones of the implementation and carried out with fidelity with ongoing support and coaching. Professional development should support the more significant change that emerges from the goals of the organization, improvements in student learning outcomes, and not merely a process that teaches the next trend in education (Guskey, 2000).

The academic results from the study were not as conclusive as the researcher had anticipated. The researcher acknowledged that the intervention of the Responsive Classroom approach was not implemented in isolation. There were other contributing and potentially confounding factors due to the implementation of a new reading curriculum and math practices. The multiple and simultaneous implementations of programs, curriculum, and approaches may

have contributed to the fluctuations and inconsistencies for the standardized testing. The

teachers also may have had implementation fatigue, with multiple new initiatives being

implemented simultaneously. Another contributing factor to the standardized testing results may

have been the unintentional bias that impacts standardized testing for minority students. The

school is identified as having a minority-majority student population, and the results are

potentially more of a reflection on the measure than on the intervention.

Implications for Creating Positive School and Classroom Communities

Proactive approaches, such as SEL approaches, are supported by research as positively

impacting the culture of the school; and relationship building is essential with lowering

discipline referrals. The teachers and administrators discussed the positive relationships that

were developed through the morning meeting, and the data reflect the decrease in discipline

referrals. The students were not surveyed for this research, but the researcher would be

interested to see if student perceptions align with the perceptions of the teachers and

administrators.

The researcher was interested in analyzing the impact of the Responsive Classroom

approach on academic achievement and improving the prosocial behaviors that would reduce the

discipline rates. The quantitative results did not show much statistical relevance to a change in

standardized test scores when summary data were compared from the year with the intervention

to the preceding year. The previous longitudinal studies of Elliott (1999), Rimm-Kaufman et al.

(2014), Rimm-Kaufmann (2006), and Baroody et al. (2014), whose implementation of the

approach was for 3 or more years, did demonstrate growth in academic achievement. Solomon

(2011) was a single year study of the approach, and his results were very similar to this study

with no statistical growth in academic achievement as measured by standardized tests. The

teachers at the intervention site of this study did not have access to the analysis of the standardized test scores, yet they indicated that they perceived their students' academic achievement to be positive. At first analysis, the researcher wondered what data the teachers had relied on to form that determination. Did the teachers notice more incremental growth through their analysis of individual students on standardized testing since they were not limited to summary data? Did the teachers base their findings on classroom performance through formative as well as summative findings? Since the other studies were longitudinal and results were only reported at the end of the final year, did they first notice the growth in classroom performance prior to seeing that growth reflected on standardized testing? These would be areas for future studies to explore.

The discipline data showed decreases in office referrals, bus referrals, ISSs, and OSSs. The number of ISSs saw a decrease of 54%, and the OSSs saw a decline of 20%. Research has shown that SEL interventions set high expectations, and new behaviors become the norm (Dwyer & Osher, 2000). These findings align with CASEL (2013), in which it was determined that the explicit teaching of social and emotional skills directly impacts student behaviors.

The Responsive Classroom approach was viewed positively at the implementation site, as evidenced by teacher surveys and administrative interviews. The discipline data suggest that the approach created the conditions to foster a greater emphasis on social and emotional skills. The researcher ponders if having a specific curriculum with developmentally explicit lessons to help teachers effectively teach the five competencies of cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control would be beneficial to the teachers and the students. Would the explicit teaching lead to more significant academic gains within the first year of implementation, or would it still require multiple years before there was a more significant statistical difference in

the standardized testing? Would the teachers view the additional support resources positively, or

would it be perceived as another draw on their limited time? Research has shown that the

conditions that are supportive of students are also supportive for the adults, and the researcher

ponders if the explicitly taught lessons would enhance the conditions to help with the increased

acquisition of the SEL skills as well as higher levels of academic achievement.

The study took place in a state that does not have SEL standards or curriculum for

teachers. The researcher is left wondering if the Responsive Classroom approach is coupled with

systematic and specific goals and targets, would the impacts be of greater statistical relevance for

academic achievement and enhancing prosocial skills? Would the presence of state standards

compel the teachers into higher fidelity, or is the fidelity and implementation more closely

aligned with administrator support?

Implications of Time

The issue of time was discussed by the teachers and administrators and has implications

across teacher training, administrators, academic achievement, and creating positive school and

classroom communities. The teachers mentioned time as a possible limitation or barrier to the

implementation of the intervention. They noted time for planning, time for implementation, time

for training, and time away from core content and tested subjects. The administrators also

discussed time in regard to time for training, time for planning, time for the implementation in

dedicated time in the schedule, and time management to balance the core content, state-tested

content, with the elements of the Responsive Classroom approach. The lack of teacher time is

listed as the most significant barrier to increasing SEL (DePaoli et al., 2017).

Time is a commodity for teachers, administrators, and students. The school leaders must

view the issue of time just as they would dollars within a school budget. Leaders allocate

budgets based on values and needs, and the commodity of time needs to be addressed in the same manner. Principals need to provide dedicated time within the school day to ensure that the intervention has the necessary time for implementation. The administration must ensure that there is time to provide training, support, and coaching with the understanding that teachers will need differentiated support as they begin the implementation journey. Teachers will need specific training and instruction on how to embed the academics into the framework so they are able to alleviate the concern regarding the intervention taking time away from the tested curriculum. The Responsive Classroom approach holds the belief the SEL curriculum is as relevant as the academic curriculum and that SEL skills should be embedded throughout the day and not only at a single designated time.

Limitations

One limitation of the study was that it only involved school level summary data. Student-level data would have potentially allowed for disaggregation between subgroups in addition to grade levels. Summary data were used to protect the personally identifiable information of the students and the other participants of the study due to the single site of the intervention. A more in-depth analysis of the data by student and by classroom has the potential to answer more in-depth questions regarding the results. The limitation of using school level summary data can be addressed in future studies.

The study was limited to the results in a single year of the treatment, rather than a longitudinal study spanning 3-5 years. This limitation was mitigated by using a mixed-method explanatory model. The qualitative survey and semi-structured interview provided more robust study components for the quantitative measures to help with determining if an association could be established between the intervention of the Responsive Classroom approach and the results

for academic progress and prosocial skills. The academic results were not as definitive with a single-year implementation; however, the discipline data did show a more significant impact with the assumption that improvements in prosocial behaviors led to a decrease in discipline notices and infractions.

The intervention was implemented at a single site, and this created a limitation to this study. The researcher only had access to one site and one set of data. By having multiple schools, the researcher would have been able to make more inferences regarding the Responsive Classroom approach. The impacts on academics and SEL could be reviewed at set time intervals during the implementation period to see if any other factors are contributing to academic performances. The researcher would be able to cross-reference teacher surveys as well as administrator interviews. Multiple sites will allow the researcher to determine if the implementation follows a similar pattern of results at intervals within the study. Having multiple test sites and multiple points of analysis would have the potential for greater generalizability of the results.

The researcher was provided with the data of how long each teacher had been in the teaching profession overall; however, the researcher was not given access to how long each teacher had been at the intervention site. A teacher's years of experience is a relevant factor as a researcher seeks to understand the results of the study. New studies have emerged that find high rates of teacher turnover in schools is harmful to student achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Understanding the length of service at the intervention site may have provided a more significant understanding of the intervention and explained more about student achievement. The administrators referenced teacher turnover during the interview. When reviewing the data, they indicated that some of those teachers were no longer at the school, and

they discussed the number of new teachers on staff. Not knowing the years of service at the intervention site created a minor limitation for the study.

The limited number of teachers who participated in the survey presented a limitation to the study. Even though there was a high percentage of participation with the surveys having a return rate of 69%, the responses did not represent all of the teachers at the intervention site. The results are lacking the voices of 10 teachers. Would the option of teacher interviews capture those voices, or did the anonymity of the survey capture a greater variety and a more authentic response?

Recommendation for Future Studies

The researcher's analysis of the data within this study and comparisons with past studies have created many wonderings and recommendations for future studies. There is more to explore in the area of SEL and the impacts within schools and beyond the classroom.

The 1-year study from this research has results that are most closely aligned with Solomon's (2011) study in which there was a modest amount of success with academic achievement, yet there were notable successes in the social-emotional area (behaviors) believed to be due to the cultural shifts in the school and the enhanced relationships between teachers and students and students and students. Extending this current study into a 3-year longitudinal study that replicates the surveys, interviews, achievement data, and discipline data at the end of each subsequent year could provide greater insight into the effectiveness of the Responsive Classroom approach for SEL and academic achievement. The longitudinal study could then be more closely compared with the earlier longitudinal studies by Elliot (1995), Rimm-Kaufmann (2006), McTigue and Rimm-Kaufmann (2011), Baroody et al. (2014) and Rimm-Kaufmann et al. (2014).

An additional future study would be to conduct a follow-up investigation for the students

at the intervention site. The purpose of this study would be to compare the students' levels of college and career readiness. The level of readiness could be evidenced by students attending a 2- or 4-year postsecondary institution or competitive employment 1 year after their high school graduation as well as their on-time graduation rate. The follow-up would align with the research in the Fast Track program by Shallcross (2015) to determine if the SEL approach maintained the projected long-term impacts as well as the proximal impacts of the intervention.

The researcher notes that using summary data was a limitation of the current study but hypothesizes that using summary class data could provide greater insight in regard to outliers. Summary class data would still protect students' personally identifiable data, but there would need to be safeguards to protect teacher identity, thus extending to the protection of student data. Class data could potentially link to levels of fidelity of the implementation or potentially expose factors beyond the implementation, which may have led to positive or negative growth. Using individual student data would allow for the disaggregation of data by gender, race, and poverty rating to enable researchers to determine the impact of the Responsive Classroom approach across the various subgroups.

The teachers self-reported via the teacher survey, and the researcher did not have direct observation of the intervention in practice. The researcher had to rely on the self-reporting of the teachers and the conclusions of the administrators. A future study could combine an observation tool to cross-reference the survey and academic progress in which the researcher or a research team could have direct observation of the intervention in practice. The inclusion of the observation tool would make the study more robust and allow for the potential also to study the impact of the fidelity of the intervention on the outcomes, as evidenced by academic progress and student discipline data. The discipline data, along with academic data, could also be linked

to each teacher to be able to determine if there is a correlation between implementation, perceptions of implementation, academic growth, and teacher-reported discipline events.

Previous research has indicated that strategic school-wide implementation of SEL yields more significant results in academics and prosocial behaviors. DePaoli et al. (2017) also found that only 25% of principals could be considered high implementers, and 39% were considered as moderate implementers. Further studies need to conducted to determine the value of implementing systemic school-wide SEL as compared to individual classrooms. The study would promote looking deeper into the effect of the teacher and could potentially impact training and staff development decisions.

The researcher would advocate for a study of the Responsive Classroom approach, which investigates the role of the school leader and the effects of that involvement or disengagement. This theory could be generalized to any intervention being introduced in the schools. What level of principal/leader involvement or buy-in is needed to promote the necessary support for the success of the intervention?

Conclusion

Two significant findings have emerged from the analyses of data. The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the Responsive Classroom approach on the SEL competencies (prosocial behaviors) and academic achievement. The first finding involved the impact of the Responsive Classroom approach on academic achievement. Even though the academic gains were not statistically significant in all grade levels, the administration discussed positive growth in most individual classrooms. For this reason, the administrative team and teachers believe that the achievement scores will improve with more time using the Responsive Classroom approach and additional training. The Responsive Classroom approach has created the conditions to allow for more significant growth in the future.

The second finding of the study was centered on the growth with prosocial behaviors. The data showed substantial decreases with OSSs as well as reductions in problem behavior on the bus, with ISS, and with overall referrals to the office. The teachers indicated observing growth in their students' abilities to problem-solve and have positive interactions with their peers.

Overall, the teachers and administrators found that the Responsive Classroom approach had positive outcomes for their classrooms and the school. Due to the positive results, the administration indicated that they support the continued implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach at their school. Both groups found the Responsive Classroom approach had benefits academically as well as with SEL.

The general conclusion of this study is that the Responsive Classroom approach is an acceptable SEL program for the intervention site. The Responsive Classroom approach was moderately effective for enhancing the prosocial behaviors of the kindergarten through fifth-

grade students, as evidenced by the discipline data, teacher surveys, and administrative interviews. With more time and training, especially with the elements of academic choice, interactive modeling, and academics infused into the morning meeting, the benefits of the approach are expected to be more evident academically as well as behaviorally. Based on the results of qualitative and quantitative elements of this research, the administration team at the intervention site has concluded to continue with the intervention of the Responsive Classroom approach and has taken steps to procure additional training and resources. The intervention site will continue to use the Responsive Classroom approach is a school-wide model.

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Appendix A

Teacher Survey

<u>Responsive Classroom Evaluation Project</u>

January 2019

Dear Teachers,

      Your perceptions and opinions about *The Responsive Classroom* (RC) Framework/Approach are requested. Some teachers at _____ Elementary School have had brief training with this framework, while others have little or no experience with the framework. Regardless of your experience with the (RC) framework, your feedback is important to the ongoing evaluation of this approach to classroom instruction and management.

      This survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete and will be used as part of an evaluation of efforts to improve the social behavior of young students in your school. Your honest responses to a series of questions would be valued. Your responses will remain confidential (your name is not requested) and the information will be used solely for the writing of my dissertation.

      To help summarize and more fully understand the responses from all teachers, I would appreciate having the following background information:

<u>Background Information</u>

Sex: _____Female _____Male

Instruction Level: *(Check all that apply)*

_____Special Education _____K5 _____1st grade _____ 2nd grade

_____3rd grade _____4th grade _____5th grade ___related arts

Trained to use *The Responsive Classroom:* _____Yes _____No

Instructions for Completing the Survey
On pages 2 through 4 of this survey, you are asked to respond to questions about your students' social behavior, implementation of instructional innovations like *The Responsive Classroom*, and finally about yourself. Please be honest, **there are no right or wrong answers**. Your opinions and observations are valuable.

Once you have completed this survey, **please return to Amy Hildenbrand at _____ by January 18, 2019.**

About My Class This Year (Circle one answer for each question)

1. **My students' interpersonal or social skills with peers in general are**
   Very Poor   Poor   Good   Very Good   Exceptional

2. **My students' abilities to solve problems with other people in general are**
   Very Poor   Poor   Good   Very Good   Exceptional

3. **My students' interpersonal or social skills overall this year**
   Did Not Improve   Improved Slightly   Improved Significantly

4. **My students' overall achievement level this year has been**
   Very Poor   Poor   Good   Very Good   Exceptional

5. **My students' reactions to school this year have been**
   Very Negative   Slightly Negative   Neutral   Positive   Very Positive

6. **Parental involvement in my class this year could be characterized as**
   Very Low   Low   Moderate   High   Very High

Reactions to The Responsive Classroom Framework
Some teacher at Merrywood Elementary School are implementing the framework (RC). This framework is designed to build a classroom into a learning community where social and academic goals are attained using this framework.

This framework involves:
- **Classroom organization** which provides for active interest areas for students, space for student-created displays of work, and an appropriate mix of whole class, group, and individual instruction.
- A **Morning Meeting** which provides children daily opportunities to practice greetings, conversation, sharing, and problem-solving.
- **Rules and Logical Consequences**, which are generated, modeled, and role-played with classmates and facilitate order and discipline in the classroom.
- **Choice Time** for all children each day which provides students opportunities to take control of their own learning in some meaningful way, both individually and cooperatively.
- **Guided Discovery**, which is a deliberate method of instruction for introducing students to new curriculum content, learning materials, and ways of behaving.
- **Assessment and Report to Parents,** which is an evolving process of mutual communication and understanding.

7. **Before receiving this survey, had you heard anything about The Responsive Classroom Framework?** (check)
   _____No   _____Maybe   _____Yes

8. **Based on my understanding of The Responsive Classroom Framework, the best way to characterize my reaction to it would be** (circle one answer)

Strongly Dislike It   Slightly Dislike It   Slightly Like It   Strongly Like It

9. **Based on my understanding of The Responsive Classroom Framework, I believe the effectiveness of this framework for improving my students' social behavior would be** (circle one answer)

Not Effective   A Little Effective   Effective   Very Effective

10. **My interest in using The Responsive Classroom Framework can best be characterized as** (circle one answer)

Very Low   Low   Moderate   High   Very High

11. **Most teachers would find implementing the RC Framework** (circle one answer)

Very Easy   Easy   Difficult   Very Difficult   I'm Unsure

12. **The aspect of the RC Framework that I like most is**

_____

_____

13. **The aspect of the RC Framework that I like least is**

_____

Appendix B

Teacher Responses for Open-Ended Questions

Teachers' responses for the aspect of the Responsive Classroom Framework that they

liked best:

1. morning meeting
2. Morning meeting, logical consequences
3. I enjoy having a daily morning meeting with my class. It gives them an opportunity to practice their social skills, and it gives us an opportunity to discuss the day ahead.
4. Morning Meeting
5. Logic Consequences and Academic Feedback
6. Morning meeting
7. The "phrases" or strategies that it teaches for social skills and problem-solving
8. I enjoy implementing each aspect of the RC framework into our daily routine because it allows the students to build relationships with one another, become better problem solvers, and it assists me in creating a positive learning community among/with my students and their peers. If I had to choose, share time during morning meeting would be my favorite aspect of the RC framework because it allows us all to share our personal thoughts, ideas, traits/skills, and experiences with each other.
9. Unknown
10. Morning Meeting and Academic Choice
11. Social behavior
12. I enjoy teaching and learning about every aspect of the RC framework because it allows my students to build positive relationships with each other, effectively communicate with each other, and enhances their social skills overall. The framework really assists.
13. The energizers and team building
14. It allows students to talk through problems in a safe environment.
15. I like the fact that it encourages a close community within my classroom. Students have respect for their teacher and classmates.
16. Morning Meeting
17. Morning meeting
18. Logical Consequences
19. logical consequences
20. Building a community
21. Reinforce, remind, and redirect
22. That no one is coming to evaluate me on how well I'm implementing it.

Teachers' responses for element(s) of the Responsive Classroom Framework/Approach that they liked least.

1. I enjoy all aspects of the responsive classroom approach.
2. I think that the RC framework is unrealistic in a regular classroom. There are many children who do not understand logical consequences and need a visual reminder that reflects their behavior.
3. I feel like I need additional training to fully implement RC in my classroom. I would like more training during the school year.
4. Not being able to public behavior. Meaning they, RC, does not like Clip Charts where everyone can see everyone's behavior.
5. I don't have an aspect that I dislike
6. The expectation to use certain phrasing when responding to a child's behavior
7. None
8. Unknown
9. Logical consequences because it is difficult to enforce at times.
10. None
11. It is not designed towards Special Education students who have mild/moderate disabilities and struggle with processing on a daily basis.
12. Although it doesn't take up a large chunk of time, it does take up much needed instructional time.
13. I love the Morning Meeting, but it is very time consuming to plan engaging activities.
14. I love it all
15. choice time
16. N/A- I do not use this within my job responsibilities, therefore I don't implement all parts in intervention :(
17. N/A I don't implement all parts of RC in intervention.
18. I don't have any
19. Morning meeting with higher grade levels
20. It's another thing to do.