Recommendations to Improve Social-Emotional Learning for Students with Disabilities at

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Virginia

By

Rebecca White

An Applied Research Report Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

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APPROVED BY:

Dr. Tammy Nolan, EdD, Faculty Mentor

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations to improve social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Virginia. The problem is that social-emotional learning practices need improving since 80% of teachers at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind reported a lack of social and emotional skills in students on the yearly Needs Assessment Survey (The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind Needs Assessment Survey, 2022). The rationale for this research is the importance of improving the development of social-emotional skills in students with disabilities. Students with disabilities commonly have delays in their social and emotional development. Strong social-emotional skill development is essential for K12 students' overall well-being, academic achievement, and positive outcomes that can last a lifetime. The central research question is: How can social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Virginia be improved? Three forms of data will be collected for this applied research including semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and a student survey. Qualitative data will be analyzed by identifying codes and themes among the responses. Quantitative data will be analyzed by calculating the frequency of each number reported on the Likert scale on a question-by-question basis, as well as the average score reported by all participants for each question. The quantitative data will be represented through a series of graphs and charts. Recommendations…

Keywords: CASEL, direct instruction, MTSS, social-emotional learning, students with disabilities

Role of the Researcher

Rebecca White currently works as a school counselor at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. She has served as a school counselor in Virginia for eight years. Her educational background consists of an associate's degree in American Sign Language from Bishop State Community College, a bachelor's degree in Psychology with a minor in Christian Counseling, a Masters of Education in School Counseling, and an Education Specialist degree in Educational Leadership all from Liberty University. She is currently pursuing a Doctorate of Education degree also from Liberty University. Prior to working in Virginia, she worked as a sign language interpreter in the Alabama public school system for six years. As a school counselor at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind, Rebecca is passionate about improving students' social-emotional skill development. In her role as a school counselor, she serves on several leadership teams such as the administrative support team, and the VTSS team. Involvement in these teams may have allowed for some biases to occur regarding her research. One bias is related to her awareness as a school counselor and knowing social-emotional weaknesses among the student population. Another bias to note was her belief that teachers need additional training in social-emotional learning to improve students' skill development. As a researcher, it is important to preserve the integrity of the research study and be aware of biases but allow the review of the literature, data collection, and analysis to determine the recommendations for this research study.

Permission to Conduct Research

Permission to conduct the research was granted by Ms. Pat Trice, superintendent of The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. Permission granted access to participants and data regarding the social skills need assessment to make recommendations to improve the social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (see Appendix A).

Ethical Considerations

Researchers are responsible for ensuring that integrity is maintained throughout the research process. Ethical practices are an expectation and involve the assurance to all stakeholders that the researcher is trustworthy and will be respectful to the participants, and the data collection and analysis (Gall et al., 2010). Purposeful sampling will be used to elicit participants since they could purposefully inform the research question (Claxton & Michael, 2021). The participants will consist of students, teachers, administration, and other educational leaders. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of all the participants. Only generic demographical questions will be used in order to protect the identity of survey participants. Interviews will occur in secure office space and computer lab on campus. Recordings will be stored on a removable thumb drive and locked in a secure filing cabinet. Institutional Review Board approval was not required because the information from this study will not be generalizable or shared outside of the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations to improve social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Virginia. The problem is that social-emotional learning practices need improving since 80% of teachers at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind reported a lack of social and emotional skills in students on the yearly Needs Assessment Survey (The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind Needs Assessment Survey, 2022). This chapter of the report represents the Organizational Profile, an Introduction to the Problem, the Significance of the Research, the Purpose Statement, the Central Research Question, Definitions for this research, and a Summary.

Organizational Profile

The educational site for this study is at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind, a state residential school located in central Virginia. The mission of The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind is to:

> Provide educational and residential services that promote: value for each person and their unique abilities, success in meeting each student's academic goals, diversity in instruction to meet the needs of all students, and building opportunities that foster expertise in technology and its integration, communication, and achievement for all staff and students and their families. (The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind, n.d., Mission and Vision section)

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind serves 63 students from all across the Commonwealth of Virginia. Students remain on campus during the school week and are returned to their homes for weekends and school breaks. Some students daily commute because they

reside near campus. The student population was 50% White, with 22% African American, 14% Asian, 13% Hispanic, and 1% Other. One hundred percent of students meet the criteria for free lunches. There is a total of 21 teachers which results in a 3:1 student-to-teacher ratio. The typical class size is five students (The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind, n.d.). The school's administration consists of a superintendent, principal, and director of student life. The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind educational programming served students from pre-school through age 22. Additionally, the school offers students opportunities to participate in deaf and blind athletics, an educational urban farm and greenhouse, work-study experiences, and nine weeks in an Independent Living Apartment lab. Parents are also provided with support through family engagement and state outreach programs which are coordinated by The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind.

Introduction to the Problem

The problem is that social-emotional learning practices need improving since 80% of teachers at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind reported a lack of social and emotional skills in students on the yearly Needs Assessment Survey (The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind Needs Assessment Survey, 2022). Teachers completed the survey and identified areas where students demonstrated weakness in skill development using the five competencies of social-emotional learning. The five competencies of social-emotional learning are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], n.d.-a). Students with disabilities often have difficulty managing emotions, bullying, and social isolation, feel unconnected to the school community, and exhibit negative behaviors (Chen et al.,

2020; Luckner & Movahedazarhouligh, 2019). Deficits in social-emotional skill development can lead to lifelong struggles.

Previously, The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind had a clinical team that provided extensive social and emotional support through programming and individual therapeutic counseling sessions. This team has since been discontinued due to the reorganization of resources. Currently, The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind is providing social-emotional learning instruction through weekly school-based psychoeducational lessons. These lessons are facilitated by a school counselor and a school social worker. Despite these efforts, students still struggle to make adequate progress in their social-emotional skill development.

Significance of the Research

The benefits of increasing social and emotional skills in students with disabilities are life-changing. Students that participated in schools with social-emotional learning programs and practices showed increased attendance, higher academic performance, graduation rates, positive attitudes, and improved social behavior (Khazanchi et al., 2021; Mahoney et al., 2018). Social-emotional learning skills are beneficial for K-12 students' overall well-being and academic achievement (Greenberg et al., 2017). Long-term benefits of social-emotional learning have been successful transitions after high school, healthy relationships, successful work performance, and decreased rates of mental illness, and incarceration (Domitrovich et al., 2017). Parents, teachers, and administrators can expect to see improved academic achievement and improved relationships both at home and school. This often leads to fewer discipline and counseling referrals and an improved school climate. Teachers experience increased academic engagement, performance, and positive learning environments (Greenberg et al., 2017). Employers are able to

hire individuals with disabilities that are socially and emotionally well and have positive experiences in the workplace (Domitrovich et al., 2017).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations to improve social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Virginia. This applied research study includes both quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches. The first approach will consist of semi-structured interviews with a total of seven members of the The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind administrative support team. Each participant is familiar with the concept of social-emotional learning and the alignment of appropriate interventions according to the Virginia multi-tiered systems of support (VTSS). The second approach will be a focus group using an in person meeting. The participants were eight educational leaders consisting of four classroom teachers, one teaching assistant, one speech and language pathologist, one orientation and mobility specialist, and one occupational therapist. The third approach will be a survey using 20 closed-ended questions. The participants are 20 students selected from middle and high school grade levels, representing both blind and deaf departments. All participants will be selected using purposeful sampling.

Central Research Question

How can social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Virginia be improved?

Definitions

1. Direct Instruction Model- "a teacher-centered approach emphasizing the delivery of material verbally from teachers to students regarding new concepts or skills to achieve learning objectives at the level of conceptual understanding" (Khairiah et al., 2022, p. 531).

2. More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)- "someone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process, or concept" (McLeod, 2023, More Knowledgeable Other section).

3. Scaffolding- "the way in which the teacher provides students with frameworks and experiences which encourage them to extend their existing schemata and incorporate new skills, competencies, and understandings" (McLeod, 2023, Scaffolding section).

4. Self-Awareness- "The ability to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts" (CASEL, n.d.-a, Interactive CASEL Wheel section).

5. Social and Emotional Learning- "the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions" (CASEL, n.d.-a, Interactive CASEL Wheel section).

6. The Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports (VTSS)- "a data-informed decision-making framework for establishing the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports needed for a school to be an effective learning environment for all students" (Virginia Department of Education, 2022, VTSS section).

7. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)- "the gap between the level of actual development, what the child can do on his own and the level of potential development, what a child can do with the assistance of more advanced and competent individuals" (McLeod, 2023, ZPD section).

Summary

The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations to improve social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Virginia. The problem is that social-emotional learning practices need improving since 80% of teachers at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind reported a lack of social and emotional skills in students on the yearly Needs Assessment Survey (The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind Needs Assessment Survey, 2022). This chapter of the report presented the Organizational Profile, an Introduction to the Problem, the Significance of the Research, the Purpose Statement, Central Research Question, and Definitions for this research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations to improve social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Virginia. The problem is that social-emotional learning practices need improving since 80% of teachers at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind reported a lack of social and emotional skills in students on the yearly Needs Assessment Survey (The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind Needs Assessment Survey, 2022). The Literature Review presents the Related Literature, Theoretical Framework, and Summary for this research.

Narrative Review

The purpose of this literature review is to present an analysis and synthesis of current research related to students with disabilities and social-emotional learning. This literature review was conducted in order to gain an understanding of current research related to social and emotional learning as it applies to students with disabilities. The current literature review focuses on various disabilities and related social-emotional challenges, at-risk considerations, social-emotional learning, interventions for students with disabilities, and teacher training. The final purpose of this literature review is to improve social-emotional instruction for students with disabilities.

Students with Disabilities

Studies have shown that "children with disabilities do not adequately develop the necessary social-emotional learning skills that are needed to support academic achievement and therefore, success in the workplace" (Gresham et al., 2020, p. 195). It is extremely important that all children develop the necessary social competence to reach their full potential. Studies show that lacking social-emotional skills predicts problematic behavior and other adverse outcomes

(Domitrovich et al., 2017). Problematic behaviors can present as non-compliance and/or verbal and physical aggression which interferes with the student's ability to access instruction (Garwood & Van Loan, 2019).

Students with disabilities are a vulnerable population and are likely to struggle to manage emotions, engage in bullying, cope with feelings of isolation, and exhibit negative behaviors (Chen et al., 2020; Daley & McCarthy, 2021). Adult students with disabilities often report experiencing high levels of emotional distress throughout their previous years in school (Shpigelman et al., 2022). These students are an identified population that needs additional support in academics, social-emotional and behavioral development to mitigate potential negative outcomes.

Specific Disabilities and Social-Emotional Challenges

All students with disabilities face unique challenges that impact how they grow and develop. Social-emotional development in students with disabilities can be just as challenging depending on the specific disability that has been identified.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism is defined as, "a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, that adversely affects a child's educational performance" (Virginia Department of Education Division of Special Education and Student Services, 2010, p.1). Other common characteristics of autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.

Autistic students face challenges in understanding their emotions and the emotions of those around them, causing socialization difficulties (Gardner et al., 2021). Students with autism

commonly experience social-emotional challenges such as negative emotional responses in social settings, difficulty with emotional regulation, and limited social interactions and participation (Gardner et al., 2021; Huei-Fan, 2019). Students at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind with autism often struggle with communication skills which impacts the quality of their relationships with others. Deficits in communication skills lead to frequent misunderstandings of verbal and non-verbal cues with their communication partner (Huei-Fan, 2019). This results in and reinforces negative social interactions and leads to emotional dysregulation and at times negative behavior responses.

Blindness/Visually Impaired

Blindness and vision impairment are defined as "an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness" (Virginia Department of Education Division of Special Education and Student Services, 2010, p. 12). Blind or visually impaired students experience social-emotional challenges due to a lack of visual understanding (Arioli et al., 2020). Individuals that are blind or visually impaired suffer from sensory loss or impairment. This type of impairment causes the overall development of the individual to be delayed (Sterkenburg et al., 2022).

The brain uses visual input to learn through observation foundational skills to support social-emotional development (Sims et al., 2021). Blind and low-vision students struggle to form appropriate facial expressions or to understand the non-verbal cues of others causing high levels of fear and stress when around unfamiliar people (Arioli et al., 2020; Sterkenburg et al., 2022). Blind and visually impaired individuals typically have smaller social networks as a result of their tendency to be more withdrawn and lack adequate social communication and adaptive skills to manage their social behavior (Sims et al., 2021). This is a direct impact of their disability and not

having visual input to learn through observation like their sighted peers. Anxiety and depression are commonly observed in students with blindness or low vision and without appropriate support, these conditions can last into adulthood (Amilon & Siren, 2022; Arioli et al., 2021). This disability impacts all areas of functioning such as independent and daily living skills, mobility, cognitive development, social-emotional development, and academic performance (Dhillon et al., 2022; Pilson, 2022). Understanding the challenges students with blindness or low vision experience can provide improvements in social-emotional learning instruction at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind.

Deafness/Hearing Impaired

Deafness is defined as "a hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification, that adversely affects the child's educational performance" (Virginia Department of Education Division of Special Education and Student Services, 2010, p. 3). Hearing-impaired is defined as "an impairment in hearing in one or both ears, with or without amplification, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance but that is not included under the definition of deafness in this section" (Virginia Department of Education Division of Special Education and Student Services, 2010, p. 5). Deaf and hearing-impaired students experience various social-emotional challenges as a result of their hearing loss. Students at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind often have various levels of hearing and cognitive understanding that contributes to their lack of social skills.

Many deaf or hearing-impaired children are born to hearing parents that do not know sign language which often results in a delay in the development of language and communication skills (Silvestri & Hartman, 2022). Students with hearing loss or deafness typically experience low

levels of support at home due to communication barriers (Bizuneh, 2022). The language barrier or insufficient access to language early in the developmental years impacts social-emotional development (Luckner & Movahedazarhouligh, 2019; Silvestri & Hartman, 2022). Deaf or hearing-impaired students also have difficulty with emotional regulation and positive peer interactions.

Other social-emotional deficits commonly occur in the areas of emotional regulation, social competence, and struggles with internalizing and/or externalizing problems (Silvestri & Hartman, 2022). These problems include depression, anxiety, social isolation, and defiant or aggressive behavior (Luckner & Movahedazarhouligh, 2019). Deaf and hearing-impaired students often report high levels of stress as a result of their social-emotional challenges (Bizuneh, 2022). Cultural identity also plays an important role in the emotional well-being of students with hearing loss. Having access to deaf role models and hearing-impaired peers that use sign language to communicate; supports the development of positive self-esteem and a sense of belonging in addition to the formation of cultural identity (Silvestri & Hartman, 2022). All of these factors promote positive social-emotional development in students with either deafness or hearing impairment. The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind offers an environment for deaf and hearing-impaired students to develop a sense of cultural identity and positive self-esteem but students still arrive to school with gaps in the social-emotional development and learning which requires supports and interventions.

Intellectual Disabilities

Intellectual disability is defined as "significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child's educational performance" (Virginia

Department of Education Division of Special Education and Student Services, 2010, p. 6). Students with intellectual disabilities are described as having poor coping mechanisms due to limited understanding in the areas of cognitive processing, adaptive behavior, and social skills (Jacob et al., 2022; Sterkenburg et al., 2022). It is noted that persons with intellectual disabilities can have comorbid impairments that can further negatively impact social-emotional and cognitive development (Sterkenburg et al., 2022).

Students with intellectual disabilities experience stressors in both academic and social contexts which has the potential to result in challenging behaviors due to emotional dysregulation (Sterkenburg et al., 2022). These students commonly experience social rejection and isolation because of negative social experiences in the school setting as a result of limited functioning (Vasileiadis et al., 2021). Low self-esteem, negative self-perception, and depression are common among individuals with intellectual disabilities (Jacob et al., 2022). It is understood that positive peer interactions help to promote prosocial behaviors and increase self-esteem (Jacob et al., 2022; Vasileiadis et al., 2021). Students at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind are oftentimes not included in the general academic setting due to their academic needs and therefore may not have equal exposure to positive social interactions when compared to their non-intellectually disabled peers and occasionally will exhibit challenging behaviors. Some students with intellectual disabilities that also exhibit challenging behaviors benefit from positive behavior supports and interventions to improve behavioral responses (Jacob et al., 2022).

Learning Disabilities

Virginia refers to learning disabilities as specific learning disabilities. Specific learning disability is defined as "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the

imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or to do mathematical calculations. It also includes conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Specific learning disabilities do not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; of intellectual disabilities; of emotional disabilities; of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage" (Virginia Department of Education Division of Special Education and Student Services, 2010, p. 11).

Students with learning disabilities struggle with understanding new concepts and learning new skills (Hagarty & Morgan, 2020). In school, students with learning disabilities struggle with social and emotional disengagement as a result of academic challenges and failure (Anderson & Valero, 2020). Academic challenges in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics are seen in students with disabilities (Anderson & Valero, 2020; Brunelle et al., 2020). These academic challenges directly impact social-emotional development and overall well-being (Brunelle et al., 2020; Swift et al., 2021). Having a learning disability poses barriers to social-emotional development as well as academic challenges. These students often have deficits resulting in difficulty identifying and understanding the emotions of others, and poor communication and social skills (Carnazzo et al., 2019; Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2020). Children with learning disabilities typically hold a negative perception of themselves which is often reinforced through negative experiences in academic and social contexts (Shpigelman et al., 2022; Swift et al., 2021).

Low self-efficacy is associated with learning disability and is a result of academic and social stressors enforced by low peer acceptance, and a feeling that they are less skilled and valued in comparison to non-learning-disabled peers (Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2020). Low self-confidence and difficulties in self-regulation are also common in students with learning

disabilities (Carnazzo et al., 2019). As a result of all these factors, students with learning disabilities are more likely to be diagnosed with mental health issues such as anxiety disorder and depression (Swift et al., 2021). This research will be able to identify how students at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind perceive themselves and what interventions are needed to improve their self-efficacy.

At-Risk Considerations

There are concerns regarding students with disabilities and their overall emotional well-being. Due to the nature of having a disability, these students are at higher risk for academic, social-emotional, and behavioral challenges. This warrants specific knowledge and considerations to provide close attention to social-emotional development and purposeful instruction and interventions when providing services to students with disabilities (Carnazzo et al., 2019). Students with learning disabilities are at risk of having a poor concept of self, poor self-worth, and feelings of loneliness (Carnazzo et al., 2019; Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2020).

Social rejection and isolation are often experienced by those with intellectual disabilities as a result of negative peer attitudes and interactions which impact their ability to feel emotionally safe in school (Vasileiadis et al., 2021). Students on the autism spectrum are also identified as having issues with emotional regulation (Gardner et al., 2021). Hearing-impaired and deaf children present with social-emotional difficulties due to low social-emotional competence, and communication skills (Sterkenburg et al., 2022). Students with disabilities can struggle to self-regulate their emotions and exhibit persistent challenging behaviors which are often a result of delays in the child's social-emotional development (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). Children with poor emotional skills often are disengaged in the classroom due to stress (Panayiotou et al., 2019). Students with disabilities have increased rates of being suspended at all

educational grades due to behavior challenges and are likely to drop out of high school (Carnazzo et al., 2019; McGuire & Meadan, 2022). Research indicates that students with learning disabilities specifically have higher rates of incarceration (Carnazzo et al., 2019). Overall, "children with disabilities are 16.3 times more likely to experience poor social-emotional outcomes than their non-disabled peers" (Swift et al., 2020, p. 403). The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind has some supports in place for when students struggle to regulate their emotions and this research is necessary to determine what additional interventions are needed to improve students overall social-emotional learning.

Mental Health Issues

Learning-disabled individuals are at risk for poor mental health and developing psychological distress, anxiety, and depression that continue into adulthood (Carnazzo et al., 2019; Sterkenburg et al., 2022). Adolescents with autism are at great risk for developing mental health issues; more than 70% of these individuals will develop a mental health disorder (Gardner et al., 2021). Anxiety and depression are common among individuals on the autism spectrum (Huei-Fan, 2019).

Mental health concerns are also found among students with vision impairments. Mental health problems are three times more likely for those with a loss of vision than their sighted peers (Pilson, 2022). Blind or visually impaired individuals are also at risk for developing psychiatric disorders requiring professional medical and mental health supports well into adulthood (Pilson, 2022). Students with hearing loss often do not have adequate support in their homes which results in higher rates of stress, low resiliency, and mental health issues including depression and anxiety (Bizuneh, 2022). Students who have hearing loss are extremely vulnerable and are at risk for abuse, neglect, and trauma that promotes poor mental health

outcomes (Bizuneh, 2022). In summary, students with disabilities are at risk of facing many stressful adversities such as societal stigma, discrimination, and low self-advocacy skills (Shpigelman et al., 2022). The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind works with community stakeholders to support mental-health of students who are in need of mental health services.

Bullying

Bullying can be strongly associated with characteristics that are common among students with disabilities such as academic challenges, hyperactivity, aggression, low social-emotional competence and intelligence, isolation from peers, inadequate social skills, and lack of problem-solving skills (Schutz et al., 2022). Any individual with a disability is at risk of being involved in some form of bullying. For instance, hearing-impaired or deaf adolescents not only have academic challenges but high incidents of social isolation and participating in bullying behaviors as both the victim and the perpetrator (Bizuneh, 2022).

Autistic students participate in more screen time than students without autism which makes them vulnerable to cyberbullying (Huei-Fan et al., 2019). Students with autism find comfort in fewer face-to-face interactions while socially engaging others through online games and chat rooms anonymously. This increased screen time combined with low peer connectedness and challenges in emotional regulation puts students with autism at high risk for gaming and gambling addictions. Any student with a disability is at risk of participating in bullying due to the nature of their disability and deficits in social-emotional development (Sterkenburg et al., 2022). Schutz et al., (2022) noted that adolescents with special social-emotional needs are often more the perpetrator of bullying as opposed to the victims however, these students remain at risk of being both the victims and perpetrators in bullying instances.

Suicide

Students with disabilities have an increased risk of suicide ideation (SI) and suicide attempts (SA) due to high levels of social-emotional distress that they encounter because of various factors previously mentioned (Khazem et al., 2021; Moses, 2018). Students that are identified as having more than one disability are at a significantly higher suicide risk than those with only one disability (Moses, 2018). Chronic stressors such as internalized stigma, discrimination, unemployment, and harassment contribute to the increased risk of psychological distress, SI, and SA within the population of individuals with disabilities (Khazem et al., 2021).

Youths identified as having hearing or vision impairments and those with autism spectrum disorder report high rates of SA (Khazem et al., 2021; Moses, 2018). Children on the autism spectrum were reported to have the second-highest report rate for SA in the past year and the highest for multiple SA (Moses, 2018). Students with blindness or vision impairment are at a higher risk of SI and SA because of perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness (Khazem et al., 2021). Research shows that individuals with vision loss are three times more likely than those without disabilities of SI, suicide planning, or SA over the past year (Khazem et al., 2021). Moses (2018) explained that youth with learning disabilities are 2-3 times more likely than non-disabled peers to experience a SA. Furthermore, Moses (2018) describes that individuals often develop a desire to die when they perceive themselves to be a burden to others; have unmet needs related to belonging, being accepted socially, or having a sense of community. Students with disabilities are at risk for many negative social-emotional outcomes that correlate to suicide behaviors (Khazem et al., 2021; Moses, 2018).

Social-Emotional Learning

It has been the responsibility of the local schools to address the academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs of students. The school setting is an ideal environment for interventions and the promotion of student well-being (Panayiotou et al., 2019; Schutz et al., 2022). This includes addressing the unique and individual needs of students with disabilities. Supports that focus on student development in the areas of social-emotional and behavioral skills result in increased positive behaviors and academic achievement (McCormick et al., 2019; Panayiotou et al., 2019).

As a response to the increasing need for school-based interventions to address student social-emotional needs; universal social-emotional programs and other approaches have been implemented across the nation (Dietrich, 2021; Panayiotou et al., 2019). According to CASEL (n.d.-a), social-emotional learning is how all persons grow and learn various skills to manage emotions, form healthy relationships, achieve life goals, develop into empathetic individuals, and make good decisions. social-emotional learning has been shown to counteract risk factors by increasing social-emotional competence and improving internal factors, such as self-esteem, resiliency, and empathy, as well as, increasing external support systems (Carnazzo et al., 2019 & Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2020).

Competencies

The five competencies of social-emotional learning are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, n.d.-a). Social-emotional learning can be the intervention that bridges learning for all students in a positive way. Positive outcomes depend on proper implementation. These competencies and skills help to mitigate all the previously mentioned negative emotional and behavioral outcomes which would also impact their academic performance and overall emotional well-being (Main, 2018;

Panayiotou et al., 2019). It is important that educators understand what the five social-emotional

learning competencies are and what they look like in order to support students in developing the

competencies necessary for overall well-being.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness can be described as an individual's ability to accurately identify one's

emotions and thoughts and how they are related to a person's behavior across multiple contexts

(CASEL, n.d.-b); Gresham et al., 2020). Some common examples of a person having strengths in

the area of self-awareness are this person can identify emotions, demonstrates honesty and

integrity, understands their own personal and cultural identity, has the ability to connect

thoughts, feelings, and values appropriately, develops a growth mindset, has a sense of purpose,

experiences self-efficacy and can examine their own biases (CASEL, n.d.-a). The ability for a

person to properly identify and communicate their emotions is key for the other aspects of self-

awareness to form. All of these skills support the development of a healthy individual having

strong self-awareness. The individual skills within the self-awareness competency can be

considered the very foundation that the other competencies and skills are built upon.

Self-Management

Self-Management is described as a person's ability to regulate their own thoughts,

behaviors, and emotions effectively across various situations and achieve personal and academic

goals (CASEL, n.d.-a; Gresham et al., 2020). This is also known as self-regulation in some

disciplines although it is referring to the same skill. The application of self-management is

exhibited through establishing and achieving goals, being motivated and self-disciplined, taking

initiative, utilizing planning and organization strategies, delaying gratification, successful

management of emotions, impulse control, and identifying and utilizing stress management

strategies. When students have a good understanding of how to manage their emotions and cope with stressful situations it supports them to then become more aware of those around them and develop skills to support a healthy level of social awareness.

Social Awareness

Social awareness is described as the ability of an individual to understand the perspective of others and empathize with those individuals who may have different backgrounds (Gresham et al., 2020). Having social awareness includes the ability to understand social and ethical behavioral norms and to identify resources in the family, school, and community. Oftentimes, social awareness is demonstrated through showing empathy and compassion for others, recognizing the strengths of others, practicing gratitude, considering the feelings of others, and understanding how systems and organizations influence others' behaviors (CASEL, n.d.-a). Social awareness is the foundational competency to support how to form healthy relationships and demonstrate appropriate relationship skills.

Relationship Skills

Relationship skills refer to an individual's ability to establish and maintain healthy supportive relationships and maneuver various situations with diverse individuals and groups (CASEL, n.d.-a; Gresham et al., 2020). The development of these relationship skills depends on strong skill development in the areas of effective communication, conflict resolution, seeking or offering help when appropriate, working collaboratively with others, leadership, problem-solving, resisting negative peer pressure, demonstrating an understanding of cultures, and advocating for the rights of others. When individuals can navigate social settings and apply the skills related to social awareness they are then better equipped to make responsible decisions.

Responsible Decision-Making

Responsible decision-making is described as an individual's ability to make respectful and constructive choices regarding one's own behavior and social interactions across various settings (CASEL, n.d.-a; Gresham et al., 2020). These choices are often rooted in demonstrating open-mindedness, considering the data, facts, and information prior to making a choice, identifying potential solutions to social and personal problems, considering potential consequences of behavior or actions, applying critical thinking skills, and considering one's role of impacting the community either positively or negatively (CASEL, n.d.-b). Responsible decision-making is where all the previous competencies merge together to support healthy social-emotional development. Social-emotional learning and instruction that emphasizes all of these competencies will provide students with the best opportunities to experience success in social contexts but also in academic achievement.

Supports Academic Achievement

Social-emotional learning positively impacts K-12 students' overall well-being and academic achievement (Greenberg et al., 2017). Students with disabilities are known to experience extra academic challenges as a result of their disability category and require specialized instruction to access their education (Shpigelman et al., 2022). School disengagement and disconnectedness are predictors of academic performance and subsequent negative outcomes (Chen et al., 2020; Panayiotou et al., 2019).

Students that participated in schools with social-emotional learning programs and practices showed increased attendance, higher academic performance, graduation rates, positive attitudes, and improved social behavior (Greenberg et al., 2017; Khazanchi et al., 2017). When

students are involved in social-emotional learning programming they typically continue to report improved positive attitudes and behaviors along with improved academic performance even after the interventions have ceased (Meyers et al., 2019).

Social skills also help to enable students in building positive relationships with peers and teachers which leads to positive interactions and increased student engagement in the classroom setting resulting in higher academic performance simply because of improved social-emotional competence (Garwood & Van Loan, 2019). Overall, the research is clear that students that exhibit stronger social-emotional skills combined with higher levels of functioning usually have a higher percentage of academic achievement, can successfully socially adapt, and have a lower chance of adult psychological needs (Gresham et al., 2020). Students at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind have numerous challenges academically however, by improving social-emotional learning may also prove to increase academic performance in some students.

Improved Emotional Well-Being

Social-emotional learning programs and interventions aim to improve overall emotional well-being. This is accomplished by focusing on necessary skills that promote goal setting, identifying/ managing emotions, empathy, resiliency, forming and maintaining positive relationships, decision-making, and many others (McCormick et al., 2019). Students that participate in social-emotional learning interventions benefit from increased school connectedness and a sense of belonging which enables healthy emotional well-being and combating negative outcomes (Panayiotou et al., 2019; Silvestri & Hartman, 2022). Social-emotional learning impacts emotional well-being by improving self-efficacy in students which reduces loneliness and emphasizes the importance of social support systems (Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2020; Silvestri & Hartman, 2022).

Long-term benefits of social-emotional learning have shown successful transitions after high school, healthy relationships, successful work performance, and decreased rates of mental illness, and incarceration (Domitrovich et al., 2017). Students that participate in social-emotional learning programs are reported to have fewer disciplinary referrals for disruptive behaviors and are noted to have improved behavioral self-regulation (McCormick et al, 2019).

Students with disabilities typically have underdeveloped or low emotional competence that negatively impacts their academic performance as well as social-emotional behaviors, however, social-emotional learning helps to support the development of these emotional competencies and improve emotional well-being (Gardner et al., 2021). Students with autism have shown improvements after participating in social-emotional learning programming which targets social-emotional skill development (Gardner et al., 2021). social-emotional learning also aims to improve students' resiliency skills which is an important factor for students with disabilities to be able to cope and persevere through academic, behavioral, and social-emotional challenges (Bizuneh, 2022; Main, 2018). Improving the overall emotional well-being of students at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind may be accomplished by designing data-based interventions to support the attainment of social-emotional skills.

Social-Emotional Learning Universal Implementation

The four most common approaches to implementation are direct classroom instruction, combining social-emotional learning skills and academic content, providing a positive learning environment, and utilizing social-emotional learning based instructional practices (Khazanchi et al., 2021). Successful implementation is the key to student success. Social-emotional learning implementation in America has been supported by the publication of formal Social-emotional

Standards in every state from grades K-12 (Khazanchi et al., 2021). The standards serve as a guide for proper implementation for school districts.

Social-emotional learning is commonly implemented using a school-wide universal approach with the application of the social-emotional learning standards. The concept of school-based implementation is to integrate social-emotional learning standards along with academic learning standards through direct instruction, teaching practices, and school-level changes in practices and policies (Meyers et al., 2018). This allows students to have multiple opportunities to improve their social-emotional skills across all content areas and settings (Gardner et al., 2021; Rivera & McKeithan, 2021). Teachers are often the primary source for implementing school-wide social-emotional learning and are usually provided with professional development and a social-emotional learning curriculum to guide them in helping students develop social-emotional skills (Gardner et al., 2021; McCormick et al., 2019).

Implementation is generally accomplished by integrating social-emotional learning competencies throughout the academic content as appropriate (McCormick et al., 2019). It is worth noting that some settings are appropriate for social-emotional learning instruction to occur in small groups for a brief time, while others are best served with whole-group instruction (Gardner et al., 2021). One study included social-emotional learning standards while also addressing social studies content by utilizing an arts integration approach (Anderson & Valero, 2020). This approach paired social studies academic content with dramatic role-play activities that fostered skill development in the areas of self-awareness, perspective-taking, and conflict resolution while learning the academic vocabulary and concepts (Anderson & Valero, 2020). An art class can successfully incorporate social-emotional learning standards along with academic standards along with differentiation for students with disabilities by providing an environment

that promoted decision-making and collaboration while developing art skills (Gross, 2021).

Although social-emotional learning programming is beneficial for positive student outcomes; it

will only be effective if implemented with fidelity (Meyers et al., 2018). Successful

implementation is most likely when students' social-emotional learning is considered equally

important as academic attainment (Dietrich, 2021; Gardner et al., 2020). It will be important to

understand the social-emotional learning programming that currently is applied at The Virginia

School for the Deaf and the Blind in order to determine any adjustments to implementation that

may improve social-emotional learning for students at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the

Blind.

Social-Emotional Learning Interventions and Students with Disabilities

School-wide social-emotional learning is important not only for general education

students but also for students with disabilities (Stormont & Reinke, 2021). Students with

disabilities require ongoing support to overcome persistent and complex social-emotional

challenges and become effective life-long learners that are emotionally healthy and have positive

self-efficacy (Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2020). It is important that social-emotional deficits

are addressed in students with disabilities at an early age because of the life-long impact on

education, employment, and overall health and well-being (Main, 2018; Swift et al., 2020). This

is accomplished by several layers of support and the incorporation of various of instructional

strategies.

Multitiered Systems of Support

Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is a framework designed to support the whole

child by using data for early detection and provision of necessary interventions in the areas of

academics, social-emotional, and behavior (Chen et al., 2020). Universal interventions combined

with an MTSS framework are most effective because the universal interventions are supported by additional tiers of support which is beneficial for all students especially those who are considered at-risk (Stormont & Reinke, 2021). The tiers are a range of intensive and comprehensive strategies to meet student needs (Chen et al., 2020). Through school-wide social-emotional learning implementation processes, teachers are taught basic evidence-based strategies to manage student challenging behaviors and how to help students recognize and manage different emotions (McCormick et al., 2019; McGuire & Meadan 2020).

These concepts and strategies are the foundation of evidence-based social-emotional learning programming which is beneficial for working with all types of students. Students with disabilities however, often requires additional support not only in the area of academic achievement but also in social-emotional skill development. The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind is in the process of establishing its own MTSS framework which is identified as The Virginia Tiered Systems of Support (VTSS) (Virginia Department of Education, 2022). VTSS is in alignment with the generic model of MTSS but is also uniquely aligned to incorporate the required Virginia standards of practice. The model that is in the process of development at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind is specially customized to meet the unique programming demands of The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind and the student population. The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind has recently begun to utilize VTSS and the data will be helpful in determining interventions to support social-emotional learning. This system will also benefit the design of future programming based on student needs.

Classroom Environment and Instructional Interventions

All students, including those with disabilities, can benefit from classroom settings that incorporate four key features (Anderson & Valero, 2020). These features are flexible enough to

be incorporated into any setting so that students are set up for successful social-emotional learning and academic learning. These key features of classroom environments help to support inclusive educational settings for students with disabilities which can increase their ability to improve emotional functioning and social skill development (Carnazzo et al., 2019; Rivera & McKeithan, 2021).

Classroom Routines and Norms. The first feature is an established collaborative membership in the class where roles/routines are clear for both the teacher and students. Classroom routines promote students' ability to complete tasks adequately while encouraging social-emotional development (Rivera & McKeithan, 2021). The second is classroom structure and personalization such as establishing individualized/special seating, classroom behavior norms, and décor to reflect the appropriate content, and structured routines. The arrangement of the physical learning space and the structure within the classroom can impact learning outcomes (Rivera & McKeithan, 2021). The third feature is including multi-sensory learning activities that incorporate visual, auditory, tactile, and movement. These three features of the classroom can support building a positive learning environment and culture. By analyzing data from teachers about their classroom routines and norms it can be determined what needs teachers have in supporting the attainment of social-emotional learning within their classrooms.

Positive Climate and Culture. Students with disabilities often encounter negative attitudes from nondisabled peers which do not support a positive school culture (Vasileiadis et al., 2021). Social-emotional learning which focuses on social interactions between all students has shown to promote a positive school culture and improve the social-emotional skills of all students (Vasileiadis et al., 2021). Children that have direct interactions with students with disabilities exhibit an improved positive attitude and the ability to accept differences in others

(Vasileiadis et al., 2021). These guided experiences also allow students with disabilities opportunities to participate in school life among their nondisabled peers (Vasileiadis et al., 2021). Climate is so vital to growth and development. This study can help to identify what teachers need in order to promote a positive climate for student learning both academically and socially-emotionally.

Social Skill Assessments. The final feature of a classroom environment is based on using authentic student assessments such as individualized learning objectives, social skills assessments, and performance and skills-based assessments (Anderson & Valero, 2020; Gresham et al., 2020). By incorporating social skill assessments into schools, educators are provided with information for all students including those with disabilities as it pertains to their social-emotional skill development. This information helps to inform decisions for instructional strategies and programming which is in alignment with VTSS and supports overall positive outcomes (Gresham et al., 2020). It is important to properly assess students' skills at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in order to identify gaps in development; this may be supported by strong social skill assessments.

Social-Emotional Learning Instructional Strategies and Disabilities

Students with disabilities often benefit from specific instructional strategies in order to access their education. There are key strategies that are used in various content areas and are also appropriate to provide social-emotional learning instruction. These strategies include direct instruction, modeling, scaffolding, and other approaches that promote learning.

Direct Instruction. Social-emotional learning when applied to students with disabilities should be approached with intentionality. Those who are involved in the implementation of universal social-emotional learning should determine if the social-emotional learning

interventions need to be adapted to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities (Carnazzo et al., 2019). When working with students that have disabilities it is most beneficial for many of them to learn through direct instruction of the necessary concepts and have access to opportunities for repetition across all settings (Carnazzo et al., 2019; Rivera & McKeithan, 2021). As an example, Luckner & Movahedazarhouligh (2019) noted that direct instruction is most effective for deaf or hearing-impaired students. Deafness and/or hearing-impaired students are diverse in their hearing and cognitive abilities; teachers should consider when determining interventions that hearing loss impacts language acquisition, communication, and cultural competence (Skura & Swiderska, 2022).

Blind or visually impaired students vary greatly in their abilities and educational needs, teachers should focus interventions on student-specific visual needs, behaviors, and social-emotional needs (Skura & Swiderska, 2022). In general, interventions for teaching social-emotional skills to all students including those with disabilities are focused on the direct and explicit teaching of the skills and differentiation of instruction as appropriate (Gross, 2021; Rivera & McKeithan, 2021). This is accomplished by "integrating age-appropriate social thinking into instruction to reinforce the awareness of thoughts, feelings, and motivations of others" (Rivera & McKeithan, 2021, p. 444). The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind provides direct instruction on a daily basis for academic content. This study can help to identify how much direct instruction is provided for social-emotional learning.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). All learners have a defined ZPD in which helps them to learn with and without instructional support. When teachers are educating students with disabilities it is important to know the student's ZPD where actual productive learning occurs. The ZPD can be discovered by using various types of formal and informal assessments. After the

ZPD is identified, then the educator can properly align evidence based instructional strategies or interventions to increase learning (Taber, 2020).

Modeling/Observational Learning. Modeling is an observational learning instructional strategy that is often used in classrooms when introducing new concepts or skills. Students with disabilities benefit from this instructional strategy because it allows for explicit instruction and is often supported by pertinent visuals and/or auditory cues to aid in the comprehension of information (Gardner et al., 2021). Modeling can refer to a live model demonstrating the behavior for the student or it can mean that the learner is observing and then attempts to imitating the modeled behavior (Rumjaun & Narod, 2020). Due to the access of technology, video modeling is a common form of modeling in classrooms today (Gardner et al., 2021). Learning through observation is learning that is supported through social contexts and still occurs even though the student may not be able to imitate the task or skill immediately (Grusec, 1992). Therefore, students with disabilities benefit from engaging models and participation in learning through observational learning opportunities coupled with other necessary instructional supports.

Scaffolding. Scaffolding is an intentional strategy that is based on direct instruction and the alignment of the ZPD. A teacher in a classroom may provide direct instruction on a given topic and as the student begins to increase their comprehension of that topic the teacher will withdraw supports gradually based on the individual student rate of success (McLeod, 2023). Students with disabilities benefit from the use of scaffolding in both academic and social-emotional learning because it helps to divide learning into smaller manageable chunks (Taber, 2020). Scaffolding provides an avenue for students to learn foundational concepts first that are

low in difficulty and progress to more challenging aspects of the concept being presented (Mahn, 1999).

More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). This concept supports learning through social interactions. Students benefit from learning from those around them. This is often experienced in the classroom between students and teachers or students and their classmates. The only criteria is that one person is more knowledgeable or experienced in an area than the other person (McLeod, 2023). Students with disabilities can benefit from inclusive classrooms which support the concept of MKO. Inclusive classrooms are full of students with varying strengths and weaknesses in which allow for MKO learning to occur while supporting students with disabilities and their unique academic and social-emotional needs (Gross, 2021; Vasileiadis et al., 2021). MKO supports social learning and inclusive settings for students with disabilities and promotes social-emotional learning for all students.

Social-Emotional Development of Resiliency. Resiliency is an important skill for all students with disabilities but especially those with hearing loss (Bizuneh, 2022). Students with learning disabilities also benefit from direct instruction and training regarding emotional regulation and other social-emotional skills (Carnazzo et al., 2019). Studies have also demonstrated that students who are at risk for disabilities and/or students with disabilities are more prone to participate in bullying behaviors (Schutz et al., 2022). Those that participated in social-emotional learning intervention and prevention programming for bullying experienced positive outcomes (Rivera & McKeithan, 2021; Schutz et al., 2022). Interventions for students with ID are most successful when instruction is concrete, related to the student's background knowledge, instructions are provided in an accessible format, and when opportunities for repetition are provided (Eklund et al., 2019; Skura & Swiderska, 2022). The education of these

students is primarily focused on preparing them for independence using multi-sensory and comprehensive interventions (Skura & Swiderska, 2022).

Language and Clear Communication. Language development is a foundational part of cognitive development that supports social learning (Mahn, 1999). As children develop, they begin to combine their understanding of language and apply it to regulating their behavior responses based on what they have internalized or learned (Mahn, 1999; Taber, 2020) Most students with disabilities, especially those with autism learn best from interventions that are guided by the level of communication abilities and the functionality of the communication (Skura & Swiderska, 2022). Teachers can also focus on targeted interventions to further develop language, communication and self-management skills to improve behavior and academic achievement (Gardner et al., 2021; Rivera & McKeithan, 2021).

Interactive Learning. Students with disabilities also benefit from interventions and strategies that target cooperative learning, self-advocacy, asking for help appropriately, anger management, emotional/self-regulation, and following classroom norms (Stormont & Reinke, 2021). Social Stories are an example of an effective intervention using a combination of visual cues and text to support social-emotional and behavioral development (Garwood & Van Loan, 2019). The learning theories presented by both Albert Bandura and Lev Vygotsky, advocate for the importance of social and interactive learning activities as a key piece of cognitive development in children (Mahn, 1999, Rumjaun & Narod, 2020; Tabor, 2020). Interventions such as peer modeling, video modeling, role-play, visual schedules, choice boards, breaks, positive reinforcers, and feedback have been proven to improve social-emotional and behavioral outcomes in students with exceptionalities (Gardner et al., 2021; Garwood & Van Loan, 2019). It

is vital for educators to remember when working with students with disabilities that all social-emotional skills need to be taught until mastery (Rivera & McKeithan, 2021).

Individualized Education Program

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is "a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting" (United States Department of Education, 2017). Students with disabilities typically have an IEP that includes any accommodations the student requires in order to access their educational environment and curriculum. These documents paired with the MTSS can offer guidance to educators on how to best support social-emotional learning instruction for students with disabilities. Supporting students' academic and social-emotional growth depends on the openness of teachers to support and help every child regardless of the challenges that the child may be facing to access the learning environment (Skura & Swiderska, 2022).

General and Special Education Teacher Training

Social-emotional learning is most effective when facilitated by school staff and faculty. Thus, teachers need to receive training focused on the instruction of the social-emotional learning competencies and how to properly integrate them into all aspects of students' education (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Main 2018). Additionally, social-emotional learning programs that enhance teacher social-emotional learning can translate to healthier classrooms and experiences (Dietrich, 2021; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Studies reflect when students with disabilities are in classrooms where teachers have received training in social-emotional learning, they show improvements in emotional regulation, academic performance, self-control, and overall social competence (Stormont & Reinke, 2021). Social-emotional learning is most effective when

classrooms are considered by students to be safe and supportive environments (Panayiotou et al., 2019).

Educators need the training to know and understand strategies to positively impact the learning environment and students' behavior so that the classroom can be a safe and respectful climate that supports learning (Dietrich, 2021). It would also be beneficial for teachers to develop skills and abilities to identify social-emotional skill deficits in their students and provide direct instruction accordingly (Pilson, 2022). Teachers that have high social competence have the least difficulties in working with severely disabled students because of their ability to adapt and cope with challenging situations (Skura & Swiderska, 2022). Secondary teachers may need more training in social-emotional learning due to their secondary educational programming focusing mainly on content areas; while primary educators learn about social-emotional development in their programs (Dietrich, 2021). Teachers should be equally prepared to support students academically and emotionally. Many teachers report feeling not equipped to teach or manage students with mental illness and disabilities; training is needed to increase the level of preparedness in teachers (Skura & Swiderska, 2022). It will be helpful to know how prepared teachers at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind are in providing support socially and emotionally to their students. That information can potentially identify areas where further training is needed for The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind educational leaders.

General and special education teachers can learn from each other. One way to support professional development is through coexisting programs. Coexisting programs (peer mentoring) are helpful not only to students but teachers alike. Coexisting programs support student interactions among students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers through learning activities guided and implemented by general and special education teachers collaboratively

(Vasileiadis et al., 2022). These experiences can help general education teachers learn through observation how to work with students with disabilities. Teachers have expressed having low confidence in knowing how to embed social-emotional learning into the general curricula which training and professional development can support this deficit (Main, 2018). Schools must commit to adequate teacher training for social-emotional learning intervention to be effective.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the social cognitive theory developed by Albert Bandura (Bandura, 1989; Grusec, 1992), and the sociocultural theory of cognitive development that was developed by Lev Vygotsky (Taber, 2020; Vygotsky, 1978). The social cognitive theory is based on previous work completed in 1941 by Miller and Dollard's publication of "Social Learning and Imitation" (Grusec, 1992, p. 777). In 1986, after considering the cognitive component of learning, Bandura renamed his social learning theory to social cognitive theory.

The social cognitive theory explains that social learning occurs through an individual's experiences by socialization and cognitively processing the observed information (Bandura, 1989; Grusec, 1992). This theory also emphasizes the importance of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy has direct impact on an individual's motivation, affect, and their behavior (Bandura, 1989). The social cognitive theory explains that the learning of emotional reactions, attitudes, and other social behaviors are accomplished through the process of modeling and observational learning, which also supports the critical concepts of self-regulation, observational learning, self-efficacy, and the development of moral judgment (Daley & McCarthy, 2021). According to this theory, social-emotional learning occurs best when the environment supports the development of self-efficacy and self-regulation (Bandura, 1989). Although individuals may be taught the tools of

self-regulation true development and growth are contingent on opportunities to practice applying the tools (Bandura, 1989).

The sociocultural theory of development was developed by Lev Vygotsky during the early 1930s while in the Soviet Union (now Russia) prior to his death at the age of 37. Vygotsky's work was recorded in Russian and was later translated into English where it became understood and received value in the United States of America in the late 1970s and into the 1980s (Taber, 2020; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky focused his work on the areas of social learning and language development and how they assist in overall cognitive development; which has proven to be beneficial for all learners and students with identified developmental or learning difficulties (Mahn, 1999; Taber, 2020). This theory takes into consideration the relationship between learning and developmental level of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's theory also emphasized that social interaction is a vital aspect of human development and learning. Children in particular learn through imitation of others in a social context. The act of learning through imitation promotes language and social-emotional growth past the child's independent capabilities (Vygotsky, 1978).

Through the influences of culture, social interactions, mediation (deliberate instruction), and tools such as words support learning and conceptual development in humans. The sociocultural theory of development and its key concepts of the ZPD and assessment, scaffolding, and other supports continue to be very influential in the field of education to inform the instruction of all learners.

Concepts

The social cognitive theory includes several important concepts. Concepts such as modeling, observational learning, social reinforcement, moral development, self-regulation, and

self-efficacy are essential to the foundation of learning (Bandura, 1989; Grusec, 1992). These

concepts are often applied in the educational setting to promote student learning and positive

outcomes. Using social cognitive theory for the attainment of social-emotional learning is

relevant because this instruction also occurs in the school setting by professional educators.

Modeling often occurs when a teacher demonstrates a concept to a student, and then the

student can understand that behavior and repeat it (Rumjaun & Narod, 2020). Modeling is a

standard instructional strategy used today. Observational learning is also supported by what the

learner observes in their environment and is able to then repeat. Social reinforcement is used to

positively support the learning of information by praising the learner for attaining knowledge or

skill. This concept supports the development of self-efficacy in students. Self-efficacy is the

belief that one can accomplish the task that is desired. These concepts are further supported by

an individual's moral development; or the understanding of fundamental right from wrong. This

understanding helps to further process what is observed and determine if it is information that

should be repeated or not. Finally, the concept of self-regulation is how a person can control their

behavior (Chen et al., 2020). The social cognitive theory encompasses all these key concepts to

align with the process of how individuals learn socially. It is based on a combination of social,

emotional, and cognitive information processing that produces learning.

Lev Vygotsky's work on the sociocultural theory was originally written in Russian and

later translated into English where it became understood and received value in the United States

of America in the late 1970s and into the 1980s (Taber, 2020; Vygotsky, 1978). The

sociocultural theory of development includes several important concepts that are applicable to

classrooms. These key concepts include the use of words as tools for instruction, the ZPD,

Scaffolding, and the MKO (Taber, 2020, Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky considered words as tools

to aid in learning and cognitive development. This concept illustrated that by using dialog based on a person's prior knowledge of a topic and applying tools such as words, and vocabulary to expand their understanding of new information. The use of words, language, and ongoing dialog would continue until the person had successfully internalized the concepts or information that was being mediated (taught) (Taber, 2020; Vygotsky, 1978).

The concept of ZPD was a major development established by Vygotsky which guided him to focus work on students with learning challenges or that were considered gifted. ZPD is best described as the gap or space between actual and potential for learning in students (McLeod, 2023; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky used the concept of ZPD to describe that children will continue to learn and develop independently but it is the support and collaboration of others that can allow them to reach their full cognitive developmental potential (Mahn, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978).

This concept of the ZPD supported Vygotsky's desire for the assessments of learners utilizing more diagnostic approaches such as project-based learning, teamwork/collaboration, open book exams, or interviews to properly assess how individuals actually learn in the social context (Mahn, 1999; Vygotsky et al., 1978). The ZPD concept also supported the education of exceptional learners which includes those with disabilities, and those who are identified as gifted learners. This concept aided the instruction of these students by guiding teachers to understand the child's ZPD and then to align appropriate learning activities that would challenge the students within their ZPD but also provide adequate supports that would enable to student to experience academic achievement (Taber, 2020). Vygotsky understood that some students with disabilities may need compensatory tools in order to assist with their learning. These alternate supports for deaf students can be in the form of language and visual supports i.e. instruction

provided through the means of sign language, graphs, charts, or pictures. If the student is blind or visually impaired the supports can contain braille, tactile materials, and auditory instructional supports. These supports are necessary when students are not able to access common materials so that they may learn in the educational setting (Taber 2020; Vygotsky, 1978).

Scaffolding is a concept that supports the learner through the process of making progress from what they already know about to gaining new information and skills (McLeod, 2023). This is accomplished through the mediation of educational activities and lessons that encourage academic growth with the right amount of support. An example of this is when a teacher uses modeling for an activity and then allows the student to do the activity with guided support and then transitions to allowing the student to complete the task independently. If the student is successful in the task after the support is withdrawn then the scaffolding was successful. Students with disabilities can receive the same scaffolding approach however, with the incorporation of the compensatory supports necessary for them to access the instruction. It is also expected that students with disabilities may need the scaffolding approach for a longer duration compared to their non-disabled peers.

Vygotsky framed the concept of the MKO as an important aspect of learning because of the sociocultural influence it provides to all learners. This concept is interesting and applicable because of the social context that is required in order to promote cognitive development. The concept of the MKO states that people can learn from a person or an electronic program that is more knowledgeable on a specific topic, task, or concept than the learner (McLeod, 2023; Vygotsky, 1978). In the classroom setting this can look like content that is being mediated by an adult that knows more than the student, it may even be a fellow peer or classmate that is paired with less knowledgeable student. In the virtual setting this can also be a tutor over electronic

means that is providing instruction (McLeod, 2023; Vygotsky, 1978). Overall, MKO concept is beneficial not only for the student that is less knowledgeable but also for the MKO in the social-emotional skill development that naturally occurs through this social learning experience.

Rationale

Students with disabilities commonly have delays in their social and emotional development. It is known that these students benefit from direct instruction, repetition, role play, and visual or auditory support to adequately address the deficits in skill development (Daley & McCarthy, 2021). The social cognitive theory can support social-emotional instruction with students that have disabilities through the concepts of modeling, observational learning, social reinforcement, moral development, self-regulation, and self-efficacy (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Rumjaun & Narod, 2020). This theory also supports learning challenges by addressing retention, attention, imitation (motor function), and sometimes motivation that students with disabilities often encounter (Chen et al., 2020).

The sociocultural theory of development also supports the education of those with disabilities through the application of concepts such as ZPD, scaffolding, and MKO. This explains that children with disabilities do not develop normally in terms of cognitive development not because they do not have the necessary cognitive potential but rather because normal development would not be mediated through the typical instructional ways but through the use of compensatory tools (Mahn, 1999; Taber 2020). By identifying the ZPD in students, scaffolding their instruction, and pairing them with peers that are more knowledgeable on social-emotional learning topics students can have a greater opportunity to increase their social-emotional competency through the sociocultural theory of development.

These theories are highly relevant to this research because The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind only enrolls students with disabilities in the areas of deafness, hearing impairment, blindness or vision impairment. This research aims to increase social-emotional learning in students with disabilities through targeted social-emotional learning direct instruction and applying the fundamental concepts outlined in the social cognitive theory and the sociocultural theory of development.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations to improve social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Virginia. The problem is that social-emotional learning practices need improving since 80% of teachers at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind reported a lack of social and emotional skills in students on the yearly Needs Assessment Survey (The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind Needs Assessment Survey, 2022). The Literature Review presented the Related Literature and Theoretical Framework for this research**.**

Chapter Three: Procedures

Overview

The purpose of this study will be to provide recommendations to improve social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Virginia. The problem is that social-emotional learning practices need improving since 80% of teachers at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind reported a lack of social and emotional skills in students on the yearly Needs Assessment Survey (The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind Needs Assessment Survey, 2022). This chapter of the report presents the Interview Procedures, Focus Group Procedures, and Survey Procedures.

Interview Procedures

The first approach used to collect data in this study will be semi-structured interviews. This approach allows for interview questions to be written on specific topics related to the research problem, and format the interview questions to gather information regarding participants' perspectives and experiences (Claxton & Michael, 2021). Conducting interviews also will provide information regarding how teachers and administration would improve the problem of the lack of social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. Purposeful sampling will be used to elicit participants since they can purposefully inform the research problem. The seven participants will be members of the administrative support team. This team consisted of one administrator, one family engagement specialist, a curriculum specialist, an IEP coordinator, a school social worker, a school counselor, and a data specialist. The participants will be selected based on their knowledge of social and emotional learning and the VTSS framework for interventions.

Interviews will be conducted on campus in a one-on-one, face-to-face format. The standard interview protocol will be utilized during the interviews (Claxton & Michael, 2021).

Each interview will be scheduled at the participant's convenience. All interviews will be conducted in an available office space with the door closed for privacy. Each interview should last for approximately one hour and will be recorded. Recordings will be transcribed immediately following the interviews for data analysis.

Once the interviews are transcribed and reviewed, coding will be used to determine the categories and themes present in the participant's responses. Coding involves a systematic process of reading the transcript from each interview to identify the various themes and relationships that are represented throughout (Claxton & Michael, 2021). This data analysis method requires the use of tables to clearly sort and categorize themes, related codes, and evidence to support the determination. This data will be used to answer the central research question. Data will be collected qualitatively via 11 semi-structured interview questions. After participants consent to participate in the study, the determined 11 questions will be utilized for the interviews (see Appendix B).

Interview Questions

1. What is your understanding of social-emotional learning skills?

This question is posed to determine the level of knowledge that educators have related to social and emotional learning. It is difficult for educators to discuss or teach a topic that is unfamiliar (Dietrich, L., 2021). This question will help to identify any gaps where professional development is needed to increase educator's knowledge base.

2. What factors do you think contribute to 80% of students lacking social-emotional learning skills?

This question is intended to determine what barriers educators identify in students' ability to develop social and emotional learning skills. Students at The Virginia School for the Deaf and

the Blind are either visually impaired or hearing-impaired to some degree. Social cognition is highly based on various sensory inputs (Arioli et al., 2021). This question helps to identify barriers so that effective interventions can be determined and implemented.

3. How does the school collaborate with families to promote social-emotional learning?

This question is intended to gain an understanding of how The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind partners with families to support educational success. Schools and families can work together to increase social and emotional skill development in children (Meyers et al., 2019). This question will allow the researcher to explore additional resources needed to support collaboration between school and home.

4. How does the VTSS support the improvement of social-emotional learning for students?

The purpose of this question is to determine what data and interventions are within the framework that The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind is using to address the lack of social-emotional learning for their students. VTSS is a framework that is intended to align interventions based on data (Virginia Department of Education, 2022). If there are interventions being provided it is important to support them with data and confirm that the framework is properly aligned (Gresham et al., 2020). This question should in fact find areas where there may be misalignment.

5. What type of assessment data is currently used to measure social skill development for students at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind?

The purpose of this question is to understand what assessment tools are currently being used to determine social-emotional skills in students. VTSS uses data-informed decision-making when determining appropriate interventions (Virginia Department of Education, 2022). However, it is important to have a tool to assess social-emotional skills and obtain a baseline

measurement initially. Baseline assessment supports the identification of a student's ZPD in regard to social-emotional learning (Taber, 2020). Assessments are beneficial for promoting social and academic success in children by identifying the social-emotional skill sets that need improving and for the evaluation of social-emotional learning programming and interventions (Gresham et al., 2020). This question would help to determine what tools are currently being used to assess students social-emotional skills and if any changes are necessary to better support social-emotional learning student assessment and positive outcomes.

6. How are social-emotional learning standards addressed through educational programming?

This question seeks to understand how social and emotional learning is being included in the general educational programming and curriculum. Social-emotional learning includes both universal and targeted programming (Hagarty & Morgan, 2020). The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind may explore options to embed social-emotional learning instruction in both a targeted or school-wide approach.

7. Describe strategies used in classrooms to incorporate social-emotional learning standards?

This question seeks to understand what teaching strategies are being used in the classrooms to address the development of social-emotional learning standards. Social-emotional teaching strategies for special education students are rare at upper-grade levels (Gardner et al., 2021). This question will allow the researcher to gain insight into what is currently being offered in the classroom setting and identify strategies to strengthen instruction.

8. How are instructional strategies determined?

This question is intended to discover how decisions are made and how interventions are applied. A systematic process is often the best approach being data-based. VTSS is an identified framework but the process to identify and apply interventions should be clearly outlined

(Virginia Department of Education, 2022). The goal of this question is to understand the process of identifying and supporting students that are lacking social-emotional learning skills.

9. What professional development is needed to support social-emotional learning in students?

This question is designed to identify areas of professional development that can increase educators' competency and skill sets in teaching social and emotional learning in the classrooms. It is important that educators stay current on social-emotional learning techniques and practices (Hagarty & Morgan, 2020). By asking this question, the researcher should be able to identify common areas of professional development strengths and weaknesses among educators and provide effective recommendations for professional development based on the responses.

10. What data are used to progress monitor student social-emotional growth?

This question seeks to know how The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind was monitoring the progress of social-emotional learning growth in students. VTSS uses a tiered system of supports and interventions this is data-driven (Virginia Department of Education, 2022). By asking this question, it should become evident how students are transitioned from one tiered level of interventions and supports to the next.

11. What else would you like to add?

This final question provides an opportunity for participants to provide any other thoughts that they may have regarding social and emotional learning and how it can be improved for students. Open-ended questions are designed to allow participants to elaborate on their responses (Claxton & Michael, 2021). This question may offer additional insight as to some solutions to improving social-emotional learning for students that may not have been yet considered.

Focus Group Procedures

The second approach used to collect data will be a single-focus group. This approach will allow for a series of pre-set focus group questions to be presented synchronously. Purposeful sampling will be used to elicit participants since they could purposefully inform the research question (Claxton & Michael, 2021). There will be a total of eight educational leaders in the focus group. These participants will include four classroom teachers, one teaching assistant, one speech and language pathologist, one orientation and mobility specialist, and one occupational therapist. All participants interact with students from both the blind and deaf departments and can inform the problem of this study. Conducting the focus group will allow the researcher to determine how these educational leaders will improve the lack of social and emotional learning for students at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind.

The focus group will be conducted in person. The standard interview protocol will be utilized during the interview (Claxton & Michael, 2021). The meeting will occur in a vacant computer lab on campus with the door closed for privacy. The meeting will be recorded for further data analysis. The focus group should last approximately an hour. The recording of the focus group will be transcribed for data analysis at the conclusion of the group meeting.

Once the focus group recording is transcribed, the transcripts will be reviewed and coded to determine themes present in the participants' dialogue. Coding involves a systematic process of reading the focus group transcript to identify the various themes and relationships that are represented throughout (Claxton & Michael, 2021). This data analysis method will require the use of tables to clearly sort and categorize themes, related codes, and evidence to support the determination. The data will be used to answer the central research question. Data will be

collected qualitatively via 12 semi-structured questions. After participants consent to be in the study, the following 12 questions will be utilized for the interviews (see Appendix C).

Focus Group Questions

1. Describe your understanding of social-emotional learning skills.

This question is intended to determine if staff have a good understanding of social-emotional learning. Without a clear understanding of social-emotional learning, it is a challenge to provide instruction regarding social-emotional learning standards and subject matter (Denston et al., 2022). Participants' responses to this question will give an indication of what professional development or social-emotional learning training is needed to support teachers and staff.

2. Describe how comfortable you are with incorporating social-emotional learning standards into your content area.

By asking this question, the researcher would be able to identify which teachers are confident and feel comfortable supporting the attainment of social-emotional learning skill development with students and which teachers should be provided with a social-emotional learning mentor. Teacher mentors help other educators learn specific instructional concepts and practices through a process of observation and modeling (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021). The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind teachers may benefit from being paired with a mentor to successfully incorporate social-emotional learning standards into their content area.

3. Describe professional development opportunities that The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind has provided supporting social-emotional learning.

This question is designed to identify areas of professional development that have been provided to increase educators' competency and skill sets in teaching social and emotional learning in the classrooms. It is important that educators stay current on social-emotional

learning techniques and practices (Hagarty & Morgan, 2020). By asking this question, the researcher should be able to identify common areas of professional development strengths and weaknesses among educators and provide effective recommendations for professional development based on the responses.

4. Describe instructional strategies you use to address social-emotional learning instruction in your classroom.

The purpose of this question is to understand what instructional strategies are currently being used by educators to address social-emotional learning competencies in the classroom setting. Applying the appropriate instructional strategies promotes both academic performance and social-emotional learning (Barney et al., 2021). This information will provide the researcher with a baseline of what strategies are implemented and what additional strategies to recommend.

5. What barriers can you identify to incorporating social-emotional learning standards in your content area?

This question is posed to identify any potential barriers that teachers have in incorporating social-emotional learning standards into their content area. Teachers often experience challenges and barriers to implementing social-emotional learning in the classroom as a result of not having access to adequate resources (Zolkoski et al., 2020). By identifying barriers, solutions can also be identified to support the successful implementation of social-emotional learning.

6. Describe the classroom expectations you have for your students?

This question aims to gain insight into the structure and climate of the classrooms. Classrooms that effectively incorporate social-emotional learning provide a supportive learning environment and incorporate academic content along with social-emotional competencies

(Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021). Students and teachers provide insight into establishing norms for learning and classroom behaviors (Scherzinger & Wettstein, 2019). This question will help determine if the current classroom expectations support social-emotional learning.

7. How would you improve social-emotional learning skills in the students at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind?

This question is designed to gather information as to any ideas or strategies that the educator has as to how to improve social-emotional learning skills in the student population at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. Teachers can help school leadership in the successful implementation of social-emotional learning (Zolkoski et al., 2020). These educators can offer a personalized perspective and add value to answering the central research question.

8. Describe which social-emotional skill deficits you observe among students in your classes.

This question seeks to understand which social-emotional skill deficits the teachers have noticed among the students taught in their classes. Teachers are in a position to report on social-emotional skill deficits and development in their students because of the consistent interactions. social-emotional learning is key to improving social-emotional competencies and overall well-being (Garwood & Van Loan, 2019). This information will help gain a sense of what skill deficits are common among the students at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind.

9. Describe your approach to supporting the social-emotional skill deficits in your students.

This question is intended to gain insight into teachers' individual preferences on how to manage or support social-emotional learning in the students that they teach. Teachers have different approaches in supporting social-emotional learning in students with disabilities, this can be because of a lack in specialized knowledge that teachers and special educators have related to social-emotional learning (Daley & McCarthy, 2021). Understanding individual approaches and

preferences will help the researcher understand what system to recommend in order to have a consistent response to social-emotional learning in the classroom setting.

10. Describe your approach when managing difficult student behaviors within your educational setting.

This question is intended to understand teachers' and educational leaders' preferences on how to manage challenging behaviors in the students that they work with. Social-emotional deficits can often present through various behavior challenges in the classroom. Problematic behaviors are common among students that have weaknesses in their social-emotional development. These behaviors can be demonstrated through physical or verbal aggression, defiance, anxiety, or depression symptoms (Garwood & Van Loan, 2019). The data from this question will help the researcher determine if there is a need for professional development with behavioral responses that foster positive social-emotional learning.

11. Describe the reporting system that is currently used to seek supports for students with social-emotional learning deficits.

This question is intended to gain insight as to how teachers and other professionals request supports for students that are struggling with social-emotional learning skill deficits or experiencing challenging behaviors. Consistency is important in supporting students social-emotional skill development which includes utilizing a process or system for requesting additional supports for students that are experiencing behavior challenges or have social-emotional learning deficits (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). This data will help to inform the researcher if there is a need for a formal system to request supports for students that need additional social-emotional learning instruction or other interventions.

12. What other thoughts do you have on how social-emotional learning can be improved at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind?

This final question provides an opportunity for participants to provide any other thoughts that they may have regarding social and emotional learning and how it can be improved for students. Open-ended questions are designed to allow participants to elaborate on their responses (Claxton & Michael, 2021). This question may offer additional insight as to some solutions to improving social-emotional learning for students that may not have been yet considered.

<div align="center">**Survey Procedures**</div>

The third approach used to collect data in this study is a survey. This approach explores how middle and high-school-aged students could improve the lack of social and emotional learning at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. To collect data, a closed-ended Likert scale survey will be administered by paper. A quantitative survey is an appropriate approach for data collection for this study since it allows participants to have only one answer to each prompt and is easy to complete (Claxton & Michael, 2021). Participants consisted of 20 students selected from middle and high school grade levels, representing both blind and deaf departments.

Participants will consist of 20 students selected from middle and high school grade levels, representing both blind and deaf departments. Purposeful sampling will be used to elicit participants since they could purposefully inform the research question (Claxton & Michael, 2021). The participants will be given the paper-based survey on an individual basis in a vacant classroom in order to provide adequate accessibility and accommodations. Blind department students will have the questions read aloud and their responses were recorded accordingly. Deaf department students will access the survey through a sign language interpreter. The interpreter

signed the questions and the answer choices on the Likert scale. Deaf students will record their own responses.

A timeframe of two weeks will be allotted for the administration and collection of survey responses from all twenty students. The results will be analyzed by calculating the frequency of each number reported on the Likert scale on a question-by-question basis, as well as the average score reported by all participants for each question. The survey includes four demographic questions and 20 prompts developed from a review of the scholarly literature, to which survey participants will respond using a five-point Likert scale (see Appendix D).

Demographic Questions

Instructions: Choose the best response for each prompt below.

1. Which category best describes your age in years?

   ☐ Under 12 years old

   ☐ 12-17 years old

   ☐ 18-24 years old

2. What is your race?

   ☐ White

   ☐ Black/African American

   ☐ Asian

   ☐ Native American/Pacific Islander

   ☐ Two or More Races

   ☐ Other

3. What is your gender?

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Prefer not to say

4. How many years (including this year) have you been a student at this school?

☐ Less than 1 year

☐ 1 year

☐ 2 years

☐ More than 2 years

Survey Questions

Instructions: Choose one response for each prompt below.

1. I understand how social-emotional skills help me in school.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This question aims to identify to what degree these students recognize the importance of social-emotional skills in relation to their performance in school both academically and personally. Social-emotional learning impacts academic and social-emotional development and self-management is key to the understanding of how social-emotional learning impacts learning (Domitrovich et al., 2017). Self-management is a core competency of social-emotional learning that supports skill development in the areas of stress management, self-discipline, motivation, delayed gratification, setting of goals, organizational and planning skills which lead to academic and personal growth. This information will help the researcher identify if self-management is an area that needs to be targeted to help improve social-emotional learning at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind.

2. I can identify my own feelings.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

       This question is intended to identify the level of confidence of the student being able to identify their own feelings. The identification of feelings is linked to the competency of Self-Awareness. This is a foundational skill that supports the development of the other core competencies of social-emotional learning (Domitrovich et al., 2017). This information will provide a basic understanding of the students interviewed and if they have a need to improve the skill of feelings identification.

3. I can accurately identify the feelings of others.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

       This question is intended to identify the level of confidence of the student being able to identify the feelings of others. The identification of feelings is linked to the competency of Self-Awareness. This is a foundational skill that supports the development of the other core competencies of social-emotional learning (Garwood & Van Loan, 2019). This information will provide a basic understanding of the students interviewed and if they have a need to improve the skill of feelings identification.

4. I use positive thinking to complete challenging tasks.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

       This question aims to identify to what degree these students self-report having resiliency in accomplishing challenging academic tasks. Self-resilience is most effectively fostered by

supportive teachers and staff that encourage success (Butler et al., 2018). This information will help the researcher identify if resiliency is a skill that needs to be targeted to help improve social-emotional learning at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind.

5. Teachers are encouraging.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This question is intended to determine what the climate in the classroom is like for students. Social-emotional learning is most effective when taught in a supportive and safe learning environment (Denston et al., 2022). This question will provide information as to if the classroom environment established by the teachers needs to be adjusted for effective social-emotional learning development to occur.

6. I feel comfortable talking to my teachers when I am feeling upset.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This question seeks to provide information on the student-teacher relationship. Trusting relationships help to support social-emotional learning in students and create a safe learning environment (Denston et al., 2022). This question should indicate whether teachers need support in building healthy and trusting relationships with their students, which will support overall academic and social-emotional performance.

7. Teachers allow social-emotional discussions in class.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

The purpose of this question is to help the researcher gain insight as to how much social-emotional learning is being included in the classrooms. When social-emotional learning instruction is used in the classroom setting, it helps to bridge the gap where traditional teaching approaches fail to address the social-emotional aspects of the whole child (Todd et al., 2022). This question will allow students to express if teachers are at providing opportunities for these discussions to occur or if it is reserved for the school counselor and social worker.

8. Practicing social-emotional skills in class helps me to learn.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This question was intended to evaluate if the student saw value in practicing social-emotional skills in various classroom settings. Students with disabilities can struggle to apply the social-emotional skills they gained in the classroom to other situations and settings (Gardner et al., 2021). This information is helpful in knowing if students recognize any benefit to practicing the social-emotional skills they learn across various settings. This information can prove helpful in assisting teachers to include certain social-emotional learning concepts across any educational setting.

9. I can understand the perspectives of others.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This question aims to identify to what degree these students can understand the perspectives of others around them. Social awareness is demonstrated in a persons' ability to understand the perspective of others, recognize social and cultural norms, and having compassion or empathy for others (Hagarty & Morgan, 2020). The development of social

awareness enables students to work collaboratively with others and experience success in school and in the work place. This information will help the researcher identify if the skill of social awareness is an area that needs to be targeted to help improve social-emotional learning at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind.

10. I prefer to learn through collaborative activities.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

   This question aims to identify to what degree these students enjoy learning through collaborative classroom activities. The development of relationship skills in students is key in to learning how to effectively communicate, resolve conflicts, work collaboratively, problem solve, utilize resources when in need of support, and become a leader (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). This information will help the researcher identify if students enjoy or recognize any benefit from developing relationship skills by participating in classroom collaborative learning activities. If so, then this can inform the research as to possible future recommendations to help improve social-emotional learning at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind.

11. I enjoy participating in project-based learning.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

   This question aims to identify to what degree these students enjoy participating in project-based learning activities. Project-based learning allows students opportunities to develop responsible decision-making skills (Khazanchi et al., 2021). Responsible decision-making is demonstrated through the ability to identify solutions to problems, make informed decisions after considering facts, data, and other information, and realize the impact of utilizing critical thinking

skills. This information will help the researcher identify if students enjoy or recognize any

benefit from participating in project-based learning activities to foster skills in the area of

responsible decision-making. This data then can inform the research as to possible future

recommendations to help improve social-emotional learning at The Virginia School for the Deaf

and the Blind.

12. I understand how my thoughts impact my behavior.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This question aims to identify to what degree these students self-report having a sense of

how self-management effects behavior. Self-management includes the ability to identify and

understand the connection between thoughts and behavior. Skill development in the competency

of self-management increases the ability to manage emotions, stress, exhibit self-discipline,

motivation, delayed gratification, and control behaviors (Hagarty & Morgan, 2020). This

information will help the researcher identify if self-management is an area that should to be

targeted to help improve social-emotional learning at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the

Blind.

13. I understand how my behavior impacts my learning.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This question aims to identify to what degree these students self-report having a sense of

self-awareness. Self-awareness is important to understanding how thoughts, emotions, and

behavior impact learning. Self-awareness is demonstrated through the ability to understand that

learning is a process and to have a growth mindset, exercising character traits such as honesty

and integrity, and fostering self-efficacy (DeMink-Carthew et al., 2020). This information will help the researcher identify if students need to expand their knowledge of how their behavior impacts their academic performance and if self-awareness needs to be targeted to help improve social-emotional learning at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind.

14. Classroom accommodations help me to understand social-emotional concepts.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This question seeks to help the researcher identify any instructional preferences that the students have when learning and practicing social-emotional topics. Students with disabilities benefit from specific instructional strategies to support learning (Daley & McCarthy, 2021). This information can allow for interventions to be applied appropriately depending on the concept and student need.

15. I think feeling check-ins with my teachers would be helpful.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This question is designed to determine if students would use a feeling check-in tool with their classroom teachers. Feeling check-ins with teachers can provide a starting point for incorporating social-emotional learning into the classroom by promoting self-awareness in students which, includes understanding one's emotions and how it is related to behavior (DeMink-Carthew et al., 2020). Communication helps to support safe classroom environments and healthy relationship building which, are essential to successful social-emotional learning implementation (Scherzinger & Wettstein, 2019).

16. Social classroom activities would help me to improve my social-emotional skills.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This question is posed to see if students thought the integration of social-emotional learning activities would be helpful in providing opportunities to practice social-emotional learning skills while focusing on core content. Providing social-emotional activities in the classroom is a way to provide frequent opportunities to practice social-emotional learning (McCormick et al., 2019).

17. A cue card would help me to communicate with my teacher when I am needing social-emotional support.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This question is intended to gauge if a cue card would support students in being able to self-advocate for social-emotional needs since students do not always feel comfortable asking in front of their peers for help. Communication and self-advocacy are important aspects of developing relationship skills which leads to a positive classroom climate (Scherzinger & Wettstein, 2019). This cue card could initiate communication and healthy student-teacher relationship building.

18. I utilize the calm down space in school to help me when I am overwhelmed.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This question is intended to learn if students are using the designated calm-down space in the school building when they are needing social-emotional support. It is important for students

to be aware of the resources available to help them and then be able to self-advocate for social-emotional support. Communication and self-advocacy are important aspects of developing relationship skills and strengthening skills in the areas of self-management and responsible decision-making (Todd et al., 2022). When students utilize the calm down space they are implementing the skills and strategies to obtain social-emotional wellness. This information would provide insight as to how many students are using the space.

19. I have been taught how to properly utilize the calm-down space in my school building.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

       This question is intended to determine if students had been instructed on how to properly use the calm-down space. Students with disabilities benefit from direct instruction, modeling, and repetition (Rumjuan & Narod, 2020). Scaffolding can be utilized as students practice using the calm down space until they are successful with independently using the space to meet their social-emotional needs (McLeod, 2023). The calm-down space when used properly supports the development of the social-emotional learning competencies in the areas of responsible decision-making and self-management (DeMink-Carthew et al., 2020).

20. I know people that I can ask to help me if school becomes too challenging.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

       This question is intended to gauge to what degree students are able to identify resources in the school for academic or social-emotional support. It is important that schools have a positive climate and community to support social-emotional and academic growth (Huei-Fan et al., 2019). Communication and self-advocacy are important aspects of developing relationship

skills which leads to a positive school climate (Brunelle & Gorey, 2020). When students are aware of the resources available to them they will be more likely to access them when appropriate.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations to improve social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Virginia. The problem is that social-emotional learning practices need improving since 80% of teachers at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind reported a lack of social and emotional skills in students on the yearly Needs Assessment Survey (The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind Needs Assessment Survey, 2022). This chapter of the report presented the Interview Procedures, Focus Group Procedures, and Survey Procedures.

Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations to improve social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Virginia. The problem is that social-emotional learning practices need improving since 80% of teachers at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind reported a lack of social and emotional skills in students on the yearly Needs Assessment Survey (The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind Needs Assessment Survey, 2022). This chapter of the report presents the Interview Findings, Focus Group Interview Findings, and Survey Findings.

Interview Findings

The first approach used in this study was interviews. Semi-structured interviews consisted of 11 questions and were completed upon the availability of the interviewee. The purpose of these interviews was to identify possible solutions of how teachers and administration would improve social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. Interviews occurred on campus in a one-on-one, in person format in an available office space with the door closed for privacy. The seven participants were members of the administrative support team. This team consisted of one administrator, one family engagement specialist, a curriculum specialist, an IEP coordinator, a school social worker, a school counselor, and a data specialist. The participants were selected based on their knowledge of social-emotional learning and the VTSS framework for interventions. Prior to beginning each interview, participants were provided a copy of the questions and the procedures were explained. Consent to participate and be recorded was also obtained. Each interview lasted for

approximately one hour or less and was recorded. Recordings were transcribed immediately following the interviews for data analysis.

Interview Description of Participants

Participant One had 17 years of experience in education, seven of those years were as an administrator at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. Prior to her serving as an administrator she was a math teacher for Grades K-12 also at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. Due to her many years at the school and her experience as a teacher and administrator, she provided a valuable perspective to the study.

Participant Two had 27 years of experience in education, six of those have been as the IEP coordinator at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. Prior to this assignment she was a special education teacher and case manager in the public-school setting. Her knowledge of special education, data, and IEP goals made her a valuable participant in the study.

Participant Three had 16 years of experience as a special education teacher and special education facilitator at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. Her role is very supportive of students, teachers, and administration. Due to her experience in multiple roles, her perspective was very insightful and added value to this study.

Participant Four had 12 years of experience as a recreational therapist in multiple settings and worked as a vocational rehabilitation counselor for adults with disabilities. She is in her fourth year at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind serving as the family engagement specialist. Her experience in social-emotional work and with family and school partnerships provided a unique perspective to the study.

Participant Five had 8 years of experience in education and was in her second year as a data specialist at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. Prior to accepting the data

specialist position, she taught math and history as a special education teacher. Prior to that she

served as a general education teacher in the public-school setting. Her insight into data and the

development of systems provided a unique perspective for the study.

Participant Six had four years of experience as a school counselor in education and was

in her second year at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. Her background and

knowledge of social-emotional learning and child development made her an appropriate

participant for the study.

Participant Seven had 20 years of experience in education and was in her fourth year as a

licensed school social worker at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. Prior to

working at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind, she served as an administrator and an

educator in both the middle and high school settings. Her experience in education paired with her

background in social work make her an ideal participant in the study.

Interview Results

Interviews were conducted on site with one administrator, one family engagement

specialist, a curriculum specialist, an IEP coordinator, a school social worker, a school counselor,

and a data specialist to identify themes related to the lack of social-emotional learning skills in

students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. Analysis consisted

of a systematic process of reading each transcript from the interviews to identify the similar

themes and relationships that are represented throughout (Claxton & Michael, 2021). The

information was then used to determine the categories, codes, and themes present in the

participant's responses. Participants' quotes were noted that supported the identified codes.

Various themes from the qualitative data were identified, as reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Codes, Categories and Themes from Interview Data

Themes	Categories	Codes	Participants' Quotes
Systems	VTSS	Tiers	"VTSS helps us use data to better align the tiers of support so we can efficiently disburse our resources."
		Supports	"I think with the establishment of VTSS we are having more conversations about how we can intentionally and consistently provide SEL instruction and interventions that maybe wasn't happening in the past."
	Data	Assessments	"SEL is important and without assessment data we will not be as effective as we want and will not see student progress."
		Progress Monitor	"The Virginia standards are aligned by grade level and developmental levels. Having a checklist with the standards. will be able to provide progress data. However, we are not using it yet."
		IEP	"The Present Level of Performance (PLEP) in the IEP identifies any areas of weakness and then goals are created. Data is collected by all teachers that are targeting the area of weakness."
		Curriculum	"Having pre/post data from a SEL curriculum will provide rich data to improve student skills."
Teacher Awareness	Instructional Strategies	Direct Instruction	"With this population of disabled students, we must be intentional about providing explicit instruction verses incidental learning."
		Practice	"When we add activities to our instruction it makes learning easier for students and provides opportunities to practice and transfer the skill to other areas of their day."

Themes	Categories	Codes	Participants' Quotes
		Language	"Labeling things and adding language to explicit instruction increases student's cognitive development."
		Modeling	"I have a set routine in my classroom and I always use modeling with my students."
		Role-play	"Hands on activities and role-play is helpful for our students to comprehend what we are teaching."
	Student Deficits	Communication	"Many deaf students are not able to fluently communicate and therefore they have limited access to developing social skills because of not being able to easily communicate with peers or parents."
		Self-regulation	"Students need to have language to understand, communicate and manage their emotions when interacting with others."
		Relationships	"The disabilities our students have impacts their how they build healthy relationships with their peers, parents, and other adults."
Program Enhancement	Professional Development	SEL Standards	"An important part of professional development is having a good understanding of what are the SEL standards."
		Disabilities	"Students have additional disabilities so we need to know how to adapt strategies specifically for those who cannot see, hear, and have an intellectual disability"
		SEL Implementation	"We need teachers to know how to incorporate SEL naturally by learning the SEL standards and adding them into their lesson planning and activities."

Themes	Categories	Codes	Participants' Quotes
		Collaborate	"Encouraging teachers to share their knowledge with one another about how to address SEL based on their experiences will help"
		Situational Training	"We need training that uses scenarios that shows teachers how to build in SEL into all classroom settings and how to apply the strategies to support students."
	SEL Instruction	SEL Courses	"Some students have a SEL course in their schedule and we are looking to expand the SEL educational programming to give students more than once a week instruction by providing daily instruction."
		Consistency	"We do not have any school wide strategies to address SEL for all students."
		Zones	"Counselors have worked to help teachers and students have an understanding of feelings and self- regulation using the Zones of regulation program."
		Vital	"For our student population, understanding and developing good social skills is vital to their success in every aspect of their life."
		Purposeful	"We need to be plan how to be purposeful about SEL and implement this type of learning for our students."
		Aligned	"SEL needs to be aligned with the content that teachers are addressing that way it is supporting the content and is most effective for students to stay focused."
		Embedded	"In some functional classes SEL topics can be embedded easier because students are learning about real life situations and how to manage themselves appropriately."

Note. VTSS refers to Virginia Tiered Systems of Support. SEL refers to Social-emotional

Learning.

Themes were identified, and a word search was completed. The results of the word search

can be found in the Frequency Codes Across Interview Data as represented in Table 2.

Table 2

Themes, Categories and Frequency Codes from Interview Data

Themes	Categories	Codes	Occurrences Across Data
Systems	VTSS	Tiers	11
		Supports	7
	Data	Assessments	5
		Progress Monitor	1
		IEP	7
		Curriculum	2
Teacher Awareness	Instructional Strategies	Direct Instruction	3
		Re-teach	3
		Practice	5
		Language	6
		Modeling	3
		Role-play	2
		In-moment	2
	Student Deficits	Communication	15

Themes	Categories	Codes	Occurrences Across Data
		Self-regulation	4
		Relationships	8
Program Enhancement	Professional Development	SEL Standards	9
		Disabilities	5
		SEL Implementation	10
		Collaborate	3
		Situational Training	4
	SEL Instruction	SEL Courses	7
		Consistency	6
		Zones	5
		Vital	4
		Purposeful	4
		Aligned	6
		Embedded	3

Focus Group Findings

The second approach used to collect data was a single focus group. The purpose of the focus group was to identify possible solutions of how teachers and administration would improve social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. This approach allowed for a series of pre-set focus group questions to be presented synchronously. The focus group interview consisted of 12 semi-structured questions and was conducted in person in the computer lab on campus. Participants included four classroom

teachers, one teaching assistant, one speech and language pathologist, one orientation and mobility specialist, and one occupational therapist. All participants interact with students from both the blind and deaf departments and can inform the problem of this study. Prior to beginning the meeting, participants were provided a copy of the questions and the procedures were explained. Consent to participate and be recorded was also obtained. The focus group lasted an hour and 15 minutes. The recording of the focus group was transcribed for data analysis at the conclusion of the group meeting.

Focus Group Description of Participants

Participant A has seven years of educational experience as a speech and language pathologist. She is beginning her fifth year at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. She works with students in both the blind and deaf departments and provided an interesting perspective to inform this research.

Participant B has 15 years of educational experience and has been at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind as a special education teacher in the deaf department for 10 years primarily with students that have multiple disabilities. Her knowledge and experience are valuable to this study as she is a deaf person herself and understands the unique needs of the students.

Participant C has 38 years of experience as an orientation and mobility specialist and in the field of blindness. She has worked at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind for four of those years. She works primarily with the blind department students and often provides social-emotional instruction in addition to mobility lessons. Her experience makes her a prime participant to inform this study.

Participant D has 37 years of educational experience as a teacher of the visually impaired. She has worked at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind for three of those years. Her input is important to this study as it is able to inform the needs of students with vision impairments and blindness and their development.

Participant E is a teacher assistant with five years of educational experience at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. She works with students in both the deaf and the blind departments. Her experience offers a unique perspective of the students and school as a whole instead of a single department.

Participant F had 37 years of special education experience. She has been a teacher in the deaf department at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind for many those years. She has taught elementary, middle and high school ages. Her perspective is important to informing the specific ways in which deaf students learn and their needs for development.

Participant G has eight years as a special education teacher and has worked at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind for three years. She is a special education teacher in the blind department. Her knowledge of the unique way to instruct students with vision impairment is important to this study.

Participant H has nine years of educational experience at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind as an occupational therapist. Her expertise in emotional regulation is valuable to this study and she also works with both the deaf and blind department students. She is able to provide a whole school perspective to the study.

Focus Group Results

A focus group interview was completed with four classroom teachers, one teaching assistant, one speech and language pathologist, one orientation and mobility specialist, and one

occupational therapist. All participants interact with students from both the blind and deaf departments and can inform the study. Analysis consisted of a systematic process of reading the transcript from the interview to identify the similar themes and relationships that were represented throughout (Claxton & Michael, 2021). The information was then used to determine the categories, codes, and themes present in the participant's responses. Participants' quotes were noted that supported the identified codes. Various themes, categories, and codes were identified, as reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Codes and Themes from Focus Group Data

Themes	Categories	Codes	Participants' Quotes
Teacher Awareness	Strategies	Re-teach	"When students react in a way that is not appropriate, I will reteach the correct way and then allow the student an opportunity to try again."
		Modeling	"I validate my students' feelings and then I model for them how and where to have their feelings- maybe in the bathroom or hallway."
		Role-play	"Some students understand information better when it is acted out in a role-play."
		Language	"After role-playing a situation, we review important vocabulary and attach language to what we have learned about."
		Direct Instruction	"For students with disabilities, skills must be taught directly and not assume that they will

Themes	Categories	Codes	Participants' Quotes
			be naturally picked up in the environment."
	Student Deficits	Feelings	"My kiddos cannot identify their feelings accurately. They have feelings but cannot tell you what they are."
		Behaviors	"Student behaviors can be more overwhelming than what can actually be managed in the classroom."
		Communication	"Our students lack language and the communication skills to explain what is bothering them."
		Sensory Loss	"Deafness, blindness, and additional disabilities impacts their development both academically and socially."
		Self-regulation	"We have students with multiple disabilities that struggle to regulate their emotions due to the neurological aspect of their disability."
Comprehensive Accountability	Systems	Discipline	"When students have behaviors, there is a lack of consequences and it is confusing for them and frustrating for us teachers."
		Data	"I use Unified Classroom to document behaviors in my classroom."
		Classroom Support	"It would help if we knew who to meet with for discussions related to classroom student issues and have support in the classroom."

Themes	Categories	Codes	Participants' Quotes
		Consistency	"Teachers and staff do not have all the same expectations to be enforced consistently across school and dorm programs."
	Collaboration	IEP Goals	"We should have IEP goals written and then we know what is the identified deficit for that student. Everyone can work together to address the goal and collect data."
		SEL PLEP	"Using a description in the Present Level of Performance (PLEP) portion of the IEP to note SEL weaknesses will help to inform staff and build in supports."
		Student Team	"By having teams with assigned staff for specific students then we can be proactive by supporting the student if something is wrong."
		Staff Team	"It would be helpful to have staff teams to work in small groups to support one another with SEL concepts."
SEL Climate	Professional Development	SEL Training	"I am looking forward to learning more about SEL, the standards and how to incorporate it into my lessons."
		SEL Standards	"We need to be trained on what the standards are and what they look like for each grade and developmental level."
		Disabilities	"We have many students with multiple disabilities. Not all teachers are trained in special education and do not

Themes	Categories	Codes	Participants' Quotes
			understand multiple disabilities or intellectual disabilities. We really need more training focused on additional disabilities."
		Small Group	"Professional development offered in a small group setting instead of large/whole staff is better. It allows us to have more productive conversation and promotes connectedness across departments."
	Instructional Resources	SEL Curriculum	"A curriculum to use would be helpful so that way all teachers and staff are approaching the problems the same way across school."
		SEL Courses	"Providing SEL classes to students through direct instruction and with repetition is the best way to increase learning."
		SEL Dorm	"Students need to learn about SEL in school and in the dorms, this would allow for dorm and family issues to be dealt with directly instead of them coming into the school hours."

Themes were identified, and a word search was completed. The results of the word search

can be found in the Frequency Codes Across Interview Data as represented in Table 4.

Table 4

Themes and Frequency Codes from Interview Data

Themes	Categories	Codes	Occurrences Across Data
Teacher Awareness	Strategies	Re-teach	8
		Modeling	9
		Role-play	4
		Language	4
		Direct Instruction	5
	Student Deficits	Feelings	8
		Behaviors	6
		Communication	6
		Sensory Loss	5
		Self-regulation	4
Comprehensive Accountability	Systems	Discipline	7
		Classroom Support	4
		Consistency	3
	Collaboration	IEP Goals	2
		SEL PLEP	1
		Student Team	3
		Staff Team	4
SEL Climate	Professional Development	SEL Training	7
		SEL Standards	6

Themes	Categories	Codes	Occurrences Across Data
		Disabilities	4
		Small Group	1
	Instructional Resources	SEL Curriculum	3
		SEL Courses	8
		SEL Dorm	5

Survey Findings

The third approach used to collect data in this study was a survey. The survey contained

four demographic questions and 20 Likert scale questions. The scale consisted of five possible

answers from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The participants were administered the

paper-based survey on an individual basis in a vacant classroom in order to provide adequate

accessibility and accommodations. Blind department students had the questions read aloud and

their responses were recorded accordingly. Deaf department students accessed the survey

through a sign language interpreter. The interpreter signed the questions and the answer choices

on the Likert scale. Deaf students recorded their own responses. A timeframe of two weeks was

allotted for the administration and collection of the survey responses from all 20 students. All

surveys were completed within the two weeks.

Survey Description of the Participants

Participants consisted of 20 students selected from middle and high school grade levels,

representing both blind and deaf departments. No participants were in the 12 and under age

range, fifteen participants were in the 12 to 17 years old age range, and five participants were in

the 18 to 24 years old age range. Nine participants were White, seven participants were

Black/African American, two participants were Asian, and two participants were Two or More

Races. 11 participants were Male and nine participants were Female. Four participants had

attended the school for Less than 1 year, three participants have attended for 1 year, one

participant had attended for 2 years, and 12 participants had attended for More than 2 years.

Survey Results

Surveys were conducted with 20 students from The Virginia School for the Deaf and the

Blind to improve social-emotional learning for students. The surveys were completed on paper

based on the accessibility needs of the students. Analysis was conducted via an Excel

spreadsheet and then a frequency and mean table was created to display the frequency and mean

of the Likert scale responses.

Table 5

Frequency and Average of Survey Responses

Questions	Frequency					Mean
	5	4	3	2	1	
1. I understand how social-emotional skills help me in school.	9	6	4	1	0	4.15
2. I can identify my own feelings.	8	7	3	2	0	4.05
3. I can accurately identify the feelings of others.	5	9	4	1	1	3.8
4. I use positive thinking to complete challenging tasks.	8	4	6	1	1	3.85
5. Teachers are encouraging.	12	7	1	0	0	4.55
6. I feel comfortable talking to my teachers when I am feeling upset.	4	7	6	1	2	3.5
7. Teachers allow social-emotional discussions in class.	3	8	5	4	0	3.5

Questions	Frequency					Mean
	5	4	3	2	1	
8. Practicing social-emotional skills in class helps me to learn.	9	2	6	3	0	3.85
9. I can understand the perspectives of others.	5	5	7	3	0	3.6
10. I prefer to learn through collaborative activities.	7	9	3	1	0	4.1
11. I enjoy participating in project-based learning.	4	3	9	2	2	3.25
12. I understand how my thoughts impact my behavior.	9	5	3	2	1	3.95
13. I understand how my behavior impacts my learning.	5	7	4	4	0	3.65
14. Classroom accommodations help me to understand social-emotional concepts.	5	7	7	0	1	3.75
15. I think feeling check-ins with my teachers would be helpful.	9	6	4	1	0	4.15
16. Social classroom activities would help me to improve my social-emotional skills.	5	10	5	0	0	4
17. A cue card would help me to communicate with my teacher when I am needing social-emotional support.	3	4	6	5	2	3.05
18. I utilize the calm down space in school to help me when I am overwhelmed.	3	7	7	0	3	3.35
19. I have been taught how to properly utilize the calm-down space in my school building.	7	8	2	0	3	3.8
20. I know people that I can ask to help me if school becomes too challenging.	6	9	3	1	1	3.9

Discussion of the Findings

Three overarching themes developed from the interviews. The first was systems, the second was teacher awareness, and the third was program enhancement. The Discussion of the Findings sections will compare and contrast the data collection and analysis results for this research. Additionally, a comparison of the findings in relation to the scholarly literature will also be presented.

The first theme revealed in the interviews data analysis was systems. The theme of systems was prominent is the data that was collected through the interviews. The participants noted the importance of having established systems to support the alignment of data-based decisions and interventions to improve social-emotional learning skills. The scholarly literature also indicated the importance of a MTSS and using data to track and make decisions to support student achievement. According to Stormont and Reinke (2021), when universal interventions combined with an MTSS framework are most effective because the universal interventions are supported by additional tiers of support which is beneficial for all students, especially those who are considered at-risk. The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind have established a VTSS. One participant noted that, "VTSS helps us to have more conversations about how to be more intentional with providing social-emotional learning instruction and interventions that wasn't happening in the past." Five other participants expressed "a need to align VTSS, social-emotional learning assessment data, and the IEP to improve social-emotional learning growth for students." The literature also supports the need for strong social skills assessments at the school. According to Gresham (2020), social skill assessment data helps to inform decisions for instructional strategies and programming which is in alignment with MTSS and supports overall

positive outcomes. The interview data and scholarly literature agree with the importance of established systems and use of data to improve social emotional learning.

The second theme resulting from the interviews was teacher awareness. Teacher awareness was emphasized through the reoccurring data related to how teachers are aware of effective instructional strategies and student skill deficits present in their classrooms. Several participants expressed the importance of utilizing research based instructional strategies to help their disabled students learn. Although several strategies were mentioned such as: reteaching, opportunities for practice, and role-play. Modeling, direct instruction, and emphasizing language were especially significant strategies noted in the data. One participant explained, "that with this population of disabled students, teachers must be intentional about providing explicit instruction verses incidental for learning to occur." According to Gross (2021), interventions for teaching social-emotional skills to all students including those with disabilities are focused on the direct and explicit teaching of the skills and differentiation of instruction as appropriate. Teacher awareness is also noted in reference to student's skill deficits. According to the data, communication, language, and relationships were among the most noted skill deficits of students at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. Several participants stated that the students "needed to have the language to understand, communicate, and manage their emotions, behaviors, and form healthy relationships with others." This concept is supported by the literature. Tabor (2020), As children develop, they begin to combine their understanding of language and apply it to regulating their behavior responses based on what they have internalized or learned. This theme emphasizes the importance of teacher awareness regarding appropriate instructional strategies to support the existing skill deficits of the students to improve their social-emotional learning.

The third theme revealed in the interviews was program enhancement. Program enhancement includes the categories of professional development and social-emotional learning instruction. Participants responded at 100% with a desire to have professional development on the social-emotional learning standards and school-wide implementation. One interviewee stated, "teachers need training to know how to incorporate the social-emotional learning standards naturally in the classroom by learning the social-emotional learning standards and aligning them with their content." As noted by Meyers et al. (2018), school-based implementation is accomplished by integrating social-emotional learning standards along with academic learning standards through direct instruction, teaching practices, and school-level changes in practices and policies. social-emotional learning instruction was also stressed under the theme of program enhancement. Participants expressed at a rate of 100% the importance of providing students with social-emotional learning classes within the standard educational programming. Four participants expressed how "it is vital for students with disabilities to understand and develop good social-emotional skills in order to be successful in every aspect of life. According to Meyers et al. (2018), although social-emotional learning programming is beneficial for positive student outcomes; it will only be effective if implemented with fidelity and is considered equally as important as academic attainment. This theme emphasizes the importance of program enhancement regarding professional development focused on understanding social-emotional learning and school wide implementation to improve social-emotional skills.

Three overarching themes also developed from the focus group interview. The first was teacher awareness, the second was comprehensive accountability, and the third was social-emotional learning climate.

The first theme revealed through the focus group data was teacher awareness. Teacher awareness was emphasized through the reoccurring data related to how teachers are aware of effective instructional strategies and student skill deficits present in their classrooms. Several participants expressed the importance of utilizing research based instructional strategies to help their disabled students learn. Although several strategies were mentioned such as: direct instruction, opportunities for practice, emphasizing language and role-play. Modeling, and reteaching were especially significant strategies noted within this group. One participant explained, "when students react in a way that is not appropriate, I will reteach or model the correct way and then allow the student an opportunity to try again." According to Rumjaun and Narod (2020), modeling can refer to a live model demonstrating the behavior for the student or it can mean that the learner is observing and then attempts to imitate the modeled behavior. Teacher awareness is also noted in reference to student's skill deficits. According to the focus group data, feelings, behaviors, and communication were among the most noted skill deficits of students at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. One participant expressed concern because "students could not identify their feelings accurately. They have feelings regularly but cannot tell you what they are feeling in the moment." This concept is supported by the literature as reported by Heiman and Olenik-Shemesh (2020), students with disabilities often have deficits resulting in difficulty identifying and understanding their own emotions, the emotions of others, and poor communication and social skills. Additionally, this group pf professionals were very concerned with deficits related to student behaviors. Several participants expressed agreement that "student behaviors can be more overwhelming than what can be managed in the classroom." The teachers and staff expressed concern and a significant need for classroom supports or guidance with managing student behaviors. The literature is clear that students with disabilities

can have deficits in managing their behaviors. Daley and McCarthy (2021), support this by explaining that students with disabilities are a vulnerable population and are likely to struggle to manage emotions, engage in bullying, cope with feelings of isolation, and exhibit negative emotions. Teacher awareness regarding appropriate instructional strategies to support the existing skill deficits of the students was very prominent in the focus group data.

The second theme resulting from the focus group interview was comprehensive accountability. This theme includes the categories of building systems and collaboration. The group overwhelmingly expressed that there needed to be accountability and systems in place to support discipline for students' behaviors as well as classroom support for teachers and staff attempting to manage challenging behaviors. The group reached 100% consensus that this was an area to improve in order to also improve social-emotional learning for students. It was noted by one participant and agreed by the entire group that, "when students have behaviors, there is a lack of consequences and it is confusing for the students and frustrating for us teachers." Another individual mentioned, "It would help if we knew who to meet with for discussions related to classroom student issues and have support in the classroom." According to Luckner and Movahedazarhouligh (2019), social-emotional deficits result in problems including depression, anxiety, social isolation, and defiant or aggressive behavior. The literature notes that students with disabilities can struggle with behaviors although the literature did not stress this as a significant issue to social-emotional learning in comparison to sensory loss, language, and delays in overall development. It is noted that the participants in this focus group felt strongly that this is an area of need. In an effort to improve social-emotional learning the focus group also recognized a need for collaboration to support comprehensive accountability. Collaboration included teachers working together to address IEP goals, adding an social-emotional learning

portion to the present level of performance within students IEP, student and staff teams. Staff teams was the most significant of the four. One participant shared, "it would be helpful to have organized staff teams to support one another with understand and applying social-emotional learning concepts." The literature does support teacher collaboration to support implementation. According to Skura and Swiderska (2022),

> Many teachers do not feel equipped to manage the social-emotional needs of students in addition to their disabilities and academic needs. However, teachers that have high social competence have the least difficulties in working with severely disabled students because of their ability to adapt and cope with challenging behaviors.

Therefore, by forming small collaborative groups it should increase accountability while addressing behavior concerns and classroom supports related to social-emotional learning implementation to improve students' skills.

The third theme revealed in the focus group interview was social-emotional learning climate. Social-emotional learning climate includes the categories of professional development and instructional strategies. The focus group data indicated a desire to have a climate of social-emotional learning on campus. Professional development on the social-emotional learning standards and specific training on social-emotional learning in general were significant regarding data although other thoughts related to professional development in smaller groups and additional focus on specific intellectual disabilities were also discussed they received less emphasis. One participant echoed the remarks of a previous colleague, "We need to be trained on what the standards are and what it looks like for each grade and developmental level." As previously noted by Meyers et al. (2018), school-based implementation is accomplished by integrating social-emotional learning standards along with academic learning standards through

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direct instruction, teaching practices, and school-level changes in practices and policies. The data

also addressed precise instructional resources to support the development of an social-emotional

learning climate at the school. Resources that were mentioned consisted of offering social-

emotional learning courses in school and in the dorms as well as utilizing a social-emotional

learning curriculum. One participant commented, "A curriculum to use would be helpful; so that

all teachers and staff are approaching social-emotional learning the same way." Participants also

mentioned, "providing social-emotional learning classes through direct instruction and with

repetition is the best way to increase learning." Others stated, "students need to learn about

social-emotional learning in school and in the dorms for additional support." The literature

supports the concept of using a curriculum and exposure through teachers to support skill

development. According to McCormick et al. (2019), teachers are often the primary source for

implementing social-emotional learning and are usually provided with professional development

and a curriculum to guide them in helping students develop social-emotional skills. The focus

group data revealed the importance of developing a climate of social-emotional learning at The

Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind as a way to increase social-emotional learning for

their student population.

Two themes emerged from the survey data including classroom supports and self-

advocacy. According to the survey data, Questions 5, 10, 15, and 16 received scores ranging

from 4 to 4.55. The data related to these questions indicates that participants identified that

classroom supports such as: feeling check-ins with teachers, collaborative social-emotional

activities, and an allowance of social-emotional discussions to occur in class would improve their

social-emotional learning. According to scholarly literature, the learning theories presented by

Albert Bandura and Lev Vygotsky advocate for the importance of social and interactive learning

activities as a key piece of cognitive development in children (Mahn, 1999). The second theme

of self-advocacy emerged from Questions 17 and 18. Question 17 received a score 3.05 which

was the lowest score on the survey and asked if students would use a communication cue card to

request a break (self-advocate). Question 18 scored 3.35 and was focused on information related

to if students would use the calm down area if needed. These questions indicate that participants

were reluctant to utilize resources to self-advocate when they need social-emotional support. It is

suspected that this is a result of insufficient instruction on the two resources. According to

scholarly literature, students with disabilities benefit from direct instruction, repetition, role-play,

and visual or auditory support to adequately address the deficits in skill development (Daley &

McCarthy, 2021). The survey data reflects that the participants clearly identified what would and

would not be helpful in regards to improving their social-emotional learning. All other scores

and questions not discussed ranged from 3.5 to 4.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations to improve social-emotional

learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in

Virginia. The problem is that social-emotional learning practices need improving since 80% of

teachers at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind reported a lack of social and

emotional skills in students on the yearly Needs Assessment Survey (The Virginia School for the

Deaf and the Blind Needs Assessment Survey, 2022). This chapter of the report presented the

Interview Findings, Focus Group Interview Findings, and Survey Findings.

Chapter Five: Recommendations

Overview

The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations to improve social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Virginia. The problem is that social-emotional learning practices need improving since 80% of teachers at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind reported a lack of social and emotional skills in students on the yearly Needs Assessment Survey (The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind Needs Assessment Survey, 2022). This chapter of the report presents the Recommendations, the Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders, Resources Needed, Timeline, and Summary.

Recommendations

The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations to improve social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Virginia. The central research question for this study was, How can social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Virginia be improved? Based on a review of scholarly literature, and data collection and analysis, three possible solutions are recommended to answer the central research question. The three recommendations are:

1. Provide professional development focused on social-emotional learning.

2. Include social-emotional learning into the educational programming.

3. Begin utilizing a formal social-emotional learning assessment tool.

Recommendation for Professional Development

The first aspect to possibly improve the social-emotional learning for students is to provide social-emotional learning focused professional development opportunities for teachers and staff. This is to enhance understanding and implementation of social-emotional learning. Professional development is essential to improving social-emotional learning learning because teachers are often the primary source for implementing school-wide social-emotional learning and are usually provided with professional development and a social-emotional learning curriculum to guide them in helping students develop social-emotional skills (Gardner et al., 2021; McCormick et al., 2019).

Interview participants repeatedly desired social-emotional learning targeted professional development or training be provided to best support students social-emotional skill development. Teachers described wanting to expand their own understanding of social-emotional learning, the Virginia Social-emotional Learning standards, and how to embed these concepts into their content area. One participant noted, "teachers need training to know how to incorporate the social-emotional learning standards naturally in the classroom by learning the social-emotional learning standards and aligning them with their content." This is the rationale for the recommendation of targeted social-emotional learning professional development.

Professional development can support the improvement of social-emotional learning in students at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind by equipping teachers and instructional support staff with the knowledge they need in order to implement social-emotional learning concepts and practices with students in the classroom. According to Khazanchi et al. (2021), "professional development can support an increase in student social-emotional learning skills by further creating a positive climate of social-emotional learning on campus."

The implications of providing ongoing professional development for teachers and instructional staff is that social-emotional learning skills may be improved by increasing adults' knowledge and skill sets to successfully integrate social-emotional learning into classrooms with consistency.

To create meaningful professional development sessions will require intentional planning and making social-emotional learning a priority which supports implementation of social-emotional learning throughout the school. Successful implementation is most likely when students' social-emotional learning is considered equally important as academic attainment (Dietrich, 2021; Gardner et al., 2020). Professional development sessions will need to be well organized and best if offered in smaller groups rather a large staff meeting. The focus group participants expressed, "it would be helpful to have organized staff teams to support one another with understand and applying social-emotional learning concepts." It is recommended that social-emotional learning focused professional development be provided to teachers and staff over four sessions. This professional development can be coordinated by administration and VTSS team with resources from a credible source such as CASEL.

Session one would be conducted in a large group to clearly define what social-emotional learning means and what it can look like across various school settings. Session two would focus on providing staff access to the Virginia social-emotional learning standards and working in small groups to discuss and brainstorm how the various standards could be integrated into the classroom content. Session three would consist on training using CASEL resources in order to properly understand how to align the social-emotional learning standards into each content area across the school. Finally, the fourth session would focus on small group work and practicing scenarios of identifying and applying social-emotional learning standards based on various

lesson plans or student behavioral examples. The final piece to the recommendation is that The Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind would have a plan to review the social-emotional learning professional development information throughout the school year.

Recommendation to Include Social-Emotional Learning in the Educational Programming

Based on scholarly literature and data, the second recommendation to support the improvement of social-emotional learning is to include social-emotional learning in the educational programming for all students. According to Meyers et al. (2018), "the concept of school-based implementation is to integrate social-emotional learning standards along with academic learning standards through direct instruction, teaching practices, and school-level changes in practices and policies." To achieve schoolwide implementation will require a formal system to be established along with an implementation plan after professional development has been provided in addition to offering social-emotional learning courses to students. Greenberg et al. (2017) emphasized, "students that participated in schools with social-emotional learning programs and practices showed increased attendance, higher academic performance, graduation rates, positive attitudes, and improved social behavior."

Those interviewed expressed strong support for all students to receive social-emotional learning direct instruction to improve their social-emotional learning skills. One participant noted, "some students have a social-emotional learning course in their schedule and we are looking to expand the social-emotional learning educational programming to give students more than once a week instruction by providing daily instruction." Including social-emotional learning into the educational programming would allow for all students to access social-emotional learning direct instruction on a daily basis compared to one time a week or even bi-weekly.

Another participant noted, "for our student population, understanding and developing good social skills is vital to their success in every aspect of their life."

Including social-emotional learning into the educational programming may improve social-emotional learning for students by increasing the amount of social-emotional learning direct instruction they receive. Students would have access to a social-emotional learning course or advisory class period utilizing a curriculum and consistent exposure to social-emotional learning across content areas through teacher lesson plans that address social-emotional learning standards.

Implications of including social-emotional learning in the educational programming is that it strengthens skills for students and supports a positive social-emotional learning climate on campus. Social-emotional learning instruction for students with disabilities is only effective when instruction is repetitive, explicit, and utilized research based instructional strategies and interventions such as: modeling, role-play, visual schedules, choice boards, breaks, positive reinforcers, and feedback have been proven to improve social-emotional and behavioral outcomes in students with exceptionalities (Gardner et al., 2021; Garwood & Van Loan, 2019). Students social-emotional development will improve while learning in a positive environment where a social-emotional learning climate is fostered.

Including social-emotional learning into the educational programming will require a few schoolwide changes. The first change is to officially add social-emotional learning into the program of studies with a detailed description of social-emotional learning instruction and the competencies that are addressed. Secondly, the master schedule will need to be developed to include a space for direct social-emotional learning instruction to take place within students' day. This is in addition to teachers incorporating the Virginia Social-emotional Learning standards

into their lesson plans. This could look like a formal social-emotional learning course and/or an advisory class that addresses social-emotional learning content as well as other topics that promote social-emotional growth. The advisory class would allow teachers to facilitate social-emotional learning lessons using direct instruction and promote the formation of meaningful relationships with students outside of academic instruction. Thirdly, students can help promote the climate of social-emotional learning on campus by the establishment of a kindness team that consists of students that would work with school support staff to model kindness across campus. The kindness team would be organized by the school counselor to promote a climate of social-emotional learning on campus. These schoolwide changes would allow students to have multiple opportunities to improve their social-emotional skills across all content areas and settings (Gardner et al., 2021; Rivera & McKeithan, 2021).

Recommendation for Social-Emotional Learning Assessment Tool

Based on scholarly literature and data, the third recommendation to support the improvement of social-emotional learning is for the school to begin utilizing an social-emotional learning assessment tool in order to collect good data to identify student's social skill developmental level and to progress monitor for growth. According to Gresham et al. (2020), "authentic social skill assessments help to inform decisions for instructional strategies and programming which is in alignment with VTSS and supports overall positive outcomes. Strong assessment data would be utilized to develop social-emotional learning goals within students IEP to address any social-emotional learning skill deficits students may demonstrate." One participant stated, "Social-emotional learning is important and without assessment data we will not be as effective as we want and will not see student progress."

The teachers at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind are accustomed to developing IEP goals that are based on data. Therefore, in order to improve social-emotional learning for students with disabilities there must be a social-emotional learning assessment tool utilized that will generate applicable data for IEP goals, progress monitoring and promote overall social-emotional learning skill development. According to Gresham et al., 2020, "Assessments are beneficial for promoting social and academic success in children by identifying the social-emotional skill sets that need improving and for the evaluation of social-emotional learning programming and interventions".

The implications of utilizing an social-emotional learning assessment tool at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind is to strengthen the use of data to align interventions based on the VTSS tiers and to support social-emotional learning progress monitoring through the assessment tool and IEP goals. Overall, the goal is to for students to increase their social-emotional learning skill development even though they have identified disabilities. Selecting an social-emotional learning assessment tool that will achieve both social-emotional learning skill assessment and provide data to support IEP goals and progress monitoring would be most beneficial to improving students social-emotional skill development.

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind serves a unique student population which requires the use of disability friendly assessments and accommodations in order to produce valid data. The students that have a vision loss or blindness need assessments that are accessible with screen reading technology or are customizable to match low vision needs. Students that are hearing impaired or deafness benefit from assessments that can be easily read independently or permit the use of a person that is fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) to read the

assessment in sign language for access. Identifying an assessment for social-emotional learning that will meet the needs of both populations will understandably not be an easy task.

The first step to selecting an assessment tool is to determine how accessible it is for students and the logistics of how it will be administered. The second is to consider an assessment that will measure social-emotional learning skill levels and provide opportunity to progress monitor for the improvement of skills. The third aspect of utilizing an social-emotional learning tool is to develop a plan to administer and analyze the assessment data and consider any additional training that may be required. This researcher, has identified three potential social-emotional learning assessment that the school administration should take into consideration. The first social-emotional learning assessment is the SSIS social-emotional learning edition complete kit by Pearson that includes rating parent, teacher, and student rating scales and screening/progress monitoring scales (Pearson, n.d.). The second assessment is a student survey and an Adult social-emotional learning toolkit by Panorama Education which includes options for professional development and support, social-emotional learning measurement assessments, Adult social-emotional learning resources, intervention tracking, progress monitoring, and check ins which all are reported to align with MTSS programs (Panorama Education, n.d.). Panorama could be a viable option since it would be expected to pair with VTSS that the school is implementing. The third option for an assessment tool is Mosaic by ACT, which provides social-emotional learning assessments, social-emotional learning curriculum, and professional development that is all CASEL aligned (Mosaic, n.d.). The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind students need to be provided social-emotional learning assessments in order to improve their social-emotional learning skills, receive VTSS aligned interventions and strong IEP goals based on reliable data.

The recommendations of professional development, social-emotional learning included in the educational programming and utilizing an social-emotional learning assessment tool are designed to support the improvement of social-emotional learning learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind.

Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders

The roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders need to be disclosed to further support the overall purpose of this study. It is important to develop and communicate a plan for how to implement the recommendations and to assign tasks accordingly. The roles and responsibilities for professional development, social-emotional learning included in the educational programming, and utilizing a social-emotional learning assessment tool are explained in this section.

Professional Development

To improve social-emotional learning for students with disabilities, it is strongly recommended that social-emotional learning professional development be provided at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. According to Skura and Swiderska (2022), "teachers report feeling not equipped to teach or manage students with mental illness and disabilities; training is needed to increase the level of preparedness in teachers." Defining the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the professional development is an important aspect of successful implementation.

Administrators

The role of administrators regarding professional development is to plan four initial sessions as well as ongoing sessions of professional development that thoroughly address the key themes of this research study, including program enhancement, social-emotional learning

climate, systems, comprehensive accountability and teacher awareness. Studies reflect when students with disabilities are in classrooms where teachers have received training in social-emotional learning, they show improvements in emotional regulation, academic performance, self-control, and overall social competence (Stormont & Reinke, 2021). Administrators are also tasked with organizing ongoing professional development sessions throughout the school year to provide opportunities to address any concerns or needs from teachers or instructional support staff.

Teachers

Professional development sessions should include all teachers and instructional support staff. According to Domitrovich et al. (2017), "teachers need to receive training focused on the instruction of the social-emotional learning competencies and how to properly integrate them into all aspects of students' education." Teachers will need to attend and be active participants in each professional development session which will focus on foundational understanding of social-emotional learning and effectively integrating social-emotional learning into their content areas.

Counselors

Counselors will be assigned to support the administration in the process of providing professional development to teachers and instructional support staff. Counselors will also assist with providing professional development resources and social-emotional learning support throughout the school year.

Include Social-Emotional Learning in the Educational Programming

Administrators

The role of the administrators regarding including social-emotional learning into the educational programming is to edit program of studies to reflect that social-emotional learning is

included in the educational programming and incorporating an social-emotional learning course and/or an advisory class within the master schedule that allows students to receive daily direct instruction in social-emotional learning. Administrators will work with school counselors to select an effective social-emotional learning curriculum that will meet the needs of students at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. Administrators will be included in the initial discussions for establishing a kindness team.

Teachers

Teachers will be responsible for integrating social-emotional learning practices and competencies into their content areas. This is accomplished by attending and participating in the provided professional development sessions. Teachers will also begin including the Virginia social-emotional learning standards into their lesson plans within their content area per administration guidance.

Counselors

Counselors will be tasked with supporting administrators with defining the social-emotional learning course to be added into the program of studies handbook. Counselors will also need to provide ongoing support to teachers as they strive to incorporate social-emotional learning standards and practices into the classroom. Counselors will continue to provide direct instruction in social-emotional learning to students through the school counseling program which includes the formal social-emotional learning classes. Counselors also have the responsibility of collaborating with administration to select an effective social-emotional learning curriculum that will meet the needs of students at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. Finally, counselors will also have the role of being the kindness team coordinator. This would be a group

of students that model kindness on campus and support the development of an social-emotional learning climate.

Social-Emotional Learning Assessment Tool

Administrators

Administrators will need to determine an appropriate social-emotional learning assessment tool based on the preidentified options. Administration should consider collaborating with the data specialist and counselors to determine the best assessment. Once an assessment tool is selected, administrators will have the role of developing a plan to implement the assessment.

Teachers

Instructional staff will have an important role in understanding assessment data and how to incorporate any interventions that may arise from the data. Depending on the assessment tool that administrators select, teachers might be needed to assist in administering the social-emotional learning assessments and receive any specialized training that will be needed.

Counselors

The role of the counselor will be to help teachers administer the selected assessment tool. Counselors will also collaborate with the data specialist and the VTSS team to provide input related to progress monitoring social-emotional learning skill development. Collaborating with the VTSS team will increase accountability that interventions are being determined based on the social-emotional learning assessment data. Counselors will also work with the IEP team to develop any social-emotional learning goals that students will be necessary to improve social-emotional skills.

Resources Needed

The resources necessary to improve social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind include both time and funding for curricula resources. It is important to determine how to manage staff's time efficiently and to secure funding to implement the recommendations. The resources needed will be explained in this section.

Professional Development

Professional development will require time. Professional development should be provided in phases. Phase one should consist of four training sessions to be completed during regularly scheduled Friday meeting hours during the month of January lasting one hour and thirty minutes each, allowing for six hours of professional development. These sessions will clearly define what social-emotional learning means and what it can look like across various school settings, training on the Virginia standards of learning, using CASEL resources in order to properly understand how to align the social-emotional learning standards into each content areas and practicing scenarios of identifying and applying social-emotional learning standards based on various lesson plans or student behavioral examples.

Phase two of professional development will require four initial training sessions and an additional four hours throughout the school year to provide an ongoing opportunity for professional learning to teachers and instructional support staff. These sessions will be reflected on the training calendar at the beginning of the school year. The course is estimated to take 1 hour to complete. The additional CASEL videos will last approximately three hours. The total amount of time to implement professional development is approximately 10 hours.

There are no identified costs to implement the recommendation of professional development in phase one since many of the resources are provided through CASEL at no cost. There are many social-emotional learning resources that can be found online that are at no cost in addition to CASEL if the school should need additional resources to support the additional professional development sessions in phase two.

Include Social-Emotional Learning in the Educational Programming

Time is a valuable resource and should be managed efficiently to meet the needs of teachers and benefit students social-emotional skill development. To implement the recommendation of including social-emotional learning in the educational programming will require many hours of planning. The implementation planning process will need to be broken down into four steps.

The first step will require a two-hour meeting between administration and school counselors to define social-emotional learning within the program of studies using a detailed description of social-emotional learning instruction and the competencies that are addressed at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. The second step will be approximately a four-hour planning session between administration and school counselors to develop a plan for schoolwide social-emotional learning implementation and to include social-emotional learning into the master schedule for the upcoming school year. The third step will require two one-hour meetings between administration and school counselors to select a social-emotional learning curriculum. The fourth step will consist of four one-hour work sessions throughout the school year with staff to focus on supporting schoolwide implementation. The one-hour sessions should occur one time within each grading quarter. The total amount of time needed to properly include social-emotional learning in the educational programming is approximately 12 hours. An

additional initiative to support integrating social-emotional learning into the educational programming is to establish a Kindness Team. This will require the counselor to identify a small group of students to join the kindness team and participate in bi-weekly meetings to plan and complete kindness projects throughout the school year.

Funding will be needed to purchase a social-emotional learning curriculum and to purchase materials for the Kindness Team to support the school wide implementation at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. Curriculum costs can range $1,850.00 to $15,000. The school administration will need to select a curriculum that will both satisfy students' needs and be within the budget. The estimated budget for the kindness team is $750.00 for the school year. This amount will cover art and crafting materials, kindness week promotional items for students and kindness shirts.

Social-Emotional Learning Assessment Tool

Implementing the use of an assessment tool will also require time and funding. The first phase of this implementation process will allow time to focus on selecting an appropriate assessment tool to assess students social-emotional learning skills and provide data to support progress monitoring and time to develop a plan for the assessment tool to be administered. This is expected to be accomplished during a series of three one-hour meetings involving administration, counselors, and the data specialist. Once an assessment tool is selected and a plan is outlined to administer the social-emotional learning assessment the team can proceed to the second phase of the implementation process.

The second phase of the assessment tool implementation is to schedule time for teacher training. Teachers will need training specifically on how to administer the assessment, understand the data, and how to incorporate interventions that result from the assessment data.

Training related to the administration of the assessment tool can take up to four hours depending on the assessment tool that is selected. The data focused training related to the assessment is expected to take place over a one-hour training session with the school data specialist and counselor. Approximately two hours should also be allocated for a meeting between administration and the data specialist to develop a plan to add the social-emotional learning assessment to the yearly testing schedule. This will promote progress monitoring and data informed decisions to support student growth. Lastly, two one-hour meetings should be provided between administration and VTSS team members to develop a plan for meetings to review social-emotional learning data with teachers and other instructional staff. It is suggested that these meetings occur once a quarter for the duration of one hour. These meetings should be added to the staff meeting schedule for accountability. These meetings would allow teachers to have prescheduled follow up discussions related to interpreting data, interventions to support social-emotional learning skill development, and other supports for schoolwide implementation of the assessment tool. The total amount of time needed to implement an social-emotional learning assessment tool is approximately 12 hours.

The costs of assessment training, materials, and resources needed will be a necessary addition to the existing system at the school. However, it would potentially improve social-emotional learning learning for students by providing the required data to properly inform decisions. This section will describe the amount of time and funding that will be needed for each of the assessment options.

The first assessment option is the SSIS social-emotional learning edition by Pearson. Pearson offers a three-hour training on the SSIS social-emotional learning edition assessment. The assessment is estimated to take 10 -25 minutes to administer and score per student. The

second assessment is a student survey by Pandora Education. This survey is estimated to take 15 minutes for each student to complete online (Panorama Education, n.d.). The last suggested assessment to consider is Mosaic by ACT. Mosaic offers both a social-emotional learning screener and an social-emotional learning assessment for grades 3-12. The screener approximately takes 5-7 minutes and the social-emotional learning assessment takes approximately 15-25 minutes to administer (ACT, n.d.).

The costs included in purchasing an assessment tool can vary greatly depending on the company. Training on the SSIS social-emotional learning edition by Pearson for a group of up to 40 people for three ours is quoted at $2,100.00. The assessment social-emotional learning edition kit will cost $443.70. This kit includes one manual, and one package of 25 each parent, teacher, and student forms and one package of 25 screener/progress monitoring scales. Additional forms will be needed as The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind current enrollment is 65 students. The option to purchase two additional packages of 25 teacher forms is quoted at $122.00 which breaks down to $61.00 per pack of 25. The total estimated cost for utilizing the Pearson SSIS social-emotional learning edition assessment tool is $2,665.70 plus taxes and shipping (Pearson, n.d.).

There was no available assessment pricing on the websites for either ACT Mosaic or Panorama Education. The administration will need to call and schedule an informational session to gather more information pertaining to these assessment options. Funding to purchase an social-emotional learning assessment tool will be allocated within the Title 1 budget.

Timeline

A plan for when the recommendations will be implemented in necessary to improve the social-emotional learning in students with disabilities at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the

Blind. The timeline for implementing professional development, including social-emotional learning in the educational programming, and utilizing a social-emotional learning assessment tool are explained in this section.

Professional Development

Implementation of professional development will take approximately two months. See Table 6 for the Timeline of Professional Development Implementation.

Table 6

Timeline of Professional Development Implementation

Date	Action Item
January 23, 2024	Administration to add four SEL follow up trainings onto the 2024-2025 training calendar to support schoolwide implementation throughout the year.
February 9, 2024	Administration to add April 2024 SEL trainings onto the training calendar and send Google invites to teachers and staff.
April 5, 2024	Training session with all teachers and instructional support staff to define SEL
April 12, 2024	Training provided to all teachers and instructional support staff on the Virginia Standards of Learning.
April 19, 2024	Training for teachers on SEL and academic alignment in the classroom and lesson plans.
April 26, 2024	Training for all teachers and instructional support staff on SEL in the classroom using practice scenarios.
August 2024+	Administration to provide four follow up trainings during the 2024-2025 school year to support schoolwide implementation.

Note. SEL refers to Social-emotional Learning.

Include Social-Emotional Learning in the Educational Programming

Implementation of including social-emotional learning in the educational programming will take

approximately two months. See Table 7 for the Timeline of Including Social-Emotional Learning

in the Educational Programming Implementation.

Table 7

Implementation Timeline of Including Social-Emotional Learning in the Educational

Programming

Date	Action Item
January 5, 2024	Administration and counselor meeting to define SEL to be added to the program of studies handbook.
February 2, 2024	VTSS, administrator, and counselor meeting to add SEL to the Master Schedule and to develop a plan for schoolwide SEL implementation.
February 9, 2024	VTSS, administrator, and counselor meeting to finalize the plan for schoolwide SEL implementation and plan for Kindness Team.
February 16, 2024	Administrator and counselor meeting to select and purchase SEL curriculum.
August 2024+	SEL courses implemented through the master schedule.
August 2024+	Teachers to begin including SEL standards of learning into their lessons and activities.

Note. VTSS refers to Virginia Tiered Systems of Support. SEL refers to Social-Emotional

Learning.

Social-Emotional Learning Assessment Tool

Implementation of an social-emotional learning assessment tool will take approximately two

months. See Table 8 for the Timeline of Social-Emotional Learning Assessment Tool

Implementation.

Table 8

Timeline of Social-Emotional Learning Assessment Tool Implementation

Date	Action Item
January 2, 2024	Administrator, counselor, and data specialist meeting to begin the process of selecting an assessment tool.
January 9, 2024	Administrator, counselor, and data specialist meeting to continue the process of selecting an assessment tool.
January 16, 2024	Administrator, counselor, and data specialist meeting to finalize the selection and purchase of an assessment tool.
January 19, 2024	Administrator to add SEL assessment to the yearly testing schedule.
January 23, 2024	Administrator to include SEL four data meetings on the yearly staff meeting calendar.
May 20, 2024	Teachers and instructional support staff receive training on the administration and scoring of the assessment tool with the counselor and data specialist.
July 22, 2024	Teachers attend a review session with the data specialist on the administration and scoring of the assessment tool with the counselor and data specialist.
August 2024+	Teachers begin to assess student SEL skills using the assessment.

Date	Action Item
September 6, 2024	Administrator will do a check in at the first staff meeting to see if there is any need for a third session on the assessment tool.

Note. SEL refers to Social-emotional Learning.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations to improve social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind in Virginia. The problem is that social-emotional learning practices need improving since 80% of teachers at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind reported a lack of social and emotional skills in students on the yearly Needs Assessment Survey (The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind Needs Assessment Survey, 2022). This chapter of the report presents the Recommendations, the Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders, Resources Needed, Timeline, and Summary. Three recommendations were made, including social-emotional learning professional development, including social-emotional learning in the educational programming, and utilizing a social-emotional learning assessment tool.

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Appendices

Appendix A

COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind

P.o. Box 2069, Staunton, VA 24402
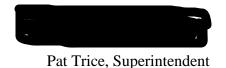(540)332-9000 Fax (540)332-9042

November 16, 2022

Dear Mrs. White,

I received your letter requesting permission to conduct applied research at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (VSDB) as part of your doctoral program at Liberty University. I feel that the topic you have chosen, to improve the social-emotional learning for students with disabilities at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (VSDB), is very applicable. I hope that the results can be used to inform future programming and instruction at VSDB. With that in mind, I am pleased to grant permission to you for the project. As we discussed, expectations are that student confidentiality be maintained at the strictest level.

Thank you for your interest in VSDB and please let me know if I can be of further

assistance as you move forward with this research.

Sincerely,

Pat Trice, Superintendent

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. What is your understanding of social-emotional learning skills?

2. What factors do you think contribute to 80% of students lacking social-emotional learning skills?

3. How does the school collaborate with families to promote social-emotional learning?

4. How does the VTSS support the improvement of social-emotional learning for students?

5. What type of assessment data is currently used to measure social skill development for students at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind?

6. How are social-emotional learning standards addressed through educational programming?

7. Describe strategies used in classrooms to incorporate social-emotional learning standards?

8. How are instructional strategies determined?

9. What professional development is needed to support social-emotional learning in students?

10. What data are used to progress monitor student social-emotional growth?

11. What else would you like to add?

Appendix C

Focus Group Questions

1. Describe your understanding of social-emotional learning skills.

2. Describe how comfortable you are with incorporating social-emotional learning standards into your content area.

3. Describe professional development opportunities that The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind has provided supporting social-emotional learning.

4. Describe instructional strategies you use to address social-emotional learning instruction in your classroom.

5. What barriers can you identify to incorporating social-emotional learning standards in your content area?

6. Describe the classroom expectations you have for your students?

7. How would you improve social-emotional learning skills in the students at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind?

8. Describe which social-emotional skill deficits you observe among students in your classes.

9. Describe your approach to supporting the social-emotional skill deficits in your students.

10. Describe your approach when managing difficult student behaviors within your educational setting.

11. Describe the reporting system that is currently used to seek supports for students with social-emotional learning deficits.

12. What other thoughts do you have on how social-emotional learning can be improved at The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind?

Appendix D

Survey

Instructions: Choose the best response for each prompt below.

1. Which category best describes your age in years?

- ☐ Under 12 years old

- ☐ 12-17 years old

- ☐ 18-24 years old

2. What is your race?

- ☐ White

- ☐ Black/African American

- ☐ Asian

- ☐ Native American/Pacific Islander

- ☐ Two or More Races

- ☐ Other

3. What is your gender?

- ☐ Male

- ☐ Female

- ☐ Prefer not to say

4. How many years (including this year) have you been a student at this school?

- ☐ Less than 1 year

- ☐ 1 year

☐   2 years

☐   More than 2 years

Survey Questions

Instructions: Choose one response for each prompt below.

1. I understand how social-emotional skills help me in school.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

2. I can identify my own feelings.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

3. I can accurately identify the feelings of others.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

4. I use positive thinking to complete challenging tasks.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

5. Teachers are encouraging.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

6. I feel comfortable talking to my teachers when I am feeling upset.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

7. Teachers allow social-emotional discussions in class.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

8. Practicing social-emotional skills in class helps me to learn.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

9. I can understand the perspectives of others.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

10. I prefer to learn through collaborative activities.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

11. I enjoy participating in project-based learning.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

12. I understand how my thoughts impact my behavior.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

13. I understand how my behavior impacts my learning.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

14. Classroom accommodations help me to understand social-emotional concepts.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

15. I think feeling check-ins with my teachers would be helpful.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

16. Social classroom activities would help me to improve my social-emotional skills.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

17. A cue card would help me to communicate with my teacher when I am needing social-emotional support.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

18. I utilize the calm down space in school to help me when I am overwhelmed.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

19. I have been taught how to properly utilize the calm-down space in my school building.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

20. I know people that I can ask to help me if school becomes too challenging.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree