Summer 2016

Teacher Awareness of Social Emotional Learning Standards and Strategies

Mary Reynolds
Governors State University

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Abstract

This study investigated teacher knowledge and attitudes of both special education and general education teachers towards social emotional learning. A total of twenty-five certified special education teachers and twenty-five certified general education teachers were surveyed regarding their familiarity with the State of Illinois Social Emotional Learning Standards. Teachers’ perceptions of the competency of their higher education preparation and professional development to meet their students’ social emotional needs were solicited. The data gathered from this study suggests that universities should prepare teachers more adequately in the areas of social emotional learning. The data also supports that there is a need for districts to offer more workshops and professional development regarding students’ social emotional needs. Educational implications and recommendations based upon the findings of this study, for future research in social emotional learning are discussed.

Keywords: Social Emotional Learning, Teacher Perceptions, Professional Teaching Standards, Professional Development
TEACHER AWARENESS OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS AND STRATEGIES

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Governors State University

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Chapter I

Introduction

It is becoming apparent in today’s society that student success is determined by both academic and social emotional learning. The intended mission of schools today is not only to provide students with an academic foundation necessary to become successful, but to also teach students to become knowledgeable, responsible, socially skilled, and health conscious members of society (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2003). Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2015) as:

the process, through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions. (§ 2, ¶ 1)

Research supports that focus on social emotional learning provided by schools result in an increase in academic success, improved quality of relationships between students and teachers, and a decrease in negative behaviors (Durlak, Weissberg, Dyminicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011). Schools are promoting SEL through the implementation of school wide SEL.

Though the importance of SEL seems to be highly recognized and promoted, it is mainly focused school wide rather than on an individual classroom or individual student level (Elksin & Elksin, 1998). The more important issue presented is that many school districts and university preparation programs fail to provide teachers with the tools necessary to effectively create or implement social emotional learning programs in the classroom (Battalio & Stevens, 2005). A study of 118 teachers from a large urban public school district, conducted by Battalio and Stevens (2005), concluded that 49% of those teachers felt it was their responsibility to teach
social skills. However, 100% of the teachers surveyed acknowledged their lack of knowledge and skill in the area of social emotional learning and desired further training (Batallio & Stevens). The question then becomes: are teachers effectively prepared to create and implement and the social emotional learning programs necessary in the classroom to produce knowledgeable, responsible, socially skilled, and health conscious members of society? When a teacher lacks the resources necessary to adequately teach social and emotional skills within the classroom, the classroom climate can begin to deteriorate, resulting in a negative atmosphere for both the teacher and the students (Marazano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003).

In spite of insufficient training, teachers are expected to contribute to emotional learning opportunities to their students (Yoder, 2014). According to Yoder, it is the responsibility of state education agencies, districts, school administration, and teachers to promote social emotional learning. Yoder’s suggestions include that each layer of the educational infrastructure takes the necessary steps to promote adequate social emotional learning at all levels. In his view, states should adopt social emotional learning standards, implement social emotional learning programs, and develop instructional strategies in the classroom that create a supportive, caring classroom environment (Yoder).

The State of Illinois was the first state to develop Social Emotional Learning standards in 2004, in accordance with Public Act 93-049, which addresses the responsibility to “develop and implement a plan to incorporate social and emotional development standards as a part of the Illinois Learning Standards” (Public Act 93-049 2004; Hoffman, 2009). There are three standards: (a) Develop self-awareness and self management skills to achieve school and life success; (b) Use social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships; and (c) Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal,
school, and community contexts (Public Act, 93-049 2004). Whether these standards are being taught and monitored is unknown. Teachers receive countless hours of education and professional development concerning Common Core and state academic standards however, they do they receive the same access to training for social emotional learning (Parvi & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006). The authors also suggest that in the case of students with emotional disturbance (ED), social emotional learning standards may be a large part of their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). It is important for teachers in the special education and general education classrooms to know how to implement these standards when working with students with ED in order to ensure that students meet their goals (Parvi & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006).

To ensure that Social Emotional Learning is being addressed effectively in classrooms, it is important to look at SEL from the teacher’s perspective (Battalio & Stephens, 2005). The following literature review takes an in-depth look into whether special education and general education teachers feel adequately prepared to meet the social emotional needs of their students, and what interventions are being used to meet those needs. Understanding how teachers view their responsibilities in the realm of social emotional learning as well as their confidence in their preparation and ability to deliver, will help to better determine the next steps in effective implementation of SEL interventions within the classroom (Idol, 2006).

**Statement of the Problem**

It is important for educators to have the same respect for Social Emotional Learning standards as for other academic learning standards. Studies have shown that there are ways to effectively and successfully implement strategies that can be used to teach and meet Social Emotional Standards (Hoffman, 2009: Jones, Jones & Vermete, 2009). Many teachers feel that they are not sufficiently prepared by university programs, or provided with the professional
development opportunities necessary to successfully teach social emotional learning standards (Barton-Arwood, Murrow, Lane & Jolivette, 2005; Battalio & Stephens, 2005; as cited in Parvi & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006). This lack of preparation and lack of opportunity are the main reasons teachers feel ill prepared, and incapable of teaching social emotional learning standards in their classrooms (Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gauge how confident teachers are in their ability to address the social emotional needs of their students. This study examined what strategies and interventions were being implemented within these classrooms to address social emotional learning. Further, this study determined whether teachers, both special education and general education, are familiar with the State of Illinois Social Emotional Learning Standards. Finally, this study analyzed whether university programs and professional development have adequately prepared teachers to effectively address the social emotional needs of their students and whether further professional development is necessary.

**Questions of the Study**

Specific questions addressed by this study include:

1. How do teachers perceive their responsibility, preparedness, and monitoring of the social and emotional needs of students?
2. To what degree do teachers understand the Illinois Social Emotional Standards?
3. How do teachers rate their understanding and use of interventions or strategies in the area of social-emotional learning?
Significance of the Study

Parvi & Hegwer-DiVita (2006) report that research conducted by several other authors suggests that a teacher’s ability to effectively teach social emotional development affects the academic and social success of students. The authors also suggest that teachers are ill prepared to effectively implement successful social emotional leaning strategies and interventions in the classroom. Adequately developed social and emotional skills are critical to success throughout life in academic, professional, and social contexts (Battalio & Stephens, 2005). If students’ social emotional needs are not met, or if they are not encouraged to develop effective social emotional skills, this will affect students negatively beyond the schooling years (Battalio & Stephens). Lack of social emotional skills will negatively affect not only academic success, but also home life and professional life (Battalio & Stephens). Educators play a crucial role in social emotional skill development and should have a positive, long-lasting impact on the lives of their students. It is vital that both special education and general education teachers deliver instruction that is tailored to meet the academic, social emotional, and vocational needs of all students. Educators need to understand the importance of teaching solid social emotional skills to all students in the most effective ways possible. As argued by Pavri and Hegwer-DiVita (2006), and Battalio and Stephens (2005), there is a need for more special education courses in undergraduate teaching programs that emphasize teaching students with social emotional needs. The authors also argue that further addressing professional development targeting social emotional learning is necessary (Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita; Battalio & Stephens). This study shows how confident educators are in addressing the social emotional needs of their students as well as how responsible they feel for teaching their students social emotional skills. The study helps educators understand the importance of effective social emotional instruction while
addressing needs to fill any deficiencies educators may feel are present within preparation. Guidance was provided by the study to help educators to gain an understanding of what they need to improve their confidence and ability to teach social emotional skills.

**Assumptions and Limitations**

Research was conducted via snowball sampling using an anonymous questionnaire that was distributed to special education and general education teachers. It is assumed that participants responded to the survey questions ethically and honestly. This study was limited to a small random sample of special education and general education participants. Time constraints for the graduate seminar class were another limitation of the study.
Definition of Terms

General Education Teacher. A teacher who teaches typically developing students based on state standards (Illinois State Board of Education, 2014)

Inclusion. Inclusion is often used to refer to the general education setting. In order to provide effective instruction for students in general education, it is essential to provide appropriate supports for students with disabilities in inclusive classroom (Yell, 2014). Inclusion is not codified in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), but it is used in Special Education (Yell, 2014).

Individual Education Program (IEP). An IEP is a plan developed by a multidisciplinary team to address the individualized needs of any student deemed to be eligible under IDEA for special education services. The IEP states the goals and objectives decided upon by the multidisciplinary team that should be met by the student by the end of the school year. The IEP serves as legal documentation of any services or other supports that the school district is required to provide to that student. The IEP will guide teachers in monitoring student progress and it provides the framework for communicating information about the student’s progress to the parent(s) as well as the student (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. § 300.114, 2004).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. § 1400, 2004).
Social Emotional Learning (SEL). The process, through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, §2 ¶ 1, 2015).

Social Emotional Learning Standards. Developed in accordance with section 15(a) of Public Act 93-0495, the State of Illinois’ social emotional standards incorporate social and emotional development as a part of Illinois Learning Standards. There are SEL goals, standards, and benchmarks. Many of the SEL standards can be correlated with the Illinois Standards (Illinois State Board of Education, 2014).

Special Education Teacher. A teacher who provides students with exceptional needs such as student with learning disabilities or emotional disturbances with a form of learning (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. § 300.39, 2004).

Specific Learning Disability. The term ‘specific learning disability’ means a disorder in one (1) or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. § 602.30, 2004).

Chapter Summary

Social Emotional Learning standards have been included as part of the Illinois Learning Standards. Effectively implementing these standards leads to more positive social emotional development, readiness to learn, classroom behaviors, and academic performance (Hoffman, 2009). Many educators feel that university programs do not adequately prepare them and that professional development opportunities are needed to meet the social emotional needs of their
students (Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006). The questions addressed in this project investigate educators’ attitudes toward social emotional learning in schools.
Chapter II

Literature Review

This discussion begins with a review of the federal legislation and state learning standards that guide the conduct of teachers in the classroom. It then discusses the research investigating the impact of adequate social emotional development and instruction on all students, especially those students with disabilities. Finally, it notes the perceptions of general education teachers and special education teachers regarding their preparedness to meet the social emotional needs of their students.

Special Education History

The federal government plays a vital role in the implementation of both general and special education (Wright’s Law, 2016). Since *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), laws regarding the educational rights of students have been disputed (Kessell, Wingenback & Lawver, 2009). Although the federal government requires each child to be provided a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE), Kessell, et al., show that historically general education teachers are ill prepared to meet the needs of the special education students within their classrooms. The Center for Parent Information and Resources (2016) states that knowledge of special education laws will allow professionals to understand what services must be provided under the law, how to access them, and how to strengthen collaboration with outside agencies and families (§1, ¶4). Knowledge of these laws by professionals ensures protection of students’ civil rights and can help professionals and parents work together to ensure that a student is provided the equal education opportunity required by the law (§1, ¶4).
Legislation

Individuals with Disabilities Act

First passed in 1990 and most recently revised in 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the most important piece of legislation in special education today (Wright’s Law, 2008). IDEA was enacted as Public Law 42-142 and gives children between the ages of three and 21 the right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) (Wright’s Law, 2008). IDEA provides the guidelines by which each public institution that receives federal funding for special education must abide (Wright’s Law, 2008).

Table 1

13 Categories of IDEA and the percentage served

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>% Served</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>% Served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Specific Learning Disability</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>8. Multiple Disability</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Speech Language Impairment</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>9. Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Other Health Impairment</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10. Orthopedic Impairment</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Autism</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11. Deaf-Blindness</td>
<td>&lt;0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Intellectual Disability</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12. Traumatic Brain Injury</td>
<td>&lt;0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Developmental Delay</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13. Visual Impairment</td>
<td>&lt;0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Emotional Disturbance</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Adapted from the National Center for Education Statistics. Deaf Blindness, Traumatic Brain Injury and Visual Impairment are not exact numbers because they equal less the 0.5% of the population served under IDEA. The numbers above are representative of the 2013-2014 school year.*
According to the U.S. Department of Education (2004), in order for a student to receive services under IDEA, he or she must be identified as having one or more of the 13 categories of disabilities set out in the statute (as outlined in Table 1): Speech/Language Disability; Multiple Disability; Learning Disability; Cognitive Delay; Emotional Disturbance; Intellectual Disability; Deaf/Blind; Traumatic Brain Injury; Visual Impairment; Hearing Impairment; Autism; Other Health Impairment; or Orthopedic Disability (IDEA, 20 U.S.C.§300.8, 2004).

Students served under IDEA must have access to a continuum of placement. As outlined in Figure 1, the continuum of placement ranges from the general education classroom setting to outside placements when necessary (IDEA, 20 U.S.C.§300.8, 2004).

![Figure 1. Continuum of Placement](image)

IDEA states that individual with disabilities must be placed in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), or the setting closest to the general education classroom to ensure that students are progressing as much as possible with their peers (IDEA, 20 U.S.C.§300.8, 2004). Table 2 outlines specific least restrictive environment mandates of IDEA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Education Classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen Ed Classroom with in-class Consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen Ed Classroom with outside consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen Ed Classroom with Resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Contained Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*The Least Restrictive Environment Mandates of IDEA*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mandates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students with disabilities should receive instruction in the general education setting to the maximum extent possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal from regular education occurs only when the nature of severity of the educational exceptionality is such that education in the regular classroom cannot be satisfactorily achieved with appropriate aids and supports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Unless the student’s IEP requires some other kind of arrangement, the student attends the same school he or she would attend if not eligible for special services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students with exceptionalities must be afforded the opportunity to participate in nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities along with their peers in regular education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Less restrictive placements must always be considered. However, where there is a reasonable likelihood that a student with exceptionality can be educated in the regular education classroom with the use of supplementary aids and support, then that placement should be trialed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from the Illinois State Board of Education (Illinois State Board of Education, 2004).*

IDEA mandates that each eligible child be provided with an Individualized Education Program (IEP); (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. § 300.114, 2004). The child’s IEP is developed by a multidisciplinary team consisting of the general education teacher, the special education teacher, a representative from the educational institution, and a highly qualified individual such as a school psychologist who will conduct the assessments necessary to appropriately identify the student (DeBettancourt, 2002). Table 3 outlines the specific parts of an appropriate IEP.
### Table 3

**Legal Contents of an IEP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents of an IEP</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present Level of Performance</td>
<td>IEP must state student’s current performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Goals</td>
<td>Measurable goals that can be reasonably accomplished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education and Related Services</td>
<td>IEP must list special education and related services that the district must provide for the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation with Nondisabled Students</td>
<td>IEP must explain the extent that the child will participate in the general education classroom or other activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in State and District-wide Test</td>
<td>IEP must state any modifications necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dates &amp; Places</td>
<td>IEP must state when services will begin, how often and where they will be provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Service Needs/ Needed Transition Services</td>
<td>At age 14.5, IEP must address post-school goals. At age 16, IEP must state necessary transition services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring Progress</td>
<td>IEP must state how child’s progress will be measured and how parents will be informed of progress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from the U.S. Department of Education Website, 2007.*

The IEP will determine measurable goals and objectives that are designed to meet the student’s specific needs while LRE is also determined (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. § 300.114, 2004). Once the IEP is developed, a meeting with the parent or legal guardian will take place in which everyone must agree on the IEP (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. § 300.114, 2004). IDEA states that if an agreement on the IEP cannot be reached, the parent has the right to proceed with due process (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. § 300.114, 2004). The school district also has the right to due process if the parent or guardian is
non-compliant (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. § 300.114, 2004). Once finalized and agreed upon, the IEP will serve as a legal document detailing the district’s responsibilities (DeBettancourt, 2002).

**Every Student Succeeds Act**

President Obama signed The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 (United States Department of Education, 2015). ESSA was designed to replace the federal education regime established by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which was passed by President Bush in 2004 (United States Department of Education, 2015). Both ESSA and NCLB were designed to narrow the achievement gap across the United States. Both acts focus on improving deficits in reading and math. The U.S Department of Education (2015) states that both acts require annual high-stakes testing which hold teachers accountable for the achievement of their students. According to Nix, Beirman, and Domitrivich (2013), under NCLB, if teachers are unable to ensure that all students make adequate academic progress and if districts repeatedly fail to demonstrate Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for multiple consecutive years, it is possible that teachers could face consequences and become subject to federal intervention. The difference between ESSA and NCLB is that ESSA shifts the responsibility for oversight of school performance from the federal government to the state government (United States Department of Education, 2015).

**Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act**

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states that any federally funded institution cannot discriminate against an individual solely based on his or her disability (Yell, 2014). In order to receive federal funding, an institution is responsible for ensuring that individuals with disabilities have access to the same activities, benefits, and services as the general population (Yell, 2014). Students who do not qualify for benefits under IDEA, but do require additional
services, can be provided with a Section 504 plan. The disability addressed in the student’s 504 plan does not need to be 1 of the 13 disabilities recognized under IDEA. However, the disability does need to be life changing in order for the student to qualify for a Section 504 plan. Section 504 Plans do not require an IEP (Yell, 2014).

**Americans with Disabilities Act**

Passed in 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) ensures the rights of individuals with disabilities to equal treatment (Yell, 2014). ADA protects individuals with disabilities from being discriminated against in the workplace, by state and local government, and in access to public transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunications (Yell, 2014).

**Social Emotional Learning Background**

As the number of students who engage in problematic behaviors increases, social-emotional learning (SEL) should become an important goal of school programs because social competence can prevent academic failure (Stoiber, 2011). Since the early 1990s, SEL has become a major component of program and curriculum design within the American education system (Hoffman, 2009). Since the Enactment of the Illinois Children’s Mental Health Act of 2003, the state has worked diligently to address the mental health of children (Hoffman, 2009). One key factor to ensure that the mental health of children is properly addressed was the development of the Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership (ICMHP). This group in turn developed a statewide strategic plan to reform the Illinois Children’s Mental Health System (Hoffman, 2009). Illinois became the first state to create SEL standards, as outlined below in Table 4, for grades K-12 in 2004 (Hoffman, 2009).
Table 4

*State of Illinois Social Emotional Learning Standards*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 1</strong>: Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success.</td>
<td>Several key sets of skills and attitudes provide a strong foundation for achieving school and life success. One involves knowing your emotions, how to manage them, and ways to express them constructively. This enables one to handle stress, control impulse, and motivate oneself to persevere in overcoming obstacles to goal achievement. A related set of skills involves accurately assessing your abilities and interests, building strengths, and making effective use of family, school and community resources. Finally, it is critical for students to be able to establish and monitor their progress toward achieving academic and personal goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 2</strong>: Use social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.</td>
<td>Building and navigating positive relationships with others are central to success in school and life and require the ability to recognize the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others, including those different from one’s own. In addition, establishing positive peer, family, and work relationships requires skills in cooperating, communicating, respectfully, and constructively resolving conflicts with others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 3</strong>: Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.</td>
<td>Promoting one’s own health, avoiding risky behaviors, dealing honestly and fairly with others, and contributing to the good of one’s classroom, school, family, community, and environment are essential to citizenship in a democratic society. Achieving these outcomes requires an ability to make decisions to and solve problems on the basis of accurately defining decisions to be made, generating alternative solutions, anticipating the consequences of each, and evaluating and learning from one’s decision making.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from the Illinois State Board of Education (2014).*
The State of Illinois Board of Education (2010) defines SEL as:

The process through which children develop awareness and management of their emotions, set and achieve important personal and academic goals, use social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships, and demonstrate decision-making and responsible behaviors to achieve school and life success. (Illinois State Board of Education, 2014).

A team of teachers, school administrators, student support staff, human services professionals, and parents with expertise in child development and learning developed the Illinois State Board of Education SEL standards (Illinois State Board of Education, 2014). Standards were made available for public feedback and were revised prior to their adoption by the Illinois State Board of Education in correlation with the Illinois Learning Standards (Illinois State Board of Education, 2014). The Illinois SEL standards were designed to be comprehensive and strategic in building a children’s mental health system that appropriately addresses adequate mental health, prevention of mental health issues, and early mental health intervention for children up to age 8 (Illinois State Board of Education, 2014). Table 4 outlines the State of Illinois SEL Standards. Illinois school districts must report how they plan to implement the Illinois State SEL goals, as they are a part of the Illinois State Learning Standards.

Social Emotional Development

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) believes that the social emotional needs of a student are as equally important as a student’s academic needs (Fleischer, 2010). According to Elias and Arnold (2006), teaching social emotional skills has been linked to higher student achievement, more positive student motivation, and more socially acceptable classroom behaviors. Hoffman (2009) states that adequate social emotional skills lead
to not only academic success, but life success, and lead students to become happier citizens of the community. The Committee for Children (as cited in Hoffman, 2009) states that students with positive views of themselves foster positive relationships with others and are ultimately more emotionally aware and engaged, which results in success later in life (p. 539). Strong social emotional skills play a vital role in academic success and create a positive academic environment.

**Social Emotional Development Theory**

Urie Bronfenbrenner published the Ecological Theory in 1979 (Eggen & Kauchack, 2012). The Ecological Theory contains five environmental systems with which a person interacts. As shown in Figure 2, the five systems are: (a) the microsystem; (b) the mesosystem, (c) the exosystem; (d) the macrosystem; (e) the chronosystem.

![Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory](image_url)

*Figure 2. Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Human Development. No citation available retrieved from Google images.*
Each system within the Ecological Theory contains roles, rules and norms that may shape an individual’s psychological development (Eggen & Kauchack, 2012). The Ecological Theory is often used to study the relationship between individuals, community and society as a whole (Eggen & Kauchack, 2012). According to Bronfenbrenner’s theory of ecological systems, interpersonal relationships in a child’s microsystem will significantly influence that child’s developmental outcome (Hoffman, 2009). More nurturing and supportive relationships will foster a person’s development more positively.

In 1958, Lawrence Kohlberg published the stages of moral development (Eggen & Kauchack, 2012). Kohlberg suggested that moral reasoning is the basis for ethical behavior (Eggen & Kauchack, 2012). Kohlberg believed that people progressed in their reasoning through different levels and stages (Eggen & Kauchack, 2012). Kohlberg’s Moral Stages consist of 6 levels separated into 3 levels, as seen below in figure 3.

### Kohlberg’s Moral Stages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level and Age</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>What determines right and wrong?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preconventional:</strong> Up to the Age of 9</td>
<td>Punishment &amp; Obedience</td>
<td>Right and wrong defined by what they get punished for. If you get told off for stealing then obviously stealing is wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental - Relativist</td>
<td></td>
<td>Similar but right and wrong is now determined by what we are rewarded for, and by doing what others want. Any concern for others is motivated by self-interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventional:</strong> Most adolescents and adults</td>
<td>Interpersonal concordance</td>
<td>Being good is whatever pleases others. The child adopts a conformist attitude to minority. Right and wrong are determined by the majority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Law and order</td>
<td>Being good now means doing your duty to society. To this end we obey laws without question and show a respect for authority. Most adults do not progress past this stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Postconventional:</strong> 10 to 15% of the over 20s.</td>
<td>Social contract</td>
<td>Right and wrong now determined by personal values, although these can be overridden by democratically agreed laws. When laws infringe our own sense of justice we can choose to ignore them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universal ethical principle</td>
<td>We now live in accordance with deeply held moral principles which are seen as more important than the laws of the land.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3. Kohlberg’s Moral Stages, no citation available retrieved from Google images.*
According to Judith G. Smetana (2006), morality regulates social relationships. Smetana (2006) suggests that most psychological approaches to moral development see morality as having affective cognitive and behavioral components. Similar to Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory, each level and stage of Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development include roles, rules and norms that play a crucial role in moral development (Eggen & Kauchack, 2012).

**Interpersonal Relationships**

Pham and Murray (2015) state that youth with disabilities are more vulnerable to social isolation and lack the social skills to develop strong interpersonal relationships, which can lead to depressive symptoms, decreasing self-esteem, and a decline in academic performance. Pham and Murray report that the National Longitudinal Transitions Study-2 indicates that social skills are an issue especially in students with disabilities, as over 80% report as having low to moderate social skills, and only one in six report having high social skills. According to Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, and Garza (2006), approximately 28% of students with disabilities and 44% with emotional disturbance dropped out or are expelled from high school. The two main reasons reported were dislike of the school and poor relationships with teachers and peers. As stated by Pham and Murray (2015), students with disabilities will face greater difficulties in their academic careers, but it is also important to teach these students the skills to foster and maintain positive social relationships to ensure a positive school environment and academic success. Students without disabilities tend to be a part of social groups that are similar in size with group members that have similar personalities and interests. Pham and Murray (2015) state the social groups that are developed among students with disabilities are a result of being placed in special education where many students have social skill deficits and there is a stigma attached to their label. Students with disabilities often have comorbidity with deficits in other academic areas or
socioeconomic difficulties that are directly related to negative affect, externalizing and internalizing problematic behaviors, and a negative perception of adult support (Pham & Murray, 2015).

**Ability to Focus on Academic Tasks**

Students who encounter emotional challenges have more difficulty focusing on academic tasks. Students who have learning deficits tend to develop more emotional issues and depressive symptoms than those students without learning deficits (Nelson & Harwood, 2011). Nelson and Harwood attribute the increase in depressive symptoms to academic difficulties. According to Calhoun and Mayes (as stated in Nelson & Harwood, 2011), depression has a negative impact on cognitive functioning and academic achievement as it slows the speed of information processing and hinders a student’s ability to recall and recognize. Based on this information, Nelson and Harwood conclude that it is important for organizations to consider depression among learning disabled students when developing programming and assessments. Elksnin and Elksnin (1998) state that many students with mild to moderate social skills express more anxiety than those who are not prone to depression. The authors go on to say that academic demands can increase anxiety and even induce panic in some cases. Elksnin and Elksnin state, “Children who fail to acquire appropriate social skills have a lower probability of completing school, becoming employed, and becoming well adjusted adults” (p. 131).

**Social Emotional Research Studies**

Extensive research has been completed on appropriate implementation of a social emotional curriculum. Research indicates that the importance of a social emotional curriculum at all levels from preschool through transition planning for high school students. Denham, Bassett, Zissner, and Wyatt (2014) conducted a study on how preschoolers’ social emotional learning
predicts their early school success. The study assessed students’ self-regulation skills, emotional knowledge, social problem solving skills, and social emotional behavior. Data was gathered via direct assessment and observation of 101 preschool students. The study addresses the fact that preschool is an introduction to school and students will begin to develop social relationships with teachers and other student as well as feelings toward school in general. For this reason, the researchers talk about how teaching these student how to form positive relationships at a young age will encourage a more positive perception of school and the people who surround them in the school. The study ultimately concluded that though it is a complex relationship, there is a relationship between SEL at the preschool student’s level and their success in early school years. The study also emphasizes the importance of SEL in early childhood education. Similarly, in a study assessing the impact of SEL in the Head Start REDI program, conducted by Nix, Bierman, Domitrovich, and Gill (2013), preschool advancement in social emotional skills made a positive contribution to kindergarten students’ outcomes in reading achievement and learning engagement. Nix, et al., concluded that their results support the importance of fostering children’s development of social emotional skills during preschool to promote school readiness.

**Bullying**

In 2015, Espelage, Rose, and Polanin released a three-year study in which a SEL program was used to reduce bullying, fighting, and victimization among middle school students with disabilities. The study was basically a clinical trial of a SEL program, Second Step: Student Success Through Prevention Middle School Program. The program consists of 41 lessons that were implemented as a part of the curriculum by teachers in the classroom.

Espelage, Rose, and Polanin (2015) state that students with disabilities are often involved in bullying incidents and in some cases overrepresented in these situations. A study completed
by Rose, Espelage, and Monda-Amaya (as cited in Espelage, Rose & Polanin, 2015) concluded that students with disabilities were twice as likely to be proactive and reactive in bullying than students without disabilities. Rose, et al., state, “Students with higher level incidence disabilities engage in significantly higher rates of reactive perpetration and experience higher levels of victimization than their same aged-peers without learning disabilities” (p. 299).

Espelage, Rose, and Polanin (2015) state that school-based SEL programs implemented with the purpose of violence prevention, including bullying, are based on the fact that academic success is linked to a student’s ability to manage/regulate emotions, communicate effectively, problem solve, and manage interpersonal conflicts (p. 300). To evaluate the effectiveness of evidence-based SEL programs on reducing bullying, physical aggression, and victimization among students with disabilities, Espelage, Rose, and Polanin (2015) studied sixth grade students with disabilities in two of five school districts that had agreed to implement the SEL curriculum. The authors found the overrepresentation of students with disabilities in school violence cases may be a direct result of the deficit in social and communication skills, which are foundational skills taught in the SEL program. Ultimately, the authors concluded that direct instruction in the areas of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, problem solving, and relationship management would effectively reduce bullying and victimization of students with disabilities.

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports

Although school-wide programs such as Positive Behaviors Inventions and Supports (PBIS) are designed to be a systematic approach to assisting schools in creating and implementing effective behavioral practices and data-based decision-making for all students, students with disabilities often require more individualized behavioral supports outside of the realm of PBIS (Robbins, Eber, & Devine-Johnson) (as cited in Sugai & Horner, 1999). PBIS is a
three-tiered system: Universal School-Wide (whole school), Targeted Intervention Systems (small group), and Intensive Intervention Systems (individualized). Development, implementation and monitoring of the three-step PBIS system is critical, especially in the case of those students who are at-risk of developing chronic behavior issues (Robbins, et al., 2003). Students who have been identified as having emotional disturbance often have behavior support plans included in their IEPs (Eber, Sugai, Smith & Scott, 2002). In the state of Illinois, most school districts have adopted and implemented school-wide PBIS systems. The development of a PBIS system requires that schools use research and data-based measures when choosing an appropriate system for the school environment (Atkins, Collins, Devine-Johnson, Eber, Pacchiano, Palmer & Robbins, 2003).

Social Emotional Instruction

According to Elksnin and Elksnin (2009), students require sufficiently developed social and interactive skills so they can effectively understand how to appropriately interact with peers and adults. Elksnin and Elksnin (2009) claim that educators are responsible for teaching students how to respond properly in social situations. Espelage, Rose, and Polanin (2015) suggest that students with a decreased sense of self-worth require increased support from teachers, family members, and peers by acknowledging that these student’s in fact have strengths. According to Johnson, Polinor, and Bonaiuto (2005), students exhibit positive behavior in an environment in which they feel known and welcomed rather than anonymous and alienated. School environments should offer students a feeling of success and accomplishment (Johnson, Polinor & Bonaiuto, 2005). Jones, Jones, and Veremete (2009) suggest that social emotional skills be taught in three ways: (1) through explicit instruction, (2) through application with appropriate feedback, and (3) through application to real-life situations.
Johnson, Polinor, and Bonaiuto (2005) suggest that effective social and emotional learning should include close attention to explicit instruction of social and emotional skills, modeling of effective social and emotional skills, and opportunities to practice and apply such skills.

Many students with disabilities require specific attention to social emotional skills, which should be reflected in their IEP (Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006). The researchers found empirical evidence that students with disabilities are also identified as having difficulties with executive functioning, self-concept, learned helplessness, attribution style, self-efficacy, and loneliness. A student’s attribution style and self-concept are strong indicators of their social behaviors, which hugely impact their relationships with other students and set the tone for future social behavior (Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006). Special education teachers play a vital role in developing supportive school communities and offer students a great deal of instrumental assistance and emotional support. Special education teachers become responsible for not only meeting the social emotional needs of their students but teaching them the skills necessary to create and maintain positive student-student and teacher-student relationships (Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006).

Pavri and Hegwer-DiVita explored the effects of what teachers do in the classroom to promote the academic, social, and emotional growth of students. The authors found that although students with disabilities have IEPs that often contain social emotional domains, the teacher responsible for that domain, generally the special education teacher does not understand how to meet the social emotional goals and therefore these goals are not met (Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006). Studies concluded that many special education teachers do not feel that they understand or know how to meet their students’ social emotional needs (Pavri & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006;
Battalio & Stephens, 2005). The teachers involved in the study conducted by Pavri and Hegwer-DiVita (2006) felt that inadequate university preparation and lack of professional development opportunities through their school district resulted in a lack of knowledge necessary to meet the social emotional needs of students.

**Social Emotional Learning Responsibility**

According to Condeman & Johnston-Rodriguez (2009), IDEA requires both special education and general education teachers to be responsible for meeting the educational needs of students with disabilities in their classroom. This implies that general education and special education teachers may need to work collaboratively to ensure student success. In order for an inclusive environment to be effective, general and special education teachers must be masters of collaborators and support each student in the general education classroom setting (Hallahan, et al., 2009; Lamar-Dukes & Dukes, 2005). Several types of cooperative teaching models can be utilized by special education and general education teachers to ensure effective collaboration, consultation, cooperative teaching in the classroom, supportive resource programming, and instructional assistants (Idol, 2006). Services should be made available in schools to provide staff with the means necessary to work collaboratively together in order for special education teachers to support regular education effectively.

Collaboration between general education and special education teachers is extremely important when addressing the social emotional needs of students with disabilities (Idol, 2006). It is important for general education teachers to be sensitive to, or understand that students with disabilities may have more demanding social emotional needs than those of their general education peers and be provided with the effective training and support to ensure they are able to address the social emotional needs of these students. When, this does not always happen, special
education teachers need to understand how to meet the social emotional needs of their students so they can guide general education teachers in understanding how to effectively meet those needs (Idol, 2006).

**Teacher Experiences**

Several factors may affect teachers’ ability to teach SEL. For example, teachers may feel that they are not able to teach social emotional needs effectively due to time constraints, or they do not know how to incorporate social emotion skills into their curriculum (Hoffman, 2009). Kress, Norris, Schoenholz, Elias, and Siegle (2004) discovered that some teachers felt that the focus on academic and state standards outweighed any focus placed on social emotional skills. The emphasis on academic and state curriculum standards stands apart from, and takes away from, creating a positive social and emotional environment within the classroom (Kress, Norris, Schoenholz, Elias & Siegle, 2004). Due to the constraints of ESSA, it is not a surprise that teachers feel they do not have adequate time to dedicate to SEL. High-stakes testing required by federal law hold teachers personally responsible for the academic achievements of their students. If standards are not met, they could face consequences. This then places the focus on academics rather than SEL (Rosenberg, Sinedlar, Hardman, 2004).

Another factor is that many teachers are not familiar with the State of Illinois Social Emotional Standards; in fact many teachers are not even aware that they exist (Hoffman, 2009). For this reason, many teachers do not know how to incorporate SEL into their daily curriculum (Norris, 2003). Parvi and Hegwer-DiVita (2006) report that many teachers do not feel confident in their knowledge of how to address social emotional skills in their classrooms. Neither their preparation nor professional development opportunities provided by their district adequately supported meeting the social motional needs of students. Batallio and Stephens (2005) also found
that teachers felt they needed to be provided more professional development opportunities in the form of in-service training or workshops, to acquire the necessary skills to meet the social emotional needs of their students. It is important to address teachers’ confidence level in teaching SEL and to understand how their own experience has led them to their current feelings surrounding SEL.

A major facet of being a special education teacher is providing students with disabilities a positive educational experience that will continue to impact them throughout their lives. According to Hoffman (2009), it is important for special education teachers to develop and implement specifically designed instruction to meet the individual educational, social, and vocational needs of students with disabilities. In other words, it is important for teachers to understand that SEL will have as much of an impact on a student with disabilities as academic and vocational training, therefore, it is important for special education teachers to effectively teach social emotional skills. Although SEL has not been a central focus in teacher education programs in the United States, however, there has been a growing interest in incorporating SEL in teacher preparation programs and in-service trainings. A study exploring the attitudes of special education and general education teachers towards the social emotional needs of students as well as their knowledge of SEL standards must be conducted to see whether the focus on SEL has strengthened.

**Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to review and discuss current research regarding social emotional learning standards and the benefits of appropriate social emotional development. Research of peer reviewed journal articles, textbooks, and educational websites supporting the use of SEL were cited throughout this chapter. The chapter focused mainly on special education
legislation, background information on SEL, the state of Illinois SEL standards, and the benefits of effective social emotional instruction and development.
Chapter III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate teacher attitudes toward social and emotional learning in schools. A quantitative approach was used (see Gay & Mills, 2012) to explore how well prepared teachers felt they were to meet the social emotional needs of their students through college preparation and professional development. A validated survey instrument was used to collect quantitative data from study participants.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of a sampling of 25 certified special education and 25 general education educators currently employed by public school districts. Two known school districts in Cook County and two known school districts in Will County were targeted. Participants were selected using the snowball sampling method. Surveys were initially sent to 10 teachers (i.e. five certified special education instructors and five general education instructors), who, in turn, sent the survey to four other teachers within their sub-field. All participants were asked to report the following: (a) number of years they have been teaching as a special education or general education teacher; (b) their level of educational attainment; and (c) the grade level(s) they are responsible for teaching. To ensure anonymity, participants were not asked to provide any information that could be used to identify them.

Instrument

A survey was specifically developed for the purpose of this study. This survey was reviewed for content validity by an expert panel of professional and peer committee members of the Multicategorical Special Education graduate seminar at Governors State University (see Gay
& Mills, 2012). This survey was adapted from an instrument created by Marta Karp (2009). The survey used in this study consists of five sections.

**Section I Demographic Information**

Section I contains six questions designed to obtain demographical information from the participants. This section allows for open-ended responses.

**Section II Familiarity with SEL standards**

Section II consists of two questions that measure participants’ familiarity with social emotional standards and participants’ role as an educator. Section II requires participants to respond to each item by checking one of five responses. These five responses are (a) Strongly Agree; (b) Agree; (c) Undecided; (d) Disagree; (e) Strongly Disagree.

**Section III Strategies and Interventions**

Section III consists of two questions that address the types of strategies and interventions used to meet students’ social and emotional needs. Participants are required to select from a list of strategies and interventions. Participants are able to select more than one response.

**Section IV Preparedness**

Section IV consists of five questions that ask each participant how prepared, as a result of his or her college education and/or professional development, he or she feels in meeting his or her students’ social and emotional needs. Section V requires participants to respond to each item by checking one of five responses. These five responses are (a) Strongly Agree; (b) Agree; (c) Undecided; (d) Disagree; (e) Strongly Disagree.

**Section V Additional Comments**

Section V allows for open-ended responses and captures any additional comments from participants.
Procedure

This survey was distributed to 25 certified special education teachers and 25 certified general education teachers. The study was conducted following ethical guidelines. All participants received informed consent in the instruction section of the survey online.

Data Collection

Data was collected through surveys distributed to 25 certified special education teachers and 25 certified general education teachers. The survey was delivered via email and returned via Google Forms. The survey was delivered using the snowball method. Beginning with a convenience approach, the survey was sent via email to 10 teachers who then sent the survey via email to four other teachers in their school (see Gay & Mills, 2012).

Data Analysis

Quantitative techniques were used to analyze the data gathered through the survey. Data was examined according to themes of the survey. A standard descriptive approach (see Gay & Mills, 2012) was applied to the data. Data was organized and tabulated in an Excel spreadsheet. Frequencies and percentages were calculated. Data was formulated into tabular, graphic and narrative formats.

Chapter Summary

The survey that was distributed was designed to collect information on special education and general education teacher’s attitudes toward social emotional learning. Certified special education and general education teachers voluntarily completed the survey that was distributed. All participant information remains confidential. The results of the surveys are analyzed and discussed in Chapter IV.
Chapter IV

Results

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the results of the study exploring the attitudes and experiences of special education and general education teachers towards social emotional learning. Sixty-two surveys were distributed, 31 to special education teachers and 31 to general education teachers. Of these 62 surveys, 50 were completed (an 80% response rate) with an even distribution between special education and general education respondents (i.e. 25 surveys were completed special education teachers, and 25 surveys were completed by general education teachers). All participants were asked to indicate their gender, age, how many years they have been teaching in special education and/or general education, and what grade they teach.

Demographics

The demographics section of the survey indicated that majority (72%) of the participating teachers were female. Specifically, within the sample set, 36 teachers were female and fourteen (28%) teachers were male. The age of the teachers responding to the survey ranged from 23 to 52, with the median age being 34. The age distribution of the respondents was approximately normal around the median with 13 (36%) of the teachers between the ages of 23 and 29, 28 (56%) of the teachers between the ages of 30 and 39, seven (14%) of the teachers between the ages 40 and 49, and two (4%) of the teachers reported to be 50 or older. Table 5 summarizes the remaining demographic information collected as part of the survey.
Table 5

*Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest Educational Attainment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors or bachelors plus</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters or masters plus</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade-Level Taught</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary (K-5)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School (6-8)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School (9-12)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Familiarity with SEL standards**

The questions in sections II of the survey measured participants’ familiarity with social emotional standards and participants’ role as an educator. Section II required participants to respond to each item by selecting one of five responses. These five responses are (a) Strongly Agree; (b) Agree; (c) Undecided; (d) Disagree; or (e) Strongly Disagree. The first statement in this section was designed to assess participants’ familiarity with the State of Illinois Social Emotional Standards by measuring the level of agreement with the following statement: I am familiar with the State of Illinois Social Emotional Standards. Results indicated that 78% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that they were familiar with the State of Illinois SEL standards, with the median rating being “strongly agree.” Fourteen percent of the participants, however, indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Eight percent of participants indicated that they were undecided. Figure 4 below shows the specific responses in the form of a bar graph.
Figure 4. Respondents rating of familiarity of SEL Standards.

*Note: The eight percent of participants who indicated they were undecided are not included in Figure 4.

Interestingly, even among respondents who indicated that they were unfamiliar with the State of Illinois SEL standards, almost every respondent acknowledged that it is their role to meet the social emotional needs of their students, with fully 98% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with that statement.

**Strategies and Interventions**

The survey next asked participants to select strategies and interventions they have used to meet students’ social and emotional needs. Participants were required to select from a preset list of strategies and interventions but were able to select more than one response.

The first question in this section asked participant to indicate if they have used any of the following strategies to assess and monitor students’ social and emotional needs. Participants were asked to choose all that apply from the following strategies: (a) direct classroom observation, (b) information from other teachers or administrators, (c) information from
psychologist or counselor, (d) behavioral checklists/inventories, (e) psychological tests, and/or (f) education tests. Figure 5 below shows the percentage of participants who chose each strategy.

Figure 5. Respondent’s selection of strategies used to address and progress monitor students’ social emotional needs.

The majority of participants (66%) indicated that they use behavioral checklists and inventories as a strategy to assess and monitor the social emotional need of their students. The least commonly utilized strategy was obtaining information from the school psychologist or counselor with only 40% of participants indicated that they have used this strategy. Overall, participants indicated that they have used the majority of the strategies listed in the survey.

The second question in this section asked participants about their use of intervention techniques. Participants were asked to select all that apply. The intervention techniques listed in the survey were as follows: (a) discussion with student, (b) purposeful seating and grouping, (c) individual behavior plans, (d) classroom behavior plans, (e) collaboration with family, (f) schoolwide prevention programs, and/or (g) published social skills curriculum. One hundred percent of participants indicated that have used purposeful seating or grouping as an intervention
technique in their classroom. The least commonly used intervention technique was published social skills curriculum with only 52% of participants indicated that they have implemented this intervention technique in their classroom. Figure 6 below depicts specific responses across the full spectrum of interventions. Overall, participant indicated that they have used the majority of the intervention techniques listed in the survey.

![Figure 6](image)

*Figure 6. Respondents’ selection of intervention techniques used to assess and monitor students’ social emotional needs.*

**Preparedness**

Section IV of the survey asked each participant how prepared, as a result of his or her college education and/or professional development, he or she felt in meeting his or her students’ social and emotional needs. Section IV required participants to respond to each item by selecting one of five responses. These five responses were (a) Strongly Agree; (b) Agree; (c) Undecided; (d) Disagree; or (e) Strongly Disagree.

The data in Figure 7 reflects participant responses to the first statement in the section: I feel well prepared through my university preparation to identify and meet the social emotional
needs of my students. Fifty-six percent of participants either strongly agree or agree with this statement, and 34% of participants disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. Disaggregating the results further, 24% of participants strongly agreed with this statement; 32% of participants agreed with this statement; 10% of participants were undecided on this statement; 32% of participants disagreed with this statement; and 2% strongly disagreed with this statement. Figure 7 shows the responses in the form of a bar graph.

*Figure 7. Respondents report on adequacy of college preparation to identify and meet social and emotional needs of students.*

*Note: The 10% of participants who were undecided were not included in Figure 7.*

Participants were also asked to respond to a statement regarding professional development opportunities offered at their school districts and whether they feel that there is a need for more professional development to help meet students’ social and emotional needs. The first statement regarding professional development: There are many workshops and professional development opportunities offered in my district that are helpful in meeting students’ social and emotional needs. Once again participants were asked if they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed,
strongly disagreed or were undecided on the statement. Figure 8 summarizes participant responses in the form of a bar graph.

**Figure 8.** Respondents report on adequacy of professional development opportunities.

*Note: The 12% of participants who were undecided were not included in Figure 8.

The final question asked participants to indicate whether they (a) Strongly Agree; (b) Agree; (c) are Undecided; (d) Disagree; or (e) Strongly Disagree with the following statement: I feel that there needs to be more workshop and professional development opportunities in my district to help in meeting students’ social and emotional needs. Figure 9 summarizes the responses in the form of a bar graph. Overall, 86% of participants either “strongly agree” or “agree” that there is a need for more professional development opportunities in their districts. Eight percent of participants were “undecided” on this statement, and 6% “disagree.” None of the survey participants indicated that they “strongly disagreed” with the statement. One participant who indicated that they “agree” with this statement commented that she felt there was a need for further professional development in the area of social and emotional development.
Overall, the average response to this final question was that participants “agree” that there is a need for more professional development to help in social emotional learning.

*Figure 9.* Respondents report on whether there is a need for professional development

*Note: The 8% of participants who were undecided were not included in Figure 9.*

**Additional Comments**

Section V allows for open-ended responses and captures any additional comments from participants. As noted above, one participant wrote an additional comment stating that she felt more professional development is necessary in the area of SEL.

**Comparison of Educator Viewpoints**

The prior results did not examine any differences that might arise between General Education (Gen Ed) and Special Education (SPED) teachers with respect to the topics examined. Breaking down the results by practice area, however, reveals interesting similarities and differences. For example, 92% of SPED teachers indicated that they were familiar with the State of Illinois SEL standards. Whereas, only 80% of Gen Ed teachers agreed that they are familiar with the State of Illinois SEL standards. One hundred percent of general education teachers and
96% of special education teachers agreed that they believe it is their role, as a teacher to address and meet the social emotional needs of their students. Forty percent of both special education and general education teachers agreed that they do not feel well prepared through their university preparedness to assess and meet the SEL needs of their students. Ninety-two percent of special education teachers agreed that there is a need for further professional development in the area of SEL, compared to 80% of general education teachers who indicated the same. Figure 10 below compares the feelings of special education teachers with those of general education teachers.

Figure 10. Comparison of the feelings of special education teachers and general education on topics surrounding SEL.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides the results of the data gathered from 25 special education teachers and 25 general education teachers. The results of the data collected is inconclusive, but does suggest that universities should prepare teachers more adequately in the areas of social emotional learning. The data also supports that there is a need for districts to offer more workshops and
professional development to help in meeting students’ social and emotional needs. This information will be further discussed in Chapter V.
Chapter V

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how prepared general education teachers and special education teachers felt in meeting their students’ social and emotional needs and their overall awareness of social emotional learning standards. This study also investigated how adequately prepared participants felt to meet the social emotional needs of their students through their university education and professional development opportunities. Additionally, participants reported whether they believe there is a need for further professional development.

Discussion

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Standards have been incorporated into the State of Illinois Learning Standards. Research indicates that addressing the social emotional needs of students will lead to better social emotional development, readiness to learn, classroom behavior and academic performance (Parvi & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006; Elias, 2006; Cohen, 2006, cited in Hoffman, 2009). The knowledge and attitudes of teachers toward SEL standards can influence the quality of social emotional learning of a student. SEL standards are not assessed by standardized tests like academic standards. Standardized tests are used to determine if a school meets adequate yearly progress, or AYP (Ransford et al. 2002). For this reason, SEL standards tend to be unrecognized and undervalued when compared to the academic standards even though they can have a similar effect on a students’ development, both academically and socially.

The need for further professional development in the area of social emotional learning is present (Pavri & Hegwer- DiVita, 2006; Battalio & Stephens, 2005). This study should show educators where they stand in meeting the social and emotional needs of their students. This study should provide educators a more clear understanding of the importance of social and
emotional learning while addressing deficits in the learning process of educators. This study should also provide insights into what steps need to be taken to improve how educators teach social emotional skills and successfully address the social emotional needs of their students. Educators could use this study to request in-service training that focuses on SEL.

Conclusions
The majority of the participants in this study indicated that they were familiar with the State of Illinois social emotional standards, and they reportedly use various strategies and interventions to assess and monitor the social emotion needs of their students. This is important because it aids teachers in curriculum development, appropriate instructional strategies, and activities that encourage positive social interaction and emotional competence (Parvi & Hegwer-DiVita, 2006). However, 30% of the participants reported that they did not feel prepared through their college education to identify and meet the social and emotional needs of their students. Additionally, 30% of participants also indicated that their districts do not offer adequate professional development opportunities or workshops geared toward social emotional learning. Forty-three percent of participants agreed that there is a need for more professional development in the area of social emotional learning. These findings corroborate the studies conducted by Parvi and Hegwer-DiVita (2006), Battalio and Stephens (2005), and Barton-Arwood, Murrow, Lane and Jolivette (2005), who found that many educators do not feel well prepared to meet the social emotional needs of their students due to lack of university preparation and staff development. Similar to what the participants in this study indicated, Battalio and Stephens (2005) reported that teachers specified that further training in social emotional development in the form of in-services training or workshops and appropriate skills training was necessary to further develop their abilities to meet the social emotional needs of their students.
Educational Implications

This study indicates that both special education teachers and general education teachers feel they are responsible for meeting the social emotional needs of their students, however, they do not feel confident in their abilities to do so. Social Emotional Learning can have as significant of an impact on students as academic learning. It would be beneficial for school administrators to be educated on the importance of social emotional learning and its impact on student success. This should result in a stronger, school-wide understanding and appreciation of social emotional learning. Administrators should recognize that social emotional learning is not exclusively the responsibility of school psychologists and teachers, but all school personnel. If administrators emphasize social emotional learning as much they do academic learning, the result may lead to the implementation of more professional development opportunities; therefore providing teachers with the confidence they need to successfully meet the social emotional needs of their students.

Recommendations for Further Research

Since this study is limited to a small number of certified special education and general education teachers in two known school districts in Cook and Will County, it would be recommended to duplicate this study or a similar study on classroom teachers’ attitudes and competency of the SEL standards with a larger and more diverse sample set to ensure the generalizability of the results found here. The sample set should include general and special education teachers, school psychologists, school administrators, and school counselors. Additionally, Participants should be asked if they include Social Emotional Learning Standards in any of their planning. It is vital that special education and general education teachers recognize the need to provide specifically designed instruction that meets the social, emotional
and vocation needs of all students, especially those with disabilities. It is also important that SEL is generalized and consistent. In order for this to occur, both special education and general education teachers need to understand the importance of teaching social emotional skills to students with disabilities and understand how to promote social emotional learning in the best ways possible (Hoffman, 2009; Pham & Murray, 2015). Therefore, continuous research on educating others on the effectiveness of SEL is necessary and important.

Illinois was innovative in being the first state to develop and implement specific social emotional learning standards for K-12 students in 2004 based on research that indicated academic achievement and readiness to learn is directly linked to social and emotional development (Hoffman, 2009). However, because SEL standards are still relatively under-recognized compared to academic standards, more research needs to be conducted on the topic of social emotional learning, and the findings should be communicated effectively to educators. An effective way to ensure the exposure of educators to developments in the areas of social emotional development and learning is to offer substantial professional development opportunities. Professional development opportunities could include workshops, in-service training, or conferences pertaining to topics related to social emotional learning and development. Professional development opportunities would effectively provide educators with the background knowledge of SEL standards as well as provide channels to the implementation of a social emotional curriculum into everyday learning. It would also be beneficial for school administrators to be educated further on the importance of SEL. If educated further, administrators should demand more professional development opportunities for teachers to ensure their students’ student social emotional needs are being met.
Furthermore, many participants indicated that they were undecided on some of the questions asked in the survey. This is an indication that educators are unsure of several topics related to social emotional learning and development. This provides evidence that further data must be gathered to provide more specific information on educators’ attitudes towards SEL. A follow-up survey may be necessary to provide more specific information about the responses of the participants in this study, as well as provide information on whether participants’ attitudes or knowledge have changed.
Summary

The main areas of research that were included in this study were education legislation, a background on social emotional learning, the State of Illinois SEL standards, and the benefits of successful social emotional development. A survey was developed to obtain information on the knowledge and attitudes of the SEL by certified special education and general education teachers. Though the majority of participants indicated that they are familiar with the SEL standards, many participants also indicated that they do not feel adequately prepared through their university or professional development preparation to identify and meet the social emotional needs of their students. Nearly half of the participants indicated that their district does not offer adequate professional development or workshops that address social emotional learning. The majority of participants indicated that there is a need for further professional development in the area of social emotional learning. Researchers must continue to examine the topic of social emotional learning and development, and educators must be provided with more appropriate professional development opportunities to aid them in meeting the social emotional needs of their students.
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Appendix A

Survey
The purpose of this survey is to explore teacher attitudes towards social and emotional learning in schools. Your participation in this research is voluntary. All surveys are anonymous and your completion of this survey implies consent. Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey.

Please begin by providing this background information:

1. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male

2. What is your age?

3. What grade(s) do you currently teach?

4. How many years have you taught in the general education setting?

5. How many years have you taught Special Education?

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - Bachelors
   - Bachelors Plus
7. I am familiar with the State of Illinois Social Emotional Standards

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

8. I believe that it is my role as a teacher to meet the social and emotional needs of my students

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

9. Please indicate if you have used any of the following strategies to assess and progress monitor students’ social and emotional needs (click all that apply):

- Direct classroom observation
- Information from other teachers or administrators
- Information from psychologist or counselor
- Behavioral checklists/inventories
- Psychological tests
- Educational tests
10. Please indicate if you have used any of the following intervention techniques (Click all that apply):

- Discussion with Student
- Purposeful seating and grouping
- Individual behavior plans
- Classroom behavior plans
- Collaboration with family
- Schoolwide prevention programs
- Published social skills curriculum

Other (please specify)

11. I feel well prepared through my university preparation to identify and meet the social and emotional needs of my students

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Agree

12. I feel somewhat prepared through my university preparation to identify and meet social emotional needs of my students

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
13. I do not feel prepared through my university preparation to identify and meet the social and emotional needs of my students

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Agree

14. There are many workshops and professional development opportunities offered in my district, that are helpful in meeting students' social and emotional needs

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

15. I feel that there is a need for more workshops and professional development opportunities in my district to help in meeting students' social and emotional needs

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

16. Additional Comments:
See how easy it is to create a survey.
Appendix B

CITI Completion Report