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Educators' Implementation and Use of Social and Emotional Learning Early in the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) has had multifaceted effects on students, their families, and the educators who support their learning. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the most notable changes for schools was the sudden move to distance learning—an unprecedented disruption to academic, social, and emotional instruction. Social and emotional learning (SEL) skills play an important role in human development by supporting academic success and overall well-being, including skills for effectively coping with stressors such as those imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Building on previous work, we created the Crisis Response Educator SEL Survey (CRESS) to examine predictors of SEL implementation during the pandemic. Structural equation models (SEMs) were used to predict: (a) educators' reported challenges implementing SEL during distance learning; (b) educator SEL implementation with students and use of social and emotional (SE) strategies for themselves; and (c) educator self-judgment and emotional exhaustion. Predictors included school/district guidance to support SEL, school/district support of educator SE needs, and the priority on SEL for the school and the educator. Our sample consisted of 219 educators committed to SEL who reported on their experience with SEL during distance learning toward the end of the 2019–2020 school year. Findings suggest that school/district support of educator SE needs predicts lower levels of challenge implementing SEL during distance learning and lower levels of educator burnout and self-judgment, whereas greater school/district guidance to support SEL was associated with more SEL implementation with students and more educator use of SE strategies for themselves.

Impact and Implications
Schools and districts are prioritizing social and emotional learning (SEL) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our findings suggest that prioritizing SEL, without guidance and support for educators' social and emotional needs, is insufficient in overcoming challenges implementing SEL during this crisis. In this study, educators whose schools or districts provided social and emotional support and SEL guidance to their staff reported fewer challenges implementing SEL during distance learning, less self-judgment and emotional exhaustion, and used SEL with their students more.

Keywords: social and emotional learning (SEL), educator, COVID-19, structural equation models

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Widespread interruption of in-person schooling in response to the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) presented educators with novel and compounding challenges in the spring of 2020. Educators had to quickly transition to teaching remotely—an unfamiliar mode of instruction, for which many were not trained, and which most schools had limited capacity to provide—while coping with the direct threat of COVID-19 (Diliberti & Kaufman, 2020). This threat and the abrupt transition to distance learning put enormous stress on school systems, educators, and the students and families they serve (Kraft et al., 2020). The full extent of the effects of stressors related to the COVID-19 pandemic on student's social and emotional (SE) well-being and associated academic growth is still emerging. Prior research suggests that major disruptions in students' routines, reduced social interaction, and increased parental stress could negatively impact children's psychosocial health (Condon et al., 2020; Connell & Strambler, 2021). These concerns are confirmed by emerging evidence of diminished student mental health, well-being, and academic performance (Courtney et al., 2020; Engzell et al., 2021; Kuhfeld et al., 2020; Marques de Miranda et al., 2020). Additionally, if schools reduced SE support, this could compound the harmful effects of isolation and trauma on learning (Cipriano et al., 2020; Yoder et al., 2020).

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Commonly, schools provide SE support through social and emotional learning (SEL) programming, or the teaching of interrelated cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies that support psychosocial functioning and development (Collaborative for Academic, Social, & Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020). However, prioritizing SEL by policy mandate (e.g., adoption of state SEL standards) may result in perfunctory prioritization, with insufficient implementation guidance or support for educators, including support for their own SE needs (Dusenbury et al., 2018; Wanless & Domitrovich, 2015). In addition, school-level prioritization and support for SEL, as well as SEL classroom instruction practices, varied greatly before and at the onset of the pandemic (Dusenbury et al., 2018; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Yet we know very little about SEL implementation during the pandemic and the factors associated with it. The current article addresses this gap in knowledge by presenting findings from the Crisis Response Educator SEL Survey (CRESS) administered early in the COVID-19 pandemic (near the close of the 2019–2020 school year). We examine how educators, including both instructional (e.g., teachers, paraprofessionals) and noninstructional (e.g., administrators, school counselors) school staff, used SEL with students and in their own lives early in the pandemic, as well as factors that facilitated or diminished SEL implementation.

Social and Emotional Learning

A sizable body of research indicates that students who participate in SEL programs tend to experience less anxiety, perform better academically, are more attentive and less hyperactive, and are less aggressive in school (Corcoran et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2011). However, for students to experience these benefits, SEL must be implemented such that students are exposed to an adequate degree and quality of SEL. Hence, districts and schools, as well as the instructional and noninstructional staff working in them, play essential roles in ensuring successful SEL implementation.

Implementation of SEL

Important ways in which districts and schools influence SEL implementation are by prioritizing SEL and providing guidance and resources to do so (Domitrovich et al., 2015; Kendziora & Yoder, 2016; Meyers et al., 2019). Additionally, school SEL leadership teams made up of instructional and noninstructional staff can promote staff receptivity of and commitment to SEL (Meyers et al., 2019). Studies have found a positive culture for SEL to be associated with higher-quality implementation and greater use of Supplemental Materials by teachers in implementing SEL curriculum (Domitrovich et al., 2019). Additionally, schools can support educators' implementation by providing ongoing implementation assistance and guidance to support educators sufficiently (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016; Meyers et al., 2019). Though SEL is often implemented by teachers, noninstructional personnel also play an important role in this work.

As school leaders, administrators are central to the success of SEL implementation. Administrators must develop an understanding of SEL themselves and support school staff in developing the commitment and requisite SE competencies (Brackett et al., 2019; Elias et al., 2006; Greenberg et al., 2017). Theoretical models and SEL implementation approaches reflect the importance of developing educators' SE competencies as part of effective SEL (Brackett et al., 2019; Greenberg et al., 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Relatedly, mindfulness-based programs to support teachers' SE development have been associated with increases in the emotional support teachers provide their students (Hirshberg et al., 2020; Jennings et al., 2017; Molloy Elreda et al., 2019). However, this relation may be driven by mindfulness rather than the use of SE skills to develop SE competence. This presumed relationship between educators' use of SE skills and their implementation of SEL with students is empirically underexplored (Brackett et al., 2019; Greenberg et al., 2017; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Additionally, successful SEL implementation involves establishing a caring and supportive school climate (Kennedy, 2019). Because the mental health and well-being-related training of school counselors, social workers, and psychologists aligns well with SEL, school mental health professionals support the development of these nonacademic SE skills in students (Bowers et al., 2017). In this way, school mental health professionals are ideally situated to guide administrators and teachers in implementing SEL content. Further, they can support all educators' SE needs (Bowers et al., 2017).

Stress and burnout have been identified as a problem not only for teachers but also for school mental health professionals (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Literature on well-being and burnout, especially in teachers, also relates to the effectiveness of SEL implementation. Research has found that teachers with diminished well-being and poor SE competencies were more likely to have students that report decreased well-being and prosocial behavior and increased disruptive behavior (Braun et al., 2020; Herman et al., 2018). Similarly, teacher burnout symptoms have been associated with a biological marker of student stress (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). There is also evidence that teacher stress can get in the way of implementing SEL programming (Larson et al., 2018). In contrast, Braun et al. (2020) found that teachers with better emotional regulation and greater well-being had students with greater well-being. Additionally, interventions designed to support educators in developing SE competence have been linked to improved well-being and reduced burnout and have been suggested for use with administrators and school counselors (e.g., Jennings et al., 2013; Kim & Lambie, 2018; Wells & Klocko, 2018). Such interventions often include mindfulness approaches designed to develop an attitude of acceptance or nonjudgment and the capacity to maintain attention on the present moment (Lomas et al., 2017). Training teachers in mindfulness, often alongside teacher SE programming, has been associated with increased teacher well-being, coping, and responsive teaching (Jennings et al., 2017; Klingbeil & Renshaw, 2018). This may be in part because an accepting, nonjudgmental appraisal of a situation is a form of emotion regulation (Garland et al., 2017). In contrast, self-judgment has been associated with increased distress (Moè & Katz, 2020), which might relate to how educators perceive challenge during distance learning and experience emotional exhaustion. Given the evidence on the effectiveness of SEL and the unique, but important roles each educator plays in enhancing SEL in schools, implementing SEL during times of crisis is a promising approach for helping students and educators cope with additional crisis-related stressors.

SEL and Crisis

Whereas SE support is associated with readiness to learn and academic success, instability and trauma diminish SEL and

academics (Cipriano et al., 2020; Yoder et al., 2020). The social isolation associated with some crises can especially increase the risk of trauma. A 2013 study of pandemic disasters and the related disease-containment public health responses compared rates of posttraumatic stress disorder in families that had been isolated or quarantined during outbreaks of the H1N1, SARS, and avian influenza to families that had not (Sprang & Silman, 2013). The study found that 30% of isolated or quarantined children and 25% of quarantined parents experienced posttraumatic stress disorder, compared with 1% and 7% of children and parents, respectively, who had not been isolated or quarantined (Sprang & Silman, 2013). Since COVID-19 resulted in similar types of quarantine, it is probable that teachers, students, and their families may be similarly affected.

The direct threat of COVID-19 increased isolation, and the immediate transition to distance learning also likely increased educators' stress, exacerbating a long-standing problem of stress and burnout in teachers and other educators (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Kraft et al., 2020; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Evidence indicates that teachers who leave the profession often do so because of burnout, which is associated with a cycle of excessive emotional demands leading to emotional exhaustion (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Because teachers' own SE well-being and capacities are fundamental to fostering academic and social–emotional growth in students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), support of teachers' and other educators' SE well-being, especially in times of increased emotional demands, could ameliorate emotional exhaustion, increase SEL implementation with students, increase educators' use of SE strategies for themselves, and improve the quality of their interactions with students (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Kraft et al., 2020).

Some school leaders have turned to SEL to provide the type of support educators need to support one another and serve students well in these challenging times (Brackett et al., 2020; Yoder et al., 2020). How schools prioritize SEL and the kind of guidance and support they provide educators likely impact social support for students and educators. Since coping with the pandemic requires careful attention to relationships and SE skill development in schools, SEL can serve as a useful framework and set of strategies to promote healthy management of emotions to support the wellness of educators and students alike (Cipriano et al., 2020).

The Present Study

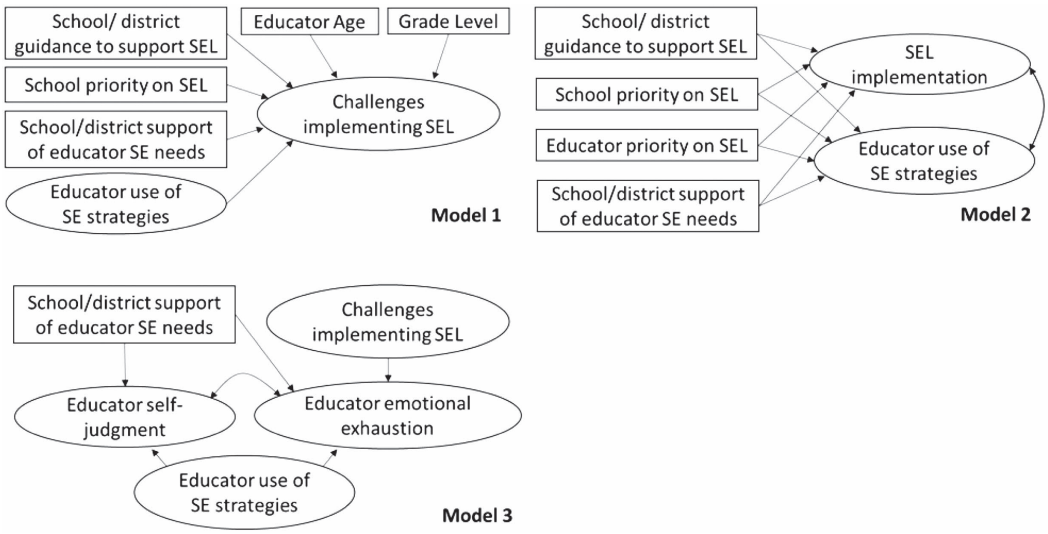
The objective of this study was to better understand educators' use of SEL with students, educators' use of SE strategies in their own lives, and to examine the factors related to the use of SEL, specifically in the early months of the pandemic. Subsequently, we addressed three research questions and related hypotheses (see Figure 1):

1. What school and educator factors influence the degree of educator-reported challenge implementing SEL with students during distance learning? We hypothesized that lower levels of challenge implementing SEL during distance learning would be predicted by greater: School/district guidance to support SEL, school priority on SEL, school/district support of educator SE needs, and educator use of SE strategies for themselves (Meyers et al., 2019).

2. What is the association between, and what school and educator factors predict, SEL implementation with students and educator use of SE strategies for themselves? We anticipated a positive association between reported SEL implementation with students and use of SEL by educators (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). We hypothesized educators would report more SEL implementation with students

Figure 1

Conceptual Models Predicting Educators' Reported Challenges Implementing SEL, SEL Implementation With Students and Educator Use of SE Strategies, and Self-Judgment and Emotional Exhaustion



Note. These conceptual models depict the theorized relationships between observed (items as boxes) and latent (scales as ovals) variables. SEL = Social and emotional learning; SE = Social and emotional.

and more use of SE strategies for themselves with greater: School/district guidance to support SEL, school/district and educators' own priority on SEL, and school/district support for educator SE needs (Meyers et al., 2019).

3. What is the relationship between educator self-judgment and emotional exhaustion, and how are each of these predicted by school/district support of educator SE needs, challenges implementing SEL during distance learning, and educator use of SE strategies for themselves? We hypothesized that self-judgment and emotional exhaustion would be correlated (Garland et al., 2017) and that both would be inversely predicted by school/district support of SEL and educator use of SE strategies for themselves. We also anticipated that educators reporting greater challenges implementing SEL during distance learning would report greater levels of emotional exhaustion.

Method

Participants

In the sample of 219 educators from across the United States (Pacific West 19%, Southwest 10%, Midwest 18%, Southeast 25%, Northeast 25%, Puerto Rico 2%), educators identified as Native American (1%), Asian or Pacific Islander (2%), other or from two or more races (5%), Hispanic or Latino (15%), African American or Black (11%), and White (67%); the majority of educators identified as women (91%). Equal portions of the sample identified as instructional staff (e.g., general education teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals) and noninstructional (e.g., school administrators, instructional coaches, psychologists, social workers, school counselors); educators reported working primarily in urban (47.5%) and suburban (37%) areas with elementary (65%), middle (36%) and high school (30%) students. Years of experience in education ranged from 1 to 41 ($M = 17$, $SD = 8.9$); age ranged from 24 to 68 ($M = 46$, $SD = 10$). More educators reported no school- or district-wide SEL approach since the pandemic started (53%) than before it started (31%).

Procedure

After institutional review board approval, educators completed a 63-item Qualtrics survey in June 2020. Educators were recruited through the Collaborative for Academic, Social, & Emotional Learning (CASEL) and PureEdge Twitter accounts and via an invitation to PureEdge's 21,000-educator mailing list. Respondents were provided a list of SEL and well-being resources and a descriptive report of preliminary results (see https://osf.io/urvfe/).

Measures

In the 2 years before the COVID-19 pandemic, our research team had been developing the Emotion-Focused Educator SEL Survey (EFESS) to measure SEL implementation with students and educator use of SE strategies for themselves (Strambler et al., 2021). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we built on this work to develop the CRESS to explore SEL implementation and educator use of SE strategies for themselves in the context of distance learning. We also included survey items from subscales of previously validated measures (i.e., self-judgment, emotional exhaustion). We chose to use subscales and individual items to keep the survey short and minimize burden on already stressed educators. See https://osf.io/urvfe/ for a complete list of domains and items. We examined the reliability of scales in this sample using composite reliability with Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) estimation (see Analysis).

Challenges Implementing SEL During Distance Learning

Educators evaluated nine Challenges Implementing SEL during distance learning (e.g., instructional resources for SEL distance learning, parent/guardian support for SEL, finding the time to focus on SEL, or other competing demands) by rating each on a five-point scale from *not challenging at all* (0) to *extremely challenging* (4). In this sample, the Challenges Implementing SEL subscale (Items 36–44) had good reliability, $\rho = .82$, 95% CI [.78, .86], with two items removed (see Results).

SEL Implementation With Students

Educators were asked to indicate how often in the last week they had assigned educational or student activities related to each of seven common SEL focus areas (identifying emotions, labeling emotions, managing emotions, managing behaviors, social problem solving, empathy/perspective-taking, kindness), rating items from *not at all* (0) to *a lot* (3). In this sample, the SEL Implementation With Students subscale (Items 22–28) had excellent reliability, $\rho = .94$, 95% CI [.92, .96].

Educator Use of SE Strategies for Themselves

Educators reported how often in the past week they had used six SE strategies or activities for themselves (regulate emotions, conflict resolution strategy, learning about SE skills, consider other perspective/empathetic toward others, kindness toward self), rating items from *never* (0) to *daily* (3). In this sample, the Educator Use of SE Strategies for themselves subscale (Items 45–50) had acceptable reliability, $\rho = .79$, 95% CI [.74, .83].

Guidance, Support, and Priority of SEL

Five items measured aspects of support for SEL. Rather than treating these items as a scale, three of the items were used individually and two were averaged, producing four observed predictors. Educators were asked about the level of School/District Guidance to Support SEL during distance learning (Item 18), School/District Priority on SEL during the pandemic (Item 19), their own (Educator) Priority on SEL during the pandemic (Item 20), and their perceptions of the level of School/District Support for Educators' SE Needs (Items 21 and 53 averaged). Items 18, 21, and 53 were rated from *none at all/not at all* (0) to *a lot* (3), whereas Items 19 and 20 were rated from *not a priority at all* (0) to *high priority* (3).

Self-Judgment

The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire's Non-Judgment subscale asks educators to rate statements related to self-judgment for the past week from *never or very rarely true* (1) to *very often or*

always true (5); items are typically reverse-coded (Baer et al., 2008). For example, educators were asked to rate the statement, "I tell myself I shouldn't be feeling how I'm feeling." The Self-Judgment subscale (Items 54–58) showed good reliability in this sample, ρ = .88, 95% CI [.85, .91].

Emotional Exhaustion

Three items from the Maslach Burnout Inventory Emotional Exhaustion subscale asked educators to rate the frequency of negative experiences related to their work in the past week (Maslach et al., 1996) from *never* (0) to *daily* (4). In this sample, the Emotional Exhaustion subscale (Items 59–61) showed good reliability, ρ = .89, 95% CI [.86, .91].

Analytic Strategy

We began by examining descriptive statistics using SPSS (IBM Corp, 2019), including scale and item correlations and *t*-tests; we determined that instructional and noninstructional staff did not have statistically different item responses. After defining our research questions and hypotheses, we first specified a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) model for each question. We calculated Raykov's Composite reliability (see Measures) for each subscale (Graham, 2009); this produces robust estimates of reliability by taking into account that items load differentially on latent factors (McNeish, 2018). After examining modification indices, we correlated identified errors within factors if doing so made theoretical sense. Then we added the structural regressions and exogenous (observed) variables to make SEMs using Mplus 8.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017). Model fit was evaluated using: CFI and TLI of 0.90 or higher, RMSEA below 0.10, and item loadings over 0.40 (Hooper et al., 2008).

We handled missing data with FIML, using auxiliary demographic variables (i.e., educational role, years in education, gender, age, urbanicity, students with Individualized Education Plans, race, ethnicity), an approach that can help the data meet missing-at-random (MAR) requirements (Graham, 2009). We compared an unrestricted model, which includes estimates of covariances among all exogenous paths with a model with all anticipated null paths restricted, and retained the better fitting model.

Results

T-tests did not identify any significant mean differences in item responses for instructional and noninstructional educators. See Supplemental Materials for item descriptive statistics, scale, and item correlations, and complete model fit statistics including confidence intervals.

Model 1: Predictors of Educator-Reported Challenges Implementing SEL

The two-factor CFA of Educator Use of SE Strategies and Challenges Implementing SEL showed good model fit, $\chi^2(62) = 112.9$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .06, CFI = .93, TLI = .92. The unrestricted SEM model fit the data better, $\chi^2(139) = 229.5$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .06, CFI = .91, TLI = .87, and was retained over the hypothesized, restricted model, $\chi^2(167) = 403.1$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .08, CFI = .76, TLI = .73. Of the predictors, only School/District Support of Educator SE Needs significantly predicted educator-reported Challenges Implementing SEL. Intercorrelations between School/District Guidance to Support SEL, School Priority on SEL, and School/District Support of Educator SE Needs were large, and School/District Guidance to Support SEL and Educator Use of SE Strategies showed a moderate correlation (see Figure 2). For these analyses, we removed two items (i.e., educator's technological skills [Item 39]; managing home and professional responsibilities [Item 44]) from the Challenges Implementing SEL factor because their standardized factor loadings were below 0.40. Errors were correlated between items related to students' or families' use of technology (Items 36 and 37) and between items related to access to technological resources (Items 36 and 38).

Model 2: Predictors of the Degree of Educator Use of SE Strategies and SEL Implementation With Students

The two-factor CFA of Educator Use of SE Strategies and Challenges Implementing SEL showed good model fit, $\chi^2(60) = 96.9$, $p = .002$., RMSEA = .05, CFI = .97, TLI = .96. We retained the unrestricted SEM model, $\chi^2(104) = 146.4$, $p = .004$, RMSEA = .04, CFI = .97, TLI = .96, because it fit the data better than the restricted model, $\chi^2(110) = 281.7$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .08, CFI = .87, TLI = .84. SEL Implementation With Students and Educator Use of SE Strategies showed a small but statistically significant correlation (see Figure 3). School/District Guidance to Support SEL strongly predicted SEL Implementation With Students and moderately predicted Educator Use of SE Strategies. As in Model 1, the school/district predictors in the model were all highly correlated, except Educator Priority on SEL.

Model 3: Relations Among School/District Support of Educator SE Needs, Educator Use of SE Strategies, Challenges Implementing SEL, Self-Judgment, and Emotional Exhaustion

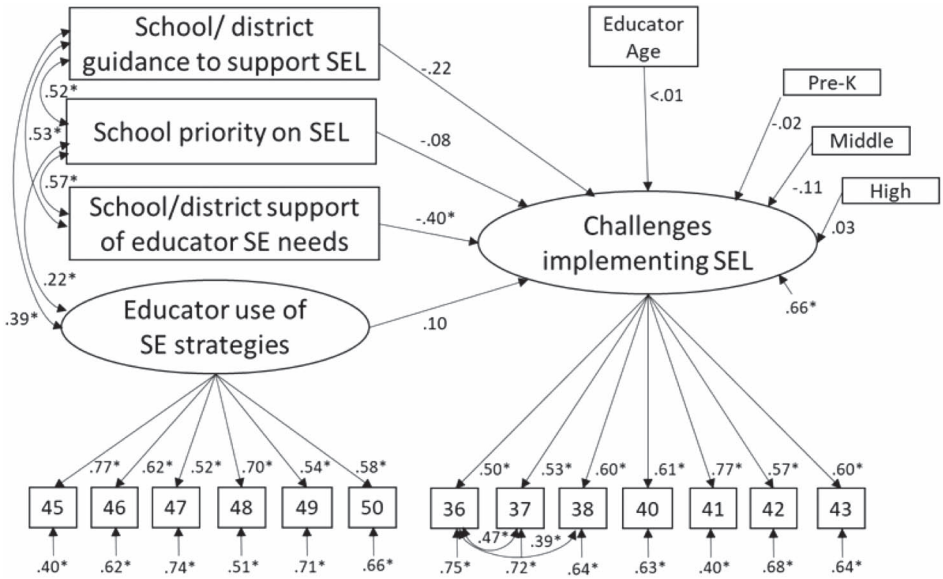
The four-factor CFA of Self-Judgment, Emotional Exhaustion, Educator Use of SE Strategies and Challenges Implementing SEL showed good model fit, $\chi^2(181) = 278.5$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .05, CFI = .94, TLI = .93. The unrestricted SEM model fit the data better, $\chi^2(199) = 335.6$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .06, CFI = .93, TLI = .91, and was retained over the restricted model, $\chi^2(202) = 382.6$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .06, CFI = .90, TLI = .89. School/District Support of Educator SE Needs inversely and weakly predicted both Self-Judgment and Emotional Exhaustion (see Figure 4). Self-Judgment and Emotional Exhaustion were weakly correlated. Educator Use of SE Strategies did not predict Self-Judgment or Emotional Exhaustion as hypothesized, and School/District Support of Educator SE Needs and Challenges Implementing SEL were strongly negatively correlated.

Discussion

The present study used the CRESS to examine the relationship between educators' SEL implementation with students and their use of SE strategies for themselves; the role of school/district guidance to support SEL and support of educator SE needs; and how these and other school and educator factors relate to the challenges

Figure 2

Model 1: Predictors of Educator-Reported Challenges Implementing SEL



Note. This structural equation model predicts educators' challenges implementing SEL during distance learning, with school/district guidance to support SEL, school priority on SEL, school/district support of educator SE needs, and educator use of SE strategies for themselves as predictors. Statistics are standardized regression coefficients. SEL = Social and emotional learning; SE = Social and emotional.
* $p < .05$.

implementing SEL during distance learning early in the COVID-19 pandemic. Results showed that educators who perceived greater school/district support of their SE needs also perceived less challenge implementing SEL during distance learning. In addition, school/district guidance to support SEL predicted both SEL implementation with students and educator use of SE, and inversely predicted self-judgment and emotional exhaustion. Relatedly, educators experiencing greater challenge implementing SEL during distance learning reported greater levels of emotional exhaustion. Notable among the results are also strong intercorrelations among the school/district predictors. We organize our discussion around these findings.

The Role of School-Level Guidance in Support of SEL

The finding that school/district guidance to support SEL predicted both SEL implementation with students and educator use of SE strategies points toward the importance of providing SEL guidance to all educators to benefit their students and themselves. Future research might examine whether school/district support for educator use of SE strategies has a unique relationship with educator use of SE strategies for themselves. Interestingly, the relationship between educator use of SE strategies and SEL implementation with students was not particularly strong. This could mean that SE strategies, at least the ones included in the measure, may not be as important a prerequisite for effective SEL implementation with students. This also indicates a need to further examine the associations between educator use of SE strategies and SEL implementation with students. Notable among the null findings is that school priority on SEL did not relate to SEL implementation with students or educator use of SE strategies. This may reflect the difference between talking the talk—saying SEL is a high priority without providing guidance—and walking the walk—providing guidance that reinforces SEL as a high priority.

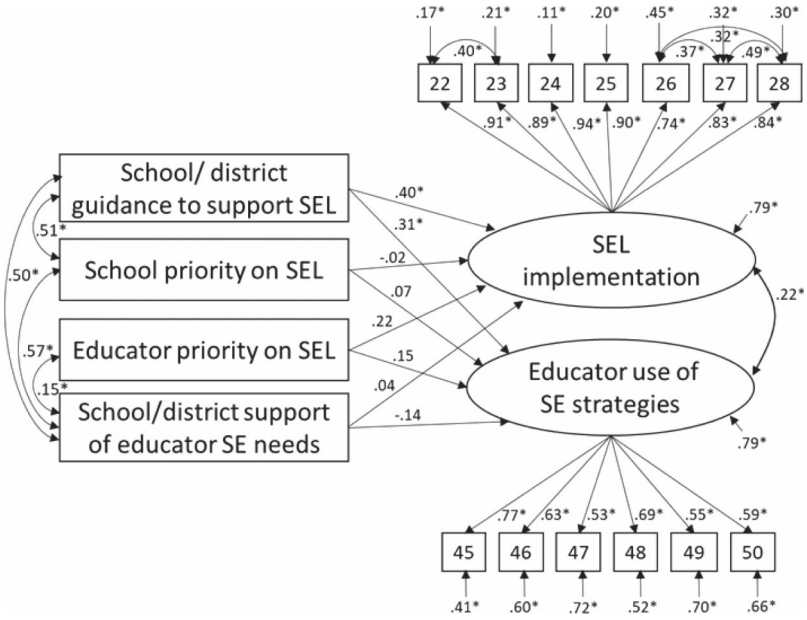
The Role of School/District Support of Educator SE Needs

As hypothesized, educators who perceived their school/district as supportive of their own SE needs perceived less challenge implementing SEL. At the same time, educators' reported use of SE strategies was not related to their report of challenges implementing SEL during distance learning. This was unexpected since use of SE strategies might be thought to decrease the perception of challenges implementing SEL during distance learning (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Similarly, neither the perceived degree of school/district guidance to support SEL nor the school's priority on SEL predicted educators' perceived challenges implementing SEL during distance learning. This may mean that the guidance being provided by schools and districts needs to include more focus on how to address the challenges of implementing SEL.

Further, educator self-judgment and emotional exhaustion were inversely predicted by school/district support of educators' SE needs, and educators experiencing greater challenge implementing SEL during distance learning reported greater levels of emotional exhaustion. However, educator use of SE strategies for themselves did not predict self-judgment or emotional exhaustion as expected. While this finding raises questions about the hypothesized role of educator use of SE strategies for themselves in preventing burnout, emotional exhaustion is just one facet of burnout; educator use of SE strategies for themselves may influence other facets of educator

Figure 3

Model 2: Predictors of the Degree of Educator Use of SE Strategies and SEL Implementation With Students



Note. This structural equation model predicts SEL implementation with students and educator use of SE strategies for themselves, with school/district guidance to support SEL, school priority on SEL, educator priority on SEL, and school/district support of educator SE needs as predictors. Statistics are standardized regression coefficients. SEL = Social and emotional learning; SE= Social and emotional.

* $p < .05$.

burnout. Alternately the list of SEL practices examined in the survey may not fully reflect the most important SE strategies for educator use (Greenberg et al., 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Interventions with educators to mitigate burnout often rely on mindfulness, which focuses on present-moment awareness and fostering nonjudgment (Jennings et al., 2013; Klingbeil & Renshaw, 2018; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). These facets are specific to mindfulness and may play an important role in addressing educator burnout. It might be that the SE strategies educators become familiar with when they are teaching SEL to students, without the inclusion of mindfulness, are not sufficient to alleviate burnout. Further research is needed to examine the impact of SEL implementation on educators, including examination of SEL approaches that do and do not incorporate mindfulness, to better understand the mechanisms that prevent burnout in educators.

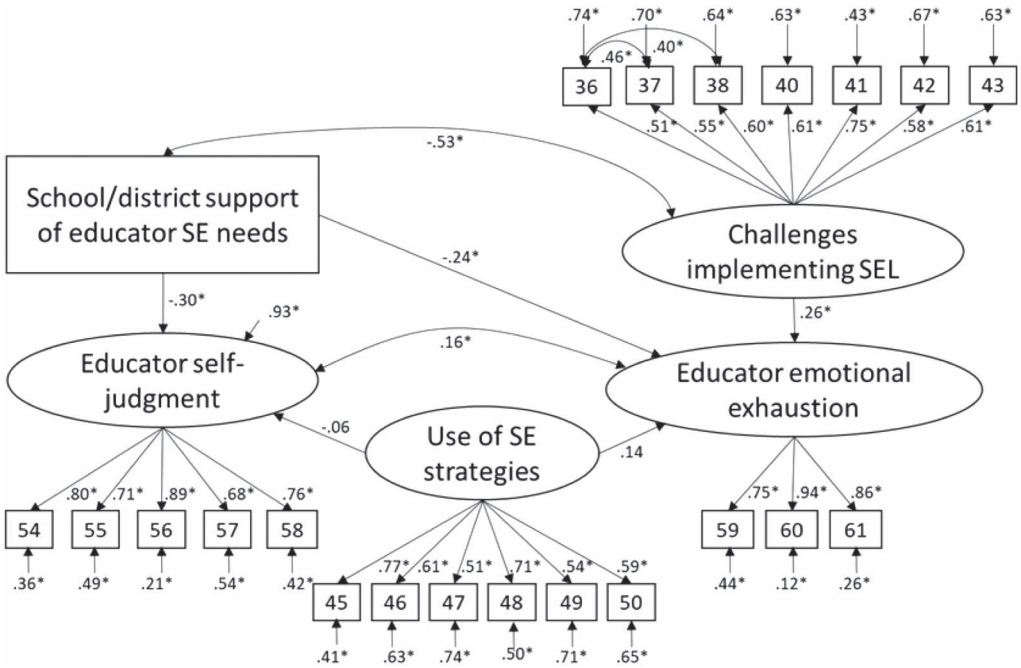
Relations Between School/District Guidance, Support, and Priority of SEL

The strong correlations between the three school/district predictors (i.e., school/district guidance to support SEL, school priority on SEL, school/district support of educator SE needs) and the weak correlation between SEL implementation with students and educator use of SE strategies may point to a more complex picture. For example, it may be that guidance for implementing SEL with students and guidance to support educator SEL are distinct and play different roles in how educators perceive challenges and how they use SE strategies. The weaker correlation between the three school/district predictors and educators' use of SE strategies as well as school/district support of educator SE needs may also indicate that a commitment to SEL does not automatically translate into a school environment where educators' SE needs are supported. Considering the concerns about educator burnout and its relations to SEL, future research should examine implementation of SEL not only in terms of how it relates to SEL implementation with students but also in terms of implementation with educators, including how to support educators' SE needs.

School/district support of educator SE needs was not only strongly associated with lower levels of challenge implementing SEL during distance learning, it was also moderately predictive of lower educator self-judgment and emotional exhaustion, whereas educator use of SE strategies for themselves was not predictive of either and educator use of SE strategies for themselves was only weakly correlated with SEL implementation with students. This may mean that educators who use SE strategies themselves are not much better equipped to implement SEL with students and that use of SE strategies may not be the most effective way to promote educator well-being. Instead, the evidence points toward the importance of school or district-provided guidance to support SEL, consistent with other findings (Domitrovich et al., 2015; Kennedy, 2019; Meyers et al., 2019). Given our findings and the most recent available data on educator burnout and turnover, along

Figure 4

Model 3: Relations Among School/District Support of Educator SE Needs, Educator Use of SE Strategies, Challenges Implementing SEL, Self-Judgment, and Emotional Exhaustion



Note. This structural equation model examines the relationship between self-judgment and emotional exhaustion, with school/district support and educator use of SE strategies for themselves as predictors of both, and challenges implementing SEL during distance learning as a predictor of emotional exhaustion. Statistics are standardized regression coefficients. SEL = Social and emotional learning; SE = Social and emotional.
* $p < .05$.

with increased stressors associated with the COVID-19 crisis, schools and districts may need to put an increased focus on how to support educators' SE needs (Brackett et al., 2020; Diliberti & Kaufman, 2020; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005).

Limitations

This study presents self-reported, cross-sectional data on a sample of educators who were recruited via professional organizations focused on SEL. As a result, findings may be limited in their generalizability to educators with knowledge of and interest in SEL. Future research should involve a larger sample that includes educators with and without an affiliation to an organization focused on SEL. Further, this study took place at a time when most schools were distance learning. As districts and schools moved to other forms of instruction (e.g., hybrid; simultaneous in-person/distance), gained experience, and adjusted, the guidance to support SEL and challenges of SEL implementation may have changed drastically. For this reason, it is imperative to continue to examine related research questions from data collected at later times in the pandemic. Lastly, in most models, we did not examine the predictive effects of educational role, years of experiences, gender, age, race, and ethnicity. Future investigations would be improved by a larger sample to allow for the inclusion of these key educator characteristics in models.

Implications

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the prioritization of SEL has been significant (Cipriano et al., 2020). Our findings suggest that prioritizing SEL, without other support, is insufficient for educators to overcome the challenges of implementing SEL during crisis; guidance on how educators can best implement SEL with their students and use SE strategies themselves is important. Schools, districts, and educators can support SEL in several ways. Schools/districts can provide a unifying vision to guide SEL implementation (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016; Meyers et al., 2019), which should not only focus on implementation with students (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016) but also on the SEL of educators (Schonert-Reichl, 2019). The CASEL's School Guide can serve as a resource for such implementation, to ensure that resources and needs are assessed, that professional learning aligns with the vision, and that the three aspects of SEL (student SEL, educator SE strategies use, and educator SE needs) are represented in the vision and incorporated throughout the school (Collaborative for Academic, Social, & Emotional Learning [CASEL], n.d.; Meyers et al., 2019).

Schools and districts can further demonstrate district and school-level prioritization of educators' SE needs by dedicating time for educator SE development during work hours. Similarly, schools can develop structures to support educator self-care, for example, by providing time to prioritize their own needs or space to get SE support (e.g., a virtual or physical debrief room). Other school

structures might include ways for instructional staff to briefly hand off responsibility during instruction if they have an emotional need to do so. Intentionally integrating school mental health professionals in developing these structures can further foster community and play a critical role in building and sustaining well-being and supportive relationships among all the adults in the school (Bowers et al., 2017). Further, schools and districts can promote an accepting and supportive work environment for educators to support SEL implementation and educators' SE needs (Rudasill et al., 2018).

The SE leadership framework can be used to promote a supportive school climate where educators feel validated. In this framework, SE strategies are used to promote responsible decision-making and democratic and affiliative leadership behaviors (Bowers et al., 2017). Similar to how mindfulness-based approaches have been found to support educators' well-being (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Lomas et al., 2017), cultivating a school climate of acceptance (the antithesis of judgment) may be one way that schools and districts, as well as the other instructional and noninstructional staff, can support each other's SE needs. For example, by offering emotional support through validation (i.e., showing understanding or empathy for another's experience), which has also been associated with increased well-being (Brackett et al., 2019; Pound, 2015). Additionally, mental health professionals can support administrators and instructional staff in translating school and district-provided guidance into practice both with students and for educators themselves. In closing, this study highlights the important role of school/district leadership in guiding SEL and in supporting educators' SE needs in ways that could reduce the effects of emotional exhaustion, so educators can better support students' social, emotional, and academic development.

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