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"Can You Hear Me?": Facilitating Social and Emotional Learning in Licking County Elementary School Students in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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"Can You Hear Me?"[1]:

Facilitating Social and Emotional Learning in Licking County

Elementary School Students in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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[1]Quote is a reference to the phrase that students and teachers often say before speaking in a video conferencing call. See Barbaro, Michael. *Odessa, Part 1: The School Year Begins* [The Daily]. The New York Times. https://the-daily.simplecast.com/episodes/20210226-a6InQGtR.

Abstract

As schooling moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring months of 2020, the educational experiences of students changed dramatically, especially those pertaining to social and emotional learning, an area of learning that the state of Ohio has adopted statewide standards. The purpose of this study is to understand these changes to the social and emotional learning practices in Licking County school districts, using the following question to guide data collection and analysis: How have teachers traditionally served elementary students' social and emotional learning in formal and informal ways? In order to account for the shifts brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, this study also examines how social and emotional learning has changed with the introduction of remote learning.

Using virtual interviews as the primary method for data collection, this study found that educators were struggling to find their footing in the remote setting and focusing on delivering quality content to their students despite the virtual format. For this reason, social and emotional learning took a backseat during remote learning in the spring of 2020 and in remote classrooms during the 2020-2021 school year. However, during the 2020-2021 school year, as remote teachers began mastering the art of teaching virtually, many worked to incorporate social and emotional learning back into their classrooms in new and exciting ways. Learning from both previous research on social and emotional learning and from the experiences of Licking County educators, we concluded that social and emotional learning must be implemented in school systems with intentionality, using different kinds of schoolwide programming and strategic classroom practices, even when students are learning in a virtual setting.

Keywords: Social and emotional learning, remote instruction, COVID-19, elementary students

Introduction

In March of 2020, K-12 schools in Licking County, Ohio shut down along with the rest of the world as infection rates caused by SARS-CoV-2 began to increase in the United States and other countries around the world. As schooling moved online, educators were forced to get creative with their lessons while students were expected to continue their education with little change in their academic performance. In addition to the added stress on educators and students who were navigating this new terrain, caregivers were expected to fill in the gaps that educators couldn't reach from virtual spaces (Fetters, 2020). For many families, especially those with school age children, the spring months of 2020 marked a long period of extreme hardship, anxiety, and sacrifice, some families having yet to recover, even now over a year since the initial school closures (Henderson, 2021).

The spring months of 2020 proved to be challenging not only for caregivers and families, but also for students. As schools transitioned to online learning, schooling changed radically. For many students, the ability to use a computer was a luxury that was only afforded to them while at school. A survey of 5,659 educators across the United States demonstrated this issue of widespread inaccessibility of these devices. According to the survey, "34 percent of respondents said that no more than one in four students were attending their remote classes, and a majority said fewer than half their students were attending" (Goodnough, 2020). Owning a household computer and having the technological skills to engage the new programs and tools that came along with online learning proved to be a privilege that many students did not have.

In addition to the issue of inaccessibility, we know that the mental health of students suffered severely since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a research brief for *Inside SEL*, Nick Woolf (2020) reports that "almost 33% [of high school students surveyed] reported

feelings of depression and anxiety since the closing of school buildings" (2020, para.16). The report speculates that these mental health issues can be largely attributed to the feelings of isolation coupled with the widespread loss of normalcy, both in the home environment and in the educational environment, that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused.

As we continue to learn more about the direct impact of COVID-19 on people's health, we must also consider the secondary consequences of the pandemic more broadly, including feelings of anxiety, depression, and fear that intensified during quarantine, social isolation, and remote instruction. Fortunately for K-12 students in Licking County, Ohio many structures were already in place to help them navigate these feelings, including social and emotional learning standards and highly skilled in-service teachers ready to implement them. This study invited teachers to reflect on how they did this work before the pandemic and how these instructional practices changed during remote instruction. The study offers recommendations for practice and policies around SEL teaching and learning should we need to continue with remote instruction for the foreseeable future.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand the ways that the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to remote learning have shaped the teaching experiences of educators in Licking County, Ohio, particularly how they delivered social and emotional learning opportunities to their students. We have scholarship addressing social and emotional learning before the transition to remote learning (e.g.,Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, and Gullotta, 2015; The Aspen Institute, 2017), but there are still many questions that have gone unanswered throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study is situated in this unanticipated shift to remote

learning and seeks to explore the gap(s) that now exist between services and students and their peers in relation to social and emotional development and wellbeing. Specifically, this study pursues a broad research question, with several related subquestions:

1. How have teachers traditionally served elementary students' social and emotional learning in formal and informal ways?

    a. What are the sources of support for SEL within the school setting?

    b. How have these supports changed in remote contexts?

    c. From educators' perspectives, what has been gained from the transition to remote learning and what has been lost as it relates to delivering SEL learning opportunities?

In the following section, I review the literature that relates to these lines of inquiry. Next, I more fully explore the methods I used to collect the data related to these research questions. Finally, I conclude with a course of action that will allow me to complete my study of this unique time in education.

Conceptual Framework

Strategies for Reviewing the Literature

In an effort to frame and contextualize the research study that I am conducting, I have done a thorough investigation of many existing studies and other pieces of literature on social and emotional learning in the United States education system (Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, and Gullotta, 2015; The Aspen Institute, 2017; Jackson, Porter, Easton, Blanchard, and Kiguel, 2021). Using both free databases like Google Scholar and university-provided databases like Education Research Complete with search terms such as "social and emotional learning",

"classroom environment", "virtual schools" and "in-person learning," I have found a wealth of resources researching the implementation and benefits of social and emotional learning in classrooms. My research goes as far back as 1979 with a research review of student achievement and attitudes in physical spaces, and as recent as 2021 with research focused on social and emotional learning implementation before and since the COVID-19 era. Using a source dated as 1979 would ordinarily affect the reputability of a conceptual framework such as this one, considering the evolving nature of the field of education as a social science. However, I decided to use it because I found it to be extremely comprehensive and useful in its review of student achievement and attitudes in relation to varying characteristics of the physical spaces that they were occupying in the classroom. Moreover, it offers an historical perspective regarding the contemporary trajectory of social and emotional learning in US public schools.

In my exploration of the existing research on the relationship between students' social-emotional development and schooling, I have found several important themes, including the history and defining factors of social and emotional learning as we know and recognize it today, the essential and formative relationship between all aspects of the classroom environment and students' development, and the formalization of social and emotional learning in schools. These themes have lead me to use the following questions to guide and organize my investigation:

- What is social and emotional learning (SEL) and why is it beneficial to young people?
- What do we know about in-person/traditional classroom environments as it relates to SEL?
- What do we know about online classroom environments as it relates to SEL?

- What do we know about social and emotional learning in these differing classroom environments?

What is Social and Emotional Learning and Why is it Beneficial to Young People?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) as a concept, as standards, and as formalized instructional practice are relatively new, established alongside the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) in 1994 by the Fetzer Institute. The Fetzer Institute is a formerly religiously-affiliated organization that believes in "a world where we understand we are all part of one human family and know our lives have purpose" (Fetzer Institute). Using these values, The Fetzer Institute worked with a group of educators, researchers, and child advocates to define and establish what social and emotional learning is and outline what it would look like in the educational experiences of young children (Weissberg et al., p. 5). Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, and Gullotta define social and emotional learning, based on the work of the Fetzer Institute, CASEL, and subsequent research on the implementation of social and emotional learning in schools, as "a conceptual framework to promote the social, emotional, and academic competence of young people and to coordinate school-family-community programming to address these educational goals" (p. 5). Social learning, in this context, is understood as the act of appropriately interacting with other people. Emotional learning is understood as the process of recognizing and regulating one's emotions. These areas of student learning and development are integral to academic learning, which tends to emphasize the acquisition and mastery of knowledge in the content areas, such as English Language Arts, math, science, and history, among others.

The work of the Fetzer Group and the benefits of a group like CASEL are further solidified by the Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. Interested in social and emotional learning, the Aspen Institute (2017) funded the Council of Distinguished Scientists, a group of experts from a wide range of fields from neuroscience to youth development, mental health advocates to positive psychologists to explore this dimension of human development. Together, they came to the agreement that SEL encompasses cognitive, social, and emotional processes, skills, and competencies, acknowledging in their consensus statements that social and emotional competencies are "essential to success in our schools, workplaces, homes, and communities" (p. 7). They also noted that "social, emotional, and cognitive capabilities are fundamentally intertwined [and] interdependent" (The Aspen Institute, p. 7).

It is generally agreed upon that social and emotional learning, when implemented with intentionality, significantly develops social skills that benefit students for the rest of their lives and appears to contribute to the academic success and emotional wellbeing of these students (The Aspen Institute, 2017; Jackson, Porter, Easton, Blanchard, and Kiguel, 2020; Hennessey and Humphrey, 2020; Haymovitz, Houseal-Allport, Lee, and Svistova, 2018). Exemplifying this agreement, in "Linking Social-Emotional Learning to Long-Term Success", Jackson and colleagues (2021) found that "at schools with higher value-added to social-emotional development, students are more likely to go on to graduate high school and enroll in a four-year college" (Jackson et al., p. 69). The Aspen Institute also found that evidence suggests that "addressing teacher specific social and emotional competencies result in improvements in a variety of indicators of teacher well-being" (The Aspen Institute, p. 8). Moreover, they found that investing in social and emotional learning in schools provides a significant return on

investment, in terms of public funds, competitive earnings, and labor productivity: $11 average return on investment for every $1 invested in schools (p. 11). Considering the evidence, it is more than apparent that investing in the implementation of social and emotional learning in schools is beneficial for every student and teacher involved.

What do we Know About In-Person/Traditional Classroom Environments?

Schooling in the United States is mostly done in-person and privileges the physical gathering of teachers, students, staff, and families within buildings and surrounded by learning materials. While some traditional public schools offer remote courses, only 5.7% of traditional public schools in the United States offer all courses available to in-person students remotely (NCES, 2018). Additionally, brick and mortar schools both public and private, including homeschooling, significantly outnumber digital schools in the United States, with approximately 315,000 students attending school digitally (Bielberg and West, 2014) of the 50.7 million school-aged students (NCES, 2018) in the United States[2]. Given these conditions of schooling, it is also common for SEL curricula to be delivered in-person, and the research suggests that this is actually extremely beneficial to the learning goals and outcomes of SEL instruction.

In "Space and Consequences: The Impact of Different Formal Learning Spaces on Instructor and Student Behavior," D. Christopher Brooks (2012) provides empirical evidence of a causal relationship between formal learning spaces and behavior, determining that instructors' behavior and the lessons and activities that they plan are affected by the shape of the classroom space, which in turn affects student productivity and focus (p. 8). In addition to Brooks' work, Carol S. Weinstein (1979) has made important contributions to our understanding of classroom space and learning. Weinstein (1979) found that classroom spaces that were varied in terms of

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[2] The COVID-19 pandemic has altered these numbers significantly due to forced school closures.

arrangement, aesthetics, and natural lighting' showed differences in achievement that were nonsignificant. However, she found significant evidence that the classroom environment can affect nonachievement behaviors and attitudes that indirectly impact the conditions for learning, such as dissatisfaction, anti-socialization, and aggression, especially when the classroom environment is overcrowded and noisy (p. 598). We can infer, based on her discoveries and our prior knowledge of schools and peer relationships, that the conditions for learning may be affected by these behaviors and attitudes. This work exemplifies the value of in-person classroom spaces by showing how learning environments can affect student learning and behavior. Using this knowledge in conversation with Brooks' aforementioned work, Brooks' assertion that "space shapes on-task student behavior" (Brooks, p. 8) is one that Weinstein would likely agree with and is incredibly applicable to the conversation about the traditional classroom environment and how it affects students' learning.

What Do We Know About Online Classroom Environments?

While it is evident that there are numerous benefits to having an intentionally designed physical classroom environment (Brooks, 2012; Brooks, 2011; Weinstein, 1979), there are also many students who benefit from the flexibility and accessibility that the online classroom environments offer. Virtual classrooms "expand educational access, provide high-quality learning opportunities, improve student outcomes and skills, allow for educational choice, and achieve administrative efficiency" (Barbour and Reeves, 2009, p. 402). Additionally, online learning has proven to be an extremely effective tool for students with learning differences or physical exceptionalities[3], offering them certain benefits that traditional schools cannot provide them

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[3] Acknowledging the evolving and ever changing nature of disability studies, I have decided to use the terms "learning differences" and "physical exceptionalities" in this section to represent students who have different learning capabilities and styles, as well as those with differing physical capabilities. This language reflects what the

(Repetto, Cavanaugh, Wayer, and Liu, 2010; Coy and Hirschmann, 2014). Online schools can be beneficial to these students by allowing them to find or create an environment that will be most accessible to their needs as well as giving them the opportunity to have a more individualized learning experience, often with a trusted adult working with their learning team as an advocate and a learning coach according to their needs (Coy and Hirschmann, 2014).

However, there are also challenges associated with online classroom environments and virtual schooling, particularly that success in virtual schools requires a great deal of discipline, motivation, and time management, which are all skills that are most common in adult learners (Barbour and Reeves, 2009, p. 402). Baum and McPherson (2019) report that in-person instruction time can be reduced without having a negative impact on learning, but that total elimination of the classroom environment and conducting courses completely virtually seems to lead to "lower course completion rates and worse outcomes" (p. 239). While this assertion is made in the context of pre-pandemic *higher education*, it is one that is relevant to the observations that K-12 teachers are making regarding the abrupt shift to online learning and how it has affected their students. As I will explore through interview data in the sections that follow, shifting instruction to an entirely online setting presented both challenges and opportunities for elementary grade teachers.

The important distinction between pre-pandemic higher education and remote learning during the COVID-19 era, however, is the fact that living through a pandemic is inherently traumatic, and many students have internalized that trauma. Dr. Adam D. Brown of NYU's Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry says that some children may show signs of traumatic stress, while others may not, depending on age, development, and social support,

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Denison University Education program's curriculum has adopted to describe these students in a way that acknowledges their identities as unique while still respecting them as students and as people.

among other factors (NYU Langone Health). The abrupt transition to remote learning coupled with sudden isolation and, in many cases, added stress surrounding family finances and health, caused virtual schooling due to the COVID-19 pandemic to be extremely stressful for many students who were used to attending school and learning in-person, increasing the need for a sound SEL curriculum that could aid young people in understanding the range of emotions they are feeling, why, and what they can do to manage those feelings.

What do we Know About Social and Emotional Learning in These Differing Classroom Environments?

While the extent to which in-person schools and educators formally serve students' social and emotional development varies, helping to maintain some level of consistency throughout the state of Ohio are the K-12 standards for social and emotional learning. The state of Ohio acknowledges "the 'whole child'" (2019, p. 5) in its learning standards for grades K-12, detailing five competencies that students are expected to have mastered by the end of their education in Ohio public schools – self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (p. 4). These standards (*see* Appendix A) are implemented in the classroom through group work, class discussion, organized playtime, and other activities that facilitate this kind of learning (Mulvahill, 2016).

While these standards are a valuable tool to ensure that students across the state of Ohio have some experience with social and emotional learning during their time in K-12 classrooms, only 29 states have social and emotional learning standards in their curriculum (Positive Action, 2020). Additionally, while online schools that are supported by state funding are required to carry out the state standards and curriculum, online schools that are privately established are not

required to follow state-mandated standards and curriculum (Ohio Department of Education). Due to the fact that the curriculum of privately established online schools is not required to follow state standards, social and emotional learning is not included in the curriculum of privately established online schools unless it is prioritized by those writing the curriculum.

However, it is evident that there is a need for a social and emotional learning curriculum in online schools, especially during the COVID-19 era. Because of the hardships that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed many families to, Kamei and Harriott (2021), in "Social Emotional Learning in Virtual Settings: Intervention Strategies," examined past research on disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and found that "children who were exposed to a significant event were more likely to experience emotional dysregulation and PTSD symptoms that would lead to reactive aggression [...] behaviors [that] were negatively associated with academic achievement" (p. 367). Acknowledging that "remote learning has forced students to learn in different conditions than if they were in school" and "demands students to practice a different skill set" (p. 367), Kamei and Harriott call for the immediate and intentional implementation of social and emotional learning in cognitive regulation, emotional regulation, and social skills in all schools, regardless of setting, in an attempt to neutralize the negative social and emotional effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

Through this conceptual framework, it is evident that social and emotional learning is a vital part not only of educating "the whole child" (Ohio Department of Education), but also of creating a more empathetic and fiscally sound and socially connected society. We know that the intentional implementation of social and emotional learning curricula in schools has been linked

to greater academic success and continuity in education for students, yet we know very little about if and how these curricula were delivered during the abrupt shift to online learning. In the sections that follow, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the curricular support for social and emotional learning in Licking County schools will be examined via interview data collected from Licking County educators, with the hope that these supports can be strengthened to better aid educators and teachers in the future.

Methodology

Positionality Statement

My interest in this project stems from my personal experiences with remote learning during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is for this reason that I feel it necessary to offer a statement of my positionality as a student during this global pandemic and as a researcher as the pandemic continues into 2021.

In March 2021 our student body was sent home unexpectedly due to the climbing death and infection rates being caused by SARS-CoV-2. Being local to my college campus and having a family that was able to afford the unexpected costs associated with housing and feeding me on such short notice afforded me immense privilege. Additionally, thanks to the university's efforts, I had all of the tools that I needed to complete the semester successfully, including a computer to use since mine was unreliable. I was also able to continue with one of my on-campus jobs remotely and was able to find temporary employment to maintain an income through the summer. In comparison to other students across the campus, the country, and the global community, I was very fortunate throughout that transitional time.

However, despite my privileges, returning to a space that I had long since outgrown coupled with the inherent trauma of prolonged isolation caused my mental and emotional wellbeing to rapidly decline. I lost my passion for my studies, finding it difficult to wake up for my classes or find the motivation to complete the assigned readings. However, I was also very privileged to have had the opportunity to be learning from some of the kindest, most caring professors on Denison's campus, who helped me find bits and pieces of passion and motivation by being flexible and understanding, yet firm and supportive. I'm finding that these kinds of connections are unique to Denison and that I am privileged to be able to experience them.

Toward the end of the semester in Qualitative Inquiry, a class I was taking with Dr. Emily Nemeth in the Education Department, I worked on a research project that explored questions of belonging in times of isolation using my younger sister as my research participant. I attribute my sister and I's newfound friendship to this project; we both found comfort in knowing that we were not alone in our feelings of isolation and grief, consequences of the ongoing pandemic. In addition to strengthening my bond with my sister, I was able to practice critical qualitative research skills such as collecting and analyzing interview data and examining relevant artifacts. From this project, the idea for this summer research project was born.

I wanted to build on the knowledge and experience gained from that exploratory study, shifting my interest to school-supported social and emotional learning before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Finding tangible things such as the ODE's K-12 learning standards for social and emotional learning and anecdotal pieces about teachers' experiences with students' social and emotional development during and since the COVID-19 pandemic filled me with curiosity that pulled me headfirst into this project. While some of the general themes and questions have been adjusted to reflect the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the subject remains

the same; a reflection on the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects that it has had on schooling, a conversation about the transition to remote or hybrid-style learning, and a call to support students and educators everywhere in navigating the new normal.

A Phenomenological Approach

This study is employing a phenomenological approach, which, when broken down, quite literally means "the study of phenomena" (Oxford English Dictionary). When used to describe qualitative research studies, phenomenology is a genre of research in which the "lived experience of a small number of people is investigated" (Rossman and Rallis, p. 85). I drew on these methodologies because I felt that they reflected both my personal and academic values and commitments, as well as lending themselves quite well to the kind of research I was interested in conducting from the start of this research project; I wanted to conduct interviews that would allow me to know and deeply understand the experiences of the participants that I was working with, enough to write a detailed profile on each of them, rather than a broad set of generalizable findings.

With these goals and my research questions in mind, I wrote my interview questions (*see* Appendix B and Appendix C) in a way that would allow me to examine social and emotional learning as a phenomenon within elementary school educators, Licking County school districts, and in the broader context of education in the United States. Using phenomenological methods for this study has allowed me the opportunity to get up close and personal with my interview data, drawing conclusions that were based on having a very close relationship with the dataset. I believe that, using any other set of methods, this study would have been incomplete. Phenomenology turned out to be the perfect methodology to use because of the way that it

allowed me to build a close relationship with my participants and my dataset and gave me the opportunity to write my findings as detailed profiles, rather than a broad findings section. These methodologies represent my personal and academic values and commitments and are visible throughout the following sections.

Methods

Participants

As with any interview-based study, recruiting participants is an essential part of the research process. In order to collect data to answer the posed research questions, it was necessary to recruit participants who had certain characteristics that allowed us to find relevant and meaningful connections between the participants' experiences, the reviewed literature, and our research questions. This study required adult participants that were educators and who were, in some capacity, required to engage with social and emotional learning curriculum and standards and student participants who had experiences learning remotely and in-person throughout the past year or so. In addition to these occupational requirements, it was also important that participants were occupationally affiliated with Licking County school districts. Setting these preliminary parameters on the study allowed sampling to begin.

Using convenient sampling, Dr. Nemeth, Professor Baker, and myself utilized personal and professional contacts with local school districts to recruit participants that are reflective of the demographics of the various Licking County school districts' student enrollment and educator populations. An initial list of individuals was generated from these contacts and an email was sent, allowing the participants to elect to participate in the study by emailing me, Zoe, directly. In order to narrow our pool of participants and ensure careful selection of educators and

children, Dr. Nemeth and I developed concrete and specific parameters for participation in this study. We felt the criteria would yield data that would address our research questions while also allowing us to be mindful and inclusive of differing perspectives and experiences.

All educators who participated in this study have, to some degree or other, a professional obligation to engage with the Ohio Department of Education's state standards for social and emotional learning. In order to maintain uniformity between educator and student participants and to reflect the categorization and taxonomies of the Ohio SEL standards, we only extended invitations to educators who worked with students in kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms. Additionally, our parameters left room for inclusivity of various modes of teaching, whether these modes were virtual or in-person, traditional classroom setting or another educational role within the school context. There was one exception to the grade requirement, an educator who worked outside of the traditional classroom in order to directly support students' social and emotional needs. This participant works in a Licking County middle school, which puts her slightly outside of the parameters we initially established; however, since she has had professional influences on the creation and execution of SEL programming in the lower grades of her district, as well as at the middle school level, we were interested in talking to her regardless of her formal grade level assignment. Including her surfaced for us a variation in the ways the state conceives of SEL curriculum delivery and the way districts organize themselves based on staffing and resources.

The parameters that were set for students participating in this study reflect the same characteristics, including the age limit (K-5) and accessibility to online lessons that are engaged with Ohio's SEL standards. However, where for educators the parameters allowed for inclusivity of various modes of teaching, the parameters for students required that the student has returned

to in-person, traditional instruction at some point in the 2020-2021 school year. This parameter allowed students to compare and contrast their experiences with remote and in-person learning as it relates to social and emotional learning. Setting these parameters for both educators and students forced us to eliminate some of our potential participants, but allowed us to think critically about the research questions we are seeking to address and how the participant pool is vital to the collection of data regarding these questions. Using these parameters, we recruited a pool of nine participants: six educators and four students. Data for this particular report was drawn from a larger corpus of data that included both teachers and students, and their experiences with SEL during the abrupt transition to remote learning. However, as outlined in the limitations section following the educator profiles, the data generated from interviews with students has been omitted from this report.

Efforts were made to recruit a diverse population of participants that would accurately represent Licking County's race, sex, and class demographics, as defined by the US Census Bureau: 90.8% white, 4.2% Black or African-American, 2.3% Asian, 2.1% Hispanic or Latino, and 2.4% mixed race, 50.9% female[4], and with approximately 9.3% of the county's population living at or below the poverty line (US Census Bureau, 2020). However, it is important to acknowledge the fact that, because our participant pool was recruited using convenient sampling methods based on proximity and network, the pool of participants was not as racially diverse as we had hoped it to be. The lack of racial diversity in our participant population generally reflects the makeup of a rural county, as Licking County is considered to be.

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[4] The United States Census Bureau cites the American Community Survey's criteria of sex for their survey purposes: "Individuals were asked to mark either 'male' or 'female' to indicate their biological sex. For most cases in which sex was invalid, the appropriate entry was determined from other information provided for that person, such as the person's given (i.e., first) name and household relationship" (American Community Survey, p. 125). This criteria is situated in a binary that does not reflect the research team nor the university's understanding of gender, sex, and sexuality diversity, and was used solely because of the accessibility of Census Bureau data to describe the demographics of Licking County.

In addition to the lack of racial diversity, there is also a significant lack of gender diversity, especially in adult participants. As we know (Wong, 2019; Mayhew, 2014), the gender gap that exists in the field of education, particularly in teaching, is significant throughout the United States, not just in Licking County. There is an overwhelming majority of female educators, which is reflected in this participant pool; all adult participants in this study are female educators, and many of the student participants are female as well. While we had hoped to have more gender diversity, when considering the fact that women hold a slight majority over men in the population of Licking County and the fact that there is a significant gender gap in the field of teaching nationwide, the lack of gender diversity in this study is justified.

Furthermore, due to utilization of virtual platforms, we also found it harder to recruit a diverse group of participants in terms of socioeconomic class. Approximately 9.3% of Licking County's population is living at or below the poverty line (US Census Bureau, 2020). These families already have struggles related to accessibility, but especially during the summer. When compared with families who have access to the kind of technologies, capabilities, and free times that studies such as this require, those families from low-income backgrounds tend to be at a significant disadvantage. In general, people who are able to participate in studies such as this one tend to be significantly more privileged in terms of how they are able to spend their money and time, which explains why this participant pool may not be completely reflective of Licking County's demographics.

In summary, all participants in this study are white. Additionally, all of the educators who participated in this study identify themselves as women, and half of the student participants identify as female. We feel that this pool represents some Licking County school districts better than others, and we regret that we were unable to recruit a more diverse population during this

10-week research period. We acknowledge that, due to the sampling methods employed in this study, there will be a slant in this data collection process, one that privileged certain experiences and perspectives over others due to the lack of race, gender, and class diversity in the participant pool. All identifying information, including names and school names, have been changed per Institutional Review Board procedure in order to protect their privacy.

Data

Two primary methods of data collection were used to pursue the research questions that this study is seeking to address: interview-based data collection with local educators and students and a collection of artifacts from their experiences with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. These structured interviews took place in a virtual setting with language intentionally designed to be accessible to all of the participants, who were all at a third grade level or below. Interview topics were directly related to the research focus, such as the change in schools' social and emotional lessons in accordance with the curriculum and state standards since the transition to remote learning in the spring of 2020, the kinds of resources available to learn about their emotions, both inside and outside of the classroom, and the differences between their experiences with social and emotional learning in-person and online. We also engaged in an informal conversation about the artifacts that each participant provided, including what the artifact represented to them, as it relates to the research questions, and why they chose to share the artifact that they did.

Procedure

After securing participants, they were contacted via email to schedule times to meet. Student participants had two meetings, one to complete the informed consent process with their parent or guardian, and another to conduct the interview and be debriefed verbally. Adult participants had one meeting in which all three components of the participation process were completed. All interviews were recorded with explicit participant permission using the "Record Meeting" feature on Zoom and were stored in a password-protected and dual authenticated Google Drive folder. At the end of their participation period, each participant was thanked graciously for devoting their time and energy to this project and were invited to contact the researchers if they had any questions or concerns. Upon completion of interviews, each recording was reviewed and analyzed by the research team in order to pull out common themes and draw conclusions based on the research questions.

Informed Consent

Since this study utilized human participants, it required approval from Denison's Institutional Review Board prior to execution of the study. The IRB requires that every participant go through an informed consent process before their participation period begins in order to ensure that they understand the purpose of the study and what they are being asked to do as a participant in the study. The informed consent process for this study was lengthy and meticulous due to the fact that the participant pool was composed of both adult and student participants. All participants completed the informed consent process virtually, with adults using a private Google Form to submit their consent form stating their understanding of the study and their willingness to participate and student participants going through a verbal informed consent

process with language that was more accessible to students of varying comprehension levels. In addition to each individual completing their own informed consent process, student participants had to receive parental permission, given via Google Form to participate in this study.

Debriefing

The IRB also requires that participants be debriefed upon completion of their time in the study. Adult participants received a written debriefing and student participants received a combination of a verbal and written debriefing with language that was designed to be accessible to differing reading levels and abilities. Participants also received more information about the field of knowledge that this study is entering into, as well as the contact information of the research team and the outgoing IRB chair, with whom I worked to obtain approval for this study. Adult and student participants, as well as the caregivers of student participants, were encouraged to reach out to any member of the research team if they had any questions or concerns regarding the study or their participation in the study and were thanked graciously for their time and energy in contributing to this study.

Data Analysis

Collected data was analyzed on a case-by-case basis, an approach which allows for a more personal connection to the data, and "facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources" (Baxter and Jack, p. 544). I did a preliminary verbal analysis of my data with Dr. Nemeth during the meetings we had following the interviews, where we discussed my initial reactions and questions and began extracting some patterns and revisiting my research questions. I really appreciated having this time to think through the data

before revisiting it, because I feel that it allowed me to more fully understand the collected data as it was related to my research questions. Then, all interview recordings were rewatched and selectively transcribed to draw out prominent themes across each of the interviews, including the following:

- Connection over distance
- Remote learning
- Parental involvement
- Staying positive and productive
- Collaboration
- Isolation
- Time consuming

- Relationship building
- Counselor and principal
- Small groups
- Color charts
- SEL programming
- Not fully familiar with ODE K-12 SEL standards

Once these themes were extracted, I began to outline how the pieces of data would be illustrated in the profiles.

The profiles offered below are of the educators who participated in the study. While the study included both teachers and students, it became clear early in the research process that in order to do justice to everyone's experiences, I would need to write distinct manuscripts that lifted up the efforts, experiences, and reflections of both groups. Due to the timeframe of Summer Scholars at Denison, which funded this research project, this is the first of two possible manuscripts. I hope to return to the student data for a future project.

As noted previously, the profiles below are written based on a subsample of a larger corpus of data including interviews with teachers and students who navigated social and emotional lessons and instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. The drafting of the educator

data profiles was in a similar fashion to the analysis and extraction of the data from the educator interviews; using a case-by-case drafting method allowed me to examine each of the aforementioned themes within the context of each individual educator. I knew I wanted to use this profiling method of data analysis and extraction because I enjoyed the way that it allowed me to get up close and personal with the data and the educators that the data came from, and I hoped that it would allow those interested in this research report to do the same.

During the process of drafting the educator profiles, I began to examine the data that the interviews generated. I paid close attention when the educators talked about things that they needed during the spring months of 2020 and into the 2020-2021 school year to be able to successfully implement social and emotional learning practices in their classrooms, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The points they emphasized here included accountability for social and emotional learning standards, structure for remote SEL programming, and additional resources for remote learning as the COVID-19 pandemic evolves and continues into the fall of 2021. In addition to the themes listed above, these points of emphasis are some of the most significant findings of this study and greatly influence the future direction of research on the topic of social and emotional learning and development in elementary school students.

Profiles

Mrs. Stevens - Southbend Elementary School

Mrs. Stevens was one of the last participants to be interviewed and she did not let our early morning meeting time affect her enthusiasm for the project nor her passion for teaching. She teaches at Southbend Elementary School, the only elementary school in Southbend Local School District, and shared with me that she would be moving from her current placement in

third grade to a new placement on the district's fifth grade team in the fall of 2021. She also worked remotely for the entire 2020-2021 school year, teaching all 40 of the third graders attending school virtually. A normal classroom size for this district would be 20 to 24 students. While she had her struggles with online learning – partially due to almost 12 years in a traditional in-person classroom – Mrs. Stevens had a very positive outlook which, paired with a can-do attitude and support from parents and other remote teachers, allowed her to succeed.

Immediately placing a large emphasis on "mak[ing] connections with kids before… teach[ing] them", Mrs. Stevens showed that she knew what social and emotional learning was and how important it is to students' overall learning. She described social and emotional learning, from a teacher's perspective, as "being aware of [students'] feelings and that they feel comfortable and safe" in her presence as well as in the presence of their peers. Additionally, she quickly demonstrated an understanding of how important social and emotional learning was to her students' overall learning and development, and the ways that social and emotional learning practices and programming are implemented in the district, citing language from the Ohio Department of Education's social and emotional learning standards for grades K-12 and providing specific examples of SEL implementation in her school district.

During our conversation about the ways that Southbend schools implement social and emotional learning into their students' learning, Mrs. Stevens, like other student and educator participants, related students' levels of emotions to colors on a chart. The colors that Mrs. Stevens talked about represent the intensity of the emotion and the amount of control that students have over these emotions, with red being intense emotions such as anxiety or anger, and orange and yellow representing calmer levels of emotions. Using colors to represent intense emotions allows students to practice self-awareness and self-management (Ohio Department of

Education, p. 4), both of which are competencies within the Ohio Department of Education's social and emotional learning standards for grades K-12, which outline the necessity of recognition and regulation of emotions in students.

We also talked about the design of the hallways at Mrs. Stevens' school. The hallways are used not only as a transitional space, but are also functioning as an extension of the classroom, purposefully designed for student learning and engagement. Using tape arranged in different patterns for students to walk on to reflect on and regulate intense emotions, as well as posters and student artwork on the wall, a welcoming environment is created for students in the hallway. Students are trusted to use the hallways, either individually or with an aide or peer, and encouraged to take a walk when they need space away from a difficult situation in the classroom, and are invited to reflect on the situation with their teachers once they have had the opportunity to calm themselves down. There are also calming areas throughout the school with comfortable seating, fidget toys, and art supplies so that students have a quiet and private space to regulate and reflect on their emotions.

In addition to these SEL supports that exist in the classroom environment, there are also various faculty and staff members within the school who are equipped to support students with social and emotional learning, as well as with other social and emotional needs. The classroom teachers are typically most responsible for their students' social and emotional learning, but at Southbend Elementary School, the guidance counselor and principal also take an interest in the students' social and emotional development, creating a supportive and unifying culture for students' social and emotional learning. Not only do all of these individuals welcome struggling students into their office to seek help, they also spend time in classrooms leading students in lessons which allow them to practice appropriate peer interactions and emotional recognition

with someone other than their classroom teacher. This point was echoed across all of the interviews, with Jane talking most explicitly about the role of the school's guidance counselor, who "meets the kids once a month to do lessons" and the teacher's role creating small groups and "taking the time to get to know the peers in the group". Providing this kind of universal support at various levels throughout the school for SEL shows students that there are people in the school community who they can turn to if they need emotional support and allows them to practice SEL skills with different adults.

Overall, Mrs. Stevens felt that the school provided students with many supports for social and emotional development from many different points within the school environment. However, during the spring months of 2020, as Ohio's governor, Mike DeWine, mandated that schools shut down, these supports fell by the wayside as teachers struggled to find creative ways to finish supplying their students with the necessary grade level content in state-tested subjects, such as reading, writing, and math. During the 2020-2021 school year, Mrs. Stevens, in particular, felt that many of her students exceeded grade level content expectations for remote learning, but that a handful of them, including a few students with exceptionalities that could not be properly met from a virtual classroom, would have benefited developmentally from the in-person student-teacher relationship that comes from traditional classroom instruction. Additionally, Mrs. Stevens said that she felt that her connections with those students who were willing to work with her and respect her classroom etiquette expectations (cameras turned on, seated at a desk or table, headphones connected) were significantly stronger than they would be in a normal year, despite the relationships taking more effort to create and maintain than they would in a typical school year.

Mrs. Stevens created and maintained relationships within her virtual classroom by utilizing the Breakout Rooms feature on Zoom to facilitate small group interactions between the students, not only regarding their academic content, but also to facilitate social interaction in a time of isolation, where they would "play 'Would You Rather?', talk and ask [each other] questions" on Friday afternoons after their virtual class session "because they didn't get the chance to do that the rest of the week" due to their focus on academic content. While she noted that the small group work made a difference in the strength of the connections between her students, she also noted that facilitating these kinds of interactions alongside their academic content in a virtual classroom was extremely time consuming for one person to manage. In addition to her time actively working with students in the whole group setting and in small groups, she was also putting in several additional hours of work doing routine lesson planning and making recordings of their lessons for students to refer back to before and after eating dinner every night. Additionally, remote teachers had access to the school building on the weekends to make copies and gather supplies for the week, so Mrs. Stevens would spend her Saturdays at the school putting together supplies for herself and for her students for the week. Mrs. Stevens ended up spending more of her personal time working than she would've during a normal school year.

Mrs. Stevens was also extremely honest with me about the level of administrative support she received during the 2020-2021 school year, saying that she ended up feeling very disappointed by the lack of support that the remote teachers got during the end of the spring semester of 2021. Due to the rollout of vaccines in Licking County, many Southbend teachers received vaccinations before the end of the school year, allowing those teachers that were in the school building during the day to use in-person meeting spaces rather than online conferencing platforms for their meetings, often leaving the team of remote teachers out of the loop. Generally,

it seems that teachers, especially those who volunteered to teach remotely during the 2020-2021 school year, at Southbend could've received more administrative support, considering the magnitude of the task they were taking on.

However, Mrs. Stevens expressed appreciation for the cohort of remote teachers and told me about how they found connections in one another by bonding over the difficulties of teaching remotely, despite representing different grade levels. Having colleagues who were having the same frustrations and disappointments as well as the same triumphs and victories was very comforting for Mrs. Stevens during the time that she felt isolated from the administration and other teachers who were all shifting back to in-person instruction during late spring 2021. While she expressed her disappointment in the lack of communication between the administration, the teachers who were in-person, and the remote teachers, Mrs. Stevens, as well as the other remote teachers at Southbend, was relieved to have some support during this time of isolation, and the bonds that these remote teachers made with one another are sure to last years into the future.

Mrs. Stevens' story was extremely inspiring to me because, although she'd had her troubles and complaints with online teaching, she is a prime example of a resilient teacher who, with a can-do attitude, deep dedication, and support from parents and other remote teachers, made the best of the school year that she was given. She worked to ensure that her students were still actively engaged in social and emotional learning despite being isolated from one another, as well as delivering quality lessons on the grade-level subject matter using a variety of different methods to ensure that students were able to engage with the content according to their own learning preferences and pace. When I think about Mrs. Stevens' story, I think about an educator who cares deeply about her students and is deeply dedicated to teaching as an art form, and I feel

very fortunate to have had the opportunity to connect with and learn from her during this research period.

Mrs. Jacobs - Southbend Elementary School

Mrs. Jacobs was extremely interested in and enthusiastic about this research study from our first contact via email to the closing of our Zoom interview. Like Mrs. Stevens, Mrs. Jacobs teaches at Southbend Elementary School, the only elementary school in the district. During the spring months of 2020 she taught her students remotely and during the 2020-2021 school year she taught her second grade class in-person according to the CDC and State of Ohio guidelines for safe in-person classroom instruction. When I asked her how she felt about teaching remotely, she responded with, "It was terrible!" For this reason, along with personal reasons for needing to teach in-person, going back to in-person instruction during the 2020-2021 school year after spending the spring months of 2020 online was a significant priority for her.

During our time together, we talked a lot about what social and emotional learning looks like in Southbend schools and in Mrs. Jacobs' classroom, including the different ways that Mrs. Jacobs incorporates social and emotional learning into her classroom on a daily basis. She noted that "it's not necessarily written down in a curriculum for [her], but [she] knows it's important so [she] does it" in her classroom, primarily using storytelling and practice interactions and conflict resolution. One of the storytelling techniques that Mrs. Jacobs uses is known as "The Legend of the Flirbits" in her classroom, and she describes it, in her own words, as:

> "something I just totally made up, but... it's an alien race that can't stop thinking only
> about themselves and they have mirrors and they're just constantly looking in the mirror
> all the time and they run into each other and they fight, but if they would just put down

the mirror and focus on somebody else, they'd be fine. So, I tell them stories like that and then we talk about, 'How does the Flirbit relate to my real life?'"

Using Mrs. Jacobs' storytelling technique allows students to relate the Flirbits' behavior to their own and recognize their own individual behaviors as either acceptable or unacceptable. Then during their discussions of the Flirbit legends, students are able to learn to express why such behaviors were unacceptable, as well as learn more appropriate ways to handle situations. In addition to the Flirbits, Mrs. Jacobs also supports students practicing appropriate interaction and conflict resolution in her classroom. Providing students with the language to engage with one another respectfully, such as "I respectfully disagree with you," Mrs. Jacobs gives students the tools to practice interacting appropriately with one another in a variety of situations, such as giving and receiving feedback on assignments.

Mrs. Jacobs also works to implement the values and programs that Southbend has instilled throughout the district into her classroom. While she, like Mrs. Stevens mentioned, adheres to the school's color system in her classroom to help students practice emotional recognition, she specifically mentioned Southbend's "Snapshot of a Student". This initiative is one that outlines the values and skills, such as "resilience and empathy", that Southbend Local School District students should have mastered by the time they graduate. Teachers are asked to help their students thoroughly understand and embody these values in their classes with the hope that Southbend graduates will leave the district with the knowledge required to be an upstanding citizen and lead a successful professional life.

We also talked about what kinds of social and emotional support Mrs. Jacobs' students have within the school environment. Like Mrs. Stevens detailed, the culture of Southbend Elementary School is one that shares the responsibility for social and emotional learning among

everyone in the school, with the school counselor and principal taking an interest in classroom life and in students' social and emotional learning alongside the teacher. However, Mrs. Jacobs' told me that, while students are welcome and encouraged to use the principal and the counselor as resources, she usually tries to solve the problem in the classroom first to ensure that the students who are visiting the counselor and the principal are the students "who really need it." In the classroom, Mrs. Jacobs will use a variety of physical and artistic techniques to de-escalate tense situations, telling her students to "go push a wall" when their anger or frustration manifests physically or to "draw how [they] feel" when they aren't able to find the right words to express themselves.

It's evident that Mrs. Jacobs has a clear understanding of what social and emotional learning is and why it is essential to her students' educational journeys. However, during the spring months of 2020, when Mrs. Jacobs was teaching her class remotely, she felt that her students weren't as connected with their social and emotional learning and development as they usually are at that stage. She stated that "it's [her] goal every year... to make [her] students who came in as individuals [that] didn't know each other very well to be a pretty cohesive family," but that she found it difficult to create that cohesion between her students in an online environment. Though she "did [her] very best to provide really good instruction and small group stuff" she felt that "the emotional side was really missing" during the spring semester of 2020.

In addition to the lack of social and emotional learning that took place at the end of the 2020 school year, Mrs. Jacobs noted that the support for teachers could have been stronger than it was. While she acknowledged that the administration "did everything they could" to support the teachers, the things that they tried to do, such as virtual coffee breaks, interfered with her responsibilities as a mother of young children and her obligations as a virtual teacher. Because of

the scheduling of these virtual events, Mrs. Jacobs was often left out of the virtual team-building and bonding times with her colleagues.

While Mrs. Jacobs certainly had a difficult time with remote learning, making her eager to return to in-person instruction as soon as it was available, something that inspired me about Mrs. Jacobs was the way that she encourages her students to channel their anxiety into something productive. In one particular story that she shared with me, we went back to the first week of March 2020, when COVID-19 was being talked about on the news and no one knew what was going to happen in the coming weeks. As the looming threat of the COVID-19 virus caused her class to become increasingly anxious, Mrs. Jacobs led her class in a project that engaged multiple parts of the curriculum. Using what they knew so far about COVID-19 and the science behind how viruses work, they worked together to make homemade hand sanitizer, using math to scale a recipe to the appropriate size for their class and using critical thinking skills to brainstorm how to keep themselves and others safe from the spread of a virus. The project was brought to an abrupt end by the school closures, but students were able to learn how to be safe during the COVID-19 pandemic and were able to use their anxiety to fuel something productive.

My time learning from Mrs. Jacobs was very valuable to me because she offered insight on the difficulties and triumphs of being a working mother, especially during the COVID-19 era. I also really enjoyed having the opportunity to hear about the strategic ways that she deals with student behavior and conflict in her classroom, a topic that reflected her understanding of social and emotional learning and the "whole child" ideology that frames the Ohio Department of Education's K-12 SEL standards. I was incredibly inspired, too, by her resilience and the ways that she instilled resilience in her students in subtle, yet powerful ways, teaching them to harness their anxiety and use it to ask, "What can I do to help?" instead of letting it consume them. I feel

very fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from Mrs. Jacobs during this research period; her perspectives and values have offered me insights that I won't soon forget.

Mrs. Maple - Southbend Elementary School

Mrs. Maple had a calming, yet confident and infectious energy from the moment we joined the Zoom call, which she attributed to "spending her formative years on the East Coast." Like Mrs. Stevens and Mrs. Jacobs, Mrs. Maple also teaches at Southbend Elementary School, working with a class of first grade students. After spending the spring months of 2020 teaching remotely, Mrs. Maple, for personal reasons, elected to spend the 2020-2021 school year teaching a class of first graders remotely rather than returning to in-person instruction. While she remarked that remote learning was "a good alternative when you can't be together," she noted that the "immediate support and intervention that happens in a classroom" is irreplaceable.

One of her biggest concerns throughout the 2020-2021 school year was ensuring that her students felt connected to the content and to one another, saying that she noticed that "if they don't feel connected, they don't really show up on the screen." During our conversation, it was evident to me that Mrs. Maple understood what social and emotional learning was and why it was so important to her students' growth. Citing her background in early childhood education and psychology, Mrs. Maple "recognizes just how important the formative experiences are" in a young child's educational journey, saying that social and emotional learning is at the foundation of everything she does as a first grade teacher. She further emphasized the foundational aspect of social and emotional learning, acknowledging that it's difficult to "get to the academics [before] you establish a relationship with the kids."

During our conversation, Mrs. Maple admitted that she is not as familiar with the Ohio Department of Education's SEL standards for grades K-12 as she is with the content (reading, writing, math) standards for her grade level. However, this statement reflects the "relationship skills" competency of the ODE social and emotional learning standards for grades K-12, showing that while she may not be as familiar with the SEL standards, she still recognizes their importance and understands how to implement them. Additionally, she noted that the lack of familiarity with the specifics of the Ohio SEL standards amongst the teachers at Southbend may be due to the fact that they are "held accountable for [meeting] all of the academic [standards]" with concrete measures such as standardized testing, whereas the measures for social and emotional learning are left to the school's discretion for further development.

However, like Mrs. Stevens and Mrs. Jacobs, Mrs. Maple remarked that the teachers at Southbend are highly encouraged to prioritize social and emotional learning during their professional development time. During this time, they share and discuss different resources and strategies as a team, learning ways to implement social and emotional learning with intentionality and uniformity in their classrooms and across the school. Mrs. Maple shared one of the ways that social and emotional learning practices are implemented across Southbend Elementary School classrooms: the PAX program. Under the PAX program students are "recognized and celebrated when they're caught being awesome" by being awarded with an "Awesome!" In addition to the PAX program, Mrs. Maple also told me that Southbend is working on building "calm spaces" throughout the building with comfortable seating, fidget toys, art supplies, and other comforting items so that students can have a comfortable space to go to if they need to take a break or get away from an uncomfortable situation.

In addition to being able to use the calm spaces throughout the school as needed, Mrs. Maple says that students are also encouraged to talk to their teachers, counselors, and the principal, further supporting the assertion that there is a culture around social and emotional learning at Southbend Elementary School, and it's one that every faculty and staff member plays a supportive role in facilitating. Not only do the adults throughout the school building have a sense of obligation to their students' social and emotional learning and development, but the caregivers also share in this responsibility. While Mrs. Maple told me that she "tried to not to do any [lessons] that involved too much parent involvement" because she found that the parents were so busy, she said that she had many parents who were able to fill in the gaps in the subjects that she felt were lacking the proper support during remote learning, including art, music, and physical education.

Mrs. Maple also felt that the emphasis on social and emotional learning suffered, even though she did what she could to support that kind of development remotely. In addition to working on the content areas for first grade, Mrs. Maple also continued using the PAX program values in her classroom. When students were "caught being awesome" they would get their rewards mailed to their house so that they could share their accomplishments with their families and have something tangible to represent their time learning at school remotely during a time of isolation.

Mrs. Maple also shared another strategy with me that she implemented for social and emotional learning during her time teaching remotely: "special-interest groups" using the Breakout Rooms feature on Zoom, which she told me more about, saying:

"It was so funny! There were kids that would say, 'I want to do the Lego Breakout Room!' and there would be five kids just talking to each other and building Legos. There

was another room that wanted to do crafts, so they each brought their art supplies and

talked about the things they were making. One day we had them bring their pets and we

had them talk about their pets, and of course, we had kids chasing them around, but it was

really fun!"

Mrs. Maple used these Breakout Rooms as a way for her students to connect with one another

outside of their classroom content, allowing them to talk to and connect with one another while

sharing things that interested them. Having students participate in this activity helped them make

friends more easily and become comfortable talking to each other via Zoom.

Toward the end of the spring semester of 2021, as teachers and parents were receiving

full doses of the COVID-19 vaccine and the CDC declared that people could gather outdoors,

Mrs. Maple invited her class to the Southbend Elementary playground for a Sunday afternoon

visit. Since Mrs. Maple had given them the opportunity to connect with one another using small

group work and the special interest Breakout Rooms, she noted that "attendance was

remarkable" throughout the school year and that the students were "so excited to see each other"

at the playground. While there were "some kids who held back," she observed "those kids who

had already made those connections and recognized their friends [...] didn't feel any different and

they still got together and played with each other." Both she and I expressed admiration for her

students' resilience during the 2020-2021 school year.

Mrs. Maple, like Mrs. Stevens, expressed appreciation, not only for her students and their

positive attitudes, but also for the cohort of online teachers who met weekly to share resources

and strategies for remote learning, as well as to recount triumphs and disappointments. She felt

very fortunate to be working with teachers that she would not have had the opportunity to

connect with in a normal school year. She also expressed appreciation for the administrators

working with the cohort of online teachers, saying that they would do "anything they were able to" in order to support the teachers and the students, including providing students with devices to access the internet and hotspots for students who did not have a way to connect to the internet at their house.

Something that really stood out to me during this portion of our conversation was when Mrs. Maple acknowledged the privilege that students at Southbend Local Schools have due to the demographics of their school district. Many districts across the country, and even in Licking County were not able to provide their students with as many resources, if they were able to provide any at all. Mrs. Maple attributed much of Southbend's success with remote learning to the fact that the district has the ability to provide students with the resources they need to succeed, saying that "when you live in a bubble and you don't look outside, you think that everybody has the same advantages and you don't understand why they aren't doing more." I really appreciated Mrs. Maple's thoughtful analysis of the positionality of Southbend students and teachers and her consideration for those who do not have as many resources provided to them through their school district.

I was also inspired by Mrs. Maple's positive attitude; while she acknowledged that there were difficulties with remote learning, she still managed to help all of her students meet and exceed their learning goals for the school year, while also making connections with their fellow classmates. Mrs. Maple, like Mrs. Stevens, has an extremely positive outlook and a deep passion for and dedication to teaching as an art form, saying that she "always feels like she can do more," but that she feels like it "doesn't make sense to focus on the negative," especially if there isn't anything that can be done to fix it. Based on our conversations about her experiences with remote learning, it is apparent that this positive outlook and philosophy is one that she values

very highly in her classroom, remote or in-person. I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from Mrs. Maple, and her story is one that has deeply inspired me as an aspiring educator.

Mrs. Mitchell - Southbend Elementary School

Mrs. Mitchell's confidence and passion for teaching was evident from the time that we entered the call to the end of our interview. Like Mrs. Stevens, Mrs. Jacobs, and Mrs. Maple, Mrs. Mitchell is currently working at Southbend Elementary School, where she teaches kindergarten. During the 2020-2021 school year, she was the only virtual teacher at the kindergarten level and, due to Southbend's kindergarten format, she was teaching two different classes virtually, one for half the day in the morning and one the other half of the day in the afternoon. She estimated that she had approximately 50 students learning remotely with her between the two classes. She noted that while there were elements of her class that she had to change in order to accommodate the virtual setting, she said that "it was the best it could've been," and that she was satisfied with her students' overall progress throughout the school year.

When we shifted our conversation to the topic of social and emotional learning, Mrs. Mitchell was eager to talk about the relationship that works to facilitate between herself, her students, and their social and emotional development. She also told me that her main goal for her class is always "to build community and establish a good rapport between [her]self and [her] students," working to build those relationships early in the school year using small group activities, one-on-one conferencing, and making herself known in her students' households. She believes that social and emotional learning is "one of the best things a teacher can do" and has found that learning comes easier when students feel like they are part of a larger community

within the classroom. She emphasized that she starts these relationship-building strategies early during the school year so that students can engage with the social and emotional learning programs that are in their classroom and learn to interact with these programs and with one another in the most appropriate way possible.

The SEL programming that Mrs. Mitchell talked about echoes the programs that Mrs. Stevens, Mrs. Jacobs, and Mrs. Maple outlined in the previous profiles. However, Mrs. Mitchell did go further into detail on the variety of programs that Southbend has implemented, including weekly lessons from the guidance counselor on emotional recognition and regulation and the "Peace Corner" that she has set up in her classroom. The Peace Corner, which mirrors the calm areas in the hallways at Southbend Elementary, gives students a space to take a break from a tense or uncomfortable situation and return when they've had time to regulate their emotions. Mrs. Mitchell's classroom also uses Southbend's colored "Zones of Regulation," which are detailed in previous profiles, but not explicitly named. These colored zones offer students a visual to represent how they are feeling and give them a target to work towards when they're feeling out of control. These programs and resources, according to Mrs. Mitchell, are enjoyed by and beneficial to the students in her class.

In addition to using the schoolwide programs and resources offered by Southbend, Mrs. Mitchell also has some personal techniques that facilitate social and emotional development in her classroom. One such technique uses the guidance counselor's lessons throughout the week, "piggybacking off of their lessons" and tying them into her own lessons. This maintains consistency within the social and emotional learning curriculum between the guidance counselor's messages and her own lessons. She also uses yoga and other breathing exercises to assist with the transition from lunch and recess to the next content lesson. This technique teaches

her students ways that they can control their emotions when they feel uncontrollable, and also signals to students that it's time to return to schoolwork after their break. Using these techniques keeps the students engaged with their social and emotional development, while also demonstrating to them that different zones are not acceptable in every setting.

Mrs. Mitchell also spoke to the unifying culture for social and emotional learning that Southbend has cultivated. She echoed that, while the classroom teacher is the "first line of defense," as Mrs. Jacobs put it, the guidance counselors, school psychologists, and the principal also have an obligation to the social and emotional development of Southbend students. It's for this reason that the guidance counselors, school psychologists, and principal work in the classrooms with students on social and emotional learning. Not only does this provide students with valuable lessons regarding social and emotional learning, but it also helps students become familiar with these figures within the school so that they are comfortable approaching these people if they need to utilize them as a resource.

In addition to having adults at the school that students can approach if they are dealing with a situation or emotion that they can't handle on their own, Mrs. Mitchell also shared with me the ways that she equips the parents of her students to be resources for social and emotional learning within the home. During this conversation, Mrs. Mitchell acknowledged that teaching at Southbend is a very different experience than teaching at some of the other schools she's been at during her career, pointing out that almost all of her students have access to a parent or other caregiver within their home who either works from home or is a stay-at-home caregiver, which is a privilege that not all students have, especially in other districts. In order to equip parents with the resources and tools to continue their students' social and emotional development at home, Mrs. Mitchell runs a blog that gives parents access to these resources, tools, and strategies so that

they can implement them in their household. Doing so has allowed parents to mirror the language of the classroom, giving students a set of common language regarding social and emotional learning between the school and the household. While the line between the school and the household was blurred by remote learning, Mrs. Mitchell continued to lean on parents for support, especially with social and emotional learning.

In order to supplement social and emotional learning virtually, Mrs. Mitchell had to replace her usual one-on-one conferencing with small group instruction and her project-based lessons with at-home alternatives with parental support. While students received support from their caregivers and teachers, there was less support available for teachers. She told me that this support came in the form of tech support and troubleshooting, but that this support came midway through the school year. Due to the fact that this support came later in the year, Mrs. Mitchell had to teach herself how to use and troubleshoot the different kinds of technology that remote learning required. Despite these changes to her curriculum and lesson plans, Mrs. Mitchell felt that remote learning was "the best it could be," acknowledging that Southbend Local Schools "didn't know what to expect, but [that] they did their best" to provide support to remote teachers and students.

During her time teaching remotely, Mrs. Mitchell did feel that social and emotional learning changed significantly due to the virtual format. Mrs. Mitchell incorporated the guidance counselor's lessons into her virtual classroom to supplement the loss of this site for social and emotional learning in the traditional classroom. Additionally, she continued to use yoga to signal transitional times during the school day and added SEL-focused read-alouds during the school day to add another form of social and emotional learning to her virtual classroom. Mrs. Mitchell

did a good job incorporating new methods for social and emotional learning and modified versions of some of her most beloved in-person lessons.

Mrs. Mitchell shared one such lesson with me: The Hero Project. She told me more about the Hero Project saying:

"... We look at real life heroes in our community and we read a lot of biographies about past and present heroes and we talk about hero characteristics. [...] We still did the project [during remote learning] actually, but we just did it virtually. We took a tour of the fire station and talked to a firefighter; we had a heart surgeon and he made a PowerPoint, and it was amazing! We have so many different heroes in our community and they all still [participated] virtually! Then the kids pick their own real life hero, and they do a presentation [...] and they do some different writing samples about their hero [...] and they all did a presentation still, we just used [an online presentation resource] instead of doing it in-person."

I really enjoyed having the opportunity to learn more about the Hero Project that Mrs. Mitchell's students participate in because I appreciate the way that Mrs. Mitchell has linked the classroom with the community through this project, both during a traditional school year and during her time teaching remotely. Providing students with a sense of community during a time of isolation is surely an implementation of social and emotional learning, which Mrs. Mitchell did an excellent job incorporating into her virtual classroom. In addition to the Hero Project, Mrs. Mitchell also shared with me that towards the end of the school year, she invited her virtual kindergarten students to participate in an in-person kindergarten graduation ceremony. Not only did this ceremony mark the transition between kindergarten and first grade for her students, but it

also provided them with the opportunity to celebrate their accomplishments throughout the school year, and to do so together as a community.

I was extremely impressed and inspired by the way that Mrs. Mitchell emphasized throughout our conversation that building community and relationships is her biggest priority throughout the school year and then proceeded to explain all of the ways that she facilitates this community-building in her virtual classroom and, in previous years, in her in-person classroom at Southbend Elementary School. I really appreciated having the opportunity to learn from an educator, like Mrs. Mitchell, who values relationships and community-building within her classroom and found a way to stay true to these values while teaching her students remotely.

Mrs. Walker - Southbend Schools

Mrs. Walker was the first educator that I interviewed for this study and, more broadly, ever during my time as a researcher at Denison. I couldn't have asked for a better person to kick off this study with; Mrs. Walker was warm and her passion for teaching was evident from the moment she popped up on my screen. Teaching fourth grade at Southbend Schools, Mrs. Walker is instructing students during a transitional time in their education, one where they are encouraged to practice independence and personal responsibility after collaboration and empathy were so heavily emphasized in the earlier grades. After telling me that she was the only remote teacher for the fourth grade class, she told me that she started the year with 45 students and ended with 25 students attending school virtually. Like Mrs. Stevens noted in her interview, a typical classroom size for this district would be 20 to 24 students. Not only was she responsible for teaching almost twice the amount of students she typically would be teaching in-person and committed to delivering quality instruction to her students despite the virtual format, she was

also tasked with teaching all of the subjects required of fourth grade students. While she admitted that "it was a lot" to be tasked with so many different things, she later said: "It's a job, but it's also a calling; the people who are there are there for the right reasons." It became clear to me very quickly that Mrs. Walker is someone who has that calling.

When we shifted our conversation to social and emotional learning, I was thoroughly impressed by the fact that Mrs. Walker mirrored the state of Ohio's language when defining social and emotional learning, saying, "[she] look[s] at it as regarding 'the whole child'" and "not just what grade they got or how they're behaving, but how they're feeling [...] and what's going on under the surface." While she was able to use the state of Ohio's language, she admitted that she's "not horribly well-versed in the standards" for social and emotional learning. Instead, she just explained to me that she knows that it's her responsibility to facilitate social and emotional development in her students and that "people who go into education with the right drive behind them will always consider the whole child." Mrs. Walker has a lot of faith in those teachers and administrators that facilitate the SEL culture that the other participants from Southbend have spoken about.

The culture for social and emotional learning at Southbend is one that relies heavily on programming. Mrs. Walker told me about the FISH program, a program for social and emotional learning that positively reinforces good behavior, saying:

> "Every child has a stuffed fish that they get with their number on it. Every morning part
> of their responsibility for checking in is letting us know they're there, their lunch choices,
> and then their fish goes in a big plastic storage container that we call "The Tank." [...]
> They come together as a community (think morning meeting) and they sit by grades —
> now, we do encourage active listening, paying attention, and we make announcements

then, like if there are issues that have cropped up, we will talk about them. [...] As part of

FISH, everyday we pick a fish out, you know, 'Orange and white, number four,' and that

child comes up and we have a small bucket that has paper fish in it [...] and they pull it

out and maybe it's 10 minutes of extra recess for your class or go to the front of the lunch

line or maybe it's lead the Pledge of Allegiance. It's something that we can put in that's

kind of fun [for them]."

Mrs. Mitchell shared with me that every student has their fish drawn at least once during the

school year and continued on to tell me about Shark Attack, saying:

"On Fridays, we have something called Shark Attack, and one of the teachers will ride a

scooter around the perimeter of everybody with a shark hat on. We select students at

Shark Attack who have shown growth or persistence; it isn't about getting an A, it's that

we noticed that they worked really hard and we want you to be recognized."

Students can also get shark attacks for exhibiting positive SEL traits such as friendliness,

collaboration, and empathy. Not every student will earn a Shark Attack throughout the school

year, but those that do earn one receive a stuffed shark to proudly display on their desk for the

next week until the next Shark Attack is awarded. The students really enjoy the FISH program

and the Shark Attack awards, according to Mrs. Walker, but so do the teachers who are involved,

which greatly contributes to the culture for social and emotional learning at Southbend,

In addition to emphasizing what Mrs. Stevens, Mrs. Jacobs, and Mrs. Mitchell shared

about the culture for social and emotional learning at Southbend, Mrs. Walker also expressed

deep appreciation and admiration for the other teachers on the fourth grade team. She told me

that there is a constant dialogue between the teachers on the fourth grade team about how to best

support specific students, especially considering that they are "growing children" and are seeking

to satisfy their unique and individualized needs as students. She outlined their approach in a very simple way, stating that their philosophy is one that respects the student involved by guiding them in taking responsibility for their actions and supporting them so that they can avoid making the same mistakes in the future. Mrs. Mitchell told me that this approach alongside the FISH program seems to be very beneficial to her fourth grade students, saying that she's found that there's a positive pressure within the classroom to follow the rules in order to earn these kinds of rewards.

I was extremely interested in Mrs. Walker's point about there being a positive pressure within the classroom to follow the rules; in my experience, when someone says they're under pressure, it generally has a negative connotation, so I was struck by her use of the word when describing her classroom. She elaborated, saying that fourth grade students, developmentally, tend to "develop a very black-and-white view of everything," a view where something is either right or wrong, leaving very little room for gray area. Thus, she continued, most of the students in her class develop a huge amount of respect for the classroom rules, procedures, and expectations. I found this to be fascinating and was glad that I asked her to elaborate, because the point that she made was one that felt unexpected, but extremely significant.

As our conversation progressed, we began to talk about her experiences teaching remotely during the spring months of 2020 and into the 2020-2021 school year. Despite the challenges that she faced with remote learning, including having a very large class, teaching every subject, and learning to use new technology and resources, all while committing to deliver quality instruction to her students, Mrs. Walker was satisfied with the progress that her students made during the 2020-2021 school year. While she felt that the emphasis on social and emotional learning could have been stronger, she adapted to the digital format and sent Shark Attack

awards to her students via mail to keep them connected to the school and their peers. She also used positive affirmations with her class to comfort students who were anxious about COVID-19; one such affirmation was, "By staying home and doing our part, we are lifesavers." She also supplemented the loss of the larger FISH program with frequent check-ins with students and implementing a hand signal system to facilitate these check-ins on a wide scale and a regular basis, since she had so many students.

Mrs. Walker also shared with me that, in her experience, teaching remotely was extremely time-consuming. In order to deliver quality instruction to her students, Mrs. Walker would go over any material with her students during the day, either in small groups or in the larger session, and then in the evenings she would record all of her lessons so that students could spend as much time with the material as they needed to. In addition to this additional preparation time, Mrs. Walker also found that facilitating small group interactions between almost 50 students was incredibly time-consuming, even though it is beneficial to students studying remotely, as Mrs. Stevens and Mrs. Maple pointed out. Mrs. Walker realized during the school year that she was spending significantly more time doing preparation work for her students than she would during a normal school school year.

However, Mrs. Walker also pointed out that, while she was doing significantly more work than she would during a normal year, she also told me that she had more parental support than she had ever had before. At the beginning of the school year, she requested that families "give [her] some grace" as she figured out the structure of her virtual class and the technology that she was required to learn. Not only did they extend her the grace that she needed, the families of her students offered her more support than she has ever experienced. In one instance that she shared with me, she had multiple families send her a message offering to hop on a Zoom video

conferencing call anytime if she ever needed to troubleshoot an issue or test out a new feature before using it with the class. When she was describing the kindness that she was shown, I was in awe of the fact that the culture for social and emotional learning and development at Southbend goes beyond the teachers, health professionals, and administrators at the school taking an interest in the social and emotional development of their students, but also includes students and their caregivers as well.

My interview with Mrs. Walker is one that I won't soon forget because of the way that her passion for teaching allowed her to thrive during remote learning, even with a very large class and more content to cover with them. I also appreciate her willingness to be my first research participant and embark on this journey with me, despite the fact that I was incredibly nervous to begin my first endeavor with a research project of this type. I was inspired by Mrs. Walker's kindness and resilience, and I have appreciated having the opportunity to learn from her.

Mrs. Morgan - Oak Grove Middle School

Mrs. Morgan is an educator whose position is very different from the educators of Southbend. Working at Oak Grove Middle School in the Hillview Local School District, a district that is larger than Southbend Local Schools and serves a more socioeconomically diverse student body. Mrs. Morgan is Oak Grove's Resource-Network Coordinator; she is responsible for assisting classroom teachers with behavioral issues and connecting students and their families with community resources such as food, counseling, transportation, and other resources they may need in order to be successful. Describing her position as a "cross between counseling and social work," Mrs. Morgan does not work in a traditional classroom and instead works to provide

resources to families that can resolve any issues that may be occurring at home so that students can focus on their education while at school. Being an educator in a middle school puts Mrs. Morgan slightly outside of the research parameters for this study, but we decided to include her in the study because she works with middle schoolers on the transition from elementary school to middle school. Additionally, she's working on implementing some of the social and emotional learning programs that she has implemented at Oak Grovel in the elementary school.

After she helped me gain a clearer understanding of her job as a Resource-Network Coordinator, we shifted the topic of our conversation to social and emotional learning and its implementation in Oak Grove Middle School and other schools in the Hillview Local School District. She shared with me that, in Hillview schools, social and emotional learning programming is implemented per each individual school's needs. In most cases, she explained, that means that the principal selects and implements a program that they think would be a good fit for their school and that different schools throughout the district may be using different programs. One such program that she explained to me was the Calm Classroom. This program is one that uses meditation during transitional periods throughout the school day, such as after lunch and recess, so that students can return to class and be ready to learn as soon after recess as possible. Another program that she shared with me was based on positive reinforcement; students earn tickets by being caught exhibiting good behavior. Their tickets then go into a raffle and the winner gets a free pizza lunch from a local pizzeria.

Other programs that Mrs. Morgan has implemented at Oak Grove Middle School are primarily focused on providing support for young girls. One specific program that she pioneered was the Girls Ongoing program, which gives young girls a space to engage in different forms of art therapy and have reflective discussion. Young girls are typically hand-selected by Mrs.

Morgan to participate when she believes that it would be beneficial for them. Mrs. Morgan is extremely passionate about providing this kind of programming to young girls and is glad that it's being offered to Oak Grove's female students, but she did point out that there is not any SEL programming specifically for young boys at Oak Grove. Mrs. Morgan hopes to implement some programming for young boys so that all of the students at Oak Grove have spaces for social and emotional development outside the classroom.

In addition to developing social and emotional learning programs specifically for young boys at Oak Grove, the teachers and administrators are also in the process of transitioning to a new system for behavior management and de-escalation in Oak Grove classrooms. She wasn't able to remember the name of the new program, but she was able to tell me that it's a very structured program that gives specific instructions and recommendations for how to handle various behavioral situations in ways that de-escalate the situation and respect anything that the student might be going through outside of the classroom. She and I both agreed that this program would be extremely beneficial for new teachers who may become overwhelmed by behavioral management and unsure of how to properly handle various situations.

As we talked about SEL programming in the classroom that administrators implement and teachers are expected to use, Mrs. Morgan shared with me that many of the teachers take issue with the administrative team's implementation approach. She shared with me that these social and emotional learning and classroom behavioral management programs are often switched to something new after one or two years in practice, which is something that is extremely frustrating for the teachers. She revealed that they often receive pushback from the teachers when trying to implement a new program who say, "If we're just going to switch to a new program in a year, why do I need to learn how to use this one?" While not all teachers react

this way, there is a portion of the teacher population at Oak Grove that does react this way, creating a negative perception of these programs. "Consistency is key for the teachers," she told me and she said that when the programming is not consistently implemented and supported, they react negatively to it.

Mrs. Morgan clarified that it's not that the teachers don't think social and emotional learning programming is beneficial and said that she, along with many of the teachers in the school, feels that this kind of programming is very necessary, but felt that it would be most beneficial if it was implemented in a way that would guarantee that every student received it. The teachers at Oak Grove have shared with Mrs. Morgan that they would appreciate having a toolkit of resources to de-escalate tense or uncomfortable situations within the classroom, like the one that she described to me earlier during our conversation. She hopes that the teachers will find this new program useful and that it will meet their needs for social and emotional learning in the classroom. Mrs. Morgan also believes that social and emotional learning should be implemented primarily in the classroom because she believes that they would see stronger development amongst their students due to the nature of the relationship that the teacher and the students have with one another. Since Mrs. Morgan doesn't have a classroom of her own and she serves as a resource to the teachers, she's not able to foster the same kinds of relationships with the students at Oak Grove.

Student and parent reactions to the social and emotional learning programming at Oak Grove are also incredibly mixed. Mrs. Morgan noted that "students often follow what is modeled at home," so if their parents find the programming to be unnecessary, then the students will also react negatively to the programming; this goes for both the in-classroom programming and the

programming for young girls provided by the school. Mrs. Morgan used the Girls Ongoing

program as an example of the range of reactions these programs can have, saying:

> "There are certain girls that I know need to be in Girls Ongoing, but they don't want to be
>
> labeled as someone who has issues. [...] But there are also girls who have come back in
>
> high school and say, 'If I hadn't gone through this program, I don't know where I would
>
> be. It saved my life'."

Mrs. Morgan also shared that some of the students who ended up having such a strong

connection to Girls Ongoing were students who, at the time, did not seem like they were

connecting with the program. For this reason, Mrs. Morgan and I agreed that this program is

essential to the development of the young women of Oak Grove Middle School.

In addition to student reactions to social and emotional programming at Oak Grove being

mixed, parental reactions to the programs were too. There were times when Mrs. Morgan would

hear from parents who had tried everything they could to support their child on their own and

would ask the school to "do anything they could for their child" so that they are able to succeed.

Other times, when Mrs. Morgan would reach out to families regarding their student, she would

learn that their student's education was not a priority because of the other things that the family

had to worry about. She told me that the latter became more common during the COVID-19

pandemic, saying that "all [she] can do is offer resources," using her approach ("I've noticed

some things regarding your child. How can I help you?") and that it's up to the students and the

families if they want to take advantage of those resources. It's worth noting that these kinds of

resources were not required at Southbend Local School District because the socioeconomic class

lines are significantly different between the two districts. A significant portion of the district

qualifies for free of reduced lunch pricing because they live at or below the poverty line in Licking County.

While many families in Hillview Local Schools are not financially able to provide resources like counseling to their students, the district has been able to provide support for their students in these areas. In Hillview schools, students have access to resource-network coordinators and student advocates in addition to their classroom teacher and the administrative team at the school. Mrs. Morgan described the student advocate as someone who is "a form of a counselor, without an official counseling license," whose primary function is to support students through any issues that they might be having in classes, at home, or internally. The resource-network coordinator and the student advocates often work closely with one another and with the classroom teachers' referrals to support students and connect them to any resources they may need.

In addition to referrals, the student advocates and the resource-network coordinators also use check-in boards throughout the school to monitor students who may need support, but may not be able to openly express this need. Using sticky notes, students write their student number on the back of their sticky note and use it to indicate on the board whether they are doing well or if they need someone to check on them and offer them support. Mrs. Morgan told me that this has helped their time to offer support and resources to students who wouldn't ordinarily be referred to them because they were not showing signs of needing support. This method allowed Mrs. Morgan to know who might be struggling in silence, and her team was able to address the issue and offer solutions.

From March through October of 2020, Hillview Local Schools was involved in completely remote instruction. Mrs. Morgan's role during this time was to check-in with the

families of students who were not participating in their classes, failing multiple classes at the same time, and not showing up to Zoom meetings at all. Upon checking in with those families, Mrs. Morgan said, she usually found that there was an underlying issue within the students' household, such as sickness, financial hardship, unreliable technology, or grief caused by isolation. Once they learned about underlying issues that students were experiencing, they were able to follow up with them and provide resources for the students and their families that were able to take advantage of them. In addition to reaching out based on classroom teachers' referrals, the resource-network coordinator and the student advocate's contact information was readily available to students on the online schooling platform, so that if they needed support they were able to reach out to someone who would be ready and able to help. Mrs. Morgan said that, while some did take advantage of their services, most students did not, but that "all [they] can do is offer the resources, [they] can't force students to take advantage of them."

Mrs. Morgan also told me that she interacted with parents a lot more than she would have during a normal school year. Laughing, she told me that she felt like a telemarketer because of how many phone calls she was making. During remote learning, she often found that students were struggling because there was tension at home due to the loss of a job, death of a loved one, or contraction of COVID-19, and the conversation often ended (and even, at times, started) with Mrs. Morgan being yelled at by families because of these tensions. Despite this, Mrs. Morgan felt that she was able to connect with many more families in the Oak Grove community than she would have in a normal year and provide more support than ever before; she truly felt that she was doing meaningful work and having an impact in the community.

She also connected more deeply with the teachers at Oak Grove because, during remote learning, her schedule was very different from a normal school year. Instead of being responsible

for lunch and recess duty, Mrs. Morgan was able to attend the teachers' team meetings and give her input to the conversations, rather than being filled in on the topics of the meetings after the fact. She said that this made her feel much more connected to the teachers, despite being physically separated from one another for almost eight months. However, she did notice that many of the teachers were suffering from exhaustion due to the amount of time they were spending in front of a screen, so there were days that the meetings did not feel as productive as they could have been during a normal school year.

In addition to supporting students with remote learning, Mrs. Morgan was also appointed the "self-love-self-care" person for Oak Grove Middle School during remote learning. In this position, she would provide students and teachers with strategies to create healthy boundaries, efficient work habits, and productive self-care routines. She also worked with the counseling team at Oak Grove to send out a weekly newsletter with the self-care tips and other announcements to encourage students and teachers to make a conscious effort to take care of themselves amidst the isolation and grief that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused. While she can't be certain how many teachers and students were reached by the newsletter because she had no way of knowing if the newsletters were read, she felt that sending it out functioned as a form of reaching out to students and offered them another avenue to reach out for support if they needed to.

Mrs. Morgan's position and story was one that was incredibly fascinating to me and I believe that every school should have someone in a position of this type because every student could benefit from having someone advocate for them when they are not able to or feel like they can't. I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn, not only more about Mrs. Morgan's position, but also to have learned about the community at Oak Grove Middle School,

an environment that is extremely different from the environment of Southbend Elementary School. I greatly enjoyed and appreciated my time working with and learning from Mrs. Morgan.

Findings

This study was incredibly fruitful, despite excluding the student profiles for the aforementioned reasons, providing many different perspectives and experiences to to be examined through the lens of social and emotional learning and the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout each of the educator interviews, which are detailed above, we found the following to be true:

- Most social and emotional learning practices are program-based, not curriculum based.
- While most teachers are not as familiar with the Ohio Department of Education's social and emotional learning standards as they are with their content standards, they all agreed that they felt that facilitating social and emotional learning into their classrooms was something that was extremely important and was implemented into their classrooms in some form.
- Programming for social and emotional learning continued virtually, with adaptations, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many teachers utilized Zoom's Breakout Rooms feature to facilitate social interaction during this time of isolation.
- Neither school that was mentioned in this report had significant support or outlets in place for students and teachers who may be struggling with mental health problems through the COVID-19 pandemic.

- All educator participants felt that the administrative team they work with did everything they could to support the students and teachers while classroom instruction was taking place online.

Considering these findings, it's clear that programming for social and emotional learning is being taken seriously and implemented in classrooms. However, many teachers voiced that there were changes that they think would be beneficial to students' social and emotional development and would be necessary to implement before social and emotional learning, as a discipline, can be taught completely effectively and efficiently.

1. Mrs. Maple mentioned to me that there is no accountability or measurement in regards to the Ohio Department of Education's social and emotional learning standards, so when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out and schools moved to remote learning for the remainder of the school year, social and emotional learning often suffered in order to maintain the other subjects. Implementing accountability measures for the SEL standards would prevent social and emotional learning from slipping in priority during normal school years, as well as in unprecedented school years, as the spring of 2020 and the 2020-2021 school year were.

2. Mrs. Morgan brought to my attention that not all schools have a counseling team that is able to seek out students who need support and provide them with resources, like Oak Grove does. Widespread implementation of teams such as the ones at Hillview Local Schools would ensure that every student is receiving the social and emotional support that they need in order to survive and thrive in the school environment. This would also provide students with knowledge of who in the school environment is best qualified and equipped to connect them with the appropriate resources for their situation.

3. It was also brought to my attention that every student in Southbend Local Schools was able to request access to the necessary technological resources that are required to be successful in schools during remote learning. This initiative was extremely beneficial to many students, and should be funded to provide students with the technology that they need to succeed, whether they are learning remotely or in-person. This kind of accessibility will not only assist students in the classroom, but it will also allow them to avoid being singled out for not having access to technological resources that are being used in the classroom.

4. All of the teachers echoed that their school uses professional development time to discuss social and emotional learning strategies. However, this time would be more effective if it was being used to implement and train teachers on programming for social and emotional learning that is reflective of the Ohio SEL standards, consistent for many consecutive years, and offers adequate training for teachers, so that they are prepared to lead these programs.

These are changes that would occur at the federal, state, and local levels that would universalize social and emotional learning standards and practices and would support a deeper understanding of what social and emotional learning is amongst educators. Additionally, administrators in education would be able to gain valuable insight on how to implement programming in the classroom that is reflective of the Ohio Department of Education's social and emotional learning standards', as well as the educational values of the schools that the programming is going into. These findings and future directions would universally shape the social and emotional development of students across the United States and would allow them to be shaped into upstanding citizens in a more efficient society.

Limitations

During the data analysis process, I made the decision to omit the student participants' data from this research report for a number of reasons. While I enjoyed my time meeting and talking with the students, I found that the student interviews were not as fruitful as I'd hoped they would be. I want it to be clear that the data from the student interviews was lacking not due to the student participants themselves, but due to my own inexperience working with students, especially considering the limitations of a virtual platform. I felt that I was unable to fully connect with my student participants because of my own inexperience working with young students and the virtual platform of the interviews, and that our interviews might have been more productive if they had taken place in an in-person setting rather than online.

I felt that my interview questions were not quite age-appropriate for the student participants, as I noticed that many of the questions were misunderstood by the student participants. When I wrote the questions back in March and April of 2021, I thought that they were age-appropriate and would be easy enough for my student participants to understand. However, as I began my interviews, I noticed that many of my student participants were unable to comprehend the questions, leaving me flustered and scrambling to try to reword the questions during the interview. For example, one of my student interviews was also attended by the participants' mother and during the interview, I noticed that she was able to restate the questions that I was asking in ways that were much more appropriate for her student's comprehension level. For instance, toward the end of our conversation, the question I asked the participant was: "How have your connections with your friends and classmates changed since moving back to in-person school?" He didn't understand what I was asking and I wasn't quite sure how to rephrase it, but his mother restated the question more simply, saying, "What was different about

being a friend at school in-person versus online?" and he was able to comprehend and answer the question more easily. I feel that if I had worded my questions differently, in a way that was more age-appropriate and more considerate of the virtual platform, the interviews might have been more insightful.

In addition to the issue of my questions being difficult for the student participants to comprehend, I also feel that the virtual platform of these interviews made the interviews feel impersonal at times, which lead to students giving shorter answers and exhibiting discomfort through their body language, such as fidgeting and looking down or away from the camera or screen. While the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible for these interviews to take place in-person, if I were to repeat these interviews to generate more insightful results, I would like to hold these interviews in-person after I have had a few meetings to get to know the student and provide an light activity (art supplies, fidget toy, etc.) during the interview to make the conversation more natural. I feel that these changes would yield a more natural flow of conversation and generate more insightful data to address the research questions.

With all that being said, I greatly appreciate my student participants and I deeply value the perspectives and insights that they offered me, as well as the time and energy that they contributed to my research. I take full responsibility for the student interviews being less than successful, and I appreciate having had the opportunity to learn from this research period so that I can improve in these areas, should I conduct a similar research study in the future.

Conclusion

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues into the fall of 2021, studies such as this one become more and more vital as we attempt to understand the long-term effects of this kind of lasting isolation and grief. While the questions being examined by this study had not been widely asked or answered yet, when we looked to educators for their input, they were able to provide valuable insight into their school's social and emotional learning practices and share the difficulties and triumphs that they faced throughout their experiences with remote learning. Providing teachers and students with resources and support for social and emotional learning during both remote learning and in-person instruction is essential to the success of their students.

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Appendix A

Applicable Excerpts from Ohio's K-12 Social and Emotional Learning Standards

Definitions

Social-emotional learning is 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, 2017). The skills associated with social-emotional learning provide the foundation for effective communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, resiliency, perseverance and teamwork — all of which are necessary for individuals to be successful in a technical or career field and postsecondary work.

The Framework for Systemic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2017) identifies and defines five competencies, which Ohio used as its basis for the standards. These five competencies are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making.

- Self-Awareness – The ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions and thoughts, including how they relate to one's identity and culture and own emotions and thoughts and how they influence behavior. Self-awareness is the ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations with a sense of integrity, confidence and optimism.
- Self-Management – The ability to navigate one's emotions, thoughts and behaviors across different situations while managing stress, controlling impulses and motivating oneself. Self-management includes the ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.
- Social Awareness – The ability to consider diverse perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. It also reflects the ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior across settings and to be able to identify and use family, school and community resources and supports.
- Relationship Skills – The ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships with diverse individuals and groups. Developing relationship skills promotes the ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist social and peer pressure, negotiate conflict and seek help or offer it to others.
- Responsible Decision-making – The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions within the context of ethical standards, safety concerns and social norms. It involves making realistic evaluations of the consequences of one's actions and a consideration of the well-being of self and others.

Competency A: Self-Awareness	
A1: Demonstrate an awareness of personal emotions	
K-2	3-5
A1. 1.a Identify basic personal emotions	A1. 1.b Identify a range of personal emotions
A1. 2.a Recognize emotions as natural and important	A1. 2.b Identify that emotions are valid, even if others feel differently
A1. 3.a Identify appropriate time and place to safely process emotions, independently or with the guidance of a trusted adult	A1. 3.b Consider when it is necessary to process emotions in a safe place, independently or with the guidance of a trusted adult
A1. 4.a Recognize that current events can impact emotions	A1. 4.b Describe how current events trigger emotions
A2: Demonstrate awareness of personal interests and qualities, including strengths and challenges	
K-2	3-5
A2. 1.a Identify personal interests and qualities	A2. 1.b Identify personal strengths based on interests and qualities
A2. 2.a Explore opportunities to develop skills and talents	A2. 2.b Demonstrate a skill or talent that builds on personal strengths
A3: Demonstrate awareness of and willingness to seek help for self or others	
K-2	3-5
A3. 1.a Identify at least one trusted adult at school and in the community and know when and how to access them	A3. 1.b Describe how a trusted adult can provide academic, social or emotional support or assistance for self and others
A3. 2.a Seek help when faced with challenges or when frustrated with a task, skill or situation	A3. 2.b Seek help and acknowledge constructive feedback from others that addresses challenges and builds on strengths
A3. 3.a Describe situations or locations that feel safe	A3. 3.b Utilize strategies that support safe practices for self and others
A4: Demonstrate a sense of personal responsibility, confidence, and advocacy	
K-2	3-5
A4. 1.a Describe the outcomes of both following and breaking rules	A4. 1.b Identify and describe how personal choices and behavior impacts self and others

A4. 2.a Demonstrate confidence in the ability to complete simple tasks and challenges independently, while expressing positive attitudes towards self	A4. 2.b Demonstrate confidence in the ability to complete a range of tasks and address challenges while expressing positive attitudes towards self
A4. 3.a Identify ways to respectfully advocate for basic personal needs	A4. 3.b Identify ways to respectfully advocate for academic and personal needs

Competency B: Self-Management	
B1: Regulate emotions and behaviors by using thinking strategies that are consistent with brain development	
K-2	3-5
B1. 1.a Identify personal behaviors or reactions when experiencing basic emotions	B1. 1.b Demonstrate strategies to express a range of emotions within the expectations of the setting
B1. 2.a Describe verbal and nonverbal ways to express emotions in different settings	B1. 2.b Describe possible outcomes associated with verbal and nonverbal expression of emotions in different settings
B1. 3.a Identify and begin to use strategies to regulate emotions and manage behaviors	B1. 3.b Apply strategies to regulate emotions and manage behaviors
B2: Set, monitor, adapt, and evaluate goals to achieve success in school and life	
K-2	3-5
B2. 1.a Identify goals for classroom behavior and academic success	B2. 1.b Identify goals for academic success and personal growth
B2. 2.a Identify how adults and peers can help with a goal	B2. 2.b Identify school, family and community resources, with adult support, that may assist in achieving a goal
B2. 3.a Describe what action steps can be taken to reach a short-term goal	B2. 3.b Plan steps needed to reach a short-term goal
B2. 4.a Discuss obstacles that can get in the way of reaching a goal and ideas for handling those obstacles	B2. 4.b Identify alternative strategies with guidance toward a specified goal
B3: Persevere through challenges and setbacks in school and life	
K-2	3-5

B3. 1.a Describe a time when you kept trying in a challenging situation	B3. 1.b Identify strategies for persevering through challenges and setbacks
B3. 2.a Explain how practice improves performance of a skill and can help in overcoming a challenge or setback	B3. 2.b Identify the cause of a challenge or setback and with assistance, develop a plan of action

Competency C: Social Awareness	
C1: Recognize, identify, and empathize with the feelings and perspectives of others	
K-2	3-5
C1. 1.a Identify facial and body cues representing feelings in others	C1. 1.b Identify verbal and nonverbal cues representing feelings in others
C1. 2.a Identify words and actions that may support or hurt the feelings of others	C1. 2.b Identify and acknowledge others' viewpoints, knowing that both sides do not have to agree but can still be respectful
C1. 3.a Define empathy and identify empathetic reactions in others	C1. 3.b Demonstrate empathetic reactions in response to others' feelings and emotions
C2: Demonstrate consideration for and contribute to the well-being of the school, community, and world	
K-2	3-5
C2. 1.a Identify the purpose for having school-wide expectations and classroom rules	C2. 1.b Identify reasons for making positive contributions to the school and community
C2. 2.a Identify characteristics of positive citizenship in the classroom and school	C2. 2.b Demonstrate citizenship in the classroom and school community
C2. 3.a Perform activities that contribute to classroom, school and home, with adult involvement as needed	C2. 3.b Perform activities that contribute to classroom, school, home and broader community
C2. 4.a Identify and participate in activities to improve school or home	C2. 4.b Identify areas of improvement for school or home and develop an action plan to address these areas
C3: Demonstrate an awareness and respect for human dignity, including the similarities and differences of all people, groups, and cultures	

K-2	3-5
C3. 1.a Discuss how people can be the same or different	C3. 1.b Discuss positive and negative opinions people may have about other people or groups, even if they aren't always true
C3. 2.a Participate in cross-cultural activities and discuss differences, similarities and positive qualities across all cultures and groups	C3. 2.b Participate in cross-cultural activities and acknowledge that individual and group differences may complement each other
C3. 3.a Discuss the concept of, and practice, treating others the way you would want to be treated	C3. 3.b Define and practice civility and respect virtually and in-person
C4: Read social cues and respond constructively	
K-2	3-5
C4. 1.a Recognize social cues in different settings	C4. 1.b Identify others' reactions by tone of voice, body language and facial expressions
C4. 2.a Identify norms for various family and social situations	C4. 2.b Identify ways that norms differ among various families, cultures and social groups
C4. 3.a Recognize others' personal space and boundaries	C4. 3.b Recognize that individuals' needs for privacy and boundaries differ and respect those differences

Competency D: Relationship Skills	
D1: Apply positive verbal and non-verbal communication and social skills to interact effectively with others and in groups	
K-2	3-5
D1. 1.a Identify and engage in positive communication skills	D1. 1.b Apply active listening and effective communication skills to increase cooperation and relationships
D1. 2.a Practice giving and receiving feedback in a respectful way	D1. 2.b Demonstrate the ability to give and receive feedback in a respectful way
D1. 3.a Develop an awareness that people communicate through social and digital media	D1. 3.b Describe the positive and negative impact of communicating through social and digital media

D2: Develop and maintain positive relationships	
K-2	3-5
D2. 1.a Demonstrate an awareness of roles in various relationships	D2. 1.b Identify what creates a feeling of belonging in various relationships
D2. 2.a Recognize the need for inclusiveness	D2. 2.b Demonstrate behaviors associated with inclusiveness in a variety of relationships
D2. 3.a Recognize that people may influence each other with words or actions	D2. 3.b Distinguish the helpful and harmful impact of peer pressure on self and others
D3: Demonstrate the ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways	
K-2	3-5
D3. 1.a Identify common conflicts and describe possible causes	D3. 1.b Identify and demonstrate personal behaviors to prevent conflict
D3. 2.a Recognize that there are various ways to solve conflicts and utilize these techniques to practice solving problems	D3. 2.b Apply conflict resolution skills to manage disagreements and maintain personal safety
D3. 3.a Apply listening and attention skills to identify the feelings and perspectives of others	D3. 3.b Generate ideas to reach a compromise and find resolution during conflict

Competency E: Responsible Decision-Making	
E1: Develop, implement, and model effective decision and critical thinking skills	
K-2	3-5
E1. 1.a Identify a problem or needed decision and recognize that there may be multiple responses	E1. 1.b Generate possible solutions or responses to a problem or needed decision recognizing that there may be more than one perspective
E1. 2.a Identify strategies to solve a problem	E1. 2.b Implement strategies to solve a problem
E2: Identify potential outcomes to help make constructive decisions	
K-2	3-5
E2. 1.a Identify factors that can make it hard for	E2. 1.b Identify factors that can make it hard to

a person to make the best decision in the classroom	make the best decisions at home or at school
E2. 2.a Identify reliable sources of adult help in the immediate setting	E2. 2.b Identify reliable sources of adult help in various settings
E2. 3.a Identify how personal choices will impact the outcome of a situation	E2. 3.b Predict possible future outcomes of personal actions in various settings
E3: Consider the ethical and civic impact of decisions	
K-2	3-5
E3. 1.a Identify how certain actions can impact others	E3. 1.b Demonstrate the ability to respect the rights of self and others
E3. 2.a Recognize safe practices and actions	E3. 2.b Demonstrate safe practices to guide actions
E3. 3.a Recognize the need for group decisions that support a common goal	E3. 3.b Consider various perspectives and sources of information when participating in group decision-making
E4: Explore and approach new situations with an open mind and curiosity while recognizing that some outcomes are not certain or comfortable	
K-2	3-5
E4. 1.a Recognize that new opportunities may have positive outcomes	E4. 1.b Explore new opportunities to expand one's knowledge and experiences
E4. 2.a Identify physical and emotional responses to unfamiliar situations	E4. 2.b Develop and practice strategies to appropriately respond in unfamiliar situations
E4. 3.a Identify examples of transitions and how they are a necessary and appropriate part of school and life	E4. 3.b Practice the ability to manage transitions and adapt to changing situations and responsibilities in school and life

Excerpts taken from:

K-12 Social and emotional learning standards. Ohio Department of Education. (2019).

http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/Social-and-Emotional-Learning/Socia

l-and-Emotional-Learning-Standards.

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Student Participants

Demographic Questions:
- What grade are you in?
- Where were you raised?
- Where do you go to school?
- Have you gone to the same school for your whole life?

SEL in Schools:
- How are students supposed to treat each other at school?
- Does your school teach you about your emotions?
- What kinds of activities have you done to learn about your emotions in school?
- What do you notice about these lessons and how you and your friends respond?

Social & Emotional Support in Schools:
- When you feel upset or happy in any way, do you talk to someone about these feelings at school? If so, who are those people? If not, why not?
- Have you learned helpful ways to deal with your feelings in class? If so, what are they? Where did you learn how to deal with your feelings? Who taught you how?

Remote SEL:
- Did you go to school online in the spring of 2020?
- What did you think of going to school online rather than in-person? What was different? Was anything the same?
- Did your teacher continue to teach lessons about emotions and interactions? If so, what did those lessons look like while you were going to school online? What did they teach you?

Remote Support:
- Were you able to connect with your friends, classmates, and teachers while you were doing school online? If so, how did you make these connections?
- Did your school provide any programming or resources while you were going to school online to teach students how to deal with difficult emotions?

Closing:
- How have your connections with your friends and classmates changed since moving back to in-person school?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share with me before we end the interview?

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Adult Participants

<u>Demographic Questions:</u>
- Where were you raised?
- Where do you teach?
- What grade do you teach?
- Have you taught at the same school for your entire career?

<u>SEL in Schools:</u>
- How would you describe the Ohio state standards for social and emotional learning?
- How does your school encourage you to integrate the SEL standards into your classroom?
- How do students practice interacting with their peers in accordance with the curriculum while at school?
- Could you describe a sample lesson for me pre-pandemic?
- How do students practice recognizing and regulating their emotions in accordance with the curriculum while at school?
- How do the students in your class react to these lessons? How do the parents react to these lessons? How do you feel about teaching these lessons?
- Do you think that teaching about emotions and interactions has been beneficial for your students? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?

<u>Social & Emotional Support in Schools:</u>
- When students feel upset, are there places within the school environment that they can turn to for support? What are these places? What kinds of support do they offer?

<u>Remote SEL:</u>
- Did you teach online in the spring of 2020 and the fall of 2020?
- What did you think of teaching online rather than in-person? What was different? Was anything the same?
- Which subjects were neglected during your time teaching remotely? Which subjects went well during your time teaching remotely, in your opinion?
- Did you continue to teach lessons on social and emotional development? If so, what did those lessons look like while you were remote? What did these lessons teach students? What did these lessons teach you, considering their remote format?

Remote Support:
- What was your favorite part of doing your lessons online? What was your least favorite part?
- Were you able to connect with your students, administrative team, and fellow teachers while you were doing school online? If so, how did you make these connections? How would you describe the strengths of these connections?
- Did your school provide any additional programming or resources to teach students how to deal with difficult emotions? Was there any programming or resources to support teachers?

Closing:
- Is there anything else you'd like to share with me before we end the interview?