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Social and Emotional Learning in Portland Public High Schools

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Mentor: Caroline Shanti, Professor of Social Work, University of Southern Maine

Abstract

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) can be defined as, “the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others; competencies that clearly are essential for all students. Thus, SEL targets a combination of behaviors, cognitions, and emotions to better students in school and prepare them for the world after” (Zins et al., 2003, p. 1). Emerging evidence suggests that schoolwide and teacher-focused interventions involving a social and emotional learning framework are among the most effective approaches for improving student behavioral outcomes and student success in school (Anyon, et al., 2016). The aim of this study was to explore the knowledge and need for SEL programming across all Portland Public High Schools by surveying the staff at Deering, Casco Bay and Portland High.

Introduction

The literature demonstrates that the use of a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum in schools leads to both increased graduation rates, and higher preparedness for college and career after high school (Durlak, et al., 2011; McCormick, et al., 2015). Further research has identified benefits related to long term success in life such as positive and meaningful relationships, better overall health and well-being and life success (Zins et al., 2003). This descriptive study aimed to identify the level to which SEL is being used in the Portland Public High Schools as well as behaviors that could benefit from SEL intervention such as bullying, negative school climate, and poor student behavior.

Methods

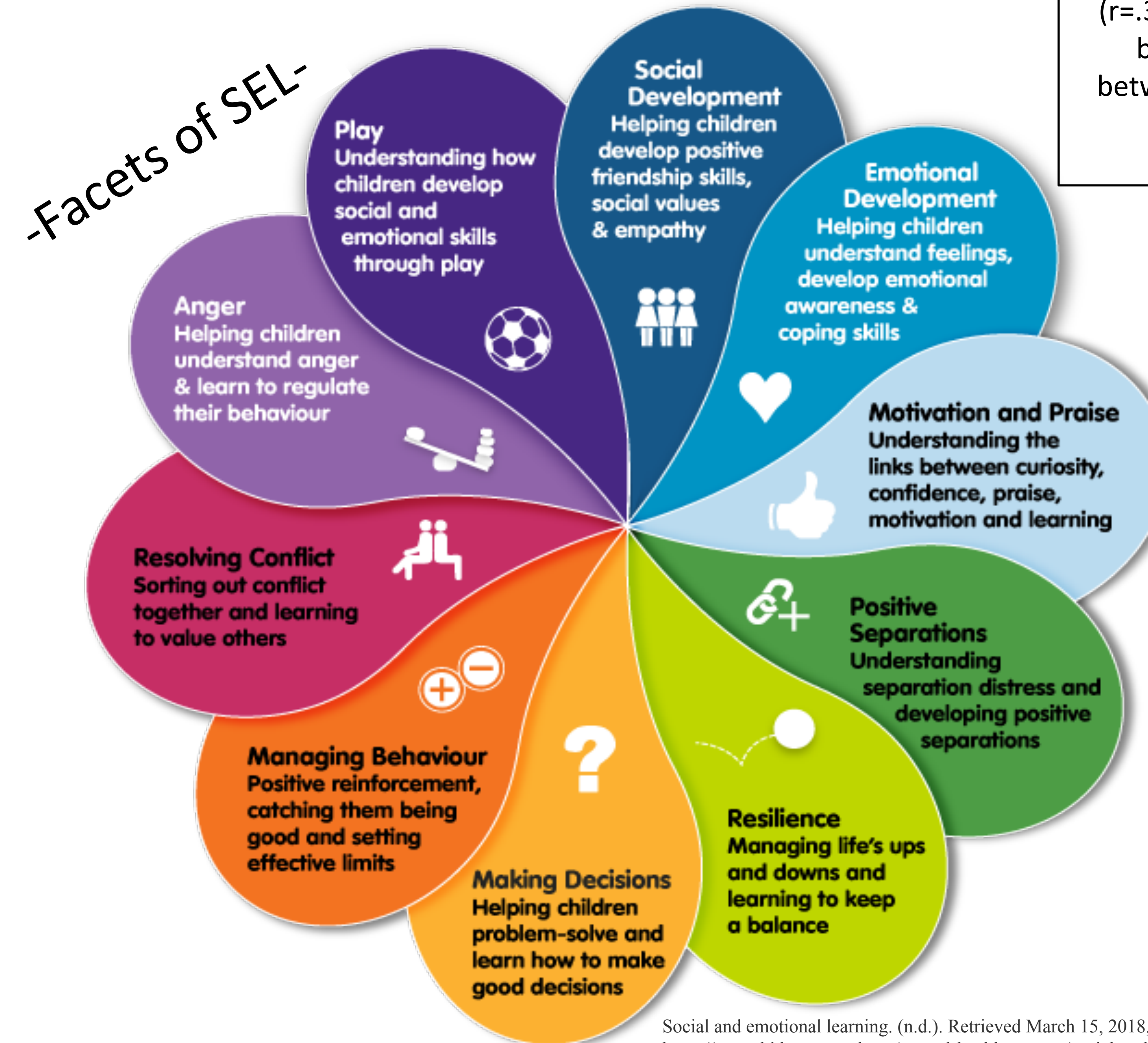
- A quantitative descriptive study
- The USM IRB approved this study
- Data collection through the use of a Google Forms Survey
- The sample was comprised of Portland Public High School Staff (n=104) (Casco Bay, Deering and Portland High School)
- Data analysis was conducted in SPSS and included descriptive and inferential statistics (Spearman’s Rho).

References:

- Anyon, Y., Nicotera, N., & Veeh, C. A. (2016). Contextual influences on the implementation of a schoolwide intervention to promote students’ social, emotional, and academic learning. *Children & Schools*, 38(2), 81-88. doi:10.1093/cs/cdw008
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- Ikebuchi, J., & Rasmussen, B. M. (2014). The Use of Emotions in Social Work Education. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 34(3), 285-301. doi:10.1080/08841233.2014.909378
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- Zins, J. E., Elias, M. J., & Topping, K. J. (2003). Social and Emotional Learning, Childhood. *Encyclopedia of Primary Prevention and Health Promotion*, 1018-1022. doi:10.1007/978-1-4615-0195-4_148

Research Questions

1. What is the general knowledge, opinions and beliefs about the current presence of SEL?
2. What are the staff perceptions of the presence of issues in their school such as bullying, negative school climate, poor student behavior?



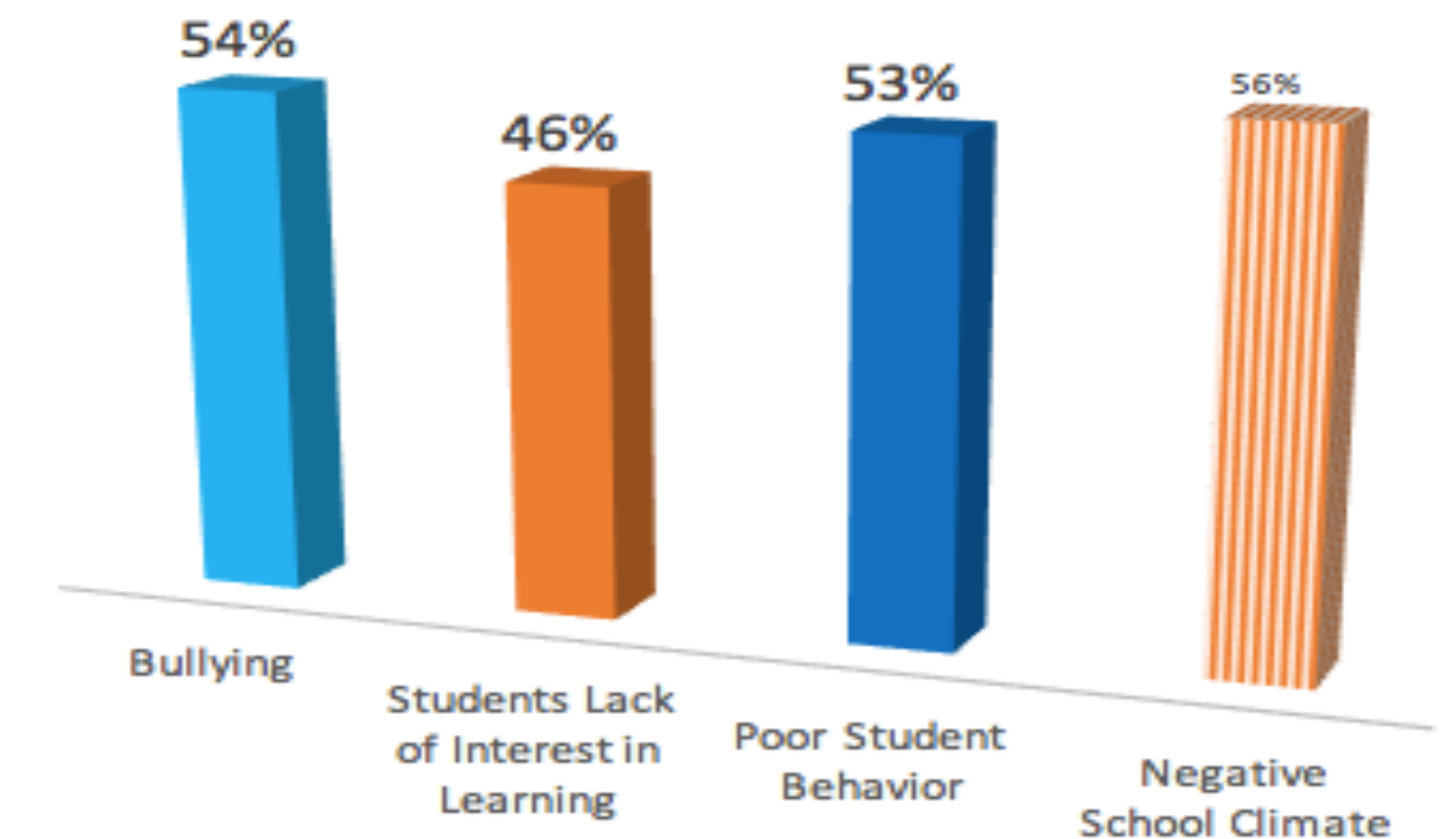
Social and emotional learning. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2018, from <https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/mental-health-matters/social-and-emotional-learning>

Results

Staff across all three schools identified student behaviors they would like to address. Specifically, 54% of staff respondents named bullying as a problem in their school. 46% of staff recognized a lack of interest in learning as an issue in their school, 56% of staff felt that negative school climate was existent in their school and 53% of staff acknowledged poor student behavior as a problem in their school.

Further analysis of the data using the Spearman’s Rho Test found a weak positive correlation ($r=.356$ and $p=.000$) between the percentage of students that staff reported have SEL skills and the presence of poor student behavior in school. Also, analysis found a weak positive correlation ($r=.307$ and $p=.002$) between teachers that said they use SEL in their classroom and the presence of bullying in their school. And lastly, a weak positive correlation ($r=.279$ and $p=.004$) was found between the teachers that said they use SEL in their classroom and the presence of negative school climate in their school.

PERCENTAGE OF STAFF THAT FEEL THE FOLLOWING ISSUES ARE PRESENT IN THEIR SCHOOL:

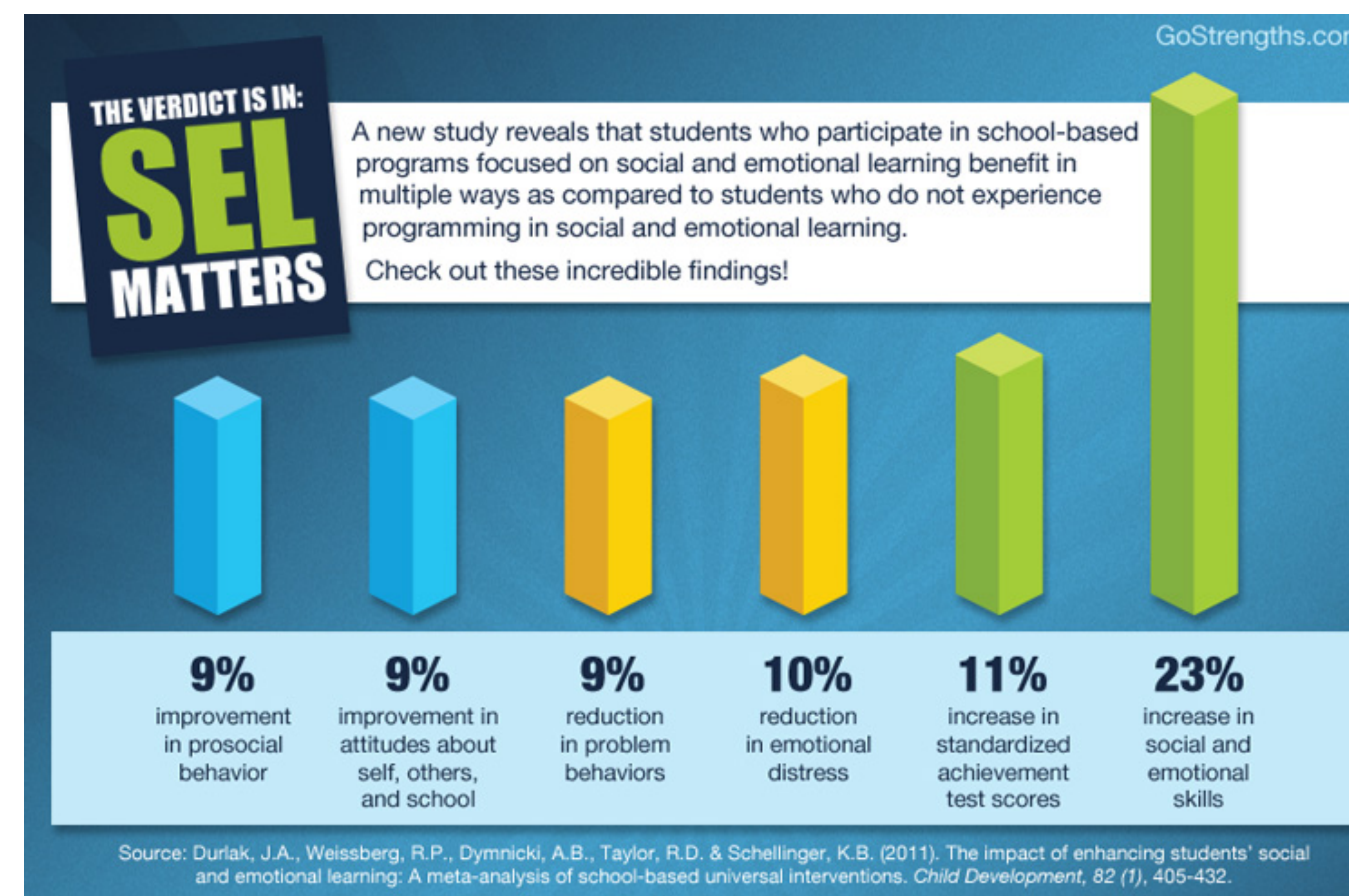


Discussion of Findings

The results for this study suggest there is both a lack of SEL curriculum and the existence of behaviors that may benefit from the introduction of an SEL curriculum as reported by the staff (such as bullying, poor student behavior, and negative school climate). The results also show that there is a correlation between the lack of teacher reported use of SEL in the classroom to the presence of bullying and negative school climate in Portland Public High Schools, however; this should be explored further, due to the small sample size.

These results also demonstrate that across the three high schools, there was a rather small amount of knowledge and implementation of SEL in the classroom and a large amount of interest in learning more. Furthermore, the results demonstrate that there was a high presence of negative behaviors that could benefit from SEL intervention such as bullying, negative school climate, and poor student behavior. Given these results, the implications for the schools are to provide more training so that staff are well equipped to implement SEL in the classroom and provide them with skills in addressing the negative behaviors.

Based on this analysis, I recommend further investigation to test the relationships between staff training of SEL and implementation in the classroom, and the presence of negative behaviors in school as it is a relationship that needs to be explored further.



The Research. (n.d.). Retrieved March 15, 2018, from <https://www.gostrengths.com/the-research/>