Post-Emergency Remote Instruction: Relationships Between Adolescents’ Social-Emotional Learning, Extracurricular Activities, and School Connectedness

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Background and Key Terms
- Since March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in emergency remote instruction across the U.S. Adolescents’ self-reported major concerns have been about loneliness and missing friends (Scott et al., 2021).
- SEL can help youth be more resilient.
  - SEL is a framework based on the concept of emotional intelligence. CASEL’s specific SEL framework identifies 5 competencies: (1) self-awareness, (2) self-management, (3) social awareness, (4) relationship skills, and (5) responsible decision making (Elias et al., 1997).
- Engagement in schools has been defined as either being behavioral, emotional, or cognitive (Fredricks et al., 2004).
- School-connectedness is how much students feel accepted, included, respected, and supported by staff and even peers in their school environment (Goodeenow, 1993), but by the time students begin high school, 40-60% feel disconnected (Durlak et al., 2011).

Research Aim & Questions
- Research Aim: To investigate the relationships between middle school students’ SEL competencies, engagement levels, and perceptions of their in-person school climate, post-pandemic.
- Research Questions:
  - While attending a northeastern public middle school, how are middle school students’ developed levels of SEL competencies related to their levels of engagement in extracurricular activities?
  - How does SEL and engagement influence these middle school students’ school connectedness?

Proposed Methodology
- Participants:
  - 60 students from a northeastern public middle school.
- Sequential Explanatory Mixed Methods Design:
  - Quantitative Phase:
    - Data will be collected from the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), a tool that measures each students’ SEL competency levels, and is completed by teachers.
    - Based on T-score results, students will be placed into comparison groups: high, average, low SEL.
  - Qualitative Phase:
    - There will be 12 focus groups (4 per grade level).
    - Questions will look into how they feel about in-person learning vs. remote, how many clubs they are in, why they joined, and how supported they feel by their teachers.
    - Sessions will be recorded, transcribed, and coded.

Data Analysis/Anticipated Findings
- Significant positive relationship between SEL and engagement (linear regression model)
- Significant increase in school connectedness due to interaction between SEL and engagement (multiple regression model)
- Significant positive association between engagement levels and school connectedness levels (chi-square test)

Discussion/Conclusion
- This study will show the role that SEL plays on students’ quality of school life in middle schools.
- SEL, engagement levels, and school connectedness are potential factors that need to be focused upon by administrators in order to make more students perceive their school positively.
- Key policy priorities among school systems should be to implement and strengthen SEL-based interventions within middle schools to foster connectivity.

Selected References

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