PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN SEL: DETERMINING BEST PRACTICES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

2018 - 2021

NOVO FOUNDATION

Academy for
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL
Learning in Schools

RUTGERS
SECD Lab
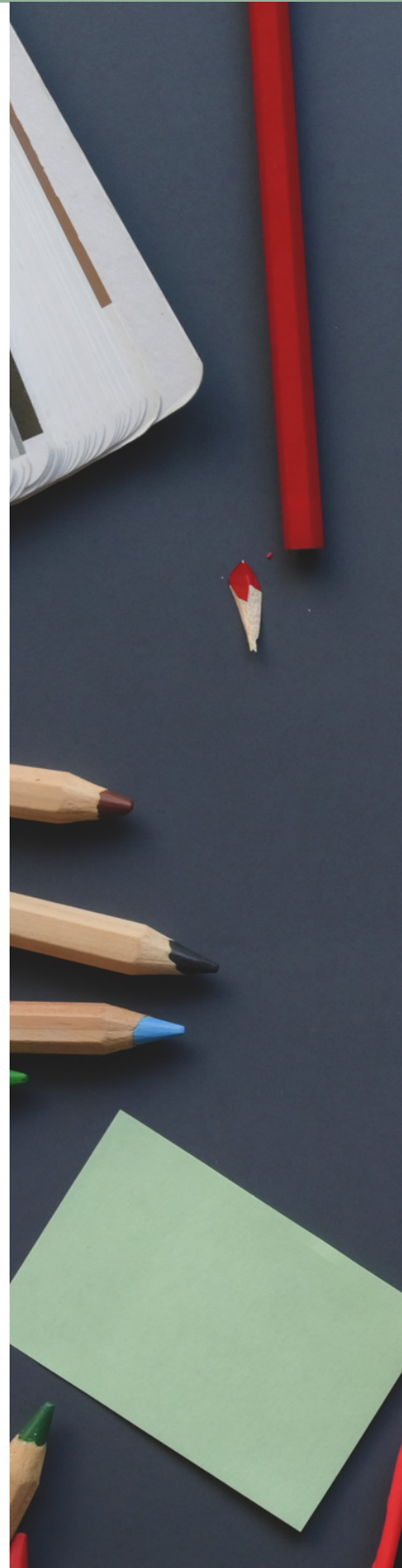
Social-Emotional
and Character
Development Lab

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About the SECD Lab:
The Rutgers Social Emotional and Character Development Lab conducts progressive evidence-based research focused on building the field of social-emotional learning and character development in order to foster collaborative and inclusive school climates. Working closely with individual schools and districts, the SECD Lab aims to deliver ongoing support for students through professional development services and materials developed from evidence-based SECD research conducted in the lab.

The mission of the SECD Lab is to bring SECD instruction and school leadership to prominence through viewing the education system as a means to promote systematic and explicit inclusion of prosocial virtues that have always been implicit in SECD programming. Through high quality instruction, educational standards, teacher certifications and training requirements, we are committed to supporting the development of youth to become citizens of nuance, social-emotional competence, and sound ethical judgment.

REPORT OVERVIEW

ABOUT THIS REPORT

In late 2018, the Social-Emotional and Character Development (SECD) Lab at Rutgers University set out to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the Academy for Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in Schools. This work represents both the final phase of a project to **establish a self-sustaining set of online certificate programs in Instruction and School Leadership in Social-Emotional and Character Development (SEL/SECD) and positive culture and climate** and a unique opportunity to **contribute to knowledge about professional development (PD) in SEL and related fields.** This report includes the following:

- A brief introduction to the Academy for SEL in Schools
- The overarching questions and goals guiding the evaluation
- A description of our evaluation approach and methods
- A presentation of our major findings
- Program updates
- Concluding thoughts and recommendations.

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The Academy for Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in Schools is a continuing education certificate program for school educators, staff, and administrators to develop the skills necessary to foster social-emotional learning, character development, and positive school culture in schools and out-of-school program settings. To meet the unique needs of both educators and administrators in this task, the Academy is divided into two tracks: a school leader track and an instructor track. The school leadership track is aimed at school/program wide SEL implementation. The instructor track is aimed at classroom or student level SEL implementation. In both tracks, the Academy course sequence includes two courses led by a SEL expert followed by a third course, which is a job-embedded practicum. For most participants, the course sequence takes 1-2 years to complete.

To provide greater flexibility to participants, the Academy is offered in two formats: a hybrid course sequence, which includes a live-in person entry point for the Instruction track (such as a day long workshop) followed by online coursework, and a fully online remote course sequence.

Both Academy tracks utilize a cohort model to develop a learning community and a job-embedded practicum to allow educators to integrate their learning into their classrooms and schools. In addition, all Academy alumni and participants have access to a virtual professional learning community (VPLC). The VPLC allows participants access to a sustained connection to a SEL community, in order to allow participants and alumni to grow their SEL toolbox and receive support in their on-going SEL implementation.

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BACKED BY EVIDENCE

The Academy for SEL in Schools is informed by Professional Development (PD) literature to design an effective and sustainable PD that prepares participants to implement and sustain long-term SEL practices in their classroom and school communities.

THE ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- In a meta-analysis of PD programs, Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2017) identified that effective PD programs should possess the following 7 features:
  1. Content Focused
  2. Sustained Duration
  3. Active Learning
  4. Collaboration
  5. Use of Models
  6. Exert Support and Coaching
  7. Opportunities for Feedback and Reflection

- Successful PD programs are sustained, collaborative and involve active learning (Garet et al., 2001)

- The inclusion of cohorts, mentoring and intensive school-based internships contribute to effective PD outcomes for school administrators (Grogan & Andrews, 2002)

*"We define effective professional development as structured professional learning that results in **changes in teacher practices** and **improvements in student learning outcomes**"*
-Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. v

CORE FEATURES OF THE ACADEMY FOR SEL IN SCHOOLS

Informed by the literature and our SEL values, The Academy weaves the elements of effective PDs for teachers and administrators into its structure and coursework. There are three core structural features of the Academy that are believed most likely to contribute to the implementation and long-term sustainability of SEL practices by participants:

- **School-based Practicum**
- **Cohort Model**
- **Virtual Professional Learning Community (VPLC)**

At the heart of these components are the SEL values of relationship building and collaborative learning.

OUR HYPOTHESIS

We believe that the structure and components of the Academy for Social Emotional Learning in Schools, including the Practicum, the Cohort Model and the VPLC, will lead educators to sustain their SEL/CD practices in their classrooms, programs and schools over months and years.

ONLINE PDS WORK!

Multiple studies have found that online PDs are as effective as in-person PD for teacher learning (Fishman et al., 2013; Becker et al., 2014). Best of all, in a nation-wide self-report survey 84% of teachers who participated in an online PD found it extremely or moderately beneficial (Parsons et al., 2019).

EVALUATION RATIONALE

HOW DO WE EFFECTIVELY PREPARE TEACHERS TO IMPLEMENT SEL IN THEIR SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS?

- Although the contours of effective PD are well known (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), there has been a lack of attention to ensuring that teachers and school leaders know how to set up the conditions to facilitate systematic and effective professional development within their contexts (Fishman et al., 2014; Moon et al., 2014).

- Additionally, although SEL has "been on the map" for some time there is still a paucity of research on SEL training. There is almost no long-term follow-back with teachers and school leaders to learn how training has served them in their implementation setting.

- The **Academy for SEL in Schools is uniquely positioned as a natural experimental setting which enables us to**:
  - **Engage alumni** who have completed the certificate in order to assess **how well the program prepared them** for their implementation context; and,
  - **Engage participants who did not continue to the practicum** in order to learn about program experiences including **barriers or reasons** for not completing the certificate.
- This has allowed us to **perform an in-depth, ecologically valid examination of "what happens next" after the PD ends**. This evaluation has helped fill a void and offer realistic guidance **to optimally prepare** those whose professional roles involve SEL instruction and the creation of setting-wide cultures and climates within which SEL can thrive.

EVALUATION
APPROACH

WHAT WE DID

Our evaluation was informed by a systems and evolutionary based approach (Urban, Hargraves, & Trochim, 2014). We developed an evaluation plan that took into consideration the programmatic lifecycle of the Academy for SEL in Schools, along with acknowledging the nested nature of such programs -- for example, the Academy is its own system that exists within the larger system of educational PDs.

The Academy and its leadership team assessed the program's lifecycle and evaluation capacity and ultimately determined that the program, though stable in terms of implementation, lessons, and curricula, was still in a phase of continuous improvement. Thus, an evaluation that used control or comparison groups was not yet necessary (or equitable in this case) and an evaluation plan that **focused on participant experiences, attitudes, and outcomes** was likely more valuable and appropriate for addressing the overarching evaluation questions on the following page.

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OVERARCHING EVALUATION QUESTIONS

While we were interested in evaluating many facets of the Academy for SEL in Schools, our primary goal was to assess **what is needed to help teachers and others working in group settings (both in and out of schools) effectively take SEL principles and practices, communicated via PD, and put them into practice in enduring ways?**

This was achieved by addressing the following evaluation questions:

For individuals who have completed the certificate, how well has it prepared them for their implementation context?
Other than Academy-related resources, what have they done to support their work and PD in SEL instruction or leadership?*

How well has the virtual PLC served as a source of support—to the extent to which it has been used?

For those who did not continue to the practicum, what is their implementation experience?
What supports, if any, have they sought out/found for their SEL-related work?*

For those who completed one course, or less, why did they not continue?
In what ways was the course structure not meeting their needs?
What have they attempted to do subsequently, to support their PD in SEL instruction or leadership—if anything?*

And what are some underlying processes that might mediate individuals' responses in these contexts?
These sub-questions were only addressed through the survey data collection. See figure 5.

PILOTING MEASURES

MEASURE DEVELOPMENT

In early 2019, initial focus groups were conducted in order to pilot focus group and interview questions. These focus groups were scheduled at times, and in locations, where alumni resided or would be gathered together (i.e., a SEL-related conferences such as Center for the Promotion of Social and Emotional Learning Annual Conference). After initial focus groups were conducted, questions were revised and a more intentional sampling strategy was implemented. Since most participants engaged in the certificate program(s) through online classes (as opposed to the in-person workshops) and, therefore, were not in the same geographic location, the research team decided to conduct the majority of focus groups using an online platform, Zoom. Additionally, staying true to our systems-based evaluation approach, we also decided to survey a sub-group of stakeholders, SEL Providers, to assess their knowledge and awareness of the Academy for SEL in Schools.

Not surprisingly, COVID-19 impacted our study design. By March 2020, focus groups and interviews shifted to a fully virtual protocol. This was further supplemented by a virtual follow up survey which mirrored the focus group/interview protocol, but offered a number of questions in a multiple choice format. This follow up survey was sent to Academy alumni and participants who did not respond to focus group requests.

SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

- Which part of the Academy program have you found to be most useful and why (in classroom, School, other contexts)?
- How have you put what you learned into practice?
- What areas would you like to see be given greater emphasis in the certificate program, based on what you are experiencing in your current job situation?

PROCEDURE

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Participants were recruited using a mailing list of 1,043 subscribers (418 from the Leadership track; 625 from the Instruction track) who were either currently participating or previously participated in the Academy for SEL in Schools. The mailing list was managed using MailChimp. For participants to be eligible for focus groups, they were required to complete a 5 minute survey, through Qualtrics, that identified whether they had participated in the certification courses offered.

The goal of the focus groups/interviews was to allow participants to speak their mind freely about their experiences in the Academy. Focus groups were our prioritized mode of data collection over survey responses, due to the potentially limiting capacity for detailed responses.

Interviewers were provided with a preset list of questions that evaluated the level of experience the participants had with the Academy, their opinions of tasks, instructors, structure and the like.

Individuals who participated in the focus groups were then excluded from the participant pool for a follow up survey that aimed to capture the experiences of participants who did not participate in the focus groups as a means to providing feedback.

The follow up survey launched in December 2019 and continued being sent out periodically until the end of June/July 2021.

CODING PROCEDURE

A total of 24 focus groups/interviews, with 31 unique participants, were conducted between August 2019 and April 2021 and transcribed. Each interview was evaluated and coded for evidence on 11 domains (see Appendix). These domains were chosen to understand participants' experience in the Academy and aligned to interview questions. Each domain was coded on a binary scale (1-evidence, 0- no evidence) based on whether the interviewee reported evidence of the domain. For each domain given a code of 1, coders recorded quotes from the interview that were evidence of the domain.

Coding was completed by two assistant coders, in collaboration with Dr. MacDonnell. Coders individually coded each interview and then compared their results to finalize codes. All codes that were consistent across coders were finalized. For domains with discrepant coding, the coders separately reviewed the interview transcript to determine if there was sufficient evidence of the domain in the interview. They compared and discussed their findings before a final code was agreed upon and assigned.

A snapshot...
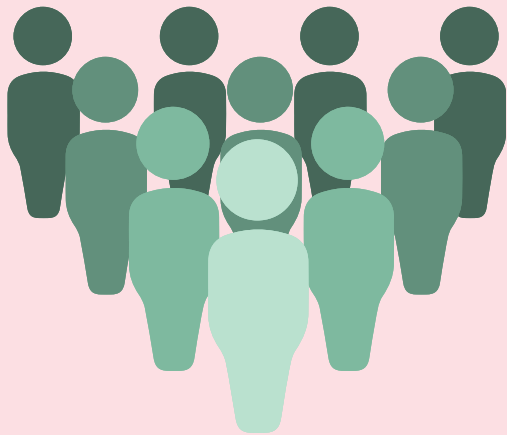
Focus Groups
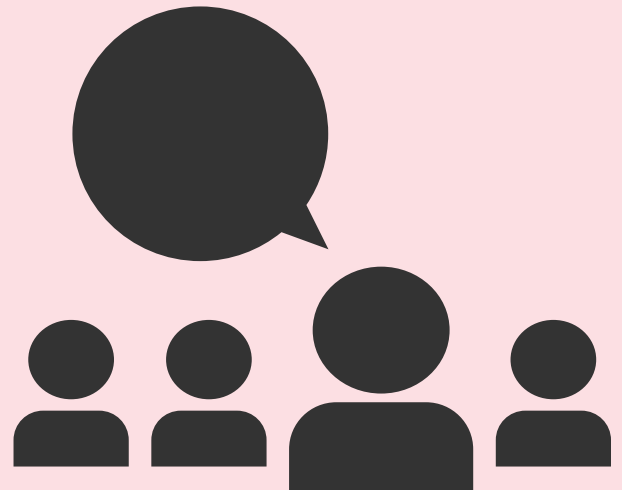
- **31 Total Participants**
  - **21 Leadership Track Participants**
  - **10 Instruction Track Participants**
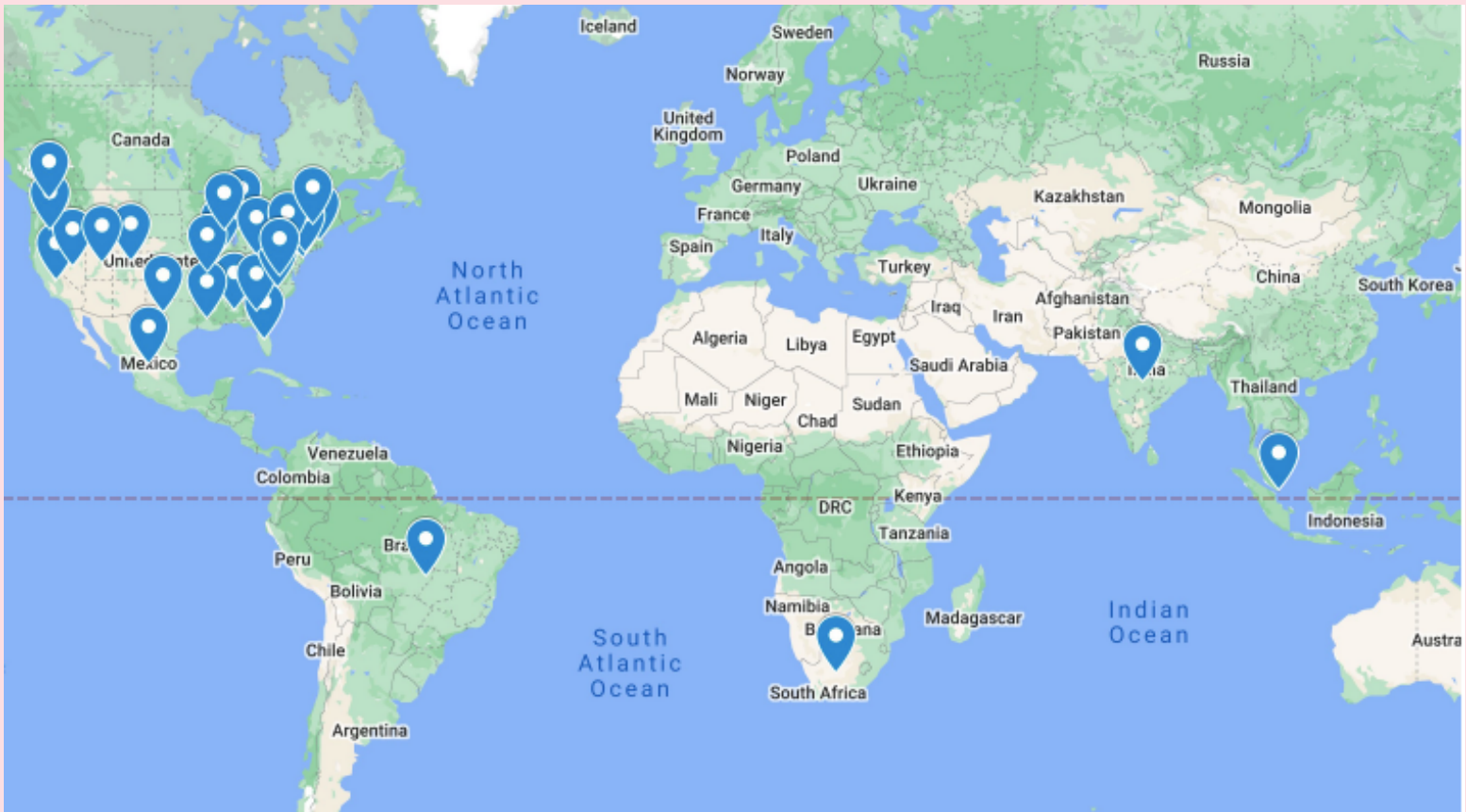- **13 Certificate Holders**

Surveys

- **120 Total Participants**
  - **54 Leadership Track Participants**
  - **66 Instruction Track Participants**
- **87* Certificate Holders**
  - ****Includes 20 participants who were actively enrolled in the practicum at the time of the evaluation***

National + International

PARTICIPATION

The evaluation included responses from a wide range of national and international Academy for SEL in Schools alumni and participants. As demonstrated on the map above, our efforts yielded feedback from participants across the U.S., including Alabama, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri Maryland, North Carolina, New Jersey, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin. Internationally, we gathered feedback from Brazil, India, Mexico, Singapore, and South Africa.

FOCUS GROUP/INTERVIEW RESULTS

As noted above, focus group and interview transcripts were analyzed and coded as a complete qualitative dataset. In this section, we present all qualitative findings that emerged from the qualitative coding process. Findings are presented in order of evaluation question. We first share aggregated totals from the coding procedure, followed by exemplary quotes.

For individuals who have completed the certificate, how well has it prepared them for their implementation context?

Of the 31 individuals who participated in focus groups or interviews, 13 identified as certificate holders. All 13 certificate holders expressed that the Academy for SEL in Schools enabled them to gain new insights, knowledge, or skills that they deemed useful, appropriate, or effective in their roles in education.

Given participants varying experiences with SEL prior to participating in Academy coursework, along with their diverse experiences and roles in education, it is not surprising that **how** the Academy prepared them for their training prompted a variety of different responses. Here we present three unique quotes that showcase these differences:

The application piece was really important to me... I could take what I was learning in the course and then design curriculum around it and then be sending it off and getting feedback from the instructor. - Oregon, USA Alumni

I think it was valuable to me to learn about character development and how to integrate that within a SEL curriculum. - California, USA Alumni

What this did for me personally, in my daily practice in interacting with the kids and with the teachers, is it took a lot of the emotional terms that teachers use with kids and it put it in a more professional way instead of saying the kid's "crazy," you know - he's having with difficulties with self-control. - New Jersey, USA Alumni

FOCUS GROUP/INTERVIEW RESULTS CONT'D

How well has the virtual PLC (VPLC) served as a source of support—to the extent to which it has been used?

The Academy for SEL in Schools conceptualized the VPLC broadly. Due to the virtual nature of the program, participants are encouraged to engage with their course cohort as a source of consultation and feedback; to reach out to their instructor(s); to utilize the online library; and to solicit advice from the Academy's community of experts via email and electronic form.

As a result of this multi-pronged conceptualization, we asked respondents a number of focus group/interview questions regarding VPLC engagement, including questions about how supported they felt by their cohort and instructors *during and after* their training, as well as about their general usage and feelings about the VPLC.

Of the 31 individuals who participated in the focus groups or interviews, 23 indicated that they felt a sense of connectedness to their cohort during their training, while 20 expressed a sense of connectedness with their instructor during the certificate program.

When probed about their engagement with their cohort and instructor post-training, we observed a significant drop in participants' connectedness, with 6 respondents sharing that they felt a sense of connectedness with their cohort post-training and 3 respondents indicating that they felt a sense of connectedness with their instructor post-training. **Finally, none of the 31 focus group/interview participants indicated that they had used the VPLC during data collection.**

FOCUS GROUP/INTERVIEW RESULTS CONT'D

For those who did not continue to the practicum, what is their implementation experience?

Of the 31 focus group/interview participants, 11 had completed both the first and second courses, but had not yet continued on to the practicum. Although these individuals had not yet enrolled in the practicum at the time of the focus group or interview, 9 out of the 11 participants expressed that the training was relevant to their job. For instance, when coded for whether the participant shared new insights, knowledge, or skills that they deemed useful, appropriate, or effective in their role in education, one participant shared the Academy's ability to provide affirmation:

Well, I'll tell you honestly what I found to be most, most interesting for me, it was a community, and it wasn't so much what I learned as much as the community of knowing... Knowing that what I'm doing is correct.. - Florida, USA Completed 1st & 2nd Course

Another participant mentioned how they were able to apply their training in real time:

There were all kinds of stuff about my administrative team that we could look at and assess as leaders and determine what areas of growth we need to have. There's some really good tools that I took right back to our leadership team for this department and put them into place. - Texas, USA Completed 1st & 2nd Course

FOCUS GROUP/INTERVIEW RESULTS CONT'D

For those who completed one course, or less, why did they not continue?
In what ways was the course structure not meeting their needs?

Only 6 of the 31 focus group/interview participants completed only one course at the time of data collection. To further investigate the reasons as to why they may have chosen not to continue on, coders reviewed transcripts for relevancy to the individual's role in education, as well their mention of useful resources, and overall satisfaction.

It is first worth noting that all 6 participants suggested, during data collection, that they still intended to enroll in the second and third courses. Therefore, it was not necessarily surprising that **all 6 participants indicated that they found the training relevant, the resources useful, and were generally satisfied with the course.**

We also looked specifically at this subgroup (the 6 participants) to see if they had any unique suggestions that may provide any additional insights. Once again, all 6 provided feedback in this area. Although there was some overlap, in general these participants had unique suggestions that could be centered around five main areas of focus: (1) cutting back the time devoted to weekly introductions/check-ins during live chats; (2) more facilitation of relationships between cohort-mates; (3) a desire for one-on-one coaching; (4) an interest in evaluation methods; and (5) further integration of equity into the training.

FOCUS GROUP/INTERVIEW RESULTS CONT'D

**And what are some underlying processes that might mediate individuals' responses in these contexts?**

To address the underlying processes that might mediate individuals feelings about their Academy training within their unique contexts, it was important to revisit the larger sample of focus group/interview participants. We did not specifically code for this evaluation question, as underlying processes, by their very nature, tend to be more subtle or nuanced and not something that we would likely be able to identify a priori. However, some of our codes did allow us to identify some recurrent themes that are important to note given the Academy's program structure and broader theory of change.

In general, participants expressed finding the training to be relevant to their jobs (29; 94%); as providing useful resources (29; 94%); and being overall satisfied with their experiences (30; 97%). However, when we looked closely at the codes for domains assessing whether the individual expressed a belief that the training "met their goals" or if the individual "offered suggestions," there was a subgroup of people who communicated the following:

- At times, assignments given as "homework" were not discussed during class time, **leading respondents to express a lack of continuity between homework and in class discussions;**
- On the instruction side, some of the training was **geared toward teachers working with younger, lower level students, which put teachers working with older students at a disadvantage;**
- Some alumni on the leadership side suggested they would have liked **more instruction on "how to" teach and/or implement SEL at the classroom level; and**
- Some participants who had **not yet continued to the practicum wanted more one-on-one support or coaching.**

FOCUS GROUP/INTERVIEW RESULTS CONT'D

Other considerations include the drop in reported connectedness (with instructors and cohort) once the formal training ended; however it is worth pointing out that although communication seemingly drops after the program has ended, participants *still* shared positive feedback in the relevancy, resources, and satisfaction domains.

TRAINING AND POST-TRAINING CONNECTEDNESS

PROGRAM RELEVANCY, RESOURCES, & SATISFACTION
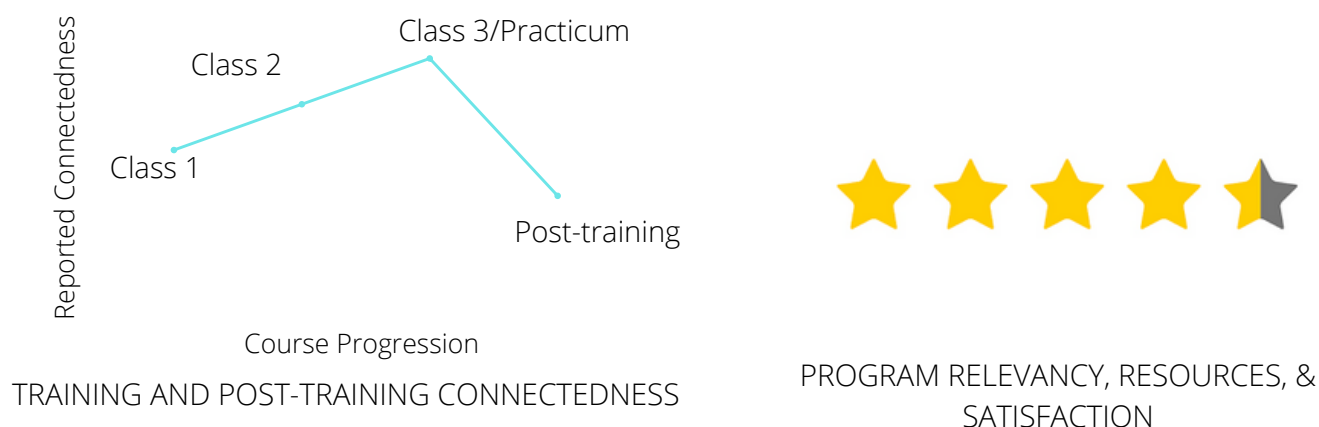
Transcripts were also coded for practicum plausibility, which included whether a student mentioned the ease and supportiveness of their practicum site. Of the 13 individuals who completed the practicum, 9 indicated some form of ease and/or support from their workplace in carrying out the practicum. The other 4 students did not mention any barriers; they simply did not identify ease in carrying out the practicum. The example below provides a strong example of a supportive practicum site:

"...what I was able to do is talk to my curriculum and instruction director. We'd say ' I just learned this, can I implement part of it during writing, we were doing equity training, Can we talk about social emotional learning during these trainings that aren't focused on social emotional learning?' And he gave us permission to do that. " - California, USA Certification Holder

SURVEY RESULTS

Survey responses were tabulated in SPSS 27. Here we present results in order of evaluation question.

For individuals who have completed the certificate, how well has it prepared them for their implementation context?

Of the 120 survey respondents, **a little over half (87; 73%) completed the certificate or their certification was pending within the last three months of they survey**. This included 5 respondents who participated in the accelerated track*. In regard to time elapsed since certificate completion, the largest category of survey respondents were those who completed the certificate within the last 3 months to a year (30.4%), followed by those who completed the certificate more than 2 years ago (24.1%), and those who completed the certificate between 1-2 years ago (19%). A small percentage of respondents had just recently completed their certificate within the last 3 months (26.6%). **In general, respondents reported that they found the training to be useful, with over 80% of all 120 survey respondents indicating that they found the training to be very or extremely useful for their current job** (see Figure 1)**.**
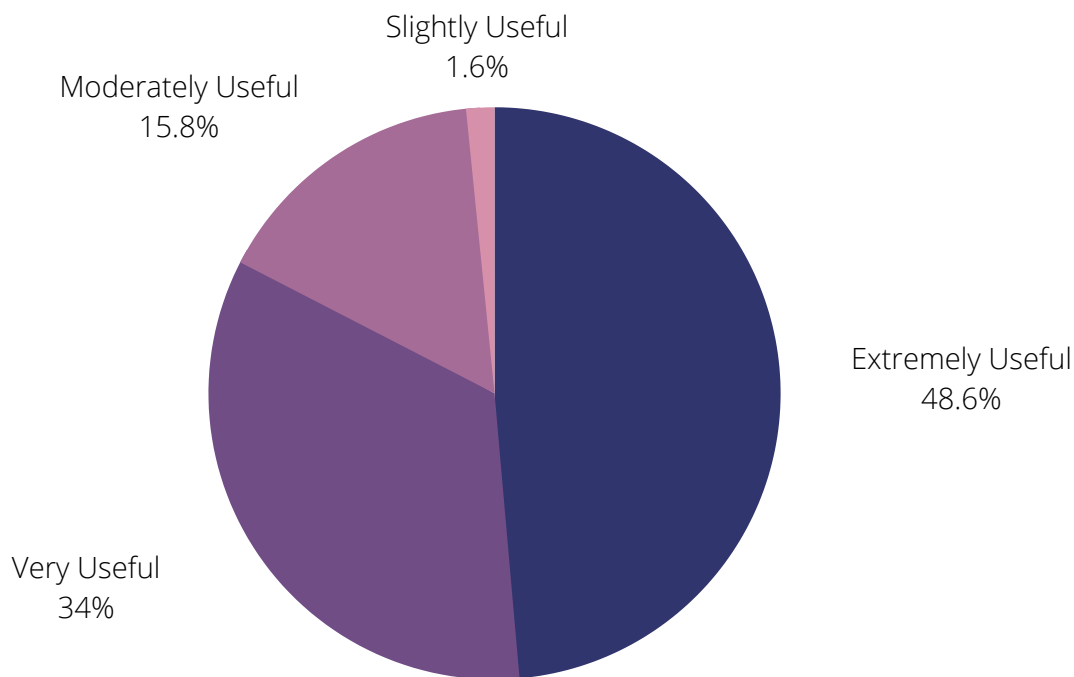

Figure 1: How useful has the training been for your current job?

*To learn more about the accelerated track, go to: https://psych.rutgers.edu/sel-certificate

SURVEY RESULTS CONT'D

How well has the virtual PLC (VPLC) served as a source of support—to the extent to which it has been used?

Once again, due to the broad conceptualization of the VPLC, we asked respondents a number of survey questions about VPLC engagement, including questions about how supported they felt by their cohort and instructors, and the usefulness of the electronic resources, and their general usage and feelings about the VPLC.

In general, the majority of participants indicated that they felt supported by their cohort (74.2%) and their instructors (80%), with only 2 of the 120 respondents indicating that they did not feel supported by their cohort.
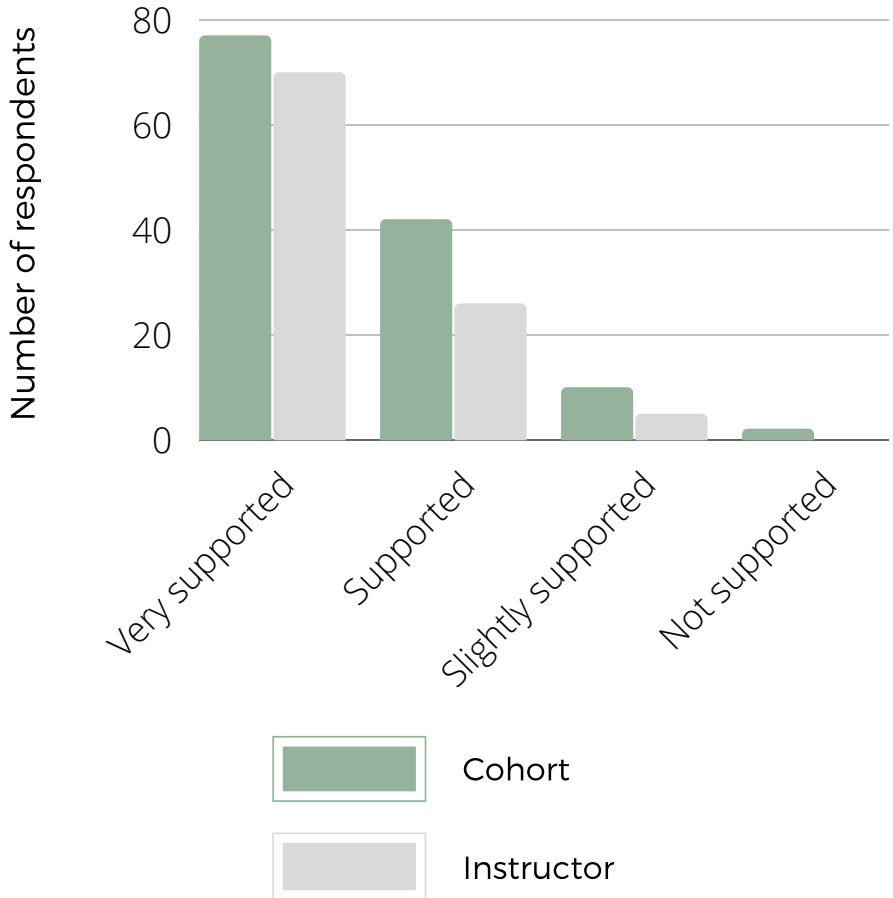

Figure 2: How supported did you feel by your cohort?

SURVEY RESULTS CONT'D

When asked about usage of the Academy's electronic resource page, **the majority (58.3%) of respondents indicated that they had *not* utilized the Resource Center on the Academy website;** however of those who indicated that they had utilized the Resource Center (45 respondents), **the majority (over 80%) reported the resources to be useful** (see Figure 3).
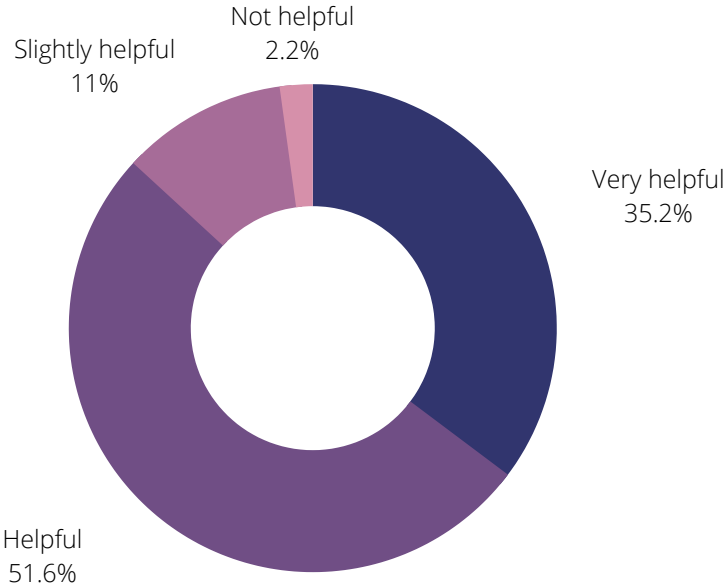
Not helpful
2.2%

Slightly helpful
11%

Very helpful
35.2%

Helpful
51.6%

Figure 3: To what extent has the Resource Center been helpful to you?

When **asked directly about engagement with the VPLC**, the **majority of respondents indicated that they had not (53.7%), or were not sure if they had used the VPLC (37%)**. Of those who indicated that they had used the VPLC (9.3%), open responses as to how the VPLC had been useful were mixed, with participants saying things such as it being useful "This summer, with COVID" and to watch a "SEL Day webinar." **The most common response from those who weren't sure or had not used the VPLC was that they "Did not know what it was."**

SURVEY RESULTS CONT'D

For those who did not continue to the practicum, what is their implementation experience?
What supports, if any, have they sought out/found for their SEL-related work?

Of the 120 survey respondents, **about a quarter (33; 27.5%) did not complete the certificate and/or continue to the practicum.** Similar to those who completed the certificate, **most found the training to be useful to their current job; nearly 70% indicated they found the training to be extremely or very useful**. However, as is visible in Figure 4, this subgroup of respondents, in general, found the training to be less useful than the certificate holders (refer back to Figure 1).
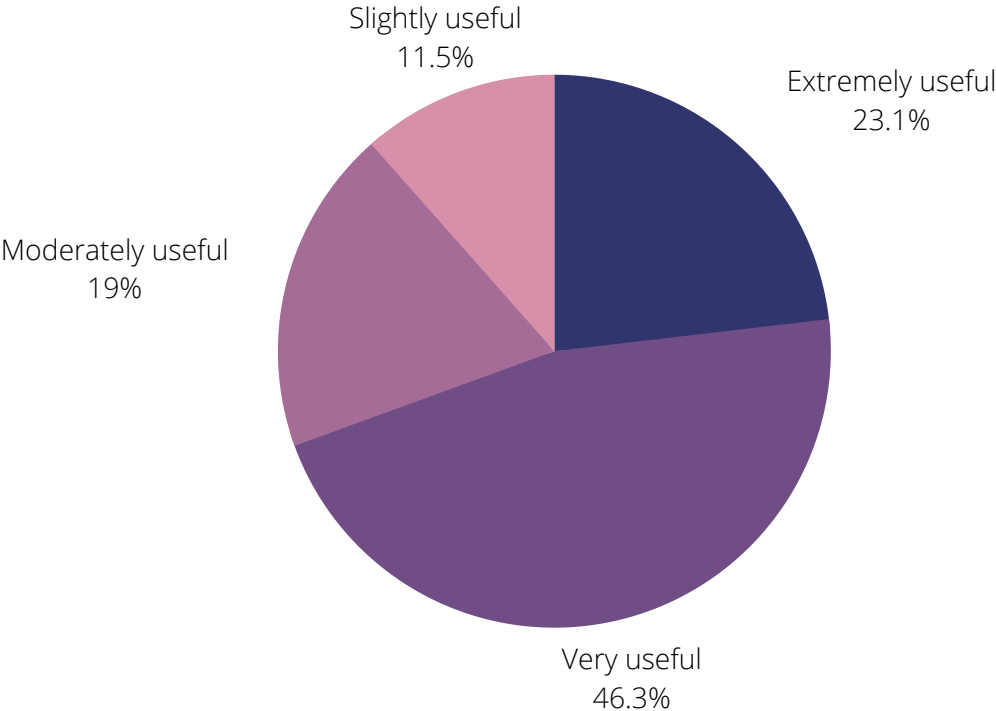

Slightly useful
11.5%

Extremely useful
23.1%

Moderately useful
19%

Very useful
46.3%

Figure 4: How useful has the training been for your current job?

When further probed about what supports they sought out to support their SEL-related work, respondents reported that they engaged in a number of activities, such as reading SEL related articles and/or talking to other SEL professionals. For a more expansive list and breakdown, see Figure 5 below. *Please note that we also included the responses of the 87 certificate holders for comparison.*
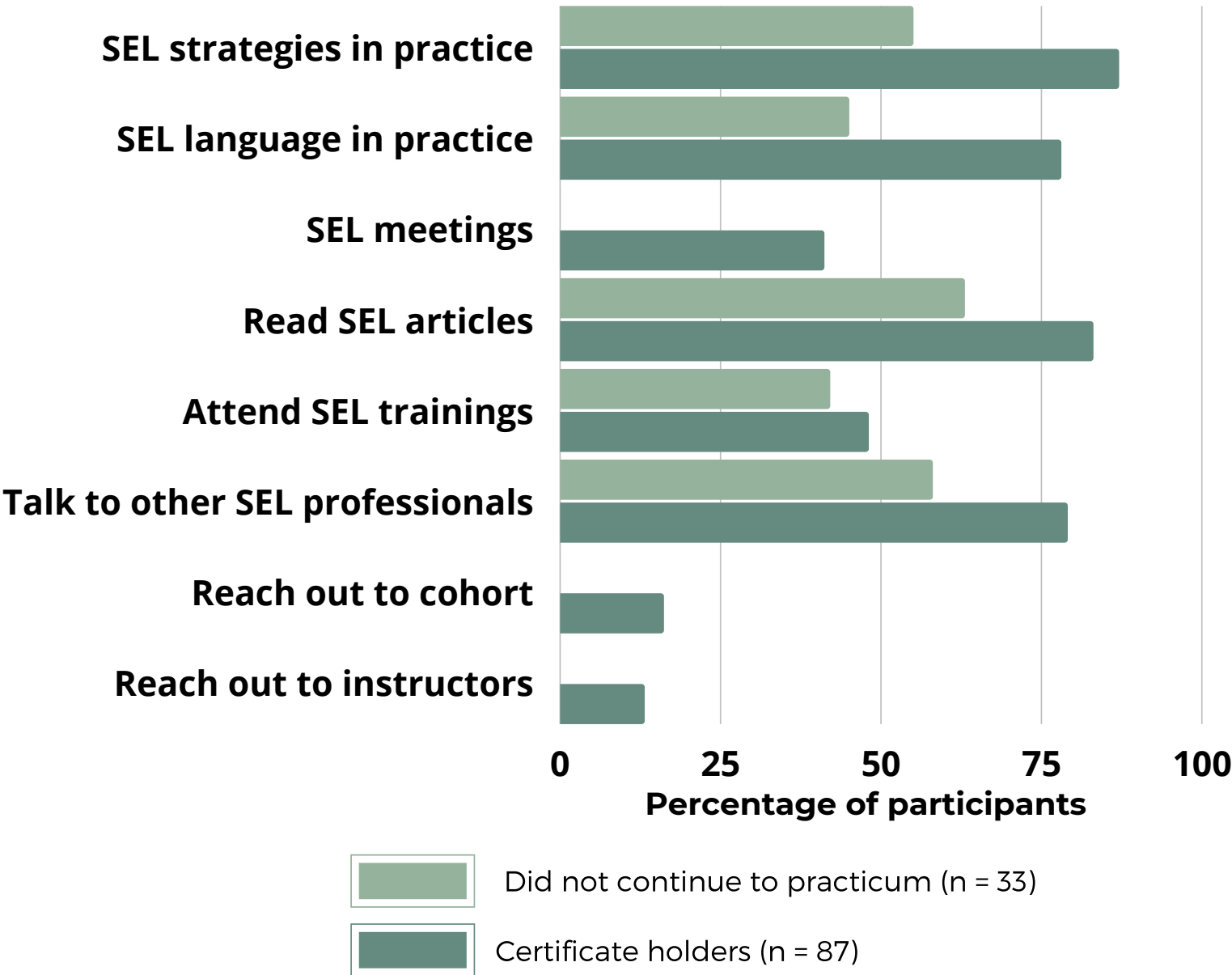

Figure 5: What supports, if any, have you done to maintain your SECD knowledge outside of training?

SURVEY RESULTS CONT'D

For those who completed one course, or less, why did they not continue? In what ways was the course structure not meeting their needs?

The respondents who indicated that they did not complete the first course, chose not to continue after the first course, or were unsure of exactly where/when they stopped the course sequence (26; 22%), we further probed them on the circumstances leading them to not continue toward the certification (see Figure 6).
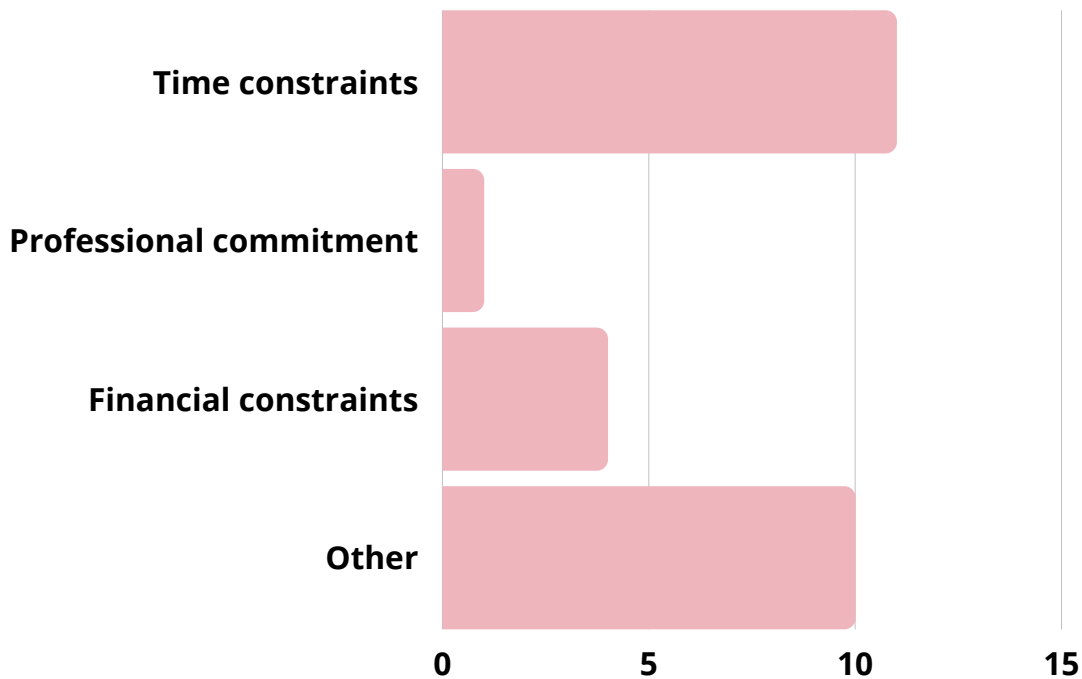

Figure 6: What were the circumstances that prevented you from completing the certification?

Of those who responded with "other" (n = 10) we followed up with an open response question to solicit additional detail. **Surprisingly, the most common response (60%) was that these individuals still intended to finish and/or re-enroll in the courses.** Two other notable responses include *one individual who felt the material was not instructive,* and *another individual who experienced health issues.*

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SURVEY RESULTS CONT'D

What are some underlying processes that might mediate individuals' responses in these contexts?

Although the survey method was not fully intended to get at the nuances that may have mediated individuals unique experiences with Academy courses, we were able to glean some important talking points within the open response data that are worth noting here. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list, but rather some of the course elements that seemed to spark feedback/conversation amongst respondents:

Live Chats
- **"**Live chats were very important to me because while engaging in our own practices we had the ability to reflect on and share these practices with others. This lead to useful resources and powerful feedback!"
- "Live chats were hard for me due to the Internet options available in my rural setting."
- "[There were] not enough live meets; I would have liked more group work to develop rapport and relationships with cohort."

Practicums
- "The course is designed primarily for educators that are currently teaching in the classroom. As an education consultant working for an intermediate unit I was fortunate to have the support of my supervisor to permit me to facilitate the practicum in an IU classroom. I am sure that other participants may encounter this situation."
- "...you are able to land the teaching and apply it to your practice."
- "I really valued the experience of teaching, reflecting, and adapting for next week. Wished for more personal feedback, though."
- "The in-person trainings were by far more helpful than the online practicum."

Credentialing/Course Credit
Although not an issue with the courses, per se, feelings about the program's lack of formal credentialing or graduate credit could present both personal frustration (i.e., not aligning with the perceived effort put in) or practical (i.e., financial) stress that may mediate their feelings about the certificate program.
- "It was a year long program. Earning some letters at the end of our titles would have been appropriate."
- "The program isn't attached to graduate credit, so my school gave me some trouble regarding reimbursement. If it had been tied to graduate credit, it would have been much easier to receive reimbursement."

PROVIDER SURVEY
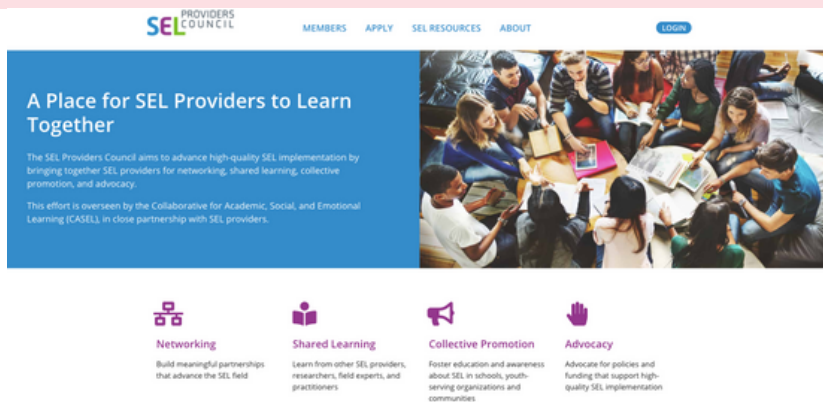
In staying with our ecological and evolutionary approach to evaluation, we also solicited feedback from a sub-group of stakeholders: Providers of SEL programming. Below, we provide a brief overview of that procedure.

Launched in January 2020, the SEL Providers Council was developed with the goal to advance high-quality SEL implementation by bringing together SEL providers for networking, shared learning, collective promotion, and advocacy. Over 130 providers of SEL curriculum, programs, and assessment have joined to-date.

The Council aims to advance high-quality SEL implementation by connecting professional SEL providers that will aid in the building of a prestigious network of professionals that fosters meaningful partnerships and facilitates collaborative learning among research, clinical practice and fieldwork.

To maintain the Academy's goal of continuous improvement, a survey was created to assess the **visibility and usage** of the Academy among our Provider's Council colleagues. The rationale for this is that the Academy provides generic SEL training that, theoretically, would align with the content and pedagogy of any specific program and foster its better implementation. This survey was developed and sent out periodically over the course of two in-school semesters. Surveys were shared by multiple senders including the Academy for SEL in Schools, the SECD Lab at Rutgers, and personally by the Co-Directors of the Academy for SEL in Schools.

The results of the survey indicate that on average, the Provider's Council was not well-versed in the ins and outs of the Academy. However, they were still quite likely to recommend the Academy to their colleagues and valued a number of the features the Academy offered.

For more a more detailed description of the results and findings of this survey, please see the attached The Academy for SEL in Schools Provider Survey Stakeholder Analysis report.

DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This evaluation was intended to help both the Academy for SEL in Schools and the broader PD and SEL communities understand **what is needed to help teachers and others working in group settings (both in and out of schools) effectively take PD principles and put them into practice in enduring ways.**

As a whole, respondents indicated that they found the coursework to be useful and helpful in their current job settings. However, there was clear conceptual confusion about what the VPLC was. There also appeared to be a disconnect between whether participants felt supported by their cohort and instructors *during* their training and whether they continued to engage with the Academy community *after* their formal coursework ended.

Further, as noted in the interview/focus group results, there was a subset of leadership alumni who sought more SEL instructional support. There was also a subgroup of participants who had not yet completed the practicum who were looking for more one-on-one support/coaching. Both of these critiques appeared to be in alignment with the course structure as we understood it; however it is worth revisiting, as these critiques can be addressed - perhaps through an optional instructional module on the leadership track and/or by clarifying in introductory courses or promotional materials that one-on-one support is provided during the practicum - in the future.

Due to our connection with the Academy, we were often able to relay preliminary evaluation findings in real time to the program developers. As a result, efforts were made over the course of the evaluation to address some of these shortcomings that were identified.

One concern that Academy staff were immediately able to address was the seemingly steep drop off in SEL support that appeared to occur once participants ended their formal training with the Academy. Although one-on-one communication between participants and instructors and/or their cohort-mates could not be facilitated across Academy alumni, a regular twice monthly newsletter was created to help address some of these concerns.

ACADEMY FOR SEL IN SCHOOLS NEWSLETTER

ESTABLISHED IN FEBRUARY 2020

In early 2020, the Academy established a twice monthly newsletter that disseminates both educational resources and content, as well as reminds participants and alumni of the virtual community available to them. Although initially intended to be a tool to engage Academy participants and offer a source of support to alumni, the COVID-19 pandemic allowed the Academy to also serve as a "filter" for the large number of virtual and pandemic resources shared throughout educational communities.
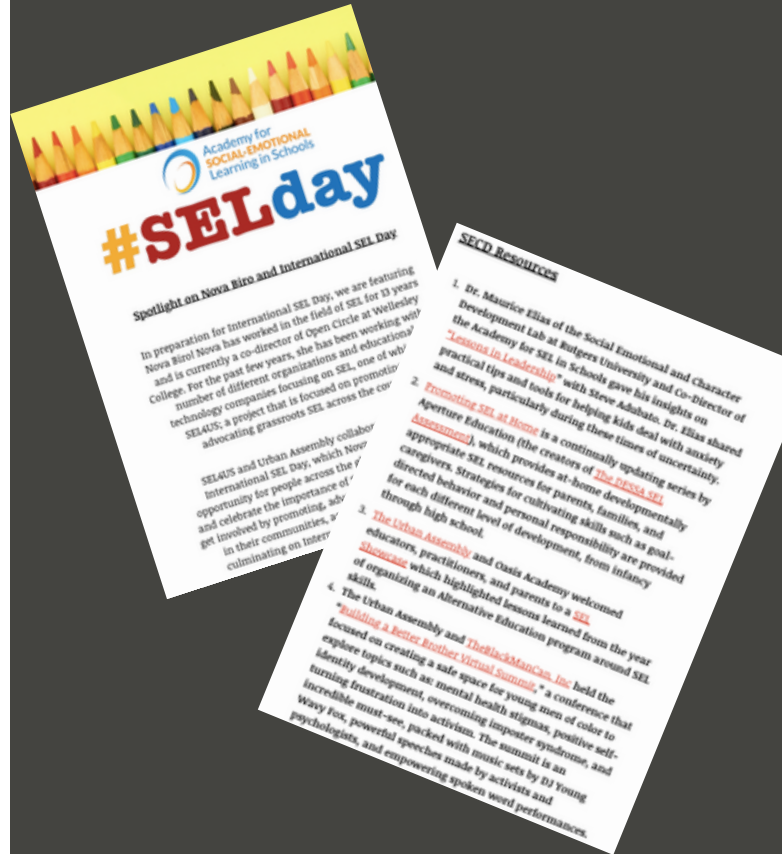
For more newsletters, go to: https://www.secdlab.org/academy-for-sel/bulletins

OVER 30 NEWSLETTERS SENT

Since the inception of the newsletter, over 30 newsletters have been sent. MailChimp analytics indicates that, on average, about 300 unique participants view the newsletter, meaning that almost 30% of alumni and participants continue to engage with the Academy through this medium.

NEW COURSE OFFERINGS

In addition to the Academy for SEL in Schools Newsletter, **three new courses beginning in the 2021-2022 school year offer supplemental ways to engage alumni post certification.** These new course offerings were informed by the evaluation findings shared in this report and specific topics that participants and alumni expressed interest in over the past few years. Here, we provide descriptions of the three courses, starting with VISION, a direct response to VPLC knowledge and usage (or lack thereof), and two additional courses, STAT and the SEL Lab.

VISION

This new VISION - Virtual, Implementation, Support, Information, Opportunities, Network - "course" builds and develops a virtual professional learning community to assist participants with their post-certificate SEL implementation plans. VISION consists of 3 Live Chat remote consultation meetings with a SEL mentor/consultant. These are presented to those getting their certificates as a "next step," requiring them to "opt out" rather than opt in.

STAT

STAT - Students Taking Action Together - is a 2-course online program that presents the five instructional strategies that are part of STAT social action pedagogy and a practicum experience. Both courses are organized around 10 units within each course, to be completed sequentially.
To learn more about STAT, please go to:
https://www.secdlab.org/about-stat

SEL Lab

The SEL Lab is an intervention or tier 2 addition to SEL prevention programming. Those successfully completing The SEL Lab Program will be able to set up and facilitate a SEL Lab in their school (or remotely).

CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE WORK

This evaluation utilized both qualitative and quantitative approaches to understand the impact and usefulness of the Academy for SEL in Schools across a range of contexts. Interviews, focus groups, and reflective surveys were the method of choice given the necessity to engage a diverse array of Academy end-users and to accomodate restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This method was chosen to support the goal of "viable validity;" meaning it was critical that the voices of stakeholders be included in order to inform how successful the Academy will continue to be in the real world (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Chen, 2009).

The timing of this evaluation was intentional. The Academy is preparing to evolve into the Dissemination stage (Urban, Hargraves, & Trochim, 2014) incorporating refinements (informed by this evaluation and student feedback) to allow for optimal and pragmatic matching of program elements to contexts, with particular attention toward sustainability. Though we had no formal hypotheses going into this evaluation, we did suspect that the VPLC would be the key to ongoing, flexible, and contextual adaptation. However, as this report indicated, participants found their training incredibly useful to their contexts, but did not seem to absorb the concept of the VLPC. Although participants engaged in aspects of a professional learning community (PLC) that is virtual- such as forming close bonds with their cohorts and instructors and utilizing the digital resource library - they did not seem to "know" what the VPLC was, nor did they seem to really engage with their cohorts, instructors, or Academy SEL experts post-certification. We do note that the increasing visibility of SEL-- in part due to COVID-19-- may mean that there are more locally available sources of support than there were at the inception of the VPLC. That is, the need the VPLC was created to meet may have diminished.

CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE WORK

Thus, in terms of program usefulness, evaluation respondents indicated very few concerns. Furthermore, those who chose not to continue to the practicum rarely indicated that it was because they were unhappy with their training. In fact, many shared that they still planned to continue on to the practicum in the future.

These findings are not necessarily novel; a recent study conducted by Teräs and Kartoğlu (2017) concluded that, within online PD contexts, learning is best facilitated by:
- A dynamic web of interactions; and
- Active engagement in authentic tasks with peers,

and that while mentors and content play in important role in the learning process, that ultimately mentors and content should be considered learning "supports."

This, along with our findings and a general push for more active, problem based learning in the PD literature (vanOostveen et al., 2019) suggests that future improvement efforts should focus on sustainability and maintaining - even growing - relationships through dynamic interactions and active engagement between Academy participants, alumni, and staff post-certification in order to support ongoing SEL implementation and continued learning. The work of vanOostveen and colleagues (2019), along with Teräs and Kartoğlu (2017), further validates the importance of having a job-embedded practicum, a hallmark of both the instruction and school leadership certificate programs.

In support of this goal, future program refinements should be informed by evaluations of the new courses added to the Academy's offerings, mentioned in this report, in addition to in-depth structured conversations with Academy faculty and instructors, and a thorough review of the practicum experience.

CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE WORK

The evaluation also noted concerns about the extent to which equity is integrated into the certificate courses. Three actions are planned in response: equity and SEL will be added explicitly into the Foundations of SEL courses; all course content will be reviewed from an equity lens, including readings, resources, and videos recommended, and an additional module on SEL and Equity will be added as a stand-along course or as a "badge" that can be added to the credentialing of certificate holders.

Finally, due to the SECD Lab's unique position straddling the provider, research, and advocacy worlds, we are fortunate to be closely involved with different organizations - such as SEL4US and the affiliated SEL4 state alliances - that offer opportunities to facilitate local networking. Organizations such as this, could serve as a resource for Academy alumni and participants to engage in peer support and continued learning, well beyond their formal Academy training.

For more information, visit: https://sel4us.org/

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