What Are School Counselors From Exemplary Alternative Schools Doing to Support Social and Emotional Learning With Students?

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What Are School Counselors From Exemplary Alternative Schools Doing to Support Social and Emotional Learning With Students?

A Dissertation by

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Irvine, California
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

February 2021

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ABSTRACT

What Are School Counselors From Exemplary Alternative Schools Doing to Support Social and Emotional Learning With Students?

by Sandra Shaw

Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the best practices school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County use to support social emotional learning (SEL) using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making). An additional purpose of the study was to describe the CASEL SEL core competencies that were perceived as most important by school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County.

Methodology: This qualitative phenomenological study identified and described the best practices school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County implement to support SEL using the CASEL core competencies. The researcher created in-depth, semistructured interviews that were composed of 15 interview questions consistent with the research questions.

Findings: Examination of phenomenological data revealed 20 themes, which led to 7 key findings and 2 unexpected findings. The following were the key findings:

- School counselors assist students with strategies in identifying stress and various stress management strategies.
- School counselors identify practices that help students to understand their emotions.
• School counselors ensure that students practice empathy to relate to themselves, peers, and others.

• School counselors work to educate students in all forms of communication.

• School counselors educate students to think critically.

• School counselors demonstrate that communication and establishing relationships are a fundamental part of SEL.

• Communicating and building rapport are skills needed to build relationships.

Conclusions: This study concluded that school counselors who support SEL using the CASEL core competencies perceive that communication and building rapport are the best practices when implementing SEL. The most important CASEL core competency practice to reach students is establishing and maintaining relationships.

Recommendations: Further research is recommended to study the perspectives of students in alternative education and SEL.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

What really matters for success, character, happiness and life-long achievements is a definite set of emotional skills—your EQ—not just purely cognitive abilities that are measured by conventional IQ test.

—Daniel Goleman

According to Loretta Whitson, executive director of the California Association of School Counselors, in a February 10, 2020, EdSource feature, “Counseling is crucial if we want more kids to graduate, be prepared for adulthood and ultimately be contributing members of society. It’s about the future of the California economy” (Jones, 2020, para. 6). Whitson emphasized, “We have to do better” (Jones, 2020, para. 6).

Why is it necessary for school counselors to do better? Because high school is the last transition into adulthood for students, and students need help in making positive and concrete decisions (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], n.d.-b). School counselors are in a position that allows them to work with students and support them in their transition into the world of work or postsecondary education. This is the time when students begin exploring their independence. The focus of all school counselors is to concentrate on assisting students to become successful by helping them flourish with “academic, career, and personal social development” (Mau, Li, & Hoetmer, 2016, p. 83).

School counselors work with students of all backgrounds and from all socioeconomic situations (Howe, 2009). School counselors advocate for students to ensure that schools provide a safe and welcoming environment for students to learn the mindsets and behaviors that can advance academic achievement outcomes (ASCA, 2019a).
The 21st century school counselor is assigned the critical and complex task of implementing comprehensive school counseling programs that meet the standards outlined by ASCA (2019a). One of the aspects of comprehensive school counseling programs is promoting and enhancing social and emotional learning (SEL) outcomes (ASCA, 2019a; Elias, 2019). According to the National Education Association, the research is clear that SEL is the key to successful student performance, especially in preschool and elementary school (Walker, 2020).

Among the foundational models that school counselors and others have implemented in schools in recent years is the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) model of SEL developed by Goleman and colleagues (CASEL, 2019). The CASEL model is applicable for students in Grades K–12 in both traditional and alternative educational settings. These comprehensive programs are designed to have an impact on student development and increase academic achievement. According to ASCA (2019a), for students to demonstrate growth, each will need to gain knowledge and skills in academics, career development, and social and emotional learning. School counselors are in a unique role of influencing all three aspects and are concerned with the development of the whole child.

In the public school system, high schools in particular are often categorized as traditional or alternative. Students in alternative schools often have not experienced success within traditional school settings. Many of the students within alternative education settings are considered “at-risk youth” or youth who have fallen behind in obtaining the necessary high school credits needed to graduate. Many of the at-risk youth are over 18 years old, and some students are pregnant or parenting. Students within
alternative education settings are often identified as foster youth, homeless, have drug or alcohol abuse problems have mental health issues, or are victims of neglect (NCSE, 2015).

According to ASCA (n.d.-b), “High school counselors are uniquely trained in child and adolescent development, learning strategies, self-management, and social skills who understand and promote success for today’s diverse student” (p. 1). Traditional high school counselors have the role of assigning and changing classes for students based on the student’s individual academic goals, scheduling college and career lectures or presentations, and presenting social and emotional lessons to groups of students. School counselors support students by implementing school counseling programs that essentially help students during this developmental stage in life (ASCA, n.d.-b). School counseling programs help students acquire the knowledge, attitude, and skills they need for academic, career, and social/emotional development.

The role of the school counselor differs in the traditional high school setting compared to the alternative education schools. Alternative education school counselors are trained and require the same credentials as traditional school counselors, but what differs is the school setting. The school counselors who work within alternative educational settings have different duties when it comes to class assignment and scheduling. Alternative education counselors emphasized helping students recover credits and complete high school more so than analyzing students’ transcripts. They do this primarily by trying to educate students on soft skills in addition to motivating students to complete their high school credits by supporting the students’ individual learning styles (Schiber, 2006).
To help students within alternative education settings become academically successful, many school counselors are implementing SEL (Van Velsor, 2009) using the CASEL core competencies developed from the theories introduced by Gardner (1987), Salovey and Mayer (1990), and Goleman (2006). The CASEL core competencies are self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, healthy relationships, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2019). Students who attend alternative education programs “need the knowledge and skills that quality programs provide in order to succeed” (Aron, 2003, p. 2) in the 21st century.

Background

School Counseling and Counseling Programs

The concept of counseling has been around for centuries. The first school counselor was hired as a vocational counselor in the early 1900s. Moving forward, the role of the school counselor has changed considerably. Early counselors were teachers who took on the extra duties (Cinotti, 2014). Social and emotional counseling became a part of the role of the counselors in the next decades. Other progressions of the role over time include more emphasis on vocational studies, policy and process, academics, and more (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; William and Mary School of Education, 2019). School counselors are responsible for the social, emotional, personal, college and career, and academic counseling for all students within their school (ASCA, 2019b; Kress & Elias, 2006; Van Velsor, 2009). The caseload for each school counselor varies; however, the ratio is usually more than ASCA recommends. The recommended student-to-counselor ratio is 250:1 (ASCA, 2019a). The National Center of Education Statistics (NCES, 2015)
estimated that the ratio in California between students and counselors is 663:1. This is far above ASCA’s recommended caseload.

School counselors are also responsible for implementing comprehensive school counseling programs. Not only are school counselors implementing programs, they are providing direct and indirect services to all students. The services school counselors provide range from individual counseling to small group intervention to programs designed to help all students (ASCA, 2019b). With all the duties that school counselors performed, there was a need to have some type of structured universal programs in place to guide school counselors.

ASCA established school counseling program standards in 1997. These standards were called the National Standards for School Counseling Programs (NSSCP) and consisted of nine standards and three domains; each domain contained three standards. Domains include academic, personal-social, and career development (Lauterbach, Harrington, Yakut, & Krezmien, 2018).

ASCA was not the only organization to develop standards-based education reform initiatives. In the same year, the Educational Trust introduced the transforming school counseling initiative (TSCI) to help school counselors move beyond just supporting students with social and emotional development to concentrate on the development of academic achievement. Prior to both ASCA and the TSCI, the comprehensive developmental guidance program (CDGP) emerged in the 1970s and was established to design a program for school counselors that was intentional and preventative in nature (Lauterbach et al., 2018).
In 2003, ASCA created a new organizational structure for the school counseling profession by combining all three of the models into one national model (ASCA, 2019a). This model was designed to be used by school counselors from all districts to design and implement a standards-based comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2019a; Lauterbach et al., 2018). With the national model in place, school counselors were encouraged to use the model to create programs that aligned with the national model.

Not all school counselors belong to ASCA, and not all schools use the ASCA National Model to design their counseling program. Many school counselors must abide by what their school districts or administration define as the role of the school counselor (Rayle & Adams, 2007). School counselors can advocate for a more structured program by promoting the ASCA National Model to their administrator.

Some administrators have perceptions of the role of the school counselor, but generally with collaboration between counselor and principal, an effective comprehensive program can be agreed upon (Rayle & Adams, 2007). The ideal program is one that takes a comprehensive approach to program foundation, delivery, management, and accountability (ASCA, 2019a). School counselors must learn to advocate for what they believe and know is going to benefit the students. To that end, developing comprehensive school programs is essential to teach students how to improve their attitudes, skills, and knowledge in areas such as SEL.

**Theoretical Foundations**

John Dewey is known for his theories in education and philosophy. He was very active in education with experience as both a high school and college teacher (Hildebrand, 2018). According to Hildebrand (2018), John Dewey “devised curricula,
established, reviewed and administered school and departments of education, participated in collective organizing, consulted and lectured internationally, and wrote extensively on many facets of education” (sec. 5, para. 3). Dewey (1934) explained the objective of education as the growth of individuals to the greatest of their capabilities. Dewey’s concept of education put a value on meaningful pursuits in learning and participation within the classroom. He believed that students must invest in what they are learning (PBS, n.d.). His view on what is coined progressive education was that the education of engaged citizens involves two necessary fundamentals: respect for diversity and the development of social intelligence (University of Vermont, 2003).

Emotional intelligence has been a topic of interest dating back to ancient Greece in the works of Plato (Dhani & Sharma, 2016). The meaning of social intelligence as a concept was propounded by psychologist Edward Thorndike in 1920. According to Dhani and Sharma (2016), “Thorndike describes the concept of social intelligence as the ability to get along with other people by being able to understand the internal states, motives, and behaviors of oneself and others” (p. 190). By this definition, the concept relates to both the cognitive aspects (the ability to understand people) and practical aspects (ability to deal with and respond appropriately toward them). This description is similar to the definition of social emotional intelligence today. Social emotional intelligence is the ability to be aware of one’s own and others’ feelings in the moment and use that information to lead oneself and others (Leadinspire, 2020). Many others such as John Dewey (1934), Salovey and Mayer (1990), Gardner (1983, 1987), Goleman (2006), and Bar-On (2006) have all contributed to the development of emotional intelligence, according to Dhani and Sharma (2016).
**Multiple intelligences.** Salovey and Mayer originally viewed emotional intelligence as a part of social intelligence, which suggested that their beliefs represented that these two concepts are interrelated (Bar-On, 2006). Howard Gardner (1983, 1987) was another theorist who explained his conceptualization of “personal intelligences,” which is based on intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence (Bar-On, 2006, p. 14), intrapersonal, meaning emotional, and interpersonal, meaning social. Goleman, too, viewed social and emotional intelligence as a “wide array of competencies and skills that drive managerial performance” (Bar-On, 2006, p. 14). The Bar-On model of emotional and social intelligence was another contributor to the establishment of social and emotional intelligence learning. Bar-On defined “emotional-social intelligence as a cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that determine how effectively we understand and express ourselves, understand others and relate with them, and cope with daily demands” (p. 14). All of these theorists have contributed to the theoretical foundations of social and emotional intelligence.

**Growth mindset.** Carol Dweck (2006, 2015) is one of the leading researchers on achievement and success. Dweck believed mindsets are important to one’s growth and learning (Rosenberger, 2017). There are two types of mindsets: a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. Rosenberger stated that Dweck believed that having a growth mindset is beneficial; when people change the way in which they look at their failures and successes, it can impact their lives. Individuals with a growth mindset are ready to take risks and confront challenges, and they continue to push forward because they approach challenges as learning opportunities (Rosenberger, 2017).
Theoretical Framework

In 1995, Daniel Goleman published his landmark research work in his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (Goleman, 2006). His collaboration with others led to the formation of CASEL (2016). SEL programs can help students’ capacity to integrate skills, attitudes, and behaviors to deal effectively and ethically with daily tasks and challenges (Mahoney et al., 2020).

According to ASCA (n.d.-b), one of the seven mindsets of school counseling is SEL. Nathanson, Rivers, Flynn, and Brackett (2016) contended that “social and emotional learning provides a framework for schools to develop social and emotional competencies and improve academic achievement in students” (p. 1). SEL addresses the development of five key areas: self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and decision-making (CASEL, 2019; Elias, O’Brien, & Weissberg, 2006; Fernandez-Berrocal & Extremera, 2006).

Self-management is defined by CASEL (n.d.) as “the abilities to manage one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations” (para. 3). Basu and Mermillod (2011) defined self-management as using “awareness of emotions to manage response to different situations and people” (p. 183). Both definitions discuss having an awareness of and/or an ability to manage one’s emotions in different situations.

Self-awareness is defined by CASEL (n.d.) as “the abilities to understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior” (para. 3). According to Basu and Mermillod (2011), self-awareness is defined as “recognizing and understanding one’s emotions in the moment as well as the tendencies across time and situation” (p. 183). Self-awareness, as defined by both CASEL (n.d.) and Basu and
Mermillod (2011), stated that one must recognize one’s emotions and understand how these emotions can influence behavior.

Social awareness is defined by CASEL (n.d.) as “the abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts” (para. 3). Basu and Mermillod (2011) defined social awareness as “understanding the perspectives of other people including their motivations, their emotions and the meaning of what they do and say” (p. 183). CASEL’s (n.d.) definition of social awareness is more descriptive and gives a more complete understanding of the term.

Relationship skills are defined by CASEL (n.d.) as “the abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups” (para. 3). CASEL described that “this includes the capacities to communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate, work collaboratively to problem solve and negotiate conflict constructively, navigate settings with differing social and cultural demands and opportunities, provide leadership, and seek or offer help when needed” (para. 3). Basu and Mermillod (2011) defined relationship skills as relationship management by “using awareness of one’s own emotions and the emotions of others to manage relationships to a successful outcome” (p. 183).

The last core competency is responsible decision-making. CASEL (n.d.) defined responsible decision-making as “the abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations” (para. 3). This includes having the ability to think about ethical standards and safety concerns. Responsible decision-making is associated with knowing how to work within a team,
collaborating with others, and exhibiting responsible behavior, according to Beland (2007).

The development of social and emotional skills is an important foundation for student achievement and well-being (ASCA, n.d.-b; Beland, 2007). Development of social and emotional skills benefits students academically and socially. With the development of these skills, students are able to effectively communicate with others, solve problems, develop positive relationships, and have the ability to be attentive and listen to others (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; CASEL, 2019). SEL skills are key to academic achievement, and students who are knowledgeable in these skills are more likely to graduate than students who do not possess knowledge of SEL (Barna & Brott, 2011; Basu & Mermillod, 2011).

Schools have become the leading providers of SEL (Bikowsky, 2013; Goleman, 2006; Sink & Edwards, 2008). Students come to school, and through school counseling programs, SEL curriculum, and emotionally intelligent teachers, students are introduced to and taught skills in SEL. Lessons may be provided to students through classroom interventions or small group instruction (SGI). These lessons provide a basic understanding of the concepts of SEL. For students to become more knowledgeable of these skills, lessons need to continue, and teachers, staff members, and other stakeholders need to be role models in emotional intelligence (Basu & Mermillod, 2011; Schiber, 2006).

Many students face trauma or lack opportunity and arrive with deficits to social and emotional skills. These students are often the ones who are failing in school, are disruptive, have behavioral problems, and are labeled as at-risk (Dicintio & Gee, 1999).
Dicintio and Gee explained that SEL benefits students in a way that supports educating them on how to manage their emotions. Some students demonstrate a lack of motivation because they are unable to meet the standards of the traditional classroom environment. Some students do not progress academically and show evidence of behavioral problems (Gable, Bullock, & Evans, 2006). Gable et al. (2006) also stated that behavioral problems can occur and intensify as a result of continual inconsistencies within the classroom environment. Problems can arise if behavioral problems remain unchecked by the teacher and multiply with intensity which can result in the removal of students, as well as a disruption in the learning process.

Students who are in a negative learning environment often engage in noncompliant behaviors, which can lead to disciplinary actions (Gable et al., 2006). These students are lacking in soft skills and need an environment that offers an atmosphere of personalized learning and emotionally intelligent staff members who can model and teach social and emotional intelligence, according to Gable et al. (2006). Many students look for alternative programs to complete their education.

**Alternative Education**

There are many forms of alternative education. Alternative programs help educate over 630,300 students annually in California (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2020). The continued growth of alternative education programs may be a result of the incompatible connections between student performance and school expectations (Bullock, 2006). Alternative education programs provide a flexible and unique learning environment that is helpful to students who are parenting, working, or
who just do not fit into the traditional school environment (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2020).

According to Aron (2003), “Alternative education students are often characterized as youth who are identified as at-risk students who have poor school attendance, failing grades, family crisis, social/emotional or medical issues, discipline problems, poor peer relationships and significant deficiencies in credits” (p. 8). Alternative programs are designed to meet the needs of students who do not fit into the traditional school framework.

Students and parents may choose alternative programs because they provide options for completing high school. Some of the options that alternative schools provide are extended learning hours, one-on-one interactions with teachers, independent study, credit recovery, and a friendly and welcoming environment. The success of alternative schools could be the result of the environment that is provided, an environment that is nonauthoritarian and empathetic to its students (Bullock, 2006).

According to Bullock (2006), alternative programs provide a safe environment for students who do not fit in at the traditional high school. Traditional schools may work for many students; however, these schools are not meeting the needs of all students. Students need to be engaged in order to learn, and if they are not participating in the learning process, they become at risk for academic failure (Schiber, 2006).

Not only do alternative education programs offer choice, they also offer an environment that is dedicated to the success of their students. Some alternative education settings have school counselors who are working with teachers to provide a safe learning environment and who are designing comprehensive counseling programs that teach SEL.
competencies to their students (Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009). The goal of the alternative school is to provide an educational program that will help students be academically and emotionally successful. This is done by the promotion of students learning social and emotional skills. Students in an independent study program must learn self-management to be successful in the program (Aron, 2003). Self-management is the ability to manage one’s own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively (CASEL, 2020).

One goal of ASCA is to collaborate with school counselors to develop comprehensive counseling programs that help students with academic, personal, social/emotional, college and career development. Many counselors develop comprehensive counseling programs that help students increase their attitudes, skills, and knowledge (ASCA, 2019b). One of the most important roles of the school counselor is to help students become academically successful.

According to ASCA (2019b), the role of the school counselor is to improve student success by implementing comprehensive school counseling programs, such as “programs that provide education, prevention and intervention activities, which integrate into all aspects of students’ lives” (ASCA, n.d.-b, para. 6). This can be accomplished using a variety of approaches. One approach is to teach skills that increase knowledge and change a student’s mindset. An SEL program is increasingly used as a program to help students succeed (ASCA, n.d.-b). SEL is a concept that has been improved upon for many years from theorists such as Salovey and Mayer (1990), Gardner (1983, 1987), Goleman (2006), and Bar-On (2006) to current collaborators such as CASEL (2019, 2020) and Riopel (2020).
Alternative education schools provide school counselors to deliver academic, personal, social/emotional, and college and career counseling to growing numbers of at-risk students. Counselors within the alternative school setting provide appropriate services to meet the needs of their students (Mullen & Lambie, 2013). Some alternative education school counselors have implemented comprehensive school counseling programs that include SEL skills. There is a gap in the literature on the effectiveness or benefits of implementing the CASEL model of SEL in alternative education schools.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

Students enroll in alternative education schools for many reasons; however, the most common reasons are academic problems, behavioral issues, pregnancy, homelessness, absenteeism, and physical, alcohol, or drug abuse (Porowski, O’Conner, & Luo, 2014). Porowski et al. (2014) indicated that these students are unable to benefit from a traditional school environment. Traditional public education systems are failing many diverse students and that is a primary reason many of these students turn to alternative education settings (Gable et al., 2006).

Gable et al. (2006) stated that alternative programs work to help improve the lives of students who no longer attend traditional school programs by offering more one-to-one interaction with teachers, independent study programs, and more autonomy. The continued growth of alternative education programs over the past decade may be a result of the lack of connections between student performance and school expectations (Bullock, 2006). Many students fall behind in traditional school for reasons known and unknown. Some of the known reasons, according to Riley (2013), are that many students lack skills in math and reading; some have behavior problems, health issues, learning
disabilities; and others have situations in their home life. All of these issues can discourage students and cause them to fall behind in school.

According to Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011), emotions can disrupt a child’s commitment to education, study habits, and school success. This is related to the emotional and relationship processes that affect how students learn and what students learn. Families and schools can effectively support students’ learning by addressing all aspects of the academic process (Durlak et al., 2011).

Durlak et al. (2011) believed it is important for schools to not only concentrate on fostering cognitive development but to also to promote social and emotional development. Additional studies indicate that SEL enhances the chances for students to be successful in school and in life (Barna & Brott, 2011; Beland, 2007). SEL combines youth development and competence building frameworks that reduce risk factors and foster protective procedures for positive change (T. Johnson & Joshi, 2020). SEL skills can be demonstrated, practiced, modeled, and applied to any situation so that students can incorporate these skills in their daily routines and behaviors (Durlak et al., 2011).

Gable et al. (2006) stated that student populations in schools are culturally and linguistically diverse and are unable to meet the standards of the traditional classroom environment. When students do not progress as expected and show evidence of learning deficits, behavioral problems occur. Behavioral problems can occur and intensify because of continual inconsistencies within the classroom environment (Bullock, 2006). Problems that go unchecked can intensify, which can result in the removal of students and a disruption in the learning process (Gable et al., 2006).
School counselors are working to address the needs of students by implementing SEL. The counselor’s role is to promote personal and social development to all students (ASCA, 2019b; Van Velsor, 2009). Counselors are implementing comprehensive school counseling programs that provide a strong foundation that encompasses academic, social/emotional, and college and career domains to their students (ASCA, 2019b; Schiber, 2006; Sink & Edwards, 2008).

Alternative schools often rely on their counselors to teach and promote SEL. CASEL’s (2019) core competencies of self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, healthy relationships, and responsible decision-making are the most widely used components of SEL programs. Alternative education students often attend school at different times and on different days, which makes implementing SEL programs that support all students more difficult than in traditional schools. Furthermore, there is a lack of information and knowledge on the practices counselors use to implement SEL in alternative education schools that are effective within the nontraditional setting and that result in improved student outcomes.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the best practices school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County use to support SEL using the CASEL core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making). An additional purpose of the study was to describe the CASEL SEL core competencies that were perceived as most important by school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County.
Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County in implementing the CASEL core competencies at their school?

Research Subquestions

1. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of self-management?
2. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of self-awareness?
3. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of social awareness?
4. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of relationship skills?
5. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of responsible decision-making?
6. What do school counselors perceive as the most important best practices used within the CASEL core competencies?

Significance of the Problem

There are a large number of high school students in California who attend alternative education programs. According to the California Department of Education (CDE; 2019b), enrollment in alternative education schools is over 136,000, for high school students, the number of all students who attend alternative programs is over
650,000. Many of these students have had problems in the traditional school setting, and many are at-risk youth.

Often, students who attend alternative programs are at risk (Aron, 2003) and need a nontraditional way to complete their education. Alternative education settings offer a different approach to learning by allowing students the option to take a new path to complete their education (Mullen & Lambie, 2013). An alternative program is designed to improve student achievement and completion of high school, allowing students to recover credits that were failed or not completed in the traditional high school setting.

Alternative education schools are different from traditional schools when it comes to providing educational programs that benefit at-risk students. Alternative education offers more one-to-one instruction, credit recovery, flexible hours, a welcoming and supportive environment, independent study programs, and access to credentialed teachers and school counselors. Alternative schools offer students who are 18 years old and over a chance to complete high school before they age out at 22 years old.

School counselors in alternative education settings are available to help students with their academic, social/emotional, and college and career development (ASCA, n.d.-b; Van Velsor, 2009). ASCA (n.d.-b) recommends that all school counselors implement a comprehensive counseling program. Comprehensive counseling programs necessarily focus on SEL development for all students. Implementing programs on SEL is beneficial to all students and supports positive social-emotional growth in students (ASCA, n.d.-b; CASEL, 2020).

According to Barna and Brott (2011), students who are emotionally intelligent are more academically successful. There is a positive link between students’ academic
achievement and emotional intelligence. The authors go on to say that “emotional intelligence acts as a moderator between cognitive ability and academic performance” (Barna & Brott, 2011, p. 243). Therefore, this study can identify how school counselors are implementing SEL programs that benefit at-risk students within alternative education programs. This includes identifying best practices and programs that are successful, why they are successful, and how they are implemented to benefit student academic achievement. Additionally, learning which of the social and emotional core competencies from CASEL that school counselors feel are the most important to help their students become academically successful may prove valuable.

Consequently, this study provides alternative education school counselors and alternative education administrators with SEL best practices that support the needs of students within the alternative education setting. This study sought to identify successful implementation strategies for SEL that benefit student achievement. This study also fills a gap in literature on alternative education school counselor’s implementation of SEL programs within alternative education settings.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined for the purpose of this study:

Alternative education. An alternative education school is defined as a public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special, or vocational education. (Sable, Plotts, & Mitchell, 2010, p. C-1)
Social and emotional learning (SEL). Social and emotional learning is the ability to be able to learn to manage and understand emotions, show empathy toward others, set goals, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Beland, 2007; CASEL, 2019; Goleman, 2006; Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2007).

CASEL. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning defined as SEL. CASEL is a collaboration of leading experts who support schools, districts, and states to promote research, guide practice, and advise policy (CASEL, 2019).

Self-management. This is defined as the ability to control one’s own emotions, thoughts, and actions in various situations; to be able to effectively manage one’s own stress, motivation, and impulses; and as the competence to set personal goals (Basu & Mernillod, 2011; CASEL, 2019).

Self-awareness. This is defined as the ability to be able to identify one’s own feelings, thoughts, and principles and understand how they impact behavior. It is the ability to evaluate one’s resilience and restraints with confidence (Basu & Mernillod, 2011; CASEL, 2019).

Social awareness. This is defined as the ability to understand and respond effectively to the emotions of other people from diverse backgrounds/cultures; and to be aware of the social environment and people within society (Basu & Mernillod, 2011; CASEL, 2019).

Healthy relationships. This is defined as the ability to form and retain healthy and satisfying relationships with other human beings and groups; and as the ability to
communicate well, get along with others, resolve conflict, and able to ask for help if one needs it (Basu & Mernillod, 2011; CASEL, 2019).

**Responsible decision-making.** This is defined as the ability to be able to make practical decisions about one’s personal behavior and the skills and to make rational choices in social situations based on one’s moral standards (Beland, 2007; CASEL, 2019).

**Exemplary.** Someone or something that is exemplary is set apart from others in a supreme manner and has suitable actions, principles, or intentions that can be copied (Thompson, 2018). For the purposes of this study, exemplary alternative schools were identified by the Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) in San Bernardino County and selected by the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools office as exemplary based on the following criteria from the National Alternative Education Association (NAEA, 2014) exemplary practices:

1. A guiding vision and mission that drives the overall program.
2. Passionate, innovative, competent, and experienced leadership.
3. A safe, caring, and orderly climate and culture.
4. Staff are effective, innovative, and qualified individuals with appropriate training.
5. Instructional practices and curriculum are supportive, rigorous, and individualized.
6. Assessment includes screening, progress monitoring, and diagnostics to improve student outcomes.
7. Transition plans include college and career readiness support for high school students.
8. Collaborative partnerships promote opportunities for life skills, soft skills, service learning, and career exploration.
9. School counselors collaborate with school stakeholders to support best practices, articulate instruction, and create effective citizens.

10. Personalized curriculum and instruction is implemented using individualized learning plans.

**Delimitations**

The study was delimited to school counselors in exemplary alternative high schools located in San Bernardino County in California. To be considered as an exemplary alternative education school, the school was designated as such by the superintendent of schools or his designee based on evidence of at least six of the National Alternative Education Association (NAEA, 2014) exemplary practices.

**Organization of the Study**

This study was organized into five chapters and concludes with references and appendices. Chapter I described the preface of the study. Chapter II is composed of a comprehensive literature review associated with the study, theoretical framework, school counselors, and SEL. Chapter III introduces the research design and methodology as well as the population sample details, types of data gathered, and instrument utilization. Chapter V includes a data analysis and conclusion of the study along with recommendations for future studies. This paper ends with references and appendices used in this study.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter II evaluates the research and literature that covers best practices of school counselors who implement social and emotional learning (SEL) using Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) core competencies and who work in exemplary alternative schools located in San Bernardino County in Southern California. Exemplary alternative schools are those identified by the California Department of Education (CDE) as Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) schools and further identified as exemplary by the referral of the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools or that person’s designee. Chapter II begins with the theoretical foundations of school counselors and school counseling programs, the history and evolution of alternative education, and the history of emotional intelligence/SEL. Additionally, Chapter II explores the impact of SEL on students and student academic achievement. Finally, this chapter examines the literature related to the purpose of the study and concludes with references and appendices.

Historical Perspective of Alternative Education

The United States has been restructuring its education system for many years (Aron, 2006). The U.S. education system does not have a framework of educational standards that identify what students need to learn to be successful in the 21st century (Aron, 2006). School districts have been trying to improve academic standards, increase accountability, and help boost low-performing students and schools. However, many students still fall behind and do not graduate from high school. Many drop out of school. According to Rumberger and Lim (2008), America has a crisis because once a student
drops out of school, it is very difficult to provide educational services. These students need access to alternative education (Aron, 2006).

Alternative education covers all educational activities that fall outside the traditional K–12 school system including home schooling, charter schools (Aron, 2006; Gilson, 2006) community day schools, continuation, independent study, and county schools. The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2010) defined an alternative education school as a public school “that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular education” (p. c-1).

**Development of Alternative Education**

Alternative education institutions were formed during the civil rights movement and have adopted many forms, all of which provide support to students with disciplinary problems, learning disabilities, substance abuse, and attendance issues (Gilson, 2006; Haro, 2019; Hodgman, 2016). The objective of alternative education schools was to “provide the best education to all of America’s students” (Hodgman, 2016, p. 30). An alternative education school is a school designed to educate students who were not successful in traditional schools and who are at risk of failure (Aron, 2006; Hodgman, 2016; Porowski et al., 2014). Alternative education schools were established to help problematic educational and social issues of academic failure in America (Hodgman, 2016). Students were failing in public schools, and initiatives were developed to offer alternatives.
Alternative education programs, according to Porowski et al. (2014), provide services such as regular academic instruction, social/life skills, counseling, job readiness, and behavioral services. Alternative programs help students whose needs have not been met through traditional school programs (Watts, 2000). Alternative programs assist pregnant and parenting teens, older students who fall behind, advanced students, and students who are looking for vocational and technical education (Porowski et al., 2014). Some of the characteristics that alternative education schools provide are small classroom size, a supportive environment, flexible scheduling, personalized learning, and student encouragement (Hodgman, 2016; Learn4Life, 2020).

Alternative education offers students a different environment and approach to education. Alternative education schools were formed for different reasons and remain an essential part of America’s educational system (Gilson, 2006). The programs of alternative education were developed to increase graduation rates, reduce the number of disruptive students in the classroom, and prevent school dropout rates (Gilson, 2006). Alternative schools, according to Aron (2006) and Hodgman (2016), positively develop students by supporting them with cognitive and educational outcomes. Alternative education students adjust better and show greater academic achievement and life satisfaction when compared to some of their traditional high school peers (Hodgman, 2016; Shankland, Genolini, Franca, Guelfi, & Ionescu, 2009).

**Alternative Education in American Schools**

In the late 1950s and early 1960s the public education system was criticized for its discriminatory practices and presumed intentions of only helping a few become successful (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Raywid, 1981). During this time, the United States
was publicizing the war on poverty and introduced the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (Paul, 2016.). This legislation propelled education to the forefront and represented commitment to equal access to education for all students.

Alternative schools were developed in America as an alternate option to traditional school (Hodgman, 2016). The alternative programs were there to help meet the needs of all students and to provide an option for students at risk of failing (Hodgman, 2016; Lange & Sletten, 2002). The education system needed some type of reform, and alternative education schools were viewed as the answer (Raywid, 1994). America’s education system was constantly evolving, and many of the educational opportunities differed according to gender, race, and social class (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

By the late 1960s, there were two categories into which alternative education schools fell: alternative schools outside of public education and alternative schools within the public school system (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Outside public education alternative schools’ purpose was to provide quality education to minorities. These schools were referred to as Freedom Schools (Lange & Sletten, 2002). The alternative schools within a public school were referred to as the Free School Movement. These schools had a purpose that was based on individual achievement and developing one’s character (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Lange and Sletten stated that with the emergence of alternative education schools, many public schools realized that there was a need to reform their programs.

Alternative education in the 1970s was centered on helping students who were culturally diverse and at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale (T. W. Young, 1990). T. W. Young (1990) stated that these alternative schools cleared the way for American
schools to continue changing and improving the existing education system. During this period, another realization regarding educational choice gave way to the perception that not all students learn in the same way or under the same educational conditions (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

In the 1970s, open schools were the next evolution in the public school system; these schools had a child-centered approach and influenced the creation of all levels of public alternatives (Lange & Sletten, 2002; T. W. Young, 1990). Other public alternatives established at this time included:

- Schools without walls—community-based learning, which provide students with an education (Lange & Sletten, 2002).
- Schools within a school—schools with regular school resources/small community schools (Lange & Sletten, 2002).
- Multicultural schools—schools that integrate culture and ethnicity into the curriculum (Lange & Sletten, 2002).
- Continuation schools—optional schools for failing students and students who are pregnant offer a more individualized program (Lange & Sletten, 2002).
- Learning centers—meet student needs with special resources (Lange & Sletten, 2002).
- Magnet schools—schools developed for racial integration (Lange & Sletten, 2002).
- Home school programs—schools that help parents educate their children at home with existing curriculum from a private, independent program, or charter school (Haro, 2019).
Charter schools—autonomous schools that are in local and state districts and have more freedom and flexibility to operate (Haro, 2019).

Community schools—schools that assist students who have disciplinary and behavior issues. These schools enroll expelled or adjudicated youth or students who are on probation or referred by the justice department (Haro, 2019).

Hodgman (2016), Aron (2006), and Raywid (1994) grouped alternative education schools into three types:

- Type I—schools of choice based on their innovative programs.
- Type II—last chance schools for students who need behavior modification.
- Type II—remedial schools that have an emphasis on academic and social and emotional issues.

Hodgman (2016) suggested that in the 1980s, the definition of alternative schools began to change to a more conservative and remedial structure, which had an emphasis on students who were failing and students with behavioral issues. Alternative education schools have grown within America and serve an important purpose by working with diverse learners and giving them opportunities to become better educated and change their lives (Miller, 2005). Alternative education benefits various student populations and could save taxpayers money by helping students become more productive within their community (Hodgman, 2016).

There are over 20,000 alternative education schools operating in the United States in both the public and private educational system (Hodgman, 2016). The number of alternative education schools has grown considerably in their first decade of existence, and they continue to grow out of necessity. According to the ERIC Clearinghouse on
Educational Management (1999), by the year 2000, 15% of students who were enrolled in public education were attending alternative schooling. There are many ways to define alternative education, and each alternative program has a central focus that varies from state to state (Hodgman, 2016).

**Alternative Schools in California**

In 1919, the first alternative education school was established in California (Haro, 2019). Between 1920–1945 alternative schools were considered to be part-time programs for employed youth (Haro, 2019). In 1965, California mandated that schools with over 100 twelfth grade students must have some kind of alternative program to earn a diploma for students susceptible to behavior or academic failure (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). Alternative schools today serve all types of students. Alternative schools still serve students who are behind in credits or students with behavior issues. They continue to serve students who have dropped out, pregnant and parenting teens, and students who just want to work independently because the traditional school system did not work for them (Learn4Life, 2020). Alternative education schools offer flexible hours and programs, such as independent study programs and life skills preparations (Haro, 2019). California has devised a list of the different types of schools within the state, as seen in Table 1. During the 2019–20 academic year in California, there were 915 schools defined as “alternative” out of 10,040 public schools. This number represents 9.1% of the state’s student population.
Table 1

*State of California School Types and Numbers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools by type</th>
<th>2015-16</th>
<th>2016-17</th>
<th>2017-18</th>
<th>2018-19</th>
<th>2019-20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community day</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuation</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County community</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>5,858</td>
<td>5,869</td>
<td>5,873</td>
<td>5,887</td>
<td>5,888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
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<td>1,311</td>
<td>1,311</td>
<td>1,321</td>
<td>1,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior high</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile court</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>54</td>
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<tr>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>339</td>
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<td>Middle</td>
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<td>1,300</td>
<td>1,296</td>
<td>1,291</td>
<td>1,283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preschool</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special ed</td>
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<td>Youth authority</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10,031</td>
<td>10,041</td>
<td>10,036</td>
<td>10,070</td>
<td>10,040</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Adapted from State Summary: California Public Schools, by Ed Data Education Partnerships (https://www.ed-data.org/state/CA).

The California Education Code (EC) sections 58500-58512 is legislation that states that school districts may establish and maintain alternative schools (CDE, 2020a).

**History of Guidance**

The profession of school counseling was first established in the early 1900s (Bauman et al., 2003; Suh, Darch, Huffman, & Hansing, 2014) in Boston, Massachusetts (Gysbers & Henderson, 1988, 2012). Vocational guidance was the initial concept behind school counseling (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). There were four conditions within society that led to the development of vocational guidance: the growth of technology,
division of labor, modern forms of democracy, and the extension of vocational education (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). Once the need was recognized, the school districts needed someone to fill the position.

Teachers were the first to be assigned the task as vocational guidance counselors (Cinotti, 2014; Gysbers & Henderson, 1988, 2001). The term vocational guidance was defined by Frank Parsons as an “organized service” and appeared in print for the first time in 1908 (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012, p. 23). The proposal by Parsons emphasized that vocational guidance should be part of every public-school system and provided by professionals, according to Gysbers and Henderson (2012). Jessie Davis was an administrator who used his colleagues to provide systematic guidance to students within his district (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012).

The 1920s brought a shift in the duties of the vocational counselor (Gysbers & Henderson, 1988). Gysbers and Henderson (1988) stated the duties were no longer only to help students apply for employment, certificates, and for placement, they were now conducting surveys, placement activities, and life-career classes. Instead of guidance for vocation as a priority, the duties shifted to more education as guidance. The philosophy changed from an emphasis on college preparation to more of an emphasis on education for life (Gysbers & Henderson, 1988). One of the contributors to this movement was John Dewey. Dewey introduced the cognitive developmental movement, which proposed that individuals go through stages of development (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The new vocational guidance theory emphasized more personal and psychological measurements toward the student. A clinical model of guidance unfolded where counseling became its primary concern. Growing recognition of guidance as an essential
part of education acknowledged that there was a need for specialized training for this educational function (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012).

Gysbers and Henderson (1988) stated that in the 1930s the components of guidance terms were expanded to include counseling, information, testing, follow-up, and placement. These additional services were implemented in schools. A list of the new additional duties counselors were expected to perform included counseling students, assigning and changing students’ courses, dealing with students who are failing or who have behavioral problems, providing transcripts and records, and interacting with other agencies on behalf of the school (Gysbers & Henderson, 1988). Many of these duties are the services that school counselors attend to today.

According to Gysbers and Henderson (1988), in 1938, more changes occurred in the profession of guidance within the schools. The establishment of the Occupational Information and Guidance Service Department was included in the Vocational Division of the U.S. Office of Education. An organizational mission was created to include specific phrases of guidance such as “personal guidance,” “educational guidance,” and “vocational guidance and placement” (Gysbers & Henderson, 1988, p. 13). The mission of service explained and described aspects of school counseling today: vocational, educational, and personal. Once guidelines were established at the federal level, many guidance offices were formed in the State Departments of Education which provided additional federal funding opportunities; however, these funds were not available at the local level (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012).

The services model of guidance and counseling continued to develop and grow into the 1940s. One contributor to the movement was Carl Rogers with his publication of
Counseling and Psychotherapy. Psychotherapy and the testing movement had an impact on guidance, which helped to give rise to counseling psychology according to Gysbers and Henderson (2012) and Lambie and Williams (2004).

Through federal legislation, the Smith-Hughes Act was funded for new vocational education within the public school system (Suh et al., 2014). In 1946, the passage of the George-Barden Act, also known as the Vocational Education Act, impacted the growth and development of guidance within schools (Gysbers & Henderson, 1988, 2012). The U.S. Commissioner of Education mandated that the funds be earmarked for the following purposes:

- State program of supervision maintenance
- Reimbursement of salaries of counselor-trainers
- Research in the discipline of guidance
- Reimbursement of salaries of local counselors and guidance supervisors

(Gysbers & Henderson, 2012, p. 34).

This piece of legislation really made an impact on the school counseling profession. The legislation also led to the question of “what should counselors be prepared to know and do?” In the 1950s, school counselors were included under the term pupil personnel services along with other professionals who worked with students (Cinotti, 2014; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012) in an effort to provide counselors with more training and preparation.

School Counseling

According to Bauman et al. (2003), in 1952, the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) was formed (see also Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Other
professional school counseling associations were also formed during this period, including the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA), which was the predecessor of the American Counseling Association (ACA). During this time, APGA joined the larger organization of ASCA and ACA (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958—Title V brought more changes to the field of educational guidance in the form of federal legislation. This legislation provided funds for states to establish testing programs and for secondary schools to provide training for individuals to become counselors (Bauman et al., 2003; Gysbers & Henderson, 1988; Lambie & Williams, 2004). With the approval of additional funds for training, more institutions implemented programs to train counselors. Pierson (1965) stated that the programs were one year long and provided a focus of five key elements with regard to the training of school counselors in NDEA organizations:

- “Determinism and a free society” (Pierson, 1965, p. 31).
- “Individual responsibility and mental health” (Pierson, 1965, p. 33).
- “Basic science and supervised practice” (Pierson, 1965, p. 35).

More provisions were added through the 1960s to support guidance programs in all school levels. The role of the counselor had not been specified and was often downplayed. The definition of the guidance counselor at the time was the adequately trained school counselor develops their own role, a role that tends to be unique with him
and unique to the situation in which the role is developed (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Pierson, 1965).

During this period, the impact of pupil personnel services increased, and guidance and counseling services became a branch of the services delivered by school counselors under this framework. The framework of guidance services included orientation, individual appraisal, counseling, information, follow-up, and placement. Counseling was now considered a primary service in the guidance program (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012).

The focus was then on the role and functions of the school counselor. Wrenn’s 1962 work, *The Counselor in a Changing World*, outlined four duties for the school counselor:

- Counsel students
- Consult with stakeholders
- Study changing facts and inform administrators
- Coordinate counseling resources (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012).

This book was a blueprint for school counselors and counseling programs. The main emphasis was that school counselors need to understand societal impacts that are influencing individuals and teach new psychological awareness (Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Wrenn, 1962).

The late 1960s brought an emergence of more elementary school counselors. This was considered the developmentalist period (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012) because there was an emphasis on development of students and more group and individual
services were favored. The work of counselors was to maintain more effective learning conditions (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

In the 1970s, various models were expanded on guidance programs within the schools. These models included planning and implementing accountable and developmental programs in guidance and counseling. Twelve modules were suggested using “a systematic approach in planning and evaluating human services programs” (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012, p. 44). The Educational Act for all Handicapped Children of 1975 increased school counseling services to special education students (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). The movement of comprehensive developmental guidance programs was endorsed by ASCA in 1974. They adopted the provisions put forth and with continuous review and revision have put comprehensive guidance and counseling programs into practice (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012).

The 1980s and 1990s brought additional legislation that influenced the school counselor’s role within the schools. With the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 (Gardner, 1983), school reform measures were promoted in areas of accountability and testing. The School to Work Opportunities Act of 1994 strengthened the significance of counseling services and career guidance, which supported students moving from school to the world of work (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). Lambie and Williamson stated that during this period, ASCA advocated for the professionals to be identified as school counselors. The duties of the school counselor were ever-changing and expanding. The challenge for counselors was that none of the accumulating job duties were being removed, rather the amount of job duties kept increasing (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).
Descriptive Changes to Guidance

ASCA published new standards for school counseling programs in 1997. These national standards were considered to be content standards for students personal-social, career, and academic development; however, a national school counseling program model was needed (ASCA, 2020). A committee was formed with practicing school counselors and national leaders to draft a national model. In 2003, ASCA officially released the ASCA National Model. The model contained four elements: (a) foundation, (b) delivery, (c) management, and (d) accountability (ASCA, n.d.-a; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). According to ASCA (n.d.-a),

The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs outlines the components of a school counseling program that is integral to the school’s academic mission and is created to have a significant positive impact on student achievement, attendance and discipline. (para. 1)

The model helps school counselors with the development of their school counseling programs. According to the model, these programs should be based on data-driven decision-making, be systematically delivered to all students, and provide curriculum that has an emphasis on the mindsets and behaviors students require for readiness and success in postsecondary schools. Additionally, the programs need to close gaps in achievement, and the programs have to result in an increase in student “achievement, attendance, and discipline” (ASCA, n.d.-a, para. 2).

There have been several revisions to the model since it was first published in 2003. The ASCA National Model over the years has purposefully moved school counseling and school counselors closer to the goal of helping all students achieve
success. While school counseling provides direct and indirect services to students, 80% of the services provided are aimed at direct services (ASCA, n.d.-a; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012).

Much legislation from both state and federal agencies has been passed on school counseling programs. One such legislation was passed by Congress to provide grants for local educational agencies to create or expand school counseling programs. The No Child Left Behind Act, Part D Subpart 2, was titled Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Programs (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). This legislation was established to provide grants to school counseling programs at elementary and secondary levels; however, these grants only subsidized elementary programs because of inadequate funds. Many states have enacted legislation to improve and fund guidance and counseling programs (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012).

According to ASCA (n.d.-b), the most recent legislation to be passed concerning school counseling in California is the California State Budget Act of 2006, which amended the California EC to guarantee that counseling services are given to students in seventh to 12th grade. The No Child Left Behind Act was replaced in 2010 with the Every Student Succeeds Act. In 2018, Strengthening Career and Technical Education for 21st Century Act (Perkin V) was authorized, replacing the Perkins Act of 2006. In 2019, the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Act (ESSCP) was introduced and is still waiting to be voted upon by government officials. This act is similar to the former ESSCP with major improvements. This new, revised act is dedicated to funding staffing ratios for educators under the pupil personnel services such as counselors, social workers, and school psychologists (ASCA, n.d.-b).
School counselors and school counseling programs are recognized as essential components within all schools (ASCA, n.d.-b). It is necessary to make sure that leadership, administration, management, and the supervision of counseling programs are effective. Without real leadership and management, comprehensive school counseling programs cannot be implemented successfully (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). School counselors must be able to manage their own counseling programs (ASCA, n.d.-b).

The history of school counseling and the rise of the profession has been thoroughly explained. Much work has been put forth in an effort to make the school counseling profession a necessary position within the school system. Major contributors such as Dewey (1934) and Rogers (1949), and many more all worked toward the establishment of the school counseling profession. Because of the hard work and dedication throughout the last 100 years, school counseling programs and school counselors continue to play a positive role in student achievement (ASCA, n.d.-b).

ASCA (n.d.-b) describes school counselors as educators who are trained in learning strategies, child and adolescent development, self-management, and social skills, and they are individuals who understand and promote success to every student. School counselors support students by implementing school counseling programs during important developmental periods within a student’s life. The programs that school counselors create provide prevention, intervention, and education that teaches knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are foundations for success (ASCA, n.d.-b).

**History of Social Emotional Learning**

The roots of SEL go back to ancient Greece (Edutopia, 2011). Plato, according to Edutopia (2011), wrote about education in *The Republic*. His vision of a holistic
curriculum required balance among math, science, arts, physical education, character, and moral judgement (Edutopia, 2011). The founding fathers in America were the first ones to contemplate how public education was going to be governed and how public schooling was going to instill moral and ethical values to American students (LeBlanc & Gallavan, 2013). LeBlanc and Gallavan (2013) stated that this was only one of the provisions that was going to be included in the country’s public schooling program. Learning social issues and building students’ character was part of the plan for educating America’s youth. Cooperative learning was encouraged, social and emotional aspects were taught, and students learned problem-solving techniques (LeBlanc & Gallavan, 2013).

According to Gysbers and Henderson (1988), the guidance-as-education view was introduced in the 1930s. Personal counseling was a goal of student adjustment between student and counselor in all phases of the individual’s life. This type of holistic counseling included social, emotional, school, occupational, and health. More focus on all of the phases of an individual’s life brought about the implementation of social and emotional curriculum within the schools (Gysbers & Henderson, 1988).

**Contributors to the Development of Social Emotional Learning**

There are many contributors to the history and development of emotional intelligence and the concepts of SEL. SEL and emotional intelligence have been topics of interest dating back to ancient Greece in the works of Plato (Dhani & Sharma, 2016). The following information is a timeline of contributors and their contributions to the theory of emotional intelligence. The timeline covers many of the theorists whose contributions are relative to the development of the concepts of emotional intelligence and SEL. According to Sharma (2008), emotional intelligence has gained much
popularity with contributions in professional and personal success in the field of behavioral and social sciences.

In the 1900s, John Dewey was a progressive educator who believed that democracy meant that individuals need to participate in social decisions that can influence their lives (University of Vermont, 2003). For people to be engaged in such decisions involves two vital foundations:

- **Respect for diversity**—individuals need to identify their abilities, ideas, needs, interests, and cultural identity.
- **Development of essential, socially engaged intelligence**, which allows individuals to understand and engage successfully in the activities of their community through collaboration (University of Vermont, 2003).

In the 19th century, Thorndike discussed the meaning of social intelligence as the ability to interact with others by understanding their behaviors and motives (Dhani & Sharma, 2016). Dhani and Sharma (2016) stated that this description is similar to the definition of social emotional intelligence today. Many others throughout the last century such as Wechsler (1975), Gardner (1983, 1987), and Salovey and Mayer (1990), have all contributed to the development of emotional intelligence (Dhani & Sharma, 2016).

In the 1930s, Edward Thorndike described social intelligence as the ability to get along with others by being able to comprehend the emotional states, behaviors, and motives of one’s own self and others (Dhani & Sharma, 2016; Goleman, 1995; Keefer, Parker, & Saklofske, 2018; Sharma, 2008). Thorndike also believed that people who can experience their feelings with clarity and who are assured in their abilities to manage their effect are able to improve their disposition more effectively after upsetting
experiences (Mayer & Salovey, 1993). Thorndike has been referred to as the “founder of modern educational psychology” (Cherry, 2020a, para. 10).

David Wechsler was another contributor to emotional intelligence by developing the concept of noncognitive intelligence in the 1940s (Dhani & Sharma, 2016). Wechsler defined nonintellective abilities as effective, social, and personality factors. Wechsler described intelligence as “the aggregate or global capacity of the individual to act purposefully, to think rationally, and to deal effectively with his environment” (Cherniss, 2000, p. 2). Nonintellective abilities, according to Cherniss (2000) and Sharma (2008), are necessary for anticipating an individual’s ability to succeed in life. In addition to developing the concept of noncognitive intelligence, Wechsler also pioneered intelligence testing (Sharma, 2008).

Abraham Maslow introduced his hierarchy of needs model in the 1950s. The needs model suggests that once one’s basic needs such as food, water, safety, and security are met, the psychological needs then need to be met before any self-fulfillment needs can be met (Poston, 2009). What the model indicated is that individuals need their psychological needs to be met, and these needs include social relationships and self-esteem, both of which are component parts of emotional intelligence (Poston, 2009). According to McLeod (2020), other substantial contributions during this era included Skinner and Freud, whose interests were in human instinct, and Fromm and Jung, whose primary interests were on psychological concepts such as self-fulfillment.

In the 1960s, James Comer’s student development program (SDP) highlighted the role schools play in strengthening children’s development. Children’s lives are shaped by their relationships with others, which include teachers and school personnel (Comer,
Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996). Many opportunities arise within schools geared toward a child’s enhancement of social and emotional development (Comer et al., 1996). SDP was recognized as a process of change that benefits schools and students. According to Lunenburg (2011), the SDP model provides improvement by building supportive bonds between children, school staff, and parents, which promotes a positive school culture.

Howard Gardner in 1975 introduced interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence and indicated that these types of intelligence are as important as IQ (Dhani & Sharma, 2016). Gardner (1983, 1987) identified eight types of intelligences:

- Linguistic—allows people to communicate through language
- Logical/mathematical—enables people to use abstract relations.
- Musical—allows people to communicate, create, and understand sound.
- Bodily/kinesthetic—allows people to use the body to create or solve problems.
- Visual/spatial—allows for people to perceive visual and spatial information.
- Naturalist—allows people to understand living things.
- Interpersonal—is understanding one’s own goals and interests.
- Intrapersonal—helps people to recognize their own feelings (Edutopia, 2016; Tobias, n.d.).

Gardner included these concepts in his 1983 theory of multiple intelligences, which was incorporated into school curriculum (Tobias, n.d.). The multiple intelligence theory was developed to help parents, educators, and psychologists understand more specifically how individuals process and learn information (Tobias, n.d.).
In 1985, Wayne Payne wrote his dissertation titled, *A Study of Emotion: Developing Emotional Intelligence; Self-Integration; Relating to Fear, Pain and Desire.* In his dissertation, Payne (1985) introduced the concept of emotional intelligence, a theoretical and philosophical framework that was developed to bring attention to the characteristics of emotion and emotional intelligence and to how individuals can develop emotional intelligence within themselves and others. There were three purposes within the study: the first was on how to relate to emotion, the second was to provide a theoretical framework to review the method of developing emotional intelligence, and the third was to help individuals develop their own emotional intelligence (Payne, 1985). Payne’s use of the term *emotional intelligence* in his doctoral dissertation was the first time the phrase had been coined in a study (Cherry, 2020b).

The literature concerning emotional intelligence was introduced in 1990 (Fernandez-Berrocal & Extremera, 2006). Salovey and Mayer, in 1990, “proposed the existence of a new intelligence, called emotional intelligence” (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2016, p. 2). Salovey and Mayer’s (1990) research into this field found that some individuals may be more knowledgeable concerning their emotions than others. Salovey and Mayer offered the definition of emotional intelligence as a set of abilities that contribute to the true “appraisal and expression of emotion in oneself and in others, the effective regulation of emotion in self and in others, and the use of feeling to motivate, plan, and achieve in one’s life” (p. 1). Interest has increased in emotional intelligence due to the importance and relevance of feelings and emotions (Fernandez-Berrocal & Extremera, 2006).
Emotional intelligence is the ability to control one’s emotions and promote one’s thinking to understand the emotions of others, according to Dhani and Sharma (2016) and CASEL (2020). People with the ability to control their feelings and manage their emotions are more motivated and have more self-awareness than people who are not emotionally intelligent (Dhani & Sharma, 2016). Over the years, the definition of emotional intelligence has been refined. Mayer and Salovey (1997) suggested that people who are emotionally intelligent can accurately perceive their emotions, can use their emotions to facilitate thought, can understand the meanings of emotions, and can manage their emotions as well as the emotions of others (Mayer et al., 2016).

When properly taught and demonstrated, SEL has proven to have positive outcomes among students who learn the core competencies of SEL (CASEL, 2020). There is a link between SEL and a reduction in school violence and dropout rates as well as a more optimistic school culture (Mazur, 2018). Another contributor to make an impact on emotional intelligence was Daniel Goleman.

In 1995, Daniel Goleman published his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More Than IQ*. After its release and popularity, the concept of emotional intelligence became very popular (Dhani & Sharma, 2016). Goleman (1995) suggested that having a high IQ does not make one more intelligent in the key elements of emotional intelligence than someone with a moderate IQ. Five key components of emotional intelligence, according to Goleman (1995), are

- Self-awareness—ongoing attention to one’s internal state
- Self-regulation—controlling one’s emotions
- Motivation—utilizing emotions to achieve goals
• Empathy—sensing the emotions of others
• Social skills—managing relationship.

Goleman’s key components are similar to the key areas of the CASEL core competencies. CASEL’s (2020) framework of the five core competencies was established with the help of Goleman as one of CASEL’s co-founders.

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was approved. ESSA is federal legislation that gives states more control to use funds for programs such as Title I and Title IV. This new flexibility has seen an increase in reinforcing SEL programs and policies (CASEL, 2020). ESSA makes states responsible for schools that are low performing and allows for more training for staff to use within the classrooms (Deluna, 2017). The funds are also used for training school counselors.

School counselors are responsible for implementing SEL into their counseling programs (ASCA, n.d.-b). ASCA (n.d.-b) described the role of the school counselor as one who helps students learn to change attitudes, improve skills, and increase knowledge by developing comprehensive school counseling programs. It is the role of the school counselor to help students with academic, social and emotional, college and career, and personal counseling (Kress & Elias, 2006; Van Velsor, 2009). SEL is an important part of the curriculum in schools today (CASEL, 2020).

**Theoretical Foundations**

**John Dewey**

John Dewey is known for his theories in education and philosophy. According to Rodgers (2002), Dewey believed the “purpose of education was the intellectual, moral, and emotional growth of the individual” (p. 845). Dewey wanted education to
communicate to students the need to pay attention to social relationships and learn to control their actions (Rodgers, 2002). Dewey defined education as “that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases one’s ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (p. 846).

John Dewey was very involved in education. He was a teacher in a high school and in a college. According to Hildebrand (2018), John Dewey “devised curricula, established, reviewed and administrated school and departments of education, participated in collective organizing, consulted and lectured internationally, and wrote extensively on many faucets of education” (sec. 5, para.3). Dewey (1934) explained the objective of education as the growth of individuals to the greatest of their capabilities. John Dewey pointed out that when people experience an interaction between themselves and the world, change occurs (Rodgers, 2002).

His concept of education put a value on meaningful pursuits in learning and participation within the classroom. He believed that students must be vested in what they are learning (PBS, n.d.). Dewey’s view on what is coined “progressive education” was that the education of engaged citizens involves two necessary fundamentals: respect for diversity and the development of social intelligence (University of Vermont, 2003). Dewey wrote that an educative experience was one that increases the field of knowledge and experience, provides awareness, and leads toward intelligent actions (Rodgers, 2002)

**Emotional/Social Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence has been a topic of interest dating back to the works of Plato (Dhani & Sharma, 2016). Social intelligence was a concept introduced by psychologist Edward Thorndike in 1920. According to Dhani and Sharma (2016)
“Thorndike describes the concept of social intelligence as the ability to get along with other people by being able to understand the internal states, motives, and behaviors of oneself and others” (p. 190). So, by the very definition, the concept relates to both the cognitive aspects (the ability to understand people) and practical aspects (ability to deal with and respond towards them). This description is similar to the definition of social emotional intelligence today. Social emotional intelligence is the ability to be aware of one’s own and others’ feelings—in the moment—and use that information to lead oneself and others (Leadinspire, 2020).

In 2018, the CDE introduced “Social and Emotional Learning in California: A Guide to Resources.” This publication was a project of the CDE SEL state team, a State Superintendent of Public Instruction initiative, supported by California’s involvement in CASEL collaborating states initiative (CDE, 2018). The focus of this guide is on social and emotional learning as an essential component of a high-quality education (CDE, 2018).

The Aspen Institute’s (n.d.) National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development stated that social emotional and academic development creates high-quality learning environments in schools and classrooms. The Council of Distinguished Educators within Aspen’s Institute’s National Commission indicated that in these environments, students can do quality work confidently because of the cooperative and welcoming group of learners. The CDE also indicated that students benefit from social, emotional, and academic development when it is deliberately interconnected with learning experiences that enrich their understanding.
In 2017, the CDE SEL state team worked together to create California’s SEL guiding principles. This criteria provided guidance to educators and was there to support the SEL needs being recognized in California (CDE, 2018). The set of statements are as follows:

1. Adopt Whole Child Development as the Goal of Education
2. Commit to Equity
3. Build Capacity
4. Partner with Families and Community
5. Learn and Improve. (CDE, 2018, p. 5)

The guide is a resource that educators can use to help support the implementation of SEL. There are many SEL tools currently in existence, and this guide provides information on resource accessibility (CDE, 2018). Each resource is aligned with SEL guiding principles and describes the intended purpose, along with other needed information so educators can compare and contrast each resource (CDE, 2018). The CDE’s guide is a systematic approach to integrating a multitiered system of support.

**Multiple Intelligences**

Howard Gardner first introduced multiple intelligences theory in 1983 in his book, *Frames of Mind* (Gardner & Moran, 2006). Gardner believed that people do not learn in the same way, and a one-size-fits-all approach toward education leaves some students behind (Edutopia, 2016). The theory of multiple intelligences questions the notion of a single IQ, according to Edutopia (2016). There are multiple types of human intelligence, each type representing different methods that individuals use to process
information (Edutopia, 2016). Table 2 illustrates the eight different types of intelligences according to Gardner.

Table 2

*Different Types of Intelligences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intelligence type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal-linguistic</td>
<td>“Verbal-linguistic intelligence” is related “to an individual’s ability to analyze information” and create compositions of language, such as books, emails, and speeches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical-mathematical</td>
<td>“Logical-mathematical intelligence describes the ability” to form calculations and solve mathematical problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual-spatial</td>
<td>“Visual-spatial intelligence allows” individuals to “comprehend . . . graphical information.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical</td>
<td>“Musical intelligence” allows people to produce and understand the “different types of sound.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naturalistic</td>
<td>“Naturalistic intelligence” is related to the ability to identify and differentiate the different types of animals, plants, and the atmospheric conditions “found in the natural world.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodily-kinesthetic</td>
<td>“Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence” involves using “one’s own body” to “solve problems” and develop products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>“Interpersonal intelligence” is the ability to understand and recognize other individuals’ “desires, moods, intentions and motivations.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal</td>
<td>“Intrapersonal intelligence” is related to people’s ability to “assess” and “recognize” one’s own characteristics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The concepts of learning styles and multiple intelligences are vastly different. According to Edutopia (2016), learning styles are the way a person approaches a variety of tasks; multiple intelligences represent a person’s intellectual abilities. This distinct specification debunks the misconception that multiple intelligences mean the same as learning styles. Gardner believed that everyone has the eight types of intelligences, but not everyone has the same level of aptitude. He believed that learning is complex and
fluid (Edutopia, 2016). The theory of multiple intelligence helps educators understand that not all students learn the same, and therefore educators should have an understanding that different teaching approaches are needed to reach all students (Edutopia, 2016).

**Growth Mindset**

Dweck (2015) contended, “The growth mindset was intended to help close achievement gaps, not hide them” (p. 1). Dweck’s growth mindset concept is about informing students on their current performance and then helping them do something to improve. Rosenberger (2017) stated that Dweck indicated that the development of either a fixed or growth mindset can be established in one’s early years. Dweck (2015) suggested that if a fixed mindset is formed during one’s early years of development, it can limit what that person does. However, according to Dweck, “You can change your mindset” (Rosenberger, 2017, p. 2).

Dweck believed that students with a growth mindset never stop trying, and their grades reflect their efforts (Rosenberger, 2017). Dweck in her research indicated that individuals with a growth mindset are constantly growing and developing their learning strategies and are willing to look for different strategies and to try new things (Rosenberger, 2017). Overall, “A growth mindset drives motivation and achievement” (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007).

Creating a growth mindset culture within schools is beneficial to students as well as teachers because students work toward developing their full potential (Rosenberger, 2017). Rosenberger (2017) explained that to change one’s mindset takes time, effort, and practice. The more one practices, the easier it is to work on changing their mindset from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset (Rosenberger, 2017). As a growth mindset is
developed, individuals embrace challenges; they are determined to overcome obstacles, look at making an effort as something that is necessary, they learn from criticism, and they are not threatened by others’ success, but rather are inspired by others’ success (Rosenberger, 2017).

**Academic Achievement in Alternative Education**

Academic achievement has gone through many changes in the United States with the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and its replacement, ESSA of 2015. Schools have had to be more accountable for student achievement. NCLB mainly focused on student academic achievement and used test scores to assess how schools were performing (The Understood Team, 2020). The Understood Team (2020) has indicated that ESSA evaluates schools with more than just test scores. There are four criteria that measure a school’s performance. These four factors are (a) “reading and math scores,” (b) “English-language proficiency test scores,” (c) “high school graduation rates,” and (d) “a state-chosen academic measure for grade schools and middle schools” (The Understood Team, 2020, p. 2).

ESSA also measures school quality factors; however, there is more weight given to the academic factors (The Understood Team, 2020). To address accountability, the state of California introduced a new dashboard system in 2017 (Fensterwald, 2017).

According to the CDE (2017), “The California school dashboard provides parents and educators with meaningful information on school and district progress so they can participate in decisions to improve student learning” (p. 1). This accountability system included state indicators and standards to determine a school’s strengths, weaknesses, and which areas needed improvement (CDE, 2017). Not only did they create a dashboard for
traditional schools, but a dashboard was also created for alternative education schools under the California EC Section 52052(d (CDE, 2019). The CDE developed the DASS program, which replaced the alternative schools accountability model (ASAM; CDE, 2019).

The DASS is for schools that assist students who are high risk. The dashboards for both traditional and alternative schools display information and measure the same set of accountability indicators: (a) academic indicator (English language arts and math), (b) chronic absenteeism indicator, (c) college/career indicator, (d) English learner progress indicator, (e) graduation rate indicator, and (f) suspension rate indicator (CDE, 2019). Each indicator is measured on performance. Alternative schools have modified measures in the academic indicator as well as the graduation rate indicator based on the population they serve (CDE, 2019). More specifically, these two areas are calculated differently and use different criteria (CDE, 2019). Schools that are defined as alternative under the EC 52052(d) are (a) continuation, (b) county or district community day, (c) opportunity, (d) county community, (e) juvenile court, (f) California Education Authority—division of juvenile justice, and (g) county-run special education schools (CDE, 2020a).

Other schools that are defined as alternative, are schools that serve at-risk students. These schools include alternative schools of choice and charter schools that serve high-risk students (CDE, 2020a). Along with the Dashboard, schools use the local control and accountability plan (LCAP) to set yearly goals, plan activities, and effectively use resources to achieve those goals. These accountability measures are in place to develop better student outcomes (CDE, 2020).
School Counselors’ Role in Academic Achievement in Alternative Education

Alternative education is no different from traditional school with regard to the roles in which the school counselor is involved (ASCA, n.d.-b). There are some activities that are different, such as the scheduling of student classes; however, school counselors are there to support all students’ growth and success (ASCA, n.d.-b). School counselors who work in alternative education schools need to have increased knowledge related to student characteristics and be familiar with empirically supported counseling interventions to assist the alternative education student population (Mullen & Lambie, 2013). Mullen and Lambie (2013) stated that important topics, such as decision-making and life skills, are pathways counselors can use to support student growth and development. These topics are part of the SEL agenda, and school counselors working in alternative education have to use diverse methods to implement interventions with students (Mullen & Lambie, 2013). Further, ASCA (n.d.-b) contended, “The school counselor role is to design and deliver school counseling programs that improve student outcomes” (p. 2).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for SEL is described in detail by the CASEL model. In 1994, CASEL was formed. The goal of CASEL was to establish “high-quality, evidence-based social and emotional learning” to be an essential part of education (CASEL, 2020, p. 1). SEL is defined as “the process through which children and adults 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, 2020, p. 2). SEL addresses the development of five key areas: self-management, self-
awareness, social awareness, decision-making, and relationship skills as outlined in Figure 1 (CASEL, 2020; Elias et al., 2006; Fernandez-Berrocal & Extremera, 2006).

Figure 1. CASEL social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies. From What is SEL? By the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2020 (https://casel.org/what-is-sel/).

CASEL (2020) is a collaboration of leading experts that support schools, districts, and states to promote research, guide practice, and advise policy. The following sections define each of the five key areas:

**Self-Management**

Self-management is defined as the ability to control one’s own emotions, thoughts, and actions in various situations. To be able to effectively manage one’s own
stress, motivation, and impulses. The competence to set personal goals (Basu & Mernillod, 2011; CASEL, 2020).

CASEL (2019) explains having self-management is possessing the ability to manage one’s own stress and control your impulses. Individuals with self-management skills are able to motivate themselves and are able to work toward their academic and personal goals. Self-management is not only understanding who one as person is but having the ability to use the information to help manage their actions and emotions (CASEL, 2019).

CASEL (2019) identifies self-management as one’s ability to turn their feelings and emotions into positive actions so they can have advocacy in what they believe. It is regulating one’s emotions and feelings so they can feel calm and relaxed. Self-management skills include learning how to stay engaged and focused (CASEL, 2019).

**Self-Awareness**

Self-awareness is defined as the ability to be able to identify one’s own feelings, thoughts, and principles and understand how they impact behavior. The ability to evaluate one’s resilience and restraints with confidence (Basu & Mernillod, 2011; CASEL, 2020) and to have self-confidence and a growth mindset (CASEL, 2020).

Individuals who have self-awareness know and understand themselves; they can understand their emotions, thoughts, and how they feel about their own identity (CASEL, 2019). Self-awareness is having the ability to be in touch with one’s self, knowing why one feels a certain way, and understanding that emotion. It is the ability to deal with your own emotions and experiences and being able to understand them (CASEL, 2019).
Social Awareness

Social awareness is defined as the ability to understand and respond effectively to the emotions of other people from diverse backgrounds/cultures. To be aware of the social environment and people within society (Basu, & Mernillod, 2011; CASEL, 2020) and to be empathetic toward others (CASEL, 2020).

Social awareness is an individual’s ability to take the perspective of and understand others from different cultures and backgrounds. It is having the capacity to be aware of ethical and social norms for behavior and to identify resources and supports. It is having empathy for others and appreciating diversity (CASEL, 2020).

According to CASEL (2019), social awareness is understanding others and how they feel by recognizing emotions, reading body language, and showing respect for other people. It is one’s ability to take another’s perspective and understand how they are feeling or thinking. Social awareness is a person’s ability to recognize the emotions of others and respond appropriately (CASEL, 2020; LaRocca, 2017).

Relationship Skills

Relationship skills is defined as the ability to form and retain healthy and satisfying relationships with other human beings and groups, and the ability to communicate well, get along with others, resolve conflict, and be able to ask for help if one needs it (Basu, & Mernillod, 2011; CASEL, 2020). It is the ability to build positive relationships with others and to work with others within a team (CASEL, 2019).

To demonstrate appropriate relationship skills, one must learn to listen well, cooperate with others, and communicate clearly (CASEL, 2020; Landmark School Outreach, n.d.). It is also important to have skills in negotiating conflict constructively.
and knowing when to seek or offer help to others when it is needed. All of these skills are foundations that can be learned and developed to improve relationships.

**Responsible Decision-Making**

Responsible decision-making is defined as the ability to be able to make practical decisions about one’s personal behavior and the skills to make rational choices in social situations based on one’s moral standards (Beland, 2007; CASEL, 2020). It is the evaluation of results or outcomes of one’s actions and concern for the well-being of others and oneself. It is the ability to identify problems and analyze solutions (CASEL, 2020).

CASEL (2020) identifies responsible decision-making as one’s ability to evaluate and solve problems. It is being able to reflect on situations and make the right choices. Making responsible decisions is having the ability to be ethically responsible (CASEL, 2020).

Responsible decision-making is understanding ethical implications and evaluating consequences. Responsible decision-making is not making impulsive decisions but thinking ahead before making a decision (CASEL, 2019). It is learning how to think though all parts of a problem and making sensible choices.

**Gaps in Literature**

The gaps in literature were identified when researching school counselors working in alternative education schools. According to Mullen and Lambie (2013), there is limited training and information school counselors receive before working in alternative education schools. Literature is also limited regarding school counselors who work in alternative education schools.
An additional identified gap in literature exists in the area of SEL programs within alternative education schools. Most of the information has been centered on SEL within traditional settings. Emotional intelligence is associated with academic achievement, but little research has been conducted on implementing SEL within the alternative education settings.

**Summary**

The literature review highlights how implementing SEL programs into alternative education schools can help improve academic achievement among students. Students in all schools benefit from learning the core competencies developed by CASEL (2020). Learning what best practices are implemented by school counselors will assist other school counselors to better serve the population of students who attend alternative schools.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter describes the research methodology presented for this qualitative phenomenological study. The chapter describes methodology and research design and the procedural components of this study. Furthermore, it provides the rationale for the research on social and emotional learning (SEL) within alternative schools. The chapter includes the purpose statement, research questions, research design, population, sample, and instrumentation. This chapter also includes data collection and analysis, limitations, and a summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the best practices school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County use to support SEL using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making). An additional purpose of the study was to describe the CASEL SEL core competencies that were perceived as most important by school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County in implementing the CASEL core competencies at their school?
Research Subquestions

1. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of self-management?
2. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of self-awareness?
3. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of social awareness?
4. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of relationship skills?
5. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of responsible decision-making?
6. What do school counselors perceive as the most important best practices used within the CASEL core competencies?

Research Design

Research designs identify the plan that was used to produce evidence to answer the study’s research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The methodology used for this study was a qualitative phenomenological design. A qualitative phenomenological methodology was chosen to acquire the meaning of the lived experience (Groenewald, 2004; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015) and to provide significant rich answers to the research questions.

Phenomenological methodology is described as exploring a lived experience that emphasizes rich descriptions of what happened and how the phenomenon was concretely experienced (Finlay, 2009; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). This
methodological approach of phenomenology centers on the study of direct experience and consciousness of that experience (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Phenomenological studies inquire into what was experienced and how it happened, and more importantly, the significance the individuals attribute to the experience.

According to Leung (2015), “The essence of qualitative research is to make sense of and recognize patterns among words in order to build up a meaningful picture without compromising its richness and dimensionality” (p. 324). The aim of qualitative research is to obtain the answers to the “how, where, when, who, and why” questions. Qualitative research manages nonnumerical information and phenomenological evaluation, which entangles both human subjectivity and human senses (Anyan, 2013; Leung, 2015). This research design provided a suitable methodology to receive rich and significant answers to the research questions of this study.

For this study, virtual interviews were conducted via the platform Zoom. Zoom is a modern communications platform used for audio and video conferencing, webinars, virtual meetings, and chats. It was necessary that interviews be conducted virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic and in respect for the practice of safety and social distancing outlined by the university of researchers.

The qualitative method and design allowed the researcher to gather personal stories and information to better understand the best practices and experiences of school counselors. The in-depth interviews were designed to obtain a genuine understanding of school counselors’ perceptions and lived experiences that are associated with best practices in supporting the CASEL core competencies at their schools. In addition, the phenomenological process helped determine which of the CASEL core competencies
were identified as most important by school counselors who work with students within exemplary alternative education schools. In order to provide further information to validate the data, artifacts were collected to provide for triangulation among multiple sources of data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The phenomenological methodology provided the researcher with a structure for data collection and analysis of virtual interviews from participating school counselors.

**Population**

A population is a group of individuals, elements, events, or objects from which information can be generalized (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Populations need to be well defined with clear inclusion and exclusion specifications (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A population, as defined by Patten (2014), is a group from which researchers draw a sample. The population is the group in which the researcher is specifically interested. The population of this study was school counselors employed with alternative education schools in the state of California.

The total number of high schools located in California in the 2019–2020 school year was 2,213 (CDE, 2019). This total included alternative, community day, juvenile court, charter, and continuation high schools along with traditional high schools. Alternative education schools are community day schools, juvenile court, charter, and continuation high schools. The total number of alternative schools during the 2019–2020 period was 269, and the enrollment was 59,094 (CED, 2019). Using these numbers and extrapolating, each alternative school was approximately 220 students in size. According to Frey (2012), the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends one counselor for every 250 students, and California falls well below that figure (Frey, 2012).
Logically, this information concluded that the population of alternative education school counselors was 269, or one per alternative school.

**Target Population**

According to Lavrakas (2008), the target population is the whole set of components for which the data are utilized to make inferences. Lavrakas asserted that the target population defines those components that the data are supposed to generalize. Target populations need to be clearly identified and defined, and the definition determines if the population will be eligible for the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It is not feasible to study large groups such as the statewide number of alternative counselors (269); therefore, the researcher narrowed the population in this study to a target population of alternative education school counselors in San Bernardino County. According to Patten (2014), “When it is impractical to study an entire population, researchers draw a sample, study it, and infer that what is true of the sample is probably also true of the population” (p. 53).

According to the CDE (2020b) web page, there are 44 schools in San Bernardino County that have been designated as having Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS), excluding charter schools. Therefore, the target population for this study was approximately 44 alternative education school counselors.

**Sample**

The sample in a qualitative study is a group of participants selected from the target population intended for generalization by the researcher. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) indicated that a group of individuals from whom data are collected are considered a sample. The purpose of the sample, according to Patton (2015), is to
“select cases to compare and contrast to learn about the factors that explain similarities
and differences” (p. 277). Purposeful sampling was used by the researcher to select a
sample that represents the population and has the requisite characteristics (McMillan &
Schumacher, 2010). School counselors who were employed at exemplary alternative
education schools located in San Bernardino County were selected as the target
population.

The sample size is connected to the nature of the study. According to McMillan
and Schumacher (2010), the understanding that comes from qualitative inquiry is
contingent on the information quality of the occurrences and the analytical skills of the
researcher rather than on the size of the sample. The sample selection was purposeful
and for phenomenological studies it is recommended that the sample be between five and
stated, “There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (p. 311). Qualitative
sample size depends on the available time, resources, and the purpose of the research
(Patton, 2015).

Exemplary alternative schools were identified by DASS in San Bernardino
County. The San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools office identified
alternative schools as exemplary based on evidence of at least six of the following
National Alternative Education Association (NAEA, 2014) exemplary practices:
1. A guiding vision and mission that drives the overall program.
2. Passionate, innovative, competent, and experienced leadership.
3. A safe, caring, and orderly climate and culture.
4. Staff are effective, innovative, and qualified individuals with appropriate training.
5. Instructional practices and curriculum are supportive, rigorous, and individualized.

6. Assessment includes screening, progress monitoring, and diagnostics to improve student outcomes.

7. Transition plans include college and career readiness support for high school students.

8. Collaborative partnerships promote opportunities for life skills, soft skills, service learning, and career exploration.

9. School counselors collaborate with school stakeholders to support best practices, articulate instruction, and create effective citizens.

10. Personalized curriculum and instruction is implemented using individualized learning plans.

A purposeful sample of school counselors from exemplary alternative schools enabled the participants to shed light on best practices of CASEL and address the purpose and research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The sample size for this research study was school counselors from exemplary alternative high schools identified by the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools office. The size of the sample was sufficient for what the researcher wanted to discover and why it is important and how these findings were to be used (Patton, 2015).

**Selection of Sample Study Participants**

The process of qualitative data collection and analysis was implemented in the following steps:

1. Contact the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools office via e-mail and ask them to approve research (Appendix A) and provide a list of the exemplary alternative education schools based on the criteria.
2. Contact the exemplary alternative education schools identified by the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools office via e-mail and ask for their participation in the research study.

3. Send all potential participants an e-mail (Appendix B) requesting their participation in collecting information through Zoom video interviews, upon agreement, establish a schedule to hold interviews with participants.

4. Begin data collection by conducting interviews via Zoom and record both audio and video for transcription purposes. After interviews, collect artifacts from interviewees.

5. Analyze data by coding information and entering them into frequency tables, determining themes, and conducting an analysis of the information.

The five steps were completed between October and December of 2020. This study was done to identify and describe the best practices of alternative education school counselors in exemplary schools located in San Bernardino County used to support SEL using CASEL core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making). In addition, the researcher set out to understand the practices within the CASEL SEL core competencies that were perceived as most important by school counselors.

Approval was granted by the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools to conduct this research. The alternative education schools that were identified as exemplary through the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools office based on the criterion were contacted via e-mail and an explanation of the nature of the study, the interview process, and the sample process was explained. School counselors from each of the alternative schools identified were asked to participate in the study. An invitation
letter (Appendix B), the Brandman University Participant’s Bill of Rights (Appendix C), informed consent (Appendix D), interview questions (Appendix E), and CASEL core competencies (Appendix F) were sent to all the school counselors who agreed to participate in the study. School counselors were asked to respond to the researcher via e-mail.

Upon receiving school counselors’ responses of acceptance to participate, the researcher worked toward equal involvement from each exemplary education school. To ensure equal participation, any school counselor for which the county provided research information and who contacted the researcher were interviewed. Because of enrollment numbers, many of the alternative schools had more than one school counselor who agreed to participate in the interviews.

**Instrumentation**

Chenail (2011) stated that researchers who conduct discovery-orientated or naturalistic inquiries generally create study-specific questions to ask during their interviews instead of pre-established survey instruments or questionnaires. In this situation, researchers become the instruments through which data are collected (Chenail, 2011; Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003). When conducting qualitative research, the researcher is the research instrument (Patton, 2015). The researcher is the main person in acquiring information for respondents, according to Chenail (2011). In support of transparency in this study, the researcher acknowledges that she is a school counselor working in an alternative education school.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated that when the researcher is the testing instrument, it is essential for the researcher to recognize any bias that may occur from
personal experience, education, or one’s own involvement. The results of the data can be threatened by individuals collecting data or when there are changes in the instruments (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). The primary instrument was the researcher in the interview data collection and analysis. During the process the interviewer remained neutral. According to Adhabi and Anozie (2017), during an interview the researcher must create a respectful connection with the interviewee for the information to be authentic.

A semistructured interview instrument was used for this qualitative phenomenological study. The interview protocol (Appendix G) instrument consisted of semistructured questions to use as a guide, which were prepared by the researcher (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017) and aligned to the theoretical framework and literature review. According to McMillian and Schumacher (2010), a semistructured interview is defined as a method that allows the researcher to determine the wording and the sequence of the questions throughout the interview. The semistructured interview was designed with a phenomenological perspective in order to understand the lived experience (Haro, 2019) of school counselors. The phenomenological interview process is an in-depth interview utilized to learn the meaning or nature of a lived experience between selected participants (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017; McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). In-depth interviews can be long, probing, and extensive because of the open-response questions that are used to gain data on the participants’ interpretations. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) also stated that interview questions can center on behaviors or experiences, values and beliefs, feelings, education, perceptions, and the person’s past or demographic information.
Interview questions were created based on the existing review of CASEL core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, healthy relationships, and making responsible decisions; Adhabi & Anozie, 2017; CASEL, 2020) and aligned with the research questions. The CASEL framework provided the concepts that were used to develop the interview instrument. Interview questions were generated and designed in progression and the researcher used probes to ensure a more detailed answer for questions that were not fully answered (Appendix F). Each question was purposely designed for open-ended responses in response to the semistructured questions.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), effective interviewing is contingent on “efficient probing and sequencing of questions” (p. 358). Suggested guidelines are as follows:

- Interview probes to elicit more detail and further explanations
- Statement of the study’s purpose and priority
- Varying sequence of questions
- Demographics questions to establish rapport
- Controversial, complex, and complicated questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Demographic questions were asked at the start of the interview to establish rapport with the interviewee. These questions were collected to understand more appropriately the lived experience of the participants. Demographic questions were used to focus attention on the context of the interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The interview process was designed to be semistructured and to collect the responses from school counselors based upon their lived experiences and their experiences related to the research focus. The questions were aligned to the purpose of
the study and designed to answer the research questions. To develop the instrumentation and collect valid data, the researcher examined the six types of interview questions formulated by McMillian and Schumacher (2015). The type and description appear in detail in Table 3.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description and Illustration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience/behavior</td>
<td>Obtain what a person does or has done with descriptions of experiences, actions, and behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinions/views</td>
<td>Obtain what the person thinks about his or her experiences that reveal his or her intentions, values, and goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>Obtain how the person responds emotionally to his or her experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Obtain factual information the person has or what the person considers as factual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory</td>
<td>Obtain the person’s account of what and how he or she sees, hears, tastes, smells, or touches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic/background</td>
<td>Obtain the person’s account of himself or herself to help the researcher in identifying &amp; locating the person in relation to others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher used this reference to create interview questions that align with the research questions to make certain they would produce reliable and valid outcomes. An alignment matrix was used to help keep consistency between interview questions and research questions. Furthermore, combining the review of literature, research questions, purpose of study, and synthesis matrix supported the validity and reliability of interview questions.

**Interview Question Development Matrix**

The researcher used an Interview Question Development Matrix (IQDM) as a validity measure which was created to align the interview questions with the research
questions in this study. The utilization of the IQDM ensures validity from the data collected from the variables and research questions in the study (Roberts, 2010). The IQDM is included in the appendices (Appendix H).

**Qualitative Reliability and Validity**

According to Leung (2015), reliability in qualitative research is challenging because of consistency. Provided the data are consistent in qualitative research, the margin for variability is allowed. Researchers need to verify their accuracy in terms of form and context with constant comparison (Leung, 2015) with peers or alone to form a triangulation. Leung (2015) acknowledged that an attempt to disprove the data and analyses should be completed to evaluate reliability.

Validity within qualitative research, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), is the standard of consistency between the clarification of the phenomena and facts. McMillan and Schumacher stated that validity of qualitative research is the level at which interpretations have common explanations between the researcher and the participants. Validity is defined as the reliability of inferences (Daytner, 2006). In a research study, reliability and validity both are equally important. To help limit researcher bias, some safeguards were created, such as a field test and coding. To help ensure reliability and validity, the researcher conducted what is known as a field test.

**Field Test**

A field test is a process in which the researcher tests the reliability and validity of the research interview questions on individuals who are represented in the population established for the study (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The field test aids the researcher to establish if there are any inadequacies, weaknesses, or limitations in their interview
design and allows the researcher to make any corrections prior to the implementation of the study. The interview protocol questions were field tested with alternative education school counselors to establish reliability.

A field test was conducted with a school counselor who holds a Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) Credential in School Counseling and who is employed in alternative education. The field-test participant was given a feedback form (Appendix I) to assist the researcher in helpful suggestions. A researcher familiar with the topic of the research study observed the interview process and provided feedback with the form provided (Appendix J) to the researcher on the performance of the field-test interview. Organizing the field test helped the researcher practice the interviewing process and provide clarity for the interview questions, interviewing method, and use of probes and to decide if the experience aligned with what was revealed in the literature review of the study. It provided feedback regarding clarity of word choice and language, and the feedback was used to revise the interview questions as necessary.

According to Patten (2014), questions need to be piloted and revisions made if necessary. Revisions were made to the interview questions and probes derived from the responses of the colleagues. Furthermore, the researcher requested for feedback from the school counselor who participated in the field test as to what she perceived of the interview process, interview questions, and recording method, and this feedback was used to execute any needed changes.

Coding

Coding is created through “shared interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon being studied” (Weston et al., 2001, p. 382). A researcher’s perspectives
and biases can influence the interpretation of the data and how codes are developed. To gain a rich understanding of the nature of the study, a coding system allows the researcher to collect the data and search for themes (Weston et al., 2001).

**Intercoder Reliability/Interrater Reliability**

To validate the data collected, the researcher must complete the data collection, transcribe the data, and code the data. Coding, according to Patton (2015), aims to determine what is happening in the data and labeling it to identify specific actions. Intercoder reliability is defined by Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken (2004) as a broad term used for the degree to which independent coders assess a characteristic of an artifact or communication and arrive at the same conclusion. It is important to establish intercoder reliability because it is a “step in validating a coding scheme” (Lombard et al., 2004, p. 3) and demonstrating a level of reliability.

Intercoder reliability benefits the researcher with assistance in the coding work (Lombard et al., 2004). The researcher and a doctoral-level student familiar with the topic and with the study each coded one of the transcribed interviews. After completing the coding, the researcher identified that the levels of intercoder reliability met the threshold of 80% agreement (Hallgren, 2012). To be considered reliable, according to Patton (2015), “coding should be replicable” (p. 667).

**Triangulation of Data**

According to Patton (2015), “Data triangulation is the use of a variety of data sources in a study” (p. 316). There are four different types of triangulation: (a) “data triangulation,” (b) “investigator triangulation,” (c) “theory triangulation,” and (d) “methodological triangulation” (p. 316). For qualitative studies, the best possible
methods strategy is comprised of three key components: (a) qualitative data, (b) realistic inquiry, and (c) research analysis (Patton, 2015). Triangulation in this research was accomplished by use of interview transcripts, artifacts, and the literature.

**Data Collection**

Before conducting the data collection process, the researcher requested approval from the Brandman University Instructional Review Board (BUIRB). This approval was to ensure that the rights of the participants in the study and their privacy were upheld to comply with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Office of Protection from Research Risks and any other additional applicable local and state laws. In addition, participants were presented with an informed consent form stating that their personal information would be kept confidential (Appendix D). Participants were also given the Brandman University Participant’s Bill of Rights (Appendix C). Upon approval from the BUIRB (Appendix K), the researcher began the data collection in November of 2020.

School counselors from San Bernardino County exemplary alternative education schools were asked to participate in the study through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows for “information-rich cases for in-depth study,” which yields insights and understanding (Patton, 2015, p. 264). The criteria used to establish the designation of exemplary were based on the NAEA (2014) exemplary practices and required participant schools to meet a minimum of six of the following:

1. A guiding vision and mission that drives the overall program.
2. Passionate, innovative, competent, and experienced leadership.
3. A safe, caring, and orderly climate and culture.
4. Staff are effective, innovative, and qualified individuals with appropriate training.
5. Instructional practices and curriculum are supportive, rigorous, and individualized.
6. Assessment includes screening, progress monitoring, and diagnostics to improve student outcomes.
7. Transition plans include college and career readiness support for high school students.
8. Collaborative partnerships promote opportunities for life skills, soft skills, service learning, and career exploration.
9. School counselors collaborate with school stakeholders to support best practices, articulate instruction, and create effective citizens.
10. Personalized curriculum and instruction is implemented using individualized learning plans.

Administrators from each school site were informed of the nature of the study and asked to allow their school counselors to participate in the recorded interviews. Each school counselor was sent a letter via e-mail (Appendix B) discussing the nature of the study and a participation consent form. The letter discussed the essence of the study and outlined a set of steps to schedule and participate in an interview. The school counselor consent form (Appendix D) gave a short explanation of the study and a confidentiality clause. School counselors who were participating were asked to e-mail the informed consent form back to the researcher so an interview could be scheduled. The researcher’s contact information was made available to all participants.

Participants were selected using the information given to the researcher by the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools office. The schools had to meet the criteria set forth by the NAEA (2014) exemplary practices. Once the superintendent’s
office provided the list of the exemplary alternative schools that met six of the 10 criteria, the school principals were notified via e-mail.

As soon as the participants agreed to the interviews, scheduling took place and interviews were arranged to take place through Zoom video conference. Each interview was recorded with the participant’s permission (Appendix L), and each participant was asked to turn their camera on so the interviews would be live face-to-face via video conference. A semistructured interview was conducted to collect data. According to McIntosh and Morse (2015), the purpose of a semistructured interview is to understand the perspectives of the participants relating to an experience connected with the research topic. This type of interview process assesses, confirms, validates, refutes, or elaborates on the existing knowledge and may uncover new knowledge (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). McIntosh and Morse stated that this process provides the interviewer with a detailed schedule to obtain knowledge about the phenomenon.

The school counselors who agreed to participate in the study were given a copy of (a) Brandman University’s Participant’s Bill of Rights, (b) informed consent, (c) interview questions, and (d) the CASEL framework and definitions. During the interview, when the researcher felt she needed more information, probes were introduced to obtain more specific data. Patten (2014) stated that semistructured refers to the practice of asking additional questions if necessary to probe for further explanations in addition to the predetermined questions. The interview questions were developed from the CASEL core competency framework and aligned directly to the purpose and research questions.
Upon completion of the interviews, the recorded data were transcribed. The transcribed data were then coded by the researcher and the doctoral-level student to establish themes. Once the themes were formed, both the researcher and the doctoral-level student reviewed the data for any additional information that may have been missed. Confidentiality was guaranteed by assigning a number to each school counselor who participated in the study. The interview data were stored in a secure area, and the researcher was the only one with access.

**Data Analysis**

Data were collected and analyzed from school counselors who were employed at the exemplary alternative education schools. The qualitative data were gathered from the school counselor interviews. Qualitative data analysis, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), is basically “an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns among relationships” (p. 367). For this study a template analysis style was applied using a set of codes and categories. Template analysis style, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “logically applies derived sets of codes and categories to the data” (p. 368). The initial codes and categories were obtained from the CASEL (2020) core competencies, which were part of the research questions. The data were evaluated, organized, and sorted by the researcher. The interview data were transcribed and analyzed. Frequency tables, the interview question alignment table (Appendix G), and a precoded chart were used to identify themes. The results from the data analysis, frequency tables, and artifacts were charted to categorize the data. The information yielded provided an understanding of the school counselors’ lived experience.
as it applied to the research questions. The findings from the data analysis were reviewed and analyzed by the researcher.

**Limitations**

According to Roberts (2010), “All studies have some limitations” (p. 162). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated that a qualitative phenomenological study described the significance of a lived experience. In this study the following limitations were identified.

**Size**

The size was limited to 10 school counselors who worked in exemplary alternative education schools located in San Bernardino County, California. The small sample size may have limited overall generalizability of the study.

**Researcher Bias**

The researcher was employed as a school counselor at an alternative school at the time of this study and may have unintentionally communicated biases that could have affected the interviewee.

**Online Platforms**

The quality of having to conduct interviews virtually may have led external factors to inadvertently influence the interactions between the interviewer and the interviewee.

**Summary**

This phenomenological study used a qualitative research design. Chapter III aimed to inform the reader of the purpose of the study, research questions, and design used to collect data. Qualitative data were gathered from interviews to understand the
lived experiences of school counselors who implemented SEL using the CASEL core competencies. Furthermore, data were collected to determine which core competency—self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, establishing and maintaining healthy relationships, or making responsible decisions—ranked the highest in importance. This chapter also discussed the population, target population, and sample size of the study. The data collection and data analysis were also reported in this chapter along with the methods used to complete the data analysis. The findings from the data analysis are discussed in Chapter IV, and Chapter V discusses the conclusions and recommendations for further studies.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

Alternative education initiatives were developed in the 1950s as an alternative for students who were failing in traditional public schools (Hodgman, 2016). Alternative education schools have continued to exist in America for decades. According to Hodgman (2016), alternative education schools are vital in America to combat educational and social issues. Students with learning disabilities, low attendance, disciplinary issues, and substance abuse have contributed to the ever-growing populations in alternative education. Aron (2006) stated that alternative pathways are for those students who have been unable to thrive and learn in the traditional education system. Educators and policymakers assert that alternate educational options are needed to meet the needs of students who may be at risk and to help ensure that they will be able to succeed (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Coats, 2016; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Raywid, 1989).

According to the California Education Code Sections 58500-58512, Alternative Schools, Chapter 3, “The governing board of any school district may establish and maintain one or more alternative schools within the district” (CDE, 2020a, p. 1). Additionally, the code suggests that the goal of alternative schools is to address students’ needs by maximizing opportunities for students to develop positive values and learn to be more self-motivated. The CDE (2020a) declares that “alternative schools and programs of choice can offer a different structure, learning philosophy, or academic emphasis to accommodate different student needs, interests, and learning styles” (p. 1). Coats (2015) stated that there are three types of alternative education schools that California state law
authorizes: (a) continuation, (b) community schools, and (c) community day schools. Each of these models exists to serve at-risk high school students.

Students are attending alternative education schools, and these schools are meeting the influx of students by offering programs that students need. School counselors from alternative education schools are working to help students learn skills that have been overlooked within the school setting. The skills in which alternative education counselors are instructing students include the key areas of social and emotional learning (SEL). According to Schachner and Darling Hammond (2020), “SEL and academics are interrelated and reinforcing” (p. 3), and these are skills students need to learn.

There is a gap in literature regarding the lived experiences of school counselors within exemplary alternative education schools and their support of students’ SEL through the frame of the CASEL core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, healthy relationships, and responsible decision-making). Understanding what school counselors experience with students, as well as their perceptions of which of the CASEL core competencies are most important, will provide information for the field on the best practices of school counselors at exemplary alternative education schools with respect to SEL.

This qualitative phenomenological study identified and described the best practices of school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools used to support SEL using the CASEL core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making). According to the CASEL history web page, both CASEL and the term “social and emotional learning”
emerged from a meeting in 1994 hosted by the Fetzer Institution (CASEL, n.d., p. 1). The website reported that “CASEL was formed in 1994 with the goal of establishing high-quality, evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) as an essential part of preschool through high school education’ (p. 1). The CASEL framework of SEL has been widely cited and adopted in the work of public education since its inception.

The researcher determined that a qualitative phenomenological research design would collect rich descriptions of school counselors’ lived experiences. This chapter begins with an overview, the purpose statement, research questions, and a review of the research methods and data collection procedures. The data collected from 10 interviews of school counselors from alternative education schools that were identified as exemplary are then summarized. This chapter includes frequency tables and figures that illustrate the patterns, themes, and alignment of data collected during the semistructured interviews. An analysis and summary of the data collected conclude the chapter.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the best practices school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County use to support SEL using the CASEL core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making). An additional purpose of the study was to describe the CASEL SEL core competencies that were perceived as most important by school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County.
Research Questions

This study was guided by six subquestions to the central research question and the determination of the most important CASEL core competency. Each subquestion was divided into three interview questions that pertained to each of the CASEL core competencies. The sixth subquestion was to determine which core competency was perceived as most important according to the responses conveyed during the interviews.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County in implementing the CASEL core competencies at their school?

Research Subquestions

1. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of self-management?
2. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of self-awareness?
3. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of social awareness?
4. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of relationship skills?
5. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of responsible decision-making?
6. What do school counselors perceive as the most important best practices used within the CASEL core competencies?
Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

The research method used for this study was qualitative. The qualitative research design was a phenomenological study, which is a method that describes the meanings of lived experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this study, the phenomenological method was used to explain the school counselor’s perception of how SEL was supported using CASEL core competencies with students and to determine the school counselor’s perception of the most important core competency. The methodology transforms the lived experiences into a description of all intents and purposes, allowing for analysis and reflection (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Information for this study was collected through interviews with school counselors who were employed at an exemplary alternative education school in San Bernardino County. Schools were identified by the County of San Bernardino Superintendent of Schools office as exemplary by meeting six of the 10 criteria presented. The criteria used to establish the designation of exemplary were based on the National Alternative Education Association (NAEA, 2014) exemplary practices:

1. A guiding vision and mission that drives the overall program.
2. Passionate, innovative, competent, and experienced leadership.
3. A safe, caring, and orderly climate and culture.
4. Staff are effective, innovative, and qualified individuals with appropriate training.
5. Instructional practices and curriculum are supportive, rigorous, and individualized.
6. Assessment includes screening, progress monitoring, and diagnostics to improve student outcomes.
7. Transition plans include college and career readiness support for high school students.
8. Collaborative partnerships promote opportunities for life skills, soft skills, service learning, and career exploration.

9. School counselors collaborate with school stakeholders to support best practices, articulate instruction, and create effective citizens.

10. Personalized curriculum and instruction is implemented using individualized learning plans.

The researcher contacted the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools to ask for assistance in identifying exemplary alternative education schools that met the criteria. A list of seven schools was sent to the researcher identifying the exemplary schools in San Bernardino County. The researcher was also provided with contact information for each school. E-mails were sent to each of the principals at the exemplary schools asking for their permission to interview their school counselors. The principals from the identified exemplary alternative schools agreed to allow their counselors to participate in the study.

Interviews were scheduled when any of the identified school counselors contacted the researcher. The school counselor suggested a time, the researcher confirmed, and a Zoom invitation was sent to the counselor. Interviews were conducted during the month of November 2020. Prior to the interviews, and upon their agreement to participate, the researcher gave each school counselor an invitation letter, informed consent, Brandman University’s Participant’s Bill of Rights, interview questions, and the CASEL core competencies.

A semistructured interview was conducted to collect the data. McMillian and Schumacher (2010) stated that semistructured interviews are defined as a method that
allows the researcher to determine the wording and the sequence of the questions throughout the interview. The semistructured interview was designed with a phenomenological perspective in order for the researcher to understand the lived experience (Haro, 2019) of the school counselors who were employed at exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County. The researcher requested artifacts from each interviewee to strengthen the research and confirm the answers provided by participants. Each interview was recorded on the Zoom platform and transcribed through Zoom; the researcher also used iTranscribe (https://www.itranscribe.net/transcription-services) to ensure an accurate account of the interview.

The researcher and a doctoral-level student familiar with the research each coded the information from one of the interviews and identified common themes. For intercoder reliability, there needed to be at least 80% accuracy on the themes. The accuracy of the themes was agreed at approximately 98% between the intercoder and the researcher. The themes were put into an Excel sheet to facilitate the analyzing of the data.

**Population**

A population is a group of individuals, elements, events, or objects whose information can be generalized (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Populations need to be well-defined with clear inclusion and exclusion specifications (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A population, as defined by Patten (2014), is a group from which researchers draw a sample. The population is the group in which the
The researcher is specifically interested. The population of this study was school counselors employed with alternative education schools in the state of California.

This study focused on the lived experiences of school counselors who were employed at alternative education schools deemed exemplary in San Bernardino County located in California. The total number of high schools located in California in the 2019-2020 school year was 2,213 (CDE, 2019b). This total included alternative, community day, juvenile court, charter, and continuation high schools along with traditional high schools. Alternative education schools are community day schools, juvenile court, charter, and continuation high schools. The total number of alternative education schools during the 2019-2020 period was 269 and the enrollment was 59,094 (Ed-Data, 2020b). School counselors working within alternative education schools were the population.

**Target Population**

According to Creswell (2013), “The target population is the actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected” (p. 393). A target population with general characteristics to the larger population is chosen by the researcher (Creswell, 2013). It is not feasible to study large groups such as the statewide number of alternative education school counselors (269); therefore, the researcher narrowed her research to a target population of alternative education school counselors in San Bernardino County. According to Patten (2014), “When it is impractical to study an entire population, researchers draw a sample, study it, and infer that what is true of the sample is probably also true of the population” (p. 53).

According to the California Department of Education (CDE, 2020b) website, there are 44 schools in San Bernardino County that have been designated as Dashboard
Alternative School Status (DASS), excluding charter schools. Therefore, the target population for this study was approximately 44 alternative education school counselors.

Sample

The sample in a qualitative study is a group of participants who are selected from the target population intended for generalization by the researcher. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) indicated that a group of individuals from whom data are collected are considered a sample. The purpose of the sample, according to Patton (2015), is to “select cases to compare and contrast to learn about the factors that explain similarities and differences” (p. 277). Purposeful sampling was used by the researcher to select a sample that represents the population and has the requisite characteristics (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). School counselors who were employed at exemplary alternative education schools located in San Bernardino County were selected as the sample population.

The sample size is connected to the nature of the study. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the understanding that comes from qualitative inquiry is contingent on the information’s quality of the occurrences and the analytical skills of the researcher rather than on the size of the sample. The sample selection was purposeful, and for phenomenological studies, it was recommended that the sample be between five and 25, according to Creswell (1998), and Morse (1994) recommended no less than six. Patton (2015) stated that “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (p. 311). Qualitative sample size depends on the available time, resources, and the purpose of the research (Patton, 2015).
Exemplary alternative education schools were identified by DASS in San Bernardino County. The San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools office identified alternative education schools as exemplary based on evidence of at least six of the following NAEA (2014) exemplary practices:

1. A guiding vision and mission that drives the overall program.
2. Passionate, innovative, competent, and experienced leadership.
3. A safe, caring, and orderly climate and culture.
4. Staff are effective, innovative, and qualified individuals with appropriate training.
5. Instructional practices and curriculum are supportive, rigorous, and individualized.
6. Assessment includes screening, progress monitoring, and diagnostics to improve student outcomes.
7. Transition plans include college and career readiness support for high school students.
8. Collaborative partnerships promote opportunities for life skills, soft skills, service learning, and career exploration.
9. School counselors collaborate with school stakeholders to support best practices, articulate instruction, and create effective citizens.
10. Personalized curriculum and instruction is implemented using individualized learning plans.

A purposeful sample of school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools enabled the participants to shed light on their best practices of CASEL core competencies and to address the purpose and research questions. The sample size for this research study was 10 school counselors from exemplary alternative education high schools identified by the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools office. Of
the seven schools whose information was provided by the county office, all met at least the minimum number of criteria to be determined as exemplary. Of note was that 40% of participants were assigned to more than one of the identified alternative education schools. The size of the sample was sufficient for what the researcher wanted to discover, why it was important, and how these findings were to be used (Patton, 2015). Table 4 encapsulates the criteria of the identified exemplary alternative education schools.

Table 4

*Identified Exemplary Alternative Education Schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School #</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>X X X X X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>X X X X X X X X</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>X X X X X X X X</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>X X X X X X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>X X X X X X X X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>X X X X X X X X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographic Data

The 10 school counselor participants’ demographic details are as follows: There were two male participants and eight female participants. The titles and education of the participants varied. Participants were clinical counselor specialists, licensed marriage and family therapists, an intervention specialist, clinical social worker, and Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) Credential holders. All participants held at least a master’s
degree. All were between the ages of 30 and 50. In Table 5, school counselor demographic data are presented.

Table 5

*School Counselor Demographic Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Clinical counselor</th>
<th>MFT</th>
<th>PPS</th>
<th>Intervention specialist</th>
<th>Clinical social worker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An analysis of the demographic data revealed that 90% of the participants were identified as clinical counselors, 60% were marriage and family therapists, and 50% held a PPS Credential. All participants were employed at alternative education schools deemed exemplary by the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools office. Principals from the exemplary alternative education schools encouraged their counselors to participate in the research study. The majority of the alternative education schools deemed exemplary were community day schools. Table 6 contains a summary of the education demographics of the participants.
Table 6

Summary of Education Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree/credentials</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinical counselors</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage and family therapist</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Personnel Services Credential</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Presentation of Interview Observational Data

During the interviews, the researcher found the counselors to be very engaged. Participants looked into the camera of their computer throughout the exchange. Each of the participants answered all 15 of the interview questions and the responses were of their lived experiences working with students in alternative education schools. There were only two occasions on which the interviewer chose to use probing questions in order to get more rich and significant details and that was in regard to techniques that were unfamiliar.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The data collection and analysis of the virtual one-on-one Zoom interviews were organized, evaluated, and presented in alignment with the research questions; an alignment table is presented in Appendix G. The semistructured interviews were used to gather information from 10 school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County. Each counselor worked within alternative education and was encouraged by the site principal to participate in the interviews. The counselors who participated were all school counselors working in alternative education. The interviews were transcribed by the Zoom communication video platform and by iTranscribe, which is a voice activated transcription service. At the conclusion of each
interview, the researcher requested artifacts as a means to strengthen the research and the answers provided by the participants. Unfortunately, artifacts provided were minimal and due to the small number, this created a potential limitation. The researcher addressed this by using extensive literature to provide depth and triangulation.

Once the transcriptions were completed, each of the interviewees was sent a copy of the transcription of the interview via e-mail and was given a 7-day period to evaluate the transcribed interview; if there were any discrepancies, the interviewer was to be notified. None of the 10 interviewees contacted the researcher with any concerns or corrections. The researcher coded the interviews to determine themes. The participants’ responses to each question were coded and divided into themes.

This section shows the findings and corroborative data for each of the research questions. Themes and frequencies are delineated and areas of connection across themes are additionally discussed. The data are described in detail based on the total number of frequencies consistent with the interview responses. Each research subquestion’s data are presented based on the 10 participants’ responses to three interview questions per subquestion constituting 30 sources per subquestion or specific CASEL framework competency.

**Research Subquestion 1**

Research Subquestion 1 sought to answer, “What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of self-management?” The data collected from the first three interview questions pertaining to self-management are presented from the responses of the 10 interviewees. Upon analyzing the data collected, the researcher concluded that the interview questions that
addressed the first subresearch question on the CASEL core competency of self-management contained four major themes. Table 7 exhibits the data pertaining to Research Subquestion 1, and Figure 2 is the percentage pie chart for Research Subquestion 1.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of self-management?</td>
<td>Identifying and using stress management strategies</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building rapport</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing one's emotions, thoughts and behaviors</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Setting personal goals</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>271</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Percentage pie chart for Research Subquestion 1.

**Theme 1: Identifying and using stress management strategies.** All participants, 100% of the counselors interviewed, stated that helping students to identify stress and use stress management strategies were some of the ways they help their students when it comes to self-management. Stress identification and management had a frequency of 96, indicating a high percentage of 34.5%. Each of the 10 participants used
similar methods to get their students to identify the cause of their stress and offered different strategies to help students learn to manage their stress.

Participant 3 stated that she would work with the student to “practice increasing their self-awareness” through “step-by-step” techniques. She would also use the “front-loading strategy,” and “go through different scenarios” with her students to “help them become more aware.” She would help them “establish goals and get organized.”

Participant 3 provided an artifact, which was a power point dealing with uncertainty. This is one of the eight artifacts furnished by the school counselors interviewed and constituted 12.5% of the provided artifacts. The power point content validated the theme from the interview that participants work with students on managing stress using awareness.

Participant 1 worked with his students to “assist them in identifying and processing complex emotions.” By doing this, he was able to help students to “make contact with their bodies and their emotions.” This way they are “able to understand themselves a little bit better, and then obviously they can manage whatever stress is going on.” Participant 4 stated, “Educate them on what it [stress] can do to your brain, your emotions, and your physical body.”

According to research, stress affects individuals both psychologically and physically, and it is becoming a growing public health concern (Rizzolo, Zipp, Stiskal, & Simpkins, 2009). Some people who feel overwhelmed with stress have adverse effects such as depression and anxiety or engage in unhealthy behaviors (Durlak et al., 2011). According to Nazeer and Sultana (2014), “Students should be taught different stress management techniques to improve their ability to cope” (p. 3111). All 10 of the school
counselors or 100% discussed using different types of techniques to help students cope such as deep breathing, role playing, grounding, and more.

**Theme 2: Communication/rapport.** On the topic of communication and building rapport with the students, 100% of the counselors gave answers pertaining to how they use communication and establish rapport with their students. Interview Questions 1 through 3 were designed to obtain the best practices school counselors use with students pertaining to self-management. The school counselors’ responses regarding communication and rapport had a frequency of 72 within 30 sources, which was equivalent to 26.6%. All 10 counselors reported that meeting with students and building rapport through communication was very important. Three of the counselors discussed giving students a safe space where they could come and discuss what was happening in school and at home. However, to get to this point, relationships had to be formed, and this was done through communication with the students. All of the counselors (100%) discussed the different ways in which they try to communicate with students and build rapport.

Participant 5 “lets them [her students] simply be sad or angry and just be able to do that in a safe space,” with “no judgement and just being able to feel whatever they’re feeling about the situation.” In addition, “providing a place where they can just kind of relax,” they will “walk through scenarios to help them process.” She stated that she is “supportive and they have discussions.”

Participant 7 provides a “safe space” and “normalizes and validates their experience.” Participant 9 lets students know that “school is their safe space.” She has
discussions on “what are some of the things that are important to them,” and “what are some of the things that you feel would help you function a little bit better” (Participant 9).

Participant 10 helps her students “work on some goals” and “identify some of their strengths.” They “focus on things that are actually going to help and focus on what’s not working.” Participant 7 “helps students develop insight” and become “more aware.”

Murphy and Valdez (2005) emphasized that the antidote to resistance is rapport. Working with students in alternative education is challenging; however, if students decide to participate in the process of knowledge building through collaboration, they will develop the attitudes and skills needed for problem-solving and decision-making, which are considered to be key to the development of individuals (Florida, 2004; Gilson & Shalley, 2004; Sonnenfeld, 2004). When the word rapport is used in normal conversations, it indicates the relationship among and between individuals (Murphy & Valdez, 2005).

According to Murphy and Valdez (2005), there are three components that make up rapport: mutual attentiveness, being positive, and coordination. The importance of all three of the components differs as time goes by and as the relationship between the individuals grows (Murphy & Valdez, 2005). They added that as rapport is built between counselors and students, each starts to feel more comfortable because they are getting to know each other, and communication becomes more honest and open (Murphy & Valdez, 2005).

**Theme 3: Managing one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.** The ability to manage one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors is one of the concepts of self-
management. The counselors (100%) referenced this theme 57 times in 30 sources, which comprised 21% of the coded subject matter used toward helping students learn how to manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors through learning new techniques. Counselors discussed techniques such as grounding, chunking, coping skills, and identifying triggers. All 10 counselors (100%) stated that they use several techniques according to what each counselor believed would work with each individual student.

Participant 5 helps the student by “pulling apart a specific scenario.” She helps students by “teaching them coping skills to help them calm down” such as “breathing exercises to focus.” She helps her students by having them “slow down their thought process.”

Participant 6 helps his students by using the technique of chunking, which is breaking it down into smaller chunks of information, which makes it easier to recall and discuss. Participant 9 uses “grounding techniques, getting in tune with their five senses”; having students “calm themselves down”; and “teaching them some of the skills of correlating mind and body.”

Participant 3 discussed how she would have students discuss their “present body experience and have them describe what is happening to them” physically. She asks them, “What are you feeling in your body right now?” Participant 3 provided an artifact—a power point on movement—that discussed the importance of knowing one’s body through movement. This power point provided students with different ways on how be in touch with their body and mind. This is one of eight artifacts furnished by the school counselors interviewed or 12.5% of the provided artifacts.
Hinek (2020) stated that “coping skills are tools and techniques you can use to help you handle difficult emotions, decrease stress, establish or maintain a sense of internal order” (p. 1). The Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior (2020) expressed that coping strategies are the emotions, behaviors, and thoughts that people use to adapt to the changes that happen in life. Coping skills are tactics used to help individuals to control their emotions. Some of the skills include deep breathing, grounding techniques, mindfulness exercises, and relaxation (Hinek, 2020). Other coping strategies included tactics such as positive reframing, which is pointing out the humorous aspects of the problem or physical exercise like running, playing a sport, and yoga (Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior, 2020).

**Theme 4: Setting personal goals.** The 10 participants interviewed regularly worked with students on a daily basis. The participants referenced setting personal goals 46 times in 30 sources, which comprised 17% of the coded content for helping students with personal and collective goal setting. All 10 school counselors (100%) do this to help their students learn how to accomplish their personal and collective goals.

Participant 2 stated that when she meets with a student she “addresses a goal that focuses on reducing any kind of harmful behavior that is negatively impacting them.” She lets the students know that she wants to “help them to be more successful in and out of school.” To help students set goals, she asks them questions like “What is it that we need to work on, what is it that we need to improve, and what is it that will help you to be more successful?”

Participant 8 stated that when she works with students to help them set goals, she helps them “identify the areas in which they are struggling.” Participant 7 likes to discuss
“What’s today’s goal?” and she encourages her students to “talk about the highs and lows.” Participant 3 provided an artifact—a power point presentation—that dealt with time management and how to be more organized, focused, and to set goals. This was one of eight artifacts furnished by the school counselors interviewed or 12.5% of provided artifacts.

Research shows that setting goals for success and tracking one’s progress toward them is a way to increase that individual’s chances for success (Elias, 2019). Most students need help to be academically successful. Helping students set goals in one or two areas and having them prioritize these goals and then revisit them to see if follow-up goals are needed is a way to academic success, according to Elias (2019).

**Research Subquestion 2**

Research Subquestion 2 sought to answer, “What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of self-awareness?” The data collected from the second set of three interview questions pertaining to self-awareness are presented from the responses of the 10 interviewees. Upon analyzing the data collected, the researcher concluded that the interview questions that addressed the second subresearch question on the CASEL core competency of self-awareness contained four major themes. Table 8 displays the data from Research Subquestion 2 and Figure 3 is the percentage pie chart for Research Subquestion 2.

**Theme 1: Communication/rapport.** The 10 school counselors who were interviewed referenced communication and building rapport 48 times in 30 sources, which comprised 33.3% of the coded information for this theme. Communicating and building rapport with students is essential. Students will not open up to strangers,
counselors need to work on their relationships with students, and many do this through communication and building rapport. Of the counselors, 100% of those interviewed provided examples of building rapport through communication with their students.

Table 8

Research Subquestion 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of self-awareness?</td>
<td>Communication/rapport</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding emotions, thoughts and values</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify strengths/recognizing one's strengths</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having a growth mindset</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>144</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Percentage pie chart for Research Subquestion 2.

Participant 1 stated that he will work with students “until we reach a point where we can feel safe in a room.” He does “rapport building with them.” “I teach them to be more self-confident and to really have more self-efficacy through reminding them that they are very valuable.”

Participant 7 works with students and does a lot of “rapport building.” She “identifies what a reciprocal relationship is.” She also dove a little deeper and asked her
students, “What would your best friend say about you?” Participant 3 stated that “being authentic,” and “once they get to a point where they feel really comfortable with me” is when she feels the communication is going well and rapport with the student is growing.

According to Grahe and Bernieri (2002), “Rapport is a term used to describe the combination of qualities that emerge from an interaction” (p. 1410). Communication not only happens through conversation, sometimes it is being able to interpret cues because of the relationship that has been established (Grahe & Bernieri, 2002). Interpersonal information is communicated nonverbally (Grahe & Bernieri, 1999), especially when rapport has been established. However, to get to this point, counselors have to interact with students often, even if it is just a greeting, eye contact, a nod, letting students know that the counselor sees them and acknowledges them, all of this is part of establishing rapport.

**Theme 2: Understanding emotions, thoughts, and values.** The 10 interviewees answered questions pertaining to self-awareness and 31.9% of their answers involved understanding emotions, thoughts, and values with their students. This theme was referenced 46 times in the 30 resources that were coded. Students learning to identify and understand their emotions is a concept that is part of the CASEL core competency of self-awareness. All school counselors (100%) mentioned in their interviews that helping students to understand and identify their emotions is helpful because having the ability to identify and regulate one’s emotions is one of the concepts of SEL.

Participant 4 stated that she helps her students “identify their emotions,” and works with them to “name their emotions.” She also “help[s] them identify the difference between sadness and anger.” Participant 5 stated that she helps students
“explore emotions” through “art exercise, free form art, and journal prompts.” She also works with students to help them “identify what they’re feeling,” and helps students “explore their emotions.” Participant 9 stated that she helps students identify what the “emotion they are experiencing looks like.” She helps them to “name them.” She also helps students “learn what they are feeling and then make the correlation between the two.”

Participant 7 uses different worksheets with her students and an artifact that relates to identifying how they feel. The artifact provided was a worksheet that was a silhouette of a body titled “where do I feel.” This worksheet allowed students to identify where they were feeling emotions and pain. This artifact was one of eight artifacts or 12.5% of those provided by the school counselors.

According to Durlak et al. (2011), emotions can help or hinder a student’s academic engagement and school success. Because emotional processes affect how and what students learn, schools need to effectively address these aspects of the students’ educational process. Students who can accurately name their emotions are more explicit about what is happening inside them; these students are able to manage themselves in more positive ways (Martinez, 2017).

**Theme 3: Identifying strengths/recognizing one’s strengths.** The 10 interviewees mentioned this theme 28 times in 30 sources, which comprised 19.4% of the coded information of identifying and recognizing one’s own strengths. To have self-awareness individuals need to have the capacity to recognize their own strengths and limitations, and the 10 counselors interviewed who were working with students try to help the students do just that. Of the school counselors, 60% stated that they used
techniques such as role play, art therapy, character development, and writing exercises to help their students identify their strengths.

Participant 1 stated that he uses “play therapy” with his students and uses a “solution-focused approach.” Participant 2 “helps the students recognize their strengths.” To help them do this, she gets their family involved and invites them to a “family session.” “Getting feedback” and “hearing others speak about their strengths” is a way she helps students recognize some of their strengths.

Participant 3 “role plays” with her students. Participant 5 likes to help students “pull out their strengths” because it is key. She also has students “identify the things they are really good at” and “the things that are really important to them.”

Participant 7 also likes to “help them [students] recognize their strengths.” She does this with a strategy of asking them, “What would your best friend say about you?” By communicating with individuals in the student’s immediate circle, such as the “teacher or the parents” and other “collateral contacts,” Participant 7 gets an idea of what some of the student’s strengths are. This helps her to teach the students recognize their own strengths. Participant 9 has her students do some “narrative story writing.”

Participant 7 provided two artifacts—worksheets that help students identify and recognize their strengths. The first worksheet was a blank personal coat of arms. The students were to fill it in identifying their strengths. The second worksheet was a “my strengths and weaknesses” worksheet. These were two of the eight artifacts provided by the school counselors or 25% of the artifacts. Participant 7 provided three of the eight artifacts.
Research has illustrated that students who are able to identify their strengths are able to build on them to develop areas of growth (Martinez, 2014). These students will be more motivated and have more self-confidence. Helping students identify their strengths gives an educator a best chance of developing rapport with the student (Martinez, 2014). When an educator has built rapport with the student, the educator is able to help the student set up goals that will help the student progress.

**Theme 4: Having a growth mindset.** The 10 interviewees discussed the concepts of having a growth mindset in their responses with a frequency rate of 22 times in 30 sources or 15.3%. The interview questions presented during the interviews relating to self-awareness were compiled using the CASEL definitions related to this competency. School counselors (70%) instituted an awareness of the importance of a growth mindset. A growth mindset shows how affective, cognitive, and behavioral characteristics are linked to one’s beliefs (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Helping students to be mindful and have a growth mindset is one of the techniques many of the counselors used when they were working with students.

Participant 1 discussed how he “reminds them that it’s okay to make mistakes, it is actually healthy, and if they didn’t make mistakes how do they learn anything.” He also teaches them “a lot of mindful techniques.” Participant 3 talked about how students need to “understand the meaning of self-confidence.” She also discussed that students need to “be themselves,” and to know that they can “do this themselves and they can make mistakes.” She “provides this non-judgement positive self-regard that is unconditional.” She also helps students to “deepen their understanding” and “make them aware.” Participant 4, when working with students on improving their growth mindset,
“points out what they’re doing good” and where they need improvement. She “teaches them about advocating for themselves.”

Carol Dweck (2015) described that an individual’s mindset plays a key role in their motivation and achievement. If students can develop a growth mindset, then their achievement can increase. Individuals who believe they can develop more intelligence outperform those who do not. If a student focuses on the process that leads to learning, such as hard work or attempting new strategies, this may lead to a growth mindset and the benefits that come with it (Dweck, 2015).

**Research Subquestion 3**

Research Subquestion 3 sought to answer, “What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of social-awareness?” The data collected from the third set of three interview questions pertaining to social awareness are presented from the responses of the 10 interviewees. Upon analyzing the data collected, the researcher concluded that the interview questions that addressed the third research subquestion on the CASEL core competency of social awareness contained four major themes. Table 9 illustrates the data from Research Subquestion 3 and Figure 4 is the percentage pie chart for Research Subquestion 3.

**Theme 1: Understanding the perspectives of and empathizing with others.**

The 10 interviewees discussed the concepts of understanding the perspectives of and empathizing with others 66 times in 30 sources, which comprised 30.4% of the coded information when answering questions related to CASEL’s core competency of social awareness. The school counselors (30% of them) stated they implement the program “I Empathize” with their students. Social awareness is to have the ability to feel
Table 9

Research Subquestion 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of social-awareness?</td>
<td>Understanding the perspectives of and empathizing with others</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifying diverse social norms</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication/rapport</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognizing situational demands and opportunities</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>217</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Percentage pie chart for Research Subquestion 3.

compassion for others, to understand basic social norms for behavior in unfamiliar settings, and to have the ability to recognize support and resources from school and family (CASEL, 2020).

Participant 1 stated that he uses the “I Empathize” program with his students. Participant 2 helps students “identify their emotions and reactions” when it comes to others. Participant 4 stated that she “validates who they are as a person” and “respects their culture.” By “helping students understand culture,” she can “teach them to understand” to “normalize their similarities” with others.
Participant 7 stated that she helps students “be more aware of other people’s feelings” and to “empathize more.” She also emphasized that “being able to value or appreciate diversity is a learned behavior.” Participant 8 “helps students understand and realize someone’s behaviors,” and introduces students to the “I Empathize” program.

Participant 9 discussed how students need to “have that self-respect.” She said that “to be self-respecting would turn into them being able to respect others.” She takes time with students and lets them know that “they are worthy, and they have value, and that they demand that respect.” Participant 10 teaches students how to “identify their own emotions,” which can “lead to more empathy.” She also introduces the “I empathize” program to her students.

Participant 3 provided an artifact that was a power point on empathy. This school counselor stated that she uses this power point with students to help demonstrate what empathy is. This artifact was one of the eight or 12.5% of the artifacts provided by the school counselors.

Research reveals that empathy is one of the supports of social interaction and understanding because it creates a depiction of another’s mental state (Stietz, Jau, Krach, & Kanske, 2019). Empathy is the ability to take on another’s perspective. Empathy is defined as sharing other’s emotions when differentiating between oneself and the other (Stietz et al., 2019). Perspective taking is a cognitive component of empathy.

Theme 2: Identifying diverse social norms. Answering questions on the subject of diversity, the 10 school counselors referenced this theme 59 times from 30 sources, which comprised 30.4% of the answers on the topic of identifying diverse social norms. The 10 interviewees discussed how they helped their students appreciate other
individuals who were culturally or physically different. The school counselors (100%) disclosed that many of their students were from minority backgrounds and had never experienced different demographics or cultures.

Participant 3 stated, “They have not been exposed to diversity and a lot of other areas of their life.” She felt that they needed “more exposure.” She liked to plan “field trips” to places they had never been so she could “highlight the differences.” She wanted to “get them to understand that there is diversity outside of their neighborhood.”

Participant 5 would “purposely have individuals from different races mixed up in different groups.” She believed that this “opens up a whole new world for them in ways that they can connect”; it gives them the opportunity to “have some fun and just play with each other.” It is helping them “create new experiences.” Participant 9 wanted her students to “be very transparent and talk about some of the experiences” they have had. She wanted them to know that “the skin you’re in is a beautiful thing.” She promoted “being sensitive to other cultures and making things culturally relevant.”

According to H. P. Young (2015), social norms control our communications with others. These norms are the unwritten codes and simple understandings that determine what we expect of others and what they expect of us (H. P. Young, 2015). Norms establish standards and are the building blocks of social order. H. P. Young stated that identifying diverse social norms is having the ability to understand other cultures and being able to relate to differences and similarities. Counselors are doing this through inclusion and relationship building, helping their students to be more aware of other students from different backgrounds.
Theme 3: Communication/rapport. This is a recurring theme from the interview questions on SEL. The 10 interviewees referenced this theme 57 times in 30 sources, which comprised 26.3% of the coded answers that pertained to communication and rapport building within the questions on social awareness. School counselors (100%) have identified this theme several times within the interview questions. Building rapport with students is essential. To build rapport, school counselors must first “extend students a warm and friendly invitation to join our community of learning,” and then must continue to adopt this demeanor (Buskist & Saville, 2001, para. 6).

Participant 1 discussed how he and his students “talk about differences of their negative experiences.” To help them, he asks them questions about “how they play a role in their own environment,” and then discusses with them the “power of choice.” Participant 2 explained that she has “discussions” with her students, and during these discussions she is trying to “educate them while exploring and talking.” Participant 6 stated that he is constantly “relationship building” with students. He helps them to “identify certain events that are in the past so they can actually start making connections.” Participant 10 stated that she is always “asking questions.” She goes on to say that she is “communicating with support,” with her students.

Buskist and Saville (2001) stated that establishing a balanced and supportive connection with students does not happen in only one meeting. They said that rapport is the result of many interactions done right. Building rapport is building a social relationship. Educators need to create positive emotions in students, such as self-worth and self-efficacy, and minimize the negative emotions students experience (Buskist & Saville, 2001).
**Theme 4: Recognizing situational demands and opportunities.** The 10 interviewees answered questions pertaining to social awareness and how they help their students to recognize and understand how to be more socially aware. This theme was referenced 35 times in 30 sources, which comprised 16.1% of the coded information toward recognizing situational demands and opportunities. Of the school counselors, 50% highlighted the techniques students need to learn to be able to recognize situations and identify opportunities.

Participant 1 discussed how he “allows them to become present in the moment.” He helps students “identify what has gone well and what hasn’t gone well.” Participant 3 stated that she helps students to “become aware” and asks them, “What do you think is happening” or “how do you think this experience/behavior has impacted you?” She goes even further and asks them, “How are they impacted, what are the ripple effects of the impact?”

Participant 5 uses strategies, “We talk about it, we pull it apart.” She said, “Talking about our situations and our experiences, and hearing those experiences from other people” helps students to be more aware. Being able to recognize things “from their perspective, and that opens everything up.” “Hearing their voices and what they’re experiencing” helps them to recognize what is happening and helps them identify the opportunities and lessons from what they are experiencing.

Participant 3 provided an artifact—a power point on job skills that highlighted skills on working with others. This artifact is one of the eight artifacts or 12.5% of those furnished by the school counselors. Participant 3 provided five of the eight artifacts.
Kobylińska and Kusev (2019) stated that students who can cope better and effectively adapt to changes are more flexible at finding possible solutions or ways to deal with problems. Recognizing situational demands and developing opportunities out of these situations are skills that can be learned from one’s flexibility and emotion regulation. Avoiding situations that elicit certain emotions can help an individual not to experience that emotion (Kobylińska & Kusev, 2019).

**Research Subquestion 4**

Research Subquestion 4 sought to answer, “What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of relationship skills?” The data collected from the fourth set of three interview questions pertaining to healthy relationships are presented from the responses of the 10 interviewees. Upon analyzing the data collected, the researcher concluded that the interview questions that addressed the fourth research subquestion on the CASEL core competency of healthy relationships contained four major themes. Table 10 displays the data from Research Subquestion 4, and Figure 5 is the percentage pie chart for Research Subquestion 4.

**Table 10**

*Research Subquestion 4*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of relationship skills?</td>
<td>Communicating effectively</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative problem solving</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive relationships</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seeking support &amp; help when needed</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>324</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 1: Communicating effectively. There is no surprise that communication is one of the themes for healthy relationships. All 10 school counselors overwhelmingly answered the interview questions with reference to communication. The interviewees (100%) answered questions about healthy relationships and mentioned the theme of communication 108 times in 30 sources, which comprised 33.3% of the coded information on the topic of effective communication.

Participant 2 stated that she “goes over what active listening is.” She also teaches, models, and practices the skill” with her students. She “helps them to become aware of their own internal process,” which will help them with the “dynamic of communication.” She also stated that she “communicates” with students and “dialogue” helps her build relationships.

Participant 3 lets her students know that there are “different forms of communication, verbal and nonverbal.” She also believes in “offering and giving them examples of ways to listen.” She does this through “presentation on listening skills,” and says that these are “skills that have to be practiced.” Participant 7 gets students involved by playing “games that are listening games. . . . Games that would help them to be able to
communicate” better. She wants them to “verbalize it and really take time to be aware.” She also teaches students “how to compromise with other people.”

According to Robinson, Segal, and Smith (2020), effective communication is understanding the emotions and meaning behind the information. It is the ability to clearly express the message and listen to what’s being said so the other person feels heard. All of these skills involve techniques to learn to effectively communicate with others. Communicating more effectively requires learning.

People who are authentic and participate in meaningful dialogue, have common goals that are easily attained through trusting relationships (Bowman, 2014; Glaser, 2014; Seidman, 2007). Individuals who are stressed tend to misread others and send confusing signals; therefore, it is better to calm down before having a conversation. Individuals who are distracted do not communicate effectively; therefore, it is better to stay focused. Robinson et al. (2020) stated that there are common barriers to effective communication. They said that another barrier to effective communication is inconsistent body language; it is important that a person’s nonverbal communication matches what they are saying.

Robinson et al. (2020) emphasized that an effective communicator, focuses on what is being said instead of what to say. An engaged listener pays attention to what the other person is saying, so they will hear the change in tone or pitch in that person’s voice (Robinson et al. 2020). All of these listening skills will help students to be effective communicators.

**Theme 2: Collaborative problem-solving.** The 10 interviewees answered questions that related to collaborative problem-solving in the interview question pertaining to relationship skills. This theme was referenced 81 times in 30 sources,
which comprised 25% of the coded content pertaining to relationship skills. Seven participants or 70% of the school counselors discussed how they help their students by teaching them different problem-solving techniques. Collaborative problem-solving focuses on building skills such as tolerance, open-mindedness, and understanding. This is done through educating students about learning how to identify problems and developing solutions.

Participant 6 stated that he works with students so they do “not let their emotions control the entire situation.” He relies on “chunking down larger situations to smaller ones,” which helps students to understand the problem and work on solutions. He helps them to “start taking positive steps toward a positive ending.” He teaches them not to “automatically take a negative perspective in situations.”

Participant 9 stated that when working with students, she “curtails some of the judgement.” She is “open, authentic, and honest with them” so they can “understand what’s happening.” She teaches them “skills on how to make more appropriate decisions.” She said they have “discussions and work on a plan.” It’s “a lot of teaching.” They work together to “put some protocols in place.”

Participant 10 stated that she “communicates” with her students and “teaches them that when they are upset they become heightened and their central nervous system reacts that is why their body feels this way.” She teaches them “relaxation skills” and how to “communicate with ‘I’ messages.” Students learn how to identify triggers and what they can do to prevent inappropriate behaviors.

Research indicates that student misbehavior is identified as a primary source of stress for teachers and parents (Pollastri, Epstein, Heath, & Ablon, 2013). Most teachers
are not adequately trained to manage challenging behaviors, so many of these students are expelled or sent to alternative schools. Helping students learn how to manage their behaviors and emotions is a focal point of SEL. Many of the counselors use collaborative problem-solving techniques to help their students develop the skills they are lagging (Pollastri et al., 2013).

**Theme 3: Positive relationships.** The 10 participants answered questions pertaining to relationship skills and identified positive relationships. This theme was referenced 78 times in 30 sources, which comprised 24.1% of the coded content pertaining to positive relationships. The 10 school counselors (100%) believed that students deserve to have individuals at school who care about them enough to build positive relationships that are nonjudgmental. Relationships are formed through communication both verbal and nonverbal. To form a relationship with a student, a school counselor must first get to know them. Learning their name is a great way to start (Woodard, 2019).

Another observation related to positive relationships with students was noted by two of the 10 school counselors when they expressed that they are careful to not be “judging.” Participant 9 discussed how she works with her students “without being judging.” Participant 5 stated that she is “never there to force students to feel comfortable talking to her,” and “if students are not comfortable talking to her, then there are other counselors that they can talk to.” This willingness to not judge and to not force connection enabled the participants to either be or find appropriate adult relationships for students.
Participant 1 stated that when he is with students he “speaks clearly which allows them to feel more comfortable.” If they are comfortable they “feel more comfortable to express themselves.” We “share what’s on our mind and our heart.” When students are able to express themselves and feel comfortable, a positive relationship is developing.

Participant 8 stated that she “establishes the relationship” with her students with “a lot of rapport.” “They need to feel like they’re seen.” She “shows them nonverbally that they’re listening” with “nonverbal cues.” She works with them by “actively listening,” which helps build their relationship.

According to Stipek (2006), “Students function more effectively when they feel respected and valued” (p. 46). Specific behaviors that encourage positive relationships include listening, smiling, and being attentive to students. Students succeed more if they are held accountable and feel supported (Stipek, 2006). Students need direct and regular communication; this can be done through encouragement and constructive feedback. Schools that support positive relationships between students and staff members contribute not only to the students’ social and emotional well-being but to the students’ academic achievement (Martin & Collie, 2018; Stipek, 2006).

**Theme 4: Seeking support and help when needed.** The 10 interviewees answered questions related to relationship skills. This theme was referenced 57 times in 30 sources and comprised 17.6% of the answers connected to seeking support and help when needed. School counselors (100%) are there for their students and students learn who they can trust and who is willing to help. For a lot of students in alternative education that person is their counselor. They seek out their counselor for support and when they need help.
Participant 4 stated that she discusses with students “how to articulate their needs.” She will help them “work through it.” She will teach them coping skills to “get through the pressures.” She stated that she “helps them realize what is important to them.” Participant 2 discusses with students how they “have those conversations” and “always emphasizes the power of choice.” She talks about “how they feel and she walks them through the process and helps them understand the impact of their actions.”

Participant 5 stated that she “sits down and listens to them [students] to hear what they have to say.” They will take the “scenario that happened, and they’ll just kind of pull it apart.” They will “see how it could have been done differently.” She will let them “voice their feelings of what their experience was.” She stated that she will “give them resources, give them options and give them other ideas.” She will also help them to “develop their own resources within themselves.”

According to Sullivan (2019), seeking help requires honesty and self-awareness, and students must first recognize that they need help. To get help successfully, students need to know that they have a problem, then decide who to ask for help, and understand the help that’s given. Students need to think of asking for help as using resources to solve a problem (Sparks, 2014).

**Research Subquestion 5**

Research Subquestion 5 sought to answer, “What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of making responsible decisions?” The data collected from the fifth set of three interview questions pertaining to responsible decision-making are presented from the responses of the 10 interviewees. Upon analyzing the data collected, the researcher concluded that the
interview questions that addressed the fifth research subquestion on the CASEL core competency of making responsible decisions contained four major themes. Table 11 displays the data from Research Subquestion 5, and Figure 6 is the percentage pie chart for Research Subquestion 5.

Table 11

Research Subquestion 5

<table>
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<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Demonstrating critical thinking skills</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication/rapport</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifying solutions for personal &amp; social problems</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constructive choices about behavior</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>252</td>
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</table>

Figure 6. Percentage pie chart for Research Subquestion 5.

**Theme 1: Demonstrating critical thinking skills.** The 10 participants answered interview questions related to making responsible decisions. The theme of demonstrating critical thinking skills was referenced 83 times in 30 sources and comprised 32.9% of the coded content. School counselors (100%) recognized that critical thinking skills are capabilities that students need. Thinking critically requires a person to be able to reason.
Critical thinkers ask questions and do not take information that does not sound correct and go with it. The counselors working with students in alternative education help their students to think and process in a more analytical manner.

Participant 1 stated that he is “teaching them [his students] to be a critical thinker.” He does this by “brainstorming with them.” He then asks them questions such as “What is the issue at hand?” He helps them by “empowering them to see,” and believes that “mindfulness is just crucial in all areas.” He has his students “break it down” and “helps them to really think” and answer the question, “What is it you would like to accomplish?” He wants them “to really focus on what’s going on.”

Participant 3 discussed how she helps them to be critical thinkers by “giving them power and control.” She will “give them an outside perspective” and “help them to identify the problem” and then “just build on the perspective.” Participant 5 helps her students “process through the options.” Once they start thinking about something, she “ask questions and continues to until eventually they start asking questions themselves.” This helps them to “start pulling things apart and realize what else is going on.”

Erstad (2018) believed that “critical thinking is a skill that allows you to make logical and informed decisions to the best of your ability” (p. 1). It is an analysis of a situation or matter and the data, factors, or evidence associated with it. Critical thinking is supposed to be done objectively; it is to be done without influence from one’s personal opinions, feelings, or biases; additionally it should only focus on factual information (Erstad, 2018). Individuals who can think critically are able to process and analyze information more effectively.
Theme 2: Communication/rapport. Communication and rapport building have been a major theme throughout the interviews with the school counselors. The 10 participants answered interview questions pertaining to responsible decision-making. Communication/rapport was referenced 79 times in 30 sources and comprised 31.3% of the coded content. The counselors (100%) discussed that they are always communicating with students and educating them about making responsible decisions.

Participant 2 stated that she helps students by asking them “open-ended questions” to gain more insight into the decisions they have made. She stated that she is “there to support them in any way.” She does this by “leading and guiding them through talk.” She stated that they have “discussions.”

Participant 8 stated that she does a lot of “talking about what’s going on in their lives.” She likes to ask “thought-provoking questions” to get them to open up more. She stated that “they talk a lot,” and that she “teaches them a lot about trusting their intuition.” She discussed that she “has a lot of time and trust established” with her students. She stated that she communicates with them by “questioning” them.

Participant 9 stated that she “listens with a listening ear.” She does “motivational questioning” with her students. She also likes to do “sharing during their conversations,” and is helping them to “learn how to make those right decisions.” She believes in “being authentic” and helping them “identify supports with judgment.”

Research shows that knowing how to communicate with others and build rapport can generate many opportunities (Mindtools, 2020). Communication is getting the right message to the right person, without any misunderstandings, or without causing
frustration. A key strategy in communication is to understand one’s audience, listen to their needs, and ask the right questions (Mindtools, 2020).

**Theme 3: Identifying solutions for personal and social problems.** The 10 interviewees answered questions pertaining to identifying solutions for personal and social problems. This theme was referenced 55 times in 30 sources and comprised 21.8% of the coded content for identifying solutions for personal and social problems. Of the counselors, 100% used a variety of strategies to help their students learn how to identify solutions for problems that arise personally and socially. Each student is an individual and some suggestions or techniques may work great for one student but not for another.

Participant 4 stated that she helps students “identify what is in and out of their control” and develops “steps they can take to correct the problem.” She will “help them to realize what they can do to correct it.” She does this by teaching them “how to figure out [on] their own, their values and morals.” She asks students what are the “social norms and cultural norms” that relate to the problem, because once that is known, a solution can be identified. She likes “discussing it in an appropriate way and helping them understand.”

Participant 5 stated that she first discusses with them, “Why did that trigger you?” She “helps calm them down” by having them take “deep breaths.” She will start “asking questions and each question is designed to pull back the layers.” The students will then start “pulling it apart, they will pull those layers back.” She “pulls those things apart a little bit more” until they “figure out what it is.” She stated that she helps students “solv[e] problems by identifying what has happened.”
Participant 6 stated that he will help students “identify the first step.” Next, he works with them to “break things down, chunk it down to smaller pieces,” teaching them how to “prioritize.” He works with them “to stretch out the measurement of results.” He does this through chunking.

Llopis (2013) stated that to solve problems there must be transparent communication. What is a problem for one person may not be a problem for another. Some students do not see their actions as problems. If no one speaks up, it is difficult to get to the root of the problem (Llopis, 2013). Students with social and personal problems need to learn to problem solve. The steps of problem-solving include identify the problem, define the problem, generate and evaluate solutions, then effectively enact the solution, and finally assess the outcome (Smith & Daunic, 2015). Problem-solving is a step-by-step process by which students can learn.

**Theme 4: Constructive choices about behavior.** The 10 interviewees answered questions pertaining to how they help their students make responsible decisions. This theme of making constructive choices about behavior was referenced 35 times in 30 sources and comprised 13.9% of the coded content. Of the school counselors, 100% agreed to make responsible decisions, students need to weigh the options and consequences and then make a choice.

Participant 3 “helps them to understand ethics,” and make “constructive choices.” She asks them, “How long can you sustain this behavior?” She wants them to “understand the need behind the behavior.” She explains to them that they are “engaging in problematic behaviors” and wants to help them “identify that need.” She lets them know that “behavior reinforces the need.”
Participant 5 stated that she “ask[s] them a ton of questions” and wants them to “be aware that this decision is something that could affect them.” Participant 6 stated that he helps students “make positive decisions to avoid having those negative things happen.” Participant 9 discussed how she helps them “learn how to make those right decisions.” Participant 10 stated that she will “separate their behaviors from who they are” by “talking to them” and having them think “about their behavior.” She helps them “look at it as something they can change.”

According to Deci and Ryan (1985), the ability to make a choice, rather than being told what to do, or being given only one option, has demonstrated positive results. When individuals feel in control and happy with their choices they are more motivated and perform better. Focusing on improving students’ responsibility level helps them realize they are in control of themselves (Kianipour & Hoseini, 2012). They are in control to make constructive choices when it comes to their own behavior.

**Research Subquestion 6**

Research Subquestion 6 sought to answer, “What do school counselors perceive as the most important best practices used within the CASEL core competences?” Based on all of the themes from each of the other five research subquestions, it was determined that the most important best practice used with the CASEL core competencies is the formation of relationship skills. This is done through communication and building rapport. Out of all five research subquestions there was one common theme that was pervasive in all CASEL competency areas the participants addressed: the theme of rapport building using communication. Table 12 illustrates the data from Research Subquestion 6.
Table 12

Research Subquestion 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which of the best practices implemented within the CASEL social emotional learning core competencies were perceived as the most important by alternative education school counselors?</td>
<td>Establishing relationships &amp; building rapport</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the school counselors, 100% had to establish some kind of relationship with students through building rapport in order to make connections. This theme held the highest overall percentage of all the themes detected in the interviews. The overall frequency rate was 346 from all 150 sources. Furthermore, to illustrate the scale of agreement, of the total frequencies of 1,208, the 346 related to relationships through rapport and connection constituted 29% of the total frequencies. This indicates that each counselor mentioned building rapport at least twice when answering each interview question. Rapport can be verbal and is established with something as simple as a hello. Building rapport helps counselors to form relationships with their students. A wave or nod are some of the nonverbal cues that also help establish rapport with students. Just acknowledging that they are seen helps build rapport.

Grahe and Bernieri (1999) stated that the majority of interpersonal information is communicated nonverbally; however, verbal information is assessed more accurately. There are three elements to rapport: coordination, mutual attention, and positivity. Grahe and Bernieri claimed that rapport between two people is influenced by (a) the total behavioral stream, verbal and nonverbal; (b) past expectations; and (c) the attribution of pertinent events. To have rapport with someone, Jorgenson (1992) stated, it is to
demonstrate a basic insight about the essence of the relationship itself. Rapport is an important characteristic of interpersonal relationships. Table 13 shows the themes and frequency for each research question.

**Key Findings**

In this qualitative study, interviews and artifacts provided data that were coded for themes. Considerable analysis of the data provided seven key findings. Themes that generated over 30% of the frequencies were to be identified as key findings. The following is a consolidated list of key findings that were revealed from the analysis of the data. There are seven key best practice findings in this study that represent how school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools support SEL using CASEL core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and making responsible decisions).

**CASEL Core Competency Key Findings**

**Key Finding 1. Identifying and using stress management strategies.** This theme represented 34.5% of the coded frequencies for self-management and was referenced 96 times in the responses to three different interview questions by all 10 school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools totaling 30 sources. School counselors discussed how they first help their students identify what is triggering the stress. Once the trigger is identified, the counselor will then teach students strategies on how to cope with the stress. Some students may need multiple strategies. Because
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research subquestion</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of self-management?</td>
<td>Identifying &amp; using stress management strategies</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building rapport</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing one's emotions, thoughts and behaviors</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Setting personal goals</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>271</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of self-awareness?</td>
<td>Communication/rapport</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding emotions, thoughts and values</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify strengths/recognizing one's strengths</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having a growth mindset</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>144</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of social-awareness?</td>
<td>Understanding the perspectives of &amp; empathizing with others</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifying diverse social norms</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication/rapport</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognizing situational demands &amp; opportunities</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>217</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of relationship skills?</td>
<td>Communicating effectively</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative problem solving</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive relationships</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seeking support &amp; help when needed</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>324</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of responsible decision-making?</td>
<td>Demonstrating critical thinking skills.</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication/rapport.</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifying solutions for personal &amp; social problems.</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constructive choices about behavior.</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>252</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Which of the best practices implemented within the CASEL social emotional learning core competencies were perceived as the most important by alternative education school counselors?</td>
<td>Establishing relationships &amp; rapport building</td>
<td>346</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total frequency</td>
<td>1,208</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
each student is an individual, some techniques work for some while others may need something different depending on the individual and the stressor.

**Key Finding 2. Understanding emotions, thoughts, and values.** This theme represented 31.9% of the coded frequencies for self-awareness and was referenced 46 times in the responses to three different interview questions by all 10 school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools totaling 30 sources. School counselors work with their students educating them in SEL techniques that help their students to learn how to recognize, manage, and understand their emotions. Students who have the capacity to understand why they think in a certain way and who are able to manage their own thought patterns are knowledgeable in SEL. Counselors work with students so they are able to understand what their values are, why they feel certain ways, and why they think the thoughts that they do.

**Key Finding 3. Understanding the perspectives of and empathizing with others.** This theme represented 30.4% of the coded frequencies for social awareness and was referenced 66 times in the responses to three different interview questions by all 10 school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools totaling 30 sources. School counselors discussed how they hold presentations and do push-ins with students to teach them about understanding the perspectives of others. One of the programs they use with students is called “I empathize.” This program teaches students about empathy. Empathy is understanding the feelings of others including individuals from other cultures and diverse backgrounds.

**Key Finding 4. Communication/rapport.** This theme represented 33.3% of the coded frequencies for relationship skills and was referenced 108 times in the responses to
three different interview questions by all 10 school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools totaling 30 sources. School counselors discussed that when they first meet a student, they work hard to build some type of relationship with them. They also stated that if a student does not connect with them for some reason and prefers someone more to their liking, the original counselor asks another counselor to work with that particular student. If there is no one else, the counselor will try to form a connection with that student. Building relationships takes time.

**Key Finding 5. Demonstrating critical thinking skills.** This theme represented 32.9% of the coded frequencies for making responsible decisions and was referenced 83 times in the responses to three different interview questions by all 10 school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools totaling 30 sources. School counselors discussed that when they work with their students, they help them to understand what it takes to be a critical thinker. They do this through activities and communication. Students learn to analyze situations and to pull them apart, and once it is broken down into smaller segments, they can think about how the situation happened, what could have been done differently, and what the outcome could have been.

**Key Finding 6. Perceived best practices.** According to the data collected, the characteristics of rapport building and building relationships have outnumbered all the other concepts within SEL. Rapport building and establishing relationships were mentioned during interviews with the school counselors 346 times in 150 questions answered by 10 different school counselors. Rapport building and communication are the best practices, according to the data from the school counselor interviews. Building
rapport aligns with establishing relationships, which makes the CASEL core competency of relationship skills the most important core competency.

Key Finding 7. Foundation building block for social and emotional learning

Of the school counselors, 100% mentioned the importance of building rapport and communication. These two themes were found in every CASEL core competency as a major theme. Therefore, communication and rapport building are essential building blocks for the foundation of SEL. This critical relationship building strategy is fundamental to SEL and ultimately to the success of all students.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the best practices school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County use to support SEL using the CASEL core competencies. This chapter presented 20 themes aligned to the central research question and six sub questions. Coding from 10 virtual interviews and 10 artifacts produced the 20 themes. Further analysis of the findings resulted in seven key findings to describe and identify the best practices of school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools. The seven key findings each generated approximately 30% of the frequencies for CASEL core competencies and included identifying and using stress management strategies; communication and rapport; understanding emotions, thoughts, and values; understanding the perspective of and empathizing with others; and demonstrating critical thinking skills. Chapter V presents a summary of this study to encapsulate the major findings, unexpected findings, conclusions, implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks and reflections from the researcher.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter I provided the introduction to the study and a background of the research. Chapter I included the statement of the research problem, purpose statement, significance of the problem, definitions, and delimitations. Chapter II introduced the review of literature pertaining to this study and its purpose. Chapter III was centered on the methodology, research design, and procedures for the data collection and analysis used for the study. Chapter IV provided the details of the data collection and analysis of the data. Chapter V provides the findings, conclusions, and implications of the results from the data analyzed for this study. Recommendations for future research are based on the findings from this study.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the best practices school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County use to support social emotional learning (SEL) using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making). An additional purpose of the study was to describe the CASEL SEL core competencies that were perceived as most important by school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County.
Research Question

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County in implementing the CASEL core competencies at their school?

Research Subquestions

1. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of self-management?
2. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of self-awareness?
3. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of social awareness?
4. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of relationship skills?
5. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of responsible decision-making?
6. What do school counselors perceive as the most important best practices used within the CASEL core competencies?

Research Methods

A qualitative phenomenological research method was selected for this study to describe and evaluate the lived experiences of school counselors working within exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County, and to determine what best practices are used to support SEL using the CASEL core competencies. The
data were collected through a Zoom semistructured interview containing 15 interview questions representing the five CASEL core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making). The semistructured interviews helped to represent the school counselors’ perceptions of which of the best practices used within the CASEL core competencies are perceived as the most important. Additionally, participants were asked to provide artifacts, and while only eight were provided, the researcher used these and the literature to triangulate the interview data.

**Population and Sample**

The population for this study was school counselors from alternative education schools in San Bernardino County. The target population emerged from alternative education schools deemed exemplary from the Superintendent of Schools office that met the six of the 10 criteria from the National Alternative Education Association (NAEA, 2014) exemplary practices:

1. A guiding vision and mission that drives the overall program.
2. Passionate, innovative, competent, and experienced leadership.
3. A safe, caring, and orderly climate and culture.
4. Staff are effective, innovative, and qualified individuals with appropriate training.
5. Instructional practices and curriculum are supportive, rigorous, and individualized.
6. Assessment includes screening, progress monitoring, and diagnostics to improve student outcomes.
7. Transition plans include college and career readiness support for high school students.
8. Collaborative partnerships promote opportunities for life skills, soft skills, service learning, and career exploration.

9. School counselors collaborate with school stakeholders to support best practices, articulate instruction, and create effective citizens.

10. Personalized curriculum and instruction is implemented using individualized learning plans.

Alternative education systems represent community day schools, juvenile court, charter, and continuation high schools. The total number of alternative education schools during the 2019-2020 period was 269 and the enrollment was 59,094 (Ed-Data, 2020b). The majority of alternative education schools deemed exemplary by the Superintendent of Schools office utilizing the criteria were community day schools.

The sample for the study was established from the target population of 17 school counselors employed at the seven exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County. All seven principals indicated a willingness to allow their counselors to participate in the study. Ten school counselors were interested in participating in the study. The sample was 10 school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools.

**Major Findings**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the best practices school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County use to support SEL using the CASEL core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making). The researcher conducted an analysis of the interviews, and for
reliability and validity, another doctoral research candidate analyzed 10% of the participant responses or one interview, therefore ensuring intercoder reliability. During the process, the researcher identified 20 themes that emerged from the data analysis.

To be considered a theme for this study, answers received from 100% of the school counselor participants during the interviews needed to be numerous enough to be deemed a theme. The significant themes identified were the ones that were 15% or higher topics that were reoccurring. From the 20 themes, seven key findings were presented in this research study and identified as having approximately 30% or more of the frequencies generated from the interviews. The themes that were recognized from the data were organized from the six research questions. Table 14 illustrates the research question and the summary of themes.

**Key Finding: Self-Management**

**Theme 1. Identifying and using stress management strategies.** This theme represented 34.5% of the coded frequencies for self-management and was referenced 96 times in the responses to three different interview questions by all 10 school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools totaling 30 sources. Sources consisted of the answers by the 10 counselors to the three questions pertaining to this research subquestion. Research indicates that students need to be taught different stress management strategies to improve their ability to cope (Nazeer & Sultana, 2014).

**Key Finding 1. Identifying and using stress management strategies.** Exemplary school counselors assist students with strategies on how to identify stress and familiarize themselves with various stress management strategies. Identifying and using
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Key findings</th>
<th>Conclusions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of self-awareness?</td>
<td>Communication/rapport. Understanding emotions, thoughts and values.</td>
<td>Understanding emotions, thoughts, and values</td>
<td>If students are not supported by alternative school counselors to understand their emotions, they will struggle to succeed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of social awareness?</td>
<td>Understanding the perspectives of &amp; empathizing with others. Communication/rapport.</td>
<td>Empathy and understanding the perspectives of others</td>
<td>School counselors help students to relate to peers and others through the practice of empathy and understanding others’ perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of relationship skills?</td>
<td>Communicating effectively.</td>
<td>Communicating effectively</td>
<td>School counselors interact regularly with students to establish good communication skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of responsible decision-making?</td>
<td>Demonstrating critical thinking skills. Communication and rapport.</td>
<td>Demonstrating critical thinking skills</td>
<td>School counselors ask questions to assist students to think critically which promotes academic success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Which of the best practices implemented within the CASEL SEL core competencies were perceived as the most important by alternative education school counselors?</td>
<td>Establishing relationships &amp; building rapport.</td>
<td>Importance of rapport and relationships between/with counselors and students</td>
<td>School counselors communicate with students to build relationships which promote academic and life success.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
stress management strategies was supported by the research data and literature. Stress can have a negative effect on students’ academic performance, physical health, and their psychological well-being (Nazeer & Sultana, 2014). Learning how to make the distinction between positive stress and negative stress is important (Selva, 2020). Positive stress is considered to be healthy stress, while negative stress is unhealthy.

The school counselors work individually or within a team to help students at the alternative education schools learn the difference between positive and negative stress. Counselors assist students with determining what their stressors are and how their body reacts to these stressors; this knowledge is important. The school counselors expressed how they try to help their students connect to their body by “increasing awareness to what’s going on within their body” (Participant 8). Educating students to get “in tune with their five senses will help them regulate the correlation between mind and body” (Participant 9).

Students who learn how to identify what is causing them stress and learn how to manage these stressors can have improved academic performance. Teaching students how to respond to multiple stressors will help them reduce stress throughout their lives. School counselors do this through educating students on how to identify what is causing the stress and helping students gain knowledge in areas of coping by using different techniques. The school counselors used multiple techniques with their students, each specifically using coping skills that would be most beneficial depending on the needs of the student. Learning how to identify and cope with stress can help students live healthy and productive lives.
School counselors help students learn how to manage stress through different stress management techniques. Some students adapt to certain techniques while others prefer strategies that provide a whole approach. Stress management strategies can include breathing exercises, art therapy, role play, chunking, grounding, front loading, journal writing, identifying of emotions, and increased knowledge. To help students, counselors work with them on techniques that the student and counselor believe are the best approach to help the student with identifying and managing their own stress. Knowing how to manage one’s own emotions is key to helping the management of stress. The ability to identify triggers and having the knowledge of how to cope with these triggers is beneficial to students.

Stress can trigger physical symptoms such as muscle tension, digestion problems, breathing problems, fatigue, headaches, and problems with sleep to name a few (Selva, 2020). Many students do not understand why they are experiencing these symptoms, which is why counselors believe it is so important for these students to learn how to identify their emotions and manage stress. The counselors work hard to help students become more knowledgeable about what is causing stress. They also are educating students about different strategies that can help identify the emotions that cause stress.

**Key Finding: Self-Awareness**

**Theme 2. Understanding emotions, thoughts, and values.** This theme represented 31.9% of the coded frequencies for self-awareness and was referenced 46 times in the responses to three different interview questions by all 10 school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools totaling 30 sources. Research indicates
that emotions can help or hinder a student’s academic engagement and school success (Durlak et al., 2011).

**Key Finding 2. Understanding emotions, thoughts, and values.** Exemplary alternative education school counselors identify practices that help students to understand their emotions by helping them identify the feelings they are experiencing. School counselors from exemplary alternative education schools underscored their practices in assisting students to be able to understand their own emotions, thoughts, and values to promote academic and life success. The ability to understand one’s emotions, thoughts, and values, which is an important concept of SEL, is supported by the data and the connection to the literature. SEL is an essential part of education and human development (CASEL, 2020). SEL is a process that individuals learn, because emotions can impede or facilitate students’ academic engagement (Durlak et al., 2011). Individuals who are knowledgeable about SEL can learn to apply the attitude, skills, and knowledge to help them develop wholesome identities, manage emotions and acquire personal goals, feel and display empathy, establish relationship skills, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2020).

School counselors work hard at helping students learn how to understand their emotions through activities and education. The focus of SEL is to build students’ positive personal competencies, attitudes, and social skills through increased opportunities that reinforce assets, build positive relationships, give social supports, and help individuals flourish within their environments (Durlak et al., 2011). All of this is done through working with students; teaching and modeling these characteristics is what school counselors do on a daily basis. Many students lack social-emotional competencies
and this lack of knowledge can negatively affect their behavior and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). It is the role of the school counselors to help students learn the best practice of how to appropriately identify their emotions.

**Key Finding: Social-Awareness**

**Theme 3. Understanding the perspectives of and empathizing with others.**

This theme represented 30.4% of the coded frequencies for social awareness and was referenced 66 times in the responses to three different interview questions by all 10 school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools totaling 30 sources. Research shows that empathy is one of the characteristics of social interactions and understanding, because it generates a representation of another’s mental state (Stietz et al., 2019).

**Key Finding 3. Understanding the perspectives of and empathizing with others.** School counselors from exemplary schools strategize to ensure that students practice empathy and perspective taking to understand, respect, and relate to differences including culture in themselves, their peers, and others. Students who can understand the perspectives of others and show empathy to others experience more connection and positive social interactions. Understanding the perspectives of and empathizing with others are two of the social and emotional concepts of social awareness and are supported by the research data and literature. These two concepts are something that school counselors consider integral to teach their students. Teaching students that people have different perspectives is basic Psychology 101. However, many students have not come to the realization that everyone has different opinions and beliefs.
School counselors employ many different tactics to get students to understand that other individuals have different perspectives. Counselors educate students by breaking down the situation and having the students look at it in a different way. They first have the students try to understand how the other person feels, or what the other person was thinking at the time, and why they behave in a certain way. Being able to think about human behavior in different ways will help students learn why it is important to understand and empathize with others. Students learn that empathy is understanding the feeling of others, including individuals from other cultures and diverse backgrounds (CASEL, 2020).

Understanding the perspectives of others is having the ability to hold all opposing ideas, views, and positions in mind at the same time and still be able to function effectively (D. Johnson, 2019). This is where one’s ability to successfully problem solve or understand how the other person sees the situation comes into play. Having the ability to put oneself into another person’s position and try to understand from their point of view is a skill that school counselors are trying to teach students. Knowledge of such skills is very important in the development of SEL. Empathy has proven to be relevant to the educational process and in educational outcomes (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009).

**Key Finding: Relationship Skills**

**Theme 4. Communicating effectively.** This theme represented 33.3% of the coded frequencies for relationship skills and was referenced 108 times in the responses to three different interview questions by all 10 school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools totaling 30 sources. Research shows that to be an effective
communicator, a person needs to focus on what is being said instead of what to say (Robinson et al., 2020).

**Key Finding 4. Communicating effectively.** School counselors from exemplary schools work diligently to educate students in all forms of communication. School counselors consistently noted that the key best practice of assisting students to communicate effectively is through active listening. The theme of communication recurred throughout this study. This theme was present in the responses to every research subquestion. Communication is a key finding in all the CASEL core competencies and especially in relationship skills. This is supported by the research data and literature. To have the ability to communicate well both verbally and nonverbally is essential to a successful life.

Research indicates that the majority of interpersonal information is communicated nonverbally; however, spoken information is gauged more accurately (Grahe & Bernieri, 1999). To have effective communication, people must be able to communicate their message clearly, know what they want to communicate, and know why they want to communicate this information (McPheat, 2010).

All 100% of the school counselors interviewed discussed communication with frequency. Communication was addressed both as a best practice tool for school counselors to use to interact effectively with students as well as a skill and strategy for students that promotes school and life success. A smile or a wave is communicating a hello, nonverbally, whereas spoken words are verbal communication. Communication is getting information from one person to another (McPheat, 2010) and is a critical life skill.
Communication is a process that is composed of several stages; each stage can have some kind of barrier getting in the way of successful communication (McPheat, 2010). Learning how to recognize barriers and work through them is essential to good communication. Aristotle described communication as an expression of ideas and opinions, and the aim of communication is to generate motivation (Bambaeroo & Shokrpour, 2017). The school counselors interviewed expressed in every question the need to have good communication with their students. Communication between school counselors and students is essential; communication helps students’ social development.

Key Finding: Making Responsible Decisions

Theme 5. Demonstrating critical thinking skills. This theme represented 32.9% of the coded frequencies for making responsible decisions and was referenced 83 times in the responses to three different interview questions by all 10 school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools totaling 30 sources. Research indicates that critical thinking is a skill that helps an individual make reasonable and knowledgeable decisions to the best of their ability (Erstad, 2018).

Key Finding 5. Demonstrating critical thinking skills. School counselors identified that helping students develop critical thinking skills is an important practice that they both model and teach their students. Critical thinking skills are an important social and emotional concept that is supported by the research data and literature. Research shows that individuals who can think critically are able to process and analyze information more effectively. Erstad (2018) discussed that critical thinking is an examination of situations, details, or other matters; it is supposed to be objective, without influence. Providing students with the ability to recognize critical thinking skills will
help them learn to be critical thinkers. Critical thinkers ask questions; they do not take information that does not sound accurate and move forward. School counselors will ask questions of their students to understand what they are thinking and why they are thinking that way. By demonstrating and modeling how to be a critical thinker, school counselors help students to think about things more logically.

Critical thinking skills include having the ability to be open minded. It is not enough to think critically, students must also be willing to use their thinking skills (Ernst & Monroe, 2004). Available knowledge is rapidly increasing and to be able to process the growing content, it is essential for students to develop critical thinking skills. Students need to be able to draw on and combine knowledge and skills from a range of subject areas to solve problems and make responsible decisions that lead to informed actions (Ernst & Monroe, 2004).

**Key Finding: Perceived Most Important**

In order to answer the research question “What do alternative school counselors perceive as the most important best practices used within the CASEL core competencies?” the researcher took the data from every research subquestion asked and used that data to encapsulate the findings. The research data illustrate that the CASEL core competency of relationship skills had the highest frequency of 346 and a percentage of 23.8%. This is a combination from all of the subquestions.

Each school counselor included building rapport through communication in every question they answered. Establishing relationships and building rapport through communication are social and emotional concepts that are supported by the data and the literature. The accumulation of the frequencies from each interview question shows that
communication and rapport building are the characteristics used a majority of the time. Of the five CASEL core competencies, forming relationships with students is determined from the data as genuinely important.

**Key Finding 6. Importance of rapport and relationships between/with counselors and students.** School counselors from exemplary schools confirm that communication and establishing relationships is a fundamental strategy in supporting students’ social and emotional well-being. The impact is clear in that all of the school counselors interviewed discussed the importance of forming relationships through communication and rapport building. Without communication there would not be relationships between students and their school counselors. School counselors use all forms of communication to interact with their students.

Research shows that educators do their best to encourage students and build satisfying relationships (Frisby & Martin, 2010). Building rapport with students can increase more personal connections and interactions, and through this connection and interaction, the counselor can have the opening to teach, guide, and support the students to their greatest potential.

Bonding and forming relationships with students increases school counselors’ chances of assisting students with their problems and educating them about strategies that are beneficial to the student. School counselors from alternative education schools work with many different types of students, and forming relationships is essential to accomplish their job.
Key Finding: Integral CASEL Competency

All of the exemplary school counselors mentioned within their interviews the importance of building rapport and communication. Communication and rapport building were themes in all five core competency research subquestions. This shows the importance of communicating and building rapport as the foundation of relationships.

Key Finding 7. Foundation building for social and emotional learning. School counselors universally agree that communicating and building rapport are skills needed to build relationships and that this skill is foundational to all the CASEL core competency areas. Communication and rapport building were found in every CASEL core competency subquestion as major themes. Therefore, communication and rapport building are building blocks for the foundation of SEL. This critical relationship building strategy is fundamental to SEL and ultimately to the success of all students.

Unexpected Findings

The study resulted in two expected findings. The first unexpected finding emerged from the education demographic information from the school counselors interviewed. Of the school counselors interviewed, 50% not only earned their Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) Credential, they also had obtained other licenses; 60% were licensed marriage and family therapists, and 90% were identified as clinical counselors; 10% identified as a clinical social worker, and 10% identified as an intervention specialist.

The second unexpected finding was that the subquestion pertaining to self-awareness had the lowest frequency of all the CASEL core competencies. This was unexpected because it is important to see oneself objectively. Many of the students may
not think about their thoughts or their behavior and that may be why they are enrolled in alternative education schools.

Research shows that improved self-awareness can make individuals more proactive, increase acceptance, and inspire positive self-development (Sutton, 2016). Having self-awareness allows one to practice self-control and can enhance self-confidence (Ackerman, 2020). All of these characteristics of self-awareness would be beneficial to students in alternative education schools.

**Conclusions**

The focus of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the best practices school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools use to support SEL using the CASEL core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making). An additional purpose of this study was to describe the CASEL SEL core competencies that were perceived as most important by school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County. A plethora of best practices were expressed by the 10 participants in the study, which resulted in findings relevant to school counselors’ use of SEL using CASEL core competencies. The following conclusions were made pertaining to the findings of this study:

**Conclusion 1. Alternative Education School Counselors Who Do Not Educate Their Students in Identifying, Regulating, and Managing Stress Are not Promoting Students Academic and Life Success**

Based on the findings and the review of the literature, the researcher concluded that alternative education school counselors who do not educate their students in
identifying, regulating, and managing stress are not promoting students’ academic and life success. Identifying, regulating, and controlling stress are critical self-management characteristics. School counselors who implement the self-management skills needed to successfully identify, regulate, and manage stress included the need to be proficient at regulating and controlling their emotions. Learning these skills does not occur in one lesson; these skills need to be continuously reinforced through exercises and modeling.

Self-management skills are taught so students can control and regulate their feelings, actions, and thoughts effectively in different situations. Assisting students to learn how to manage themselves helps students change their behavior and be more academically successful. School counselors help students manage their emotions and teach them that they can manage their stress. Students who learn to recognize a problem and find solutions for that problem are taking first steps toward self-management; these students can then follow through with the steps to rectify the problem and assess the results. Many of the students do not have skills in self-management and it is the school counselor’s intent to help these students learn the basic skills of self-management through social and emotional learning.

**Conclusion 2. If Students Are Not Supported by Alternative Education School Counselors to Understand Their Emotions, They Will Not Experience Success in School or Life**

Based on the findings and the review of the literature, the researcher concluded that if students are not supported by alternative education school counselors to understand their emotions, they will not experience success in school or life. One’s emotions and thoughts are important self-awareness characteristics. School counselors who implement
these SEL skills will help foster student academic success. The depth of self-awareness needed to successfully apply these skills suggests that students need to be proficient at understanding what is going on emotionally within themselves. Students with more self-awareness are also more self-confident and practice more self-control, which is essential when they are learning how to understand their emotions, thoughts, and personal values.

Understanding one’s emotions, thoughts, and values is self-management on a deeper level. School counselors work with individuals so they can learn to have self-control, be self-aware, and learn to understand and be knowledgeable of their emotions. Having the ability to identify what emotion is being felt at that time, and having the capacity to name that emotion, helps students to accurately assess their strengths and limitations.

According to Martinez (2017), when students can correctly identify their emotions, they are able to positively manage what is going on inside. School counselors work with students to help them understand their emotions, thoughts, and values. They do this by educating students with the skills necessary to understand what is occurring within their minds and bodies.

**Conclusion 3. School Counselors Who Help to Ensure That Students Relate to Peers and Others Through the Practice of Empathy Help Their Students to Have a Better Understanding of Others’ Perspectives, Differences, and Diversity**

Based on the findings and the review of the literature, the researcher concluded that school counselors who help to ensure that students relate to peers and others through the practice of empathy help their students to have a better understanding of others’ perspectives, differences, and diversity. Understanding others’ perspectives and having
the ability to empathize with others was the most frequently noted practice of the social
awareness competency. The depth of social awareness needed to successfully apply
these skills suggests that students need to learn what empathy is and how to empathize
with others, and understand others’ perspectives. Understanding the perspectives of and
empathizing with others is taught to the students through several different avenues. Of
the school counselors, 40% discussed how they use the “I empathize” program, and
others discussed chunking down situations and reenacting a scenario that just occurred.
School counselors will use different techniques they feel are appropriate for each
situation to help students understand and learn how to be more socially aware.

Stietz et al. (2019) expressed that empathy is one of the supports of social
interaction and understanding; when someone is empathic, they are able to relate to
another person’s mental state. School counselors model social awareness to their
students so they will learn through observation and not only from social awareness
techniques. All of the school counselors interviewed expressed how they model CASEL
core competencies through their behavior.

**Conclusion 4. School Counselors Who Regularly Communicate With Their students
Using Both Verbal and Nonverbal Strategies Will Help Their Students to Establish
Good Communication Skills**

Based on the findings and the review of the literature, the researcher concluded
that school counselors who regularly communicate with their students using both verbal
and nonverbal strategies will help their students to establish good communication skills.
Learning how to communicate is an important relationship-building characteristic.
School counselors who teach students communication skills will help foster student
academic success. The depth of communication skills needed to successfully connect with others is having the ability to not only communicate verbally and nonverbally but also to be an active listener. Students who are proficient at communicating will understand the intentions behind the information they are receiving and can convey their own message.

Communicating effectively is an important aspect of school counseling. School counselors work hard to connect with their students. Counselors need to communicate effectively with students to get any respect or acknowledgement. If a student does not respect or like their counselor, little progress will be made. School counselors should be authentic with their students; if they are not, students will know.

Research shows that to communicate effectively, the focus needs to be on what a person is saying instead of what one’s response is going to be (Robinson et al., 2020). The school counselors interviewed expressed how important it is to listen to what the student is saying. For school counselors to actually listen to their students without distractions takes enormous skill.

**Conclusion 5. School Counselors Who Are Not Willing to Ask Questions of Their Students Will Not Teach Them How to Think Critically; Therefore, Academic Success Will Be Limited**

Based on the findings and the review of the literature, the researcher concluded that school counselors who are not willing to ask questions of their students will not teach them how to think critically and will therefore limit their academic success. Critical thinking is an important characteristic in responsible decision-making. School counselors who implement this SEL skill will help foster student academic success. The depth of
responsible decision-making skills needed to successfully apply critical thinking skills suggests that students need to learn how to be proficient at asking questions and thinking about situations before they act.

Helping students to be critical thinkers first requires recognition of what critical thinking skills are. School counselors work with their students to teach them how to always ask questions especially when what the student is hearing does not sound genuine. All of the school counselors interviewed discussed how they ask their students open-ended questions to get them to think critically about situations that occurred or things that they heard.

A critical thinker is someone who can make logical and informed decisions (Erstad, 2018). School counselors work with students to help them think critically about their situation and how they can help themselves. Counselors are not there to be judgmental; they are there to educate students on how to be more knowledgeable and to think about ways to accomplish their needs and goals.

**Conclusion 6. School Counselors Who Are Committed to Communicating and Building Relationships With Their Students Contribute to Their Academic and Life Success**

Based on the findings and the review of the literature, the researcher concluded that school counselors who are committed to communicating and building relationships with their students contribute to their academic and life success. Relationship-building skills are the highest rated skill of all the CASEL core competencies. All five CASEL core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) are important; however, the core competency of
building relationships surfaced as genuinely important. Communication and building rapport are characteristics that were mentioned throughout the interviews. Establishing rapport is central to building relationships, and building rapport comes from communication.

According to the data, the most important best practices perceived by school counselors are establishing rapport and building relationships. These data encapsulated the 10 interviews with school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools. Rapport building and relationships had the highest number of frequencies totaling 346. School counselors discussed building rapport through communication as a highly important best practice according to the number of times counselors gave answers relating to this subject.

Establishing relationships with students is key to building rapport and is essential in student learning (Frisby & Martin, 2010). Rapport is relationship centered; it is hard to have good rapport if some kind of relationship has not been established. Relationships and rapport are established through communication. School counselors are constantly reaching out to students to build rapport and establish substantial relationships.

Building rapport can have positive effects. These positive effects can encourage and structure social interaction, which could foster students’ positive rapport with other classmates (Coupland, 2003; Frisby & Martin, 2010). School counselors can build a positive environment by developing relationships with their students. All of the school counselors expressed the importance of building rapport and establishing relationships with their students. This research study found that school counselors perceive all five CASEL core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness,
relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) are important when supporting SEL with students.

**Implications for Action**

The focus of this study was on the best practices of school counselors in exemplary alternative education schools used to support SEL using the CASEL core competencies. The implications for action come from the key findings and conclusions. The implications for action are provided to encourage and improve the SEL programs for students. The following are recommendations for action:

**Implication for Action 1: More Communication Classes for all Alternative Education School Staff**

The San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools office should require all alternative education school staff members to annually have instruction on the different forms of communication and how to effectively communicate. Alternative education school staff should have an annual requirement to be certified in communication skills that are specific to working with at-risk students and those experiencing or having experienced trauma. The findings of this study should be used to help improve that coursework.

**Implication for Action 2: SEL Classes Throughout Students’ Education**

The legislature needs to approve and mandate SEL curriculum for all students from preschool to high school. Curriculum providers must be provided with specifications and provide multiple options by grade level and modality. CDE will provide a list of acceptable curriculum options after the State Board of Education goes through the adoption process. The CDE (2020c) webpage states “that they are committed
to helping educators learn more about SEL” (para. 6) and they provide resources.

However, this is not enough. Every school needs to have classes in SEL each week in which students can participate.

All school districts must prioritize and commit funding to support SEL training programs. Monies must be allocated for classes that teach SEL to school staff members and students. SEL should be required courses in all schools.

**Implication for Action 3: DASS Schools**

The CDE, Superintendent of Schools, school district, or governing board needs to require all schools identified by the state as Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) to be required to provide SEL training using CASEL core competencies to school staff members and students on an annual basis. Alternative schools must use the results from this study to implement training on CASEL SEL strategies to all their staff members. It is not enough to have only a few educators modeling and teaching SEL, it is imperative that everyone working in an alternative school setting have the knowledge to demonstrate SEL characteristics and its principles to and with the students within alternative education.

**Implication for Action 4: SEL as an LCAP Requirement**

The State Board of Education should ensure that a component of the LCAP template requires explicit goals to cover the components of the CASEL model. Superintendents of schools, school districts, or the governing board should require all schools to prioritize and commit funding to support ongoing SEL training for school counselors to enable them to become more proficient in areas of SEL using CASEL core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills,
and responsible decision-making). These trainings will ensure that school counselors become more proficient in the characteristics of SEL, and provide more assistance to the population of students within alternative education.

**Implication 5: School Counselor SEL Strategies Handbook Publication**

A handbook of strategies and activities on how to address the CASEL competencies from the role of school counselor needs to be developed. A key component of the handbook should be focused on establishing relationships and building rapport with students. The researcher together with the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) Educational Options Council will use this research study as a base to work together to create and publish this handbook. The handbook will be disseminated by ACSA at all conferences and workshops where counselors and/or alternative education staff are present. Additionally, it will be provided in digital form on the ACSA web page and advertised through their social media presence.

**Implication 6: Presentation of Research Findings**

The researcher will use the findings of this study to present at a variety of annual conferences in order to share the impactful strategies of school counselors who work in alternative education and successfully implement SEL using the CASEL core competencies. The researcher will present at the following organizations’ conferences: California Consortium for Independent Study [CCIS], California Association of School Counselors [CASC], and ASCA. These are the best conferences at which to share the results of the research and distribute the relationship handbook, which will be created using the data from this study. Additionally, the researcher will continue to meet with
other alternative education practitioners to add content, strategies, and additional voices to the presentation and handbook.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings from this study demonstrate how school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools are working hard to implement SEL to students; however, it is not enough for only one group of educators to be implementing SEL. Recommendations for further studies relating to SEL using CASEL core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) include the following recommendations for further research:

1. Replicate this study with teachers and compare which best practices they use to support the CASEL core competencies with their students. Additionally, determine what teachers perceive are the most important CASEL core competencies.

2. Expand this study to a traditional comprehensive high school setting with school counselors to determine if their best practices are equivalent to the best practices of alternative education school counselors. Determine what is the same and what is different based on school size and student numbers.

3. Conduct a similar phenomenological study with middle school counselors to ascertain what strategies are used with middle school students to create social and emotional competency through the lens of the CASEL competency.

4. Conduct a phenomenological study with alternative education students regarding the strategies counselors utilize to instruct students in CASEL competencies that the students feel are most helpful to their academic success.
Concluding Remarks and Reflections

For 30 years, I have worked in public service, and during that time, I continued my education. It has been a long journey of taking one or two classes at a time and holding down a full-time job, but it has all been worth it. It took 10 years to earn my AA, then 2 years for my BS, and another 2 for my master’s degree. I was on a roll. Then came the discovery that I should have included a specialty with my master’s degree. So, I decided I wanted to be a college counselor, and help students not make the mistakes I did in college; however I soon found out that I needed my PPS Credential to be a college counselor, so back to school I went.

I soon discovered that I love education and would gladly be a professional student; there is so much to learn. I earned my PPS Credential, and became a school counselor at an alternative education school. To finally get to help students was fulfilling a goal of mine.

The alternative education school at which I am employed helps students who for one reason or another left traditional school and enrolled with us. Many of these students are at-risk, some are parents, and some are just lost. I work hard to help every student I can.

I soon came to the realization that I needed to continue my education and learn new skills that can help me provide more services to students. A colleague and I decided we would enroll in Brandman University’s doctoral program in organizational leadership. The journey has been enlightening and very powerful. I have gained much knowledge, and I feel excited to push forward and take the next step toward my future.
My subject topic of SEL will hopefully inspire others to research the importance of SEL within all aspects of life not only in schools. I am a firm believer that SEL should be a required subject in all schools from preschool to high school and beyond. There is so much to learn in this life, I believe that people can never stop learning and I encourage them to always push forward.
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APPENDIX A

Research Study Request Letter (Draft)

Date:

Dear San Bernardino County Superintendent or Designee,

My name is Sandra Shaw and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Brandman University’s Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership Program. Currently, I am working on a dissertation that concentrates on the best practices of school counselors who are employed at exemplary alternative education schools. I am reaching out to you to request help in identifying exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County.

The criterion that was established in my research defined exemplary alternative schools as alternative schools identified by the Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS) in San Bernardino County which have been nominated by the San Bernardino County superintendent of schools’ office as exemplary based on evidence of at least 6 of the following National Alternative Education Association Exemplary Practices (2014):
1. A guiding vision and mission that drives the overall program.
2. Passionate, innovative, competent and experienced leadership.
3. A safe, caring, and orderly climate and culture.
4. Staff are effective, innovative and qualified individuals with appropriate training.
5. Instructional practices and curriculum are supportive, rigorous and individualized.
6. Assessment includes screening, progress monitoring and diagnostics to improve student outcomes.
7. Transition plans include college and career readiness support for high school students.
8. Collaborative partnerships promote opportunities for life skills, soft skills, service learning and career exploration.
9. School counselors collaborate with school stakeholders to support best practices, articulate instruction, and create effective citizens.
10. Personalized curriculum and instruction is implemented using individualized learning plans.

It would be much appreciated if you can assist me in identifying your top 10 exemplary alternative education schools based on the criterion specified above. Please contact Sandra Shaw or my dissertation chair Dr. Cindy Petersen if you are willing to assist me in my research.

Contact information:
Sandra Shaw
sshaw4@mail.brandman.edu

Dr. Cindy Petersen
cpeterse@brandman.edu

Thank you very much and hope to hear from you soon.
Sandra Shaw (Doctoral Candidate)
APPENDIX B

Invitation Letter to Potential Participants

Date

Dear Potential Participant:
Hello, my name is Sandra Shaw and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Brandman University’s Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership Program. Currently, I am working on dissertation that concentrates on the best practices school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools use to support social emotional learning. I am requesting support from school counselors who will help my research by sharing their best practices in CASEL core competencies used to support students. This can be done by participating in an interview via Zoom.

The purpose of this research is to identify and describe the best practices school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County use to support social emotional learning using the CASEL core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making). In addition, the research will identify the CASEL core competency school counselors perceive as the most important.

As a prospective candidate, you are encouraged to participate in this research, because your school has been identified as an exemplary alternative education school by the San Bernardino County Superintendent or District Superintendent. Your participation is voluntary. However, your expertise would be greatly appreciated in identifying best practices implemented by school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools.

The interview will be composed of fifteen questions, and will last approximately forty-five to sixty minutes. The results of this research will be used by exemplary alternative education schools to increase understanding of best practice implementation of the CASEL’s core competencies by their school counselors, it will also increase research on this subject.

Thank you, in advance for your participation. After deciding to participate or declining to participate, please fill out the letter of acceptance or non-acceptance and return via email to the researcher.

For any further questions please feel free to contact me by email or phone. My information is included in this letter.

Sincerely,

Sandra Shaw
sshaw4@mail.brandman.edu
Research Participant’s Bill of Rights

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.
APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this phenomenological study is to identify and describe the best practices implemented by School Counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County to support social emotional learning using the CASEL core competencies; self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. An additional purpose of the study is to understand the practices within the CASEL social emotional learning core competencies that were perceived as most important by School Counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County.

I want to advise you that any information that is acquired in relationship to this study will remain confidential. All of the data will be presented without the identity of any contributors or any institutions. Each interview will be held via Zoom platform which is an electronic meeting room, each interview will be recorded.

By agreeing to participate in this study, I agree to participate in a recorded interview and answer all questions to the best of my knowledge. The one on one virtual Zoom interview will last between 30-45 minutes. Interviews will take place before the end of the year 2020.

I understand that:

a) There are minimal risks connected with participating in this research. I understand that the researcher will protect my personal information and keep by identity confidential by using codes which will be under lock and key of the researcher.

b) I understand the interview will be recorded via Zoom platform. The recordings will be accessible only to the researcher and the transcriptionist. The recordings will be used to recount the dialogue and establish accuracy of the information gathered during the interview. All information will be confidential and each participant will be identified through code only known to the researcher and dissertation chair.

c) The possible benefit of this study to me is I will be able to add my input to help eliminate some of the gap in literature concerning the best practices of school counselors who work in alternative education schools and implement social and emotional learning using the CASEL core competencies with their students. These findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study.
and will provide insights on the best practices of school counselors and what the perception of the perceived most important core competency of the CASEL core competencies.

d) Any questions I have concerning my participation in the study will be answered by Sandra Shaw at sshaw4@mail.brandman.edu or Dr. Petersen (Dissertation Chair) at cpetersen@brandman.edu.

e) My participation in this study is voluntary. I understand I can refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without any negative results. I do not have to answer any questions during the interview if I do not want to. Additionally, the researcher can stop the study at any time.

f) I understand the interview will be video recorded, and the recording will not be used for any other purpose but this research.

g) I understand the video recordings will be used to transcribe the interviews. Upon completion of the transcription the recordings will be kept for a minimum of five years by the researcher.

h) I understand no information that identifies me will be released without my written consent and that all identifiable information will be protected. If any changes to the study occurs, I will be notified and my consent will be acquired again.

i) I understand that if I have any questions, concerns, or comments about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form via email and the “Research Participant’s Bill of BUIRB written informed consent rights.” I have read the above statements and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure set forth.

________________________________________
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

________________________________________
Signature of Investigator-Sandra Shaw

________________________________________
Date
APPENDIX E

Interview Questions

Self-management

1. What strategies do you use to help your students learn impulse control?

2. What are some of the ways you get your students to establish goals and get organized?

3. How do you help your students deal with stressful situations?

Self-awareness

4. What strategies do you use to help your students learn how to identify their emotions?

5. How do you help students recognize their strengths?

6. What are some of the ways you get students to be more self-confident and demonstrate self-efficacy?

Social awareness

7. What do you say to your students to help them understand the feelings or emotions of someone else?

8. Please describe how you help your students appreciate diversity?

9. How do you support your students when it comes to respecting others?

Relationship skills

10. What are some of the strategies you use to help your students communicate more clearly, and improve their listening skills?

11. What strategies do you give to your students to help them resist inappropriate social pressures?
12. How do you help your students negotiate conflict constructively?

_Responsibility decision making_

13. In what ways do you help your students identify and solve problems?

14. How do you help your students make constructive choices about ethical responsibility?

15. What are some of the ways you assist your students in evaluating their personal behavior?

_Additional prompts may be used at any point during the interview if the interviewer feels that the answer was not sufficient in detail._

1. “What did you mean by ...”
2. “Do you have more to add?”
3. “Would you expand upon that a bit?”
4. “Why do think that was the case?”
5. “Could you please tell me more about ...”
6. “Can you share an example of...”
7. “Can you give me an example of how...”
8. “How did you feel about that?”
9. “Why do you think that strategy was so effective?”
10. “Can you expand on that?”
APPENDIX F

What is SEL?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) COMPETENCIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SELF-AWARENESS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to accurately recognize one’s own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotions, thoughts, and values and how they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>influence behavior. The ability to accurately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assess one’s strengths and limitations, with a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and a “growth mindset.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ IDENTIFYING EMOTIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ ACCURATE SELF-PERCEPTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ RECOGNIZING STRENGTHS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ SELF-CONFIDENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ SELF-EFFICACY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOCIAL AWARENESS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to take the perspective of and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>empathize with others, including those from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to understand social and ethical norms for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behavior and to recognize family, school, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community resources and supports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ PERSPECTIVE-TAKING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ EMPATHY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ APPRECIATING DIVERSITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ RESPECT FOR OTHERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SELF-MANAGEMENT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to successfully regulate one’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>situations — effectively managing stress,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>controlling impulses, and motivating oneself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to set and work toward personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and academic goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ IMPULSE CONTROL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ STRESS MANAGEMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ SELF-DISCIPLINE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ SELF-MOTIVATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ GOAL SETTING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RELATIONSHIP SKILLS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to establish and maintain healthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and rewarding relationships with diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individuals and groups. The ability to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with others, resist inappropriate social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pressure, negotiate conflict constructively,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and seek and offer help when needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ COMMUNICATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ RELATIONSHIP BUILDING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ TEAMWORK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to make constructive choices about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal behavior and social interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>based on ethical standards, safety concerns,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and social norms. The realistic evaluation of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consequences of various actions, and a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consideration of the well-being of oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ ANALYZING SITUATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ SOLVING PROBLEMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ EVALUATING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ REFLECTING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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January 2017
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
www.easel.org
APPENDIX G

Interview Protocol

Script:

[Interviewer states:] Hello, my name is Sandra Shaw. I am a school counselor for an alternative education school. I have been a school counselor for about 3 years and think the work we do makes a valuable contribution to the students we serve. Thank you so much for your dedication and all the hard work you do to help make a difference in the lives of the students who need us the most. I am a Doctoral Candidate at Brandman University’s Doctor of Education in the area of Organizational Leadership. I truly appreciate you taking the time to participate in an interview with me. The purpose of this study is to gather your perceptions of the implementation of the CASEL core competencies (self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationships skills, and making responsible decisions) within the alternative education school you are employed.

The study seeks to identify and describe best practices of school counselors from exemplary alternative schools. This interview is to specifically explore what it is that you, a school counselor from an alternative education school that has been identified as an exemplary school from the superintendent of schools in San Bernardino County due to implement the CASEL core competencies with students.

I am conducting 10 interviews with school counselors like myself. The information you, and other counselors give will provide a better understanding of the best practices that school counselors from exemplary alternative schools use to implement and instruct the CASEL core competencies with students.
Equally important, I will be conducting the interviews verbally and virtually, and I will be reading most of what I say. This will be done to guarantee that all interviews will be coordinated in the same way with all participating school counselors.

**Informed Consent:**

I want to advise you that any information that is acquired in relationship to this study will remain confidential. All of the data will be presented without the identity of any contributors or any institutions. Each interview will be held via Zoom platform which is an electronic meeting room, each interview will be recorded.

By agreeing to participate in this study, you agree to participate in a recorded interview and answer all questions to the best of your knowledge. At any point during the interview, if you do not want to answer a question you have the right to skip the question or end the interview at any time. The one on one virtual Zoom interview will last between 45-60 minutes. Interviews will take place before the end of the year 2020.

I want to confirm with you that you received a copy of the Brandman University Research Participant’s Bill of Rights, interview questions, CASEL core competencies, and the informed consent form.

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview? Okay, I am going to begin and just to remind you I will be reading from a script to ensure every interview is conducted in the same way to ensure validity.

I do want to clarify a few points.

These questions are based on your lived experiences, and the best practices as a school counselor using the CASEL core competencies of self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and making responsible decisions.
## APPENDIX H

### Interview Question Alignment Matrix/Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview Question Alignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the lived experiences of school counselors from exemplary alternative education schools in San Bernardino County in implementing the CASEL core competencies at their school?</td>
<td>1-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub Question 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of self-management?</td>
<td>1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub Question 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of self-awareness?</td>
<td>4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub Question 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What best practices do school use with students based on the CASEL core competency of social awareness?</td>
<td>7-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub Question 4</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of relationship skills?</td>
<td>10-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub Question 5</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What best practices do school counselors use with students based on the CASEL core competency of responsible decision making?</td>
<td>13-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub Question 6</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which of the best practices implemented within the CASEL social emotional learning core competencies were perceived as the most important by alternative education school counselors?</td>
<td>1-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX I

Field Test Participant Feedback

As a doctoral student at Brandman University, your assistance is appreciated in creating this interview instrument. Your participation is essential to the development of a reliable and valid instrument. Below are questions pertaining to the interview that I would greatly appreciate you answering upon completion of the interview. Your responses will help me in refining my interview protocol and questions.

You have been provided with a copy of the interview questions along with this form to remind you if needed.

1. How did you feel about the interview?

2. Do you think you had ample time to describe what you do as a school counselor based on the questions?

3. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok?

4. Were the questions clear or were there places where you were uncertain what was being asked?

5. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing?

6. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview?
APPENDIX J

Field Test – Observer Feedback

Conducting interviews is a learned skill set based on experience and feedback. Gaining valuable insight about interview skills and affect with the interview will support the collection of data gathering when interviewing actual participant. As the interview observer you should reflect on the questions below after the interview is finished. You should provide independent feedback at the conclusion of the interview field test. As observer you should take notes that will assist the interviewer to be successful in improving their interview skills.

You have been provided with a copy of the interview questions, this form has been provided for your feedback upon completion of the interview.

1. How long did the interview take? _______Did the time seem appropriate?

2. Did the interviewer communicate in a receptive, cordial, and encouraging manner?

3. Was the introduction of the interview friendly with the use of commonly understood language?

4. How did the interviewee feel during the interview?

5. Was the interviewer prepared and relaxed during the interview?

6. Did the interviewee understand the interview questions or did they require clarification?
7. What parts of the interview went smoothly and why?

8. What parts of the interview seem to struggle and why do you think that was the case?

9. Did the interviewer maintain objectivity and not interject value judgements or lead the interviewee?

10. Did the interviewer take opportunity to discuss or request artifacts that support the data gathered from the interview?

11. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you suggest changing it?

12. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

*Conducting interviews virtually is different than face-to-face and requires more attention to number 2 & 3 above. As an observer give specific feedback on these items

*Thank you for taking time to assist me with this essential process.*
APPENDIX K

IRB Approval

Dear Sandra Stax,

Congratulations, your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. This approval grants permission for you to proceed with data collection for your research. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If any issues should arise that are pertinent to your IRB approval, please contact the IRB immediately at IRB@brandman.edu. If you need to modify your BUIRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at the following link: https://irb.brandman.edu/Applications/Modification.pdf.

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank you,
Doug DeVore, Ed.D.
Professor
Organizational Leadership
BUIRB Chair
ddevore@brandman.edu
www.brandman.edu