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## Surviving in School: A Correlational Study on Teachers' Social Emotional Learning, Self-efficacy, and Response to Students' Challenging Behaviors

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SURVIVING IN SCHOOL: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY ON TEACHERS' SOCIAL  
EMOTIONAL LEARNING, SELF-EFFICACY, AND RESPONSE TO STUDENTS'  
CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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May 2020



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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to the children of this world who struggle to succeed in school because of reactions to their environment, lack of direct teaching of skill that might have made a difference and their parents who always sent their best to school each day. This is also dedicated to teachers in public education who signed up to teach all students regardless of circumstance and gave their best each day to give to their students the ability to achieve all that life has to offer.

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## NOMENCLATURE

ABA	Applied Behavioral Analysis
BCBA	Board Certified Behavior Analyst
CASEL	Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
FPSD	Fargo Public School District
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NEA	National Education Association
NPV	Non-physical Violence
PA	Physical Assault
PB	Psychological Behaviorism
PD	Professional Development
SBRF	Student Behavior Reporting Form
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
S-R	Stimulus-Response
S-O-R	Stimulus-Organism-Response
TB	Teleological Behaviorism

## **ABSTRACT**

This study explored possible correlations among elementary general education teachers' knowledge of Social Emotional Learning (SEL), their perceived self-efficacy, and their responses to students' challenging behaviors. It was hypothesized that teachers with increased levels of SEL knowledge and perceived self-efficacy would respond to students' challenging behaviors using methods that allowed for students to remain in the classroom. It was reasoned that if these variables were correlated districts could provide professional development that would increase teachers' levels in these areas and thereby providing them with effective training to respond to students' challenging behaviors. Although no correlations were found among these variables, a moderate statistically significant correlation was found between novice teachers' reported self-efficacy and their response to students' challenging behaviors. The study included qualitative responses from teachers which provided valuable insight about the impact of students' challenging behaviors on teachers' reported self-efficacy. Further study about the impact of students' challenging behaviors on teachers' self-efficacy could provide information that may lead to increasing teacher retention.

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

“Teachers are screaming out” reads the headline of a recent article in the Fargo Forum (2019, May 14, 2019 6:11 PM). It is a negotiation year for the Fargo Public School District (FPSD), and, in an unusual turn, teacher pay was not the forerunner of negotiation topics during the most recent teacher negotiation meeting with FPSD’s Board of Education. Rising concerns about students’ physical aggression was the top concern for teachers. The local news article stated that “there were 630 student behavioral issues in which a staff member was injured” in the 2018-19 school year. A previous Fargo Forum article (2019, Apr 29, 9PM) shared that 70% of teachers indicated they are “fearful in their classrooms” and “facing violence regularly because of student behavioral problems.” These articles are becoming prolific as teacher contract negotiations continue. This district is not, however, alone seeing a rise in such student behaviors. Reported by KGW8 (2019, May 1 10:22 AM), Oregon teachers are leaving the classroom due to increasing verbal and physical student behaviors in general education classrooms. In this article, teachers cite a lack of support being the reason for their exodus from the classroom.

The Fargo Forum accessed their information through FPSD’s Student Behavioral Reporting Form (SBRF) developed by administrators in FPSD as a means to report on specific student behaviors and as a way to conduct data driven discussions to better problem solve the issue of student behaviors. The SBRF was designed using the district’s Administrative Policy 6310 *Student Behavior, Discipline, and Reporting*. Teachers initiate completion of the form and determine if the student’s behavior is a minor behavior (e.g., dishonesty, inappropriate language, or teasing) or major behavior (e.g., aggression with injury, credible threats, major property

destruction). If student behavior is deemed to be major, the form is forwarded to the building principal which triggers the provision of additional support for teachers to address the issue with the student's parents. As with any staff injury, those caused by response to students' challenging behaviors must be filed with FPSD's human resources. Each school principal has access to all of the completed SBRFs for their school and can see aggregated data about the amount, location, and time of student incidents. There have been several data driven discussions at the elementary principals' monthly meetings using this reporting form. The SBRF was created due increased reports of student behavior and teachers concern about the level of support they receive from school and district administration.

By most standards, teachers are held accountable for creating effective and engaging lessons, establishing classroom routines, developing relationships with students and families, and maintaining a safe and positive learning environment. When unable to meet these expectations, teachers can begin to feel ineffective. As noted by Galand, Lecoq, and Philippot (2007), "Frequent student misbehaviour, repeated verbal victimization and high perceived violence could hurt teachers and lead to emotional exhaustion" (p. 466). "Moreover, anxious, depressed or disengaged teachers are less able to sustain the academic engagement of their students" (Galand, et al., p. 467). Additionally, employers should not assume that teachers are prepared in classroom management. Marzano and Marzano (2003) published an article that highlights nine characteristics of effective teacher-student relationships that aid teachers in classroom management. According to the authors, positive classroom dynamics occur when teachers use "appropriate levels of dominance and cooperation and an awareness of student needs" (p. 16). Although Marzano and Marzano indicated that dominance and cooperation made for positive dynamics, Malinen and Savolainen (2016) stated the following about teachers,

Subject teachers in particular usually have a strong background in their teaching subjects but much less knowledge about effective behavior management. However, the capability of building a positive classroom learning climate is at least as important as the mastery of content knowledge. (p. 151)

While classroom management is an important element to positive classroom dynamics, it is not within the scope of this study to determine what type of classroom management strategies are most effective.

While it is reasonable to believe that teachers need to maintain a positive learning environment, it is less reasonable to expect that they have the most effective tools to fulfill this task in the face of increasing students' challenging behaviors. Knowledge of SEL may be one such tool and development of such knowledge could be provided through district professional development.

Several studies have researched the occurrence of student behaviors in school. In *neaToday*, Walker (2013) published an interview with Dr. Dorothy Espelage, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign researcher and author of studies about student aggression toward teachers. When asked about the types of aggression that teachers are met with Espelage stated,

About half of the teachers who reported being victimized experienced harassment.

Others reported property offenses, including theft and damage to property. And about one-quarter of these teachers experienced physical attacks. Harassment includes anything from obscene gestures, verbal threats and intimidation and obscene remarks. With physical offenses, teachers widely reported objects being thrown at them and being physically attacked. (para. 4)

Teachers in the United States are calling for change within their districts, in part, due to students' challenging behavior. In her article based on interviews with 20 teachers in Allentown,

PA, Polochko (2018) reported teachers describing students' wide-use of profanity, young children engaging in physical altercations with adults and increased peer-to-peer physical and disruptive interactions. Polochko goes on to state that "When teachers are dealing with the disruptive behavior, it sometimes takes the entire class period to get the one student to behave" (para. 11).

In 2018, The Connecticut Education Association (CEA) issued a statement about the rise in students' challenging behavior. CEA's president, Sheila Cohen, stated, "Students are disrupting classrooms and putting themselves, other students, and teachers at risk at an alarming rate." (para. 2). Removing students from the classroom is one management technique that continues to be implemented although it fails to reduce the occurrence of further challenging behaviors (File, Evans, Pederson, & Tamke, 2017; Mayworm & Sharkey, 2014). While teachers do still use non-instructional tools to maintain safe environments for students and themselves, those tools (e.g., sending students home or to the principal's office) are contrary to the mission of public education and for students with disabilities often illegal when due process is not considered. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) limits the number of days students with disabilities can be removed from the classroom without procedural actions. The Office of Civil Rights also protects students' rights to attend public schools and frowns upon practices that limit students with disabilities access to education. A dilemma exists for teachers when providing a guaranteed education for all students. At what point are teachers placed at risk, both physically and emotionally, in order to fulfill the mission of public education? A recent example of this dilemma is that of the arrest of a middle-school student who was out in the community during COVID-19. Schools had moved to distance learning while shelter-in-place orders were in effect. This student had broken the law while out in the community and placed in



a day program by the court system. While in the day program, the student assaulted an adult and was taken into juvenile detention. From there, this student was admitted to a residential treatment facility. In this student's time in public education, many meetings were held with multiple agencies represented to determine appropriate programming for the student in response to several physical acts of aggression toward adults in the schools. Although programming was altered several times, the challenging behaviors continued. The school district had limited actions it could take to provide education to this student and ensure safety of its staff, while other entities in the community are not bound by such laws and are able to take swifter action to protect members of the community. While it is important to ensure students' attendance in school and protect their rights, the limitations placed on teachers and schools to provide all the needed supports is causing friction among staff, administration, and parents. As teachers are faced with increased student behaviors, the responses teachers have to these behaviors can either help maintain a safe and effective learning environment, or unintentionally lead to further challenging behaviors.

### **Science of Behavior**

Science has long taught that when an organism interacts with a stimulus, the organism will affect a response. According to DeSteno, Gross, and Kubzanskyith (2013), "with the advent of the cognitive revolution in psychology, there was a shift from S-R (stimulus-response) models to S-O-R (stimulus-organism-response) models, which acknowledged the important role of construal processes" (p. 475). In other words, it matters how the organism, in the case of this study, teachers, interpret the stimulus, which for this study is students' challenging behaviors.

This positioning of the organism into the equation of reaction creates a foundation for belief that teachers' knowledge of SEL will have a direct impact on how they react to students'

challenging behaviors. It is posited that teachers who have greater knowledge of SEL will better understand the student's perspective and reason for engaging in challenging behaviors which in turn would affect teachers' response to the challenging behaviors. Researchers have indicated that "where once we had assumed that coping and emotion regulation occurred after an effective response had taken place (as mop-up operations), it is now clear that emotion-regulation processes operate at multiple points through the emotion-generative process" (p. 474).

With a better understanding of what drives individuals to engage in negative behavior, one could anticipate a timely and effective response to the behavior. According to Jones, Bailey and Jacob (2014), teachers who make time to consider how students will react to activities and transitions between activities will be more prepared to deal with student behaviors that take the teacher's and other students' attention from the desired task. The authors go on to say "[these teachers are] more likely to have a strategy prepared in advance and to implement it quickly, enabling them to steer students back on track when disruptions occur" (p. 20). In their 2014 report to CASEL, Bridgeland, Bruce and Hariharan reported that teachers had been implementing concepts of SEL into their classrooms through natural and untrained methods, intrinsically knowing that it would promote positive student outcomes. The authors stated "SEL helps teachers become more effective by fostering their own social and emotional development and supporting a caring and challenging classroom climate" (p. 8). Zakrzewski (2015), educational director of the Greater Good Science Center established at the University of California, Berkeley indicated the importance of SEL as part of education by stating,

If we can become aware of our emotions and learn to work with them in a healthy way – to see them as information rather than as overpowering responses that control our actions – then we can choose to respond to situations in a manner that brings out the good in us

and in others. Instead of acting out of fear, hate, and anger, we can take a deep breath and try to empathize with what the other person is feeling or experiencing and then make the choice to respond with care. (para. 14)

### **Theoretical Framework**

In their 2011 book, *Challenging Behaviour*, Emerson and Einfeld defined challenging behaviors as

Culturally abnormal behavior(s) of such intensity, frequency and/or duration that the physical safety of the person or others is likely to be placed in serious jeopardy, or behavior which is likely to seriously limit use of, or result in the person being denied access to, ordinary community facilities. (2011, p. 4)

According to Lee and Connelly (2016), it is this definition that most often “represents the standard within the literature” (p. 419), therefore this definition will be used for the purposes of this study.

There is no doubt that teachers want students to use “correct” behaviors in the classroom. Teachers can post expected behaviors as classroom rules, but there are often additional “hidden rules” of which teacher may assume that students know and use to guide “how they should act.” Although resources exist to enable teachers to use positive behavior supports for all students, not all teachers have been exposed to these resources. Teachers enter education and progress through their career with varying degrees and types of professional development. Whether teachers have been exposed to coursework about the science of behavior is largely left up to each teacher’s preferences or the preferences of school or district-wide leaders. Looking through the

behaviorist lens, one can see how teachers, without a specific understanding of behavior, could unintentionally reinforce negative behaviors.

Unless teachers are well-versed in the science of behavior, the inadvertent reinforcement of negative student behaviors may prevail. This could establish a cyclical pattern between reinforcement of negative behaviors, and continuation of the behavior, which if the child is attention-seeking would exacerbate the issue. In a different scenario, the student may be seeking to escape the classroom and use challenging behaviors to do so. Teachers who respond by removing students from classroom have rewarded the students' behavior which increases the likelihood of students using the behavior to escape the environment in the future. Even when the reason (i.e., function of behavior) for students' challenging behavior is known, it is the response to behavior that can effect a change.

For teachers to be effective in their response to negative student behaviors, they need to feel confident in their ability to understand and use techniques that result in a reduction of negative student behaviors. Recalling what the author Zakrzewski (2015) indicated, that SEL helps teachers create a supportive classroom, it is posited that teachers who have increased knowledge of SEL, will respond to students' challenging behaviors in a manner that reduces behaviors, but does not negatively the impact teacher-student relationship.

### **Student Behaviors**

As previously stated, there are many types of students' challenging behaviors that teachers face on a daily basis. The article "8 Classroom Disrupters" in *neaToday* (2012) lists several student behaviors that can cause disruption of the classroom (e.g., The Limelighter, The Chatterbox, and The Clown). Many types of student behaviors, such as blurting, work refusal,

and attention-seeking can cause classroom disruptions that teachers must manage in order to maintain a positive learning environment. One type of challenging behavior that teachers may be ill-prepared to address is the student that is labeled “The Short Fuse” or angry child (p. 7). The article indicated that teachers are seeing a growing number of angry students and suggested that national economic issues which are causing family strife are creating stressed-out children.

The anger felt by students can manifest in different ways depending upon individual child. Some angry students use profanity, while others react with physical aggression such as hitting, kicking, and biting. People may think that it is only special education students who are exhibiting challenging behaviors, or that students with these types of challenging behaviors require special education service. Districts are finding that student’s challenging behaviors are resulting in increased numbers of students receiving special education services. There are students, however, whose challenging behaviors are not due to a disability, rather, mental health issues are at work. The distinction is important because the solutions are different. Special education is put in place to teach students lagging skills caused by a disability, it is not intended to serve in place of mental health therapy. Unfortunately, one of the only resources a general education can turn to for help is special education. Many times, a student who is exhibiting challenging behaviors will be sent to a special education classroom to cool down, which decreases the amount of time spent in the general education learning environment. This can create the unintended consequence of students missing important education and not receiving the intervention that is needed. Thus, the cycle continues.

Although classroom management has long been a part of teacher preparation, there are indications that teachers continue to remove students from the classroom to solve the issue of challenging behaviors. When students are returned to their classrooms, as determined by the

principal, teachers may feel unsupported and no more informed about how to manage the disruptive and often harmful behavior. While there are resources that provide teachers with information about classroom management techniques, there is also an indication that teachers are far more prepared to teach content than they are to apply behavioral management strategies. Indeed, becoming an expert in behaviors constitutes an entire area of study on its own. This research is not suggesting that teachers need to be behavioral specialists, rather that understanding SEL may help teachers better understand students' social-emotional development which may allow them to react to students in such a way as to minimize the effects of students' challenging behavior. Much of what we now know about behavior allows us to realize that we can, by our own actions and reactions, change the behaviors of others.

Research into behavioral science began as a part of psychology in the early 1900s. Perhaps the most well-known early proponents of behaviorism are B.F. Skinner and J.B. Watson. Skinner and Watson believed that it is important to be able to quantify events and behavior. They indicated that it is the observable behavior that should be considered rather than the unobservable feelings or thoughts of people. Skinner and Watson, who are most often cited as being "extreme" or "radical" behaviorists were labeled as such due to "the denial or ignoring of consciousness" (Schneider and Morris, 1987, p.32). That, in essence, consciousness is behavior.

While radical behaviorism is extreme in its views, other schools of behaviorism lend themselves to incorporating emotions and thought, albeit as behaviors, into the behavior equation. Skinner believed that behavior is emitted in response to reinforcements or punishments (i.e., operant conditioning). Missing from operant conditioning is the concept that human beings learn in a cumulative manner. If followed strictly, operant conditioning would

have individuals acting or reacting only in response to stimuli. This type of behaviorism works on a basic level and assumes that people are not applying past experiences to new interactions. Operant conditioning is used by today's Board-Certified Behavioral Analysts (BCBAs) primarily in working with individuals on the Autism spectrum. Many school districts employ BCBAs to change students' negative behaviors in the school setting. Unfortunately, to show improvement, the prescribed amount of this type of intervention begins at 20 hours per week of intensive application and often many BCBAs working in the medical field will spend up to 40 hours per week providing direct services to children in order to shape their behaviors. This amount of time is not supportable in the educational setting and the resulting less intensive intervention afforded to schools may not be as effective as what can be done through the medical model.

Teleological Behaviorism (TB) is another branch of behaviorism. If classical behaviorism can be viewed as focusing on the short-term reaction of a stimuli (e.g., removing one's hand from a hot stove), then TB can be described as focusing on the long-term view of behavior. The concept behind the long-term view is that the behavior one engages now has an outcome that is desired in the future. TB is the brainchild of Howard Rachlin, an Emeritus Research Professor in the Department of Psychology at Stony Brook University and founder of Behavioral Economics. He focused his research on patterns of choice over time and how those patterns affect self-control. Teachers who would espouse this method of behaviorism would expect that students could exhibit a level of self-control over their behavior in order to gain something in future. An example would be attending to the rules in order to be considered a "good" student in the future. This theory assumes a level of internal motivation that may not exist in many of our students today. It also expects that delayed gratification is a skill that students progressively develop, which is not always the case.

A third type of behaviorism is Psychological Behaviorism (PB). The premise behind PB is that, in general, human behaviors are learned. With this basic assumption, it is believed that psychology can be explained through observable behaviors. PB espouses that people's early repertoires are a foundation for more complex repertoires. In this way, personality is developed through a cumulative learning process. In their 2001 article, Riedel, Heiby, and Kopetskie indicated basic behavioral repertoires "are a result of an individual's learning history and organic conditions" (p. 510). In other words, not everyone will react in the same way to the same stimulus. This type of behaviorism suggests that students would apply past learning to gain new skills. PB adds emotions to the reinforcement system indicating that emotions are not merely behaviors themselves. Student reactions are part of their learning rather than a mere reaction to a basic stimulus. PB places a significant amount of consideration on the individual, therefore teachers who follow PB would not expect all students comply to school expectations for the same reasons. Because PB has a basis in learning from social interactions, there is also room in this theory for teaching about social interactions.

This study bases its theoretical framework upon PB. Foremost, that behaviors are learned throughout a person's lifetime. When certain behaviors result in expected and desired outcomes, one can expect those behaviors to continue. This does not, however, typically happen when the person is in isolation. A public school is one place that exemplifies social interaction and the responses to the myriad of stimuli that exist in this man-made construct. If, as PB indicates, that individuals learn through social interaction, could teachers' knowledge of SEL support them in their responses to students' challenging behaviors and the student, in turn, learn from this support?



## **Teachers' Response to Challenging Behaviors**

### **Reactive Techniques**

**De-escalation, restraint and seclusion.** Beyond universal classroom management techniques, there are alternatives for teachers when student behaviors have gone beyond typical development. In order of least invasive, these options are de-escalation techniques, physical restraint, and seclusion. In their 2013 book, Peterson, Ryan, and Rozalski stated they were “startled by the use and abuse” (p. v) of physical restraints used in schools. They indicated that they were further perplexed at this fact given that there is no data to show that physical restraints and seclusion have any therapeutic value to reducing challenging student behaviors.

**De-escalation.** Peterson, Ryan, and Rozalski (2013) stated,  
Often we think of [students' challenging behaviors] as random and unpredictable events;  
hence many teachers and administrators view the use of physical restraint procedures as an  
effective means of getting through such a behavioral crisis in the safest possible way.  
(p. 51)

There is more, however, to the observable behavior than meets the eye. We know that those observable behaviors occur within the context of a larger social situation.

Yang, Johnson, Bauer, Groer, and Salomon (2013) explained who the body reacts to the perception of unfair social interactions. The brain releases the stress hormone cortisol which triggers the body's “flight, fight, or freeze” system. According to the authors, this self-preservation response exists not only for physical protection, but also for social reasons. The authors stated, “one way of preserving the social self is via displays of aggression toward the source of social-evaluative threats” (p. 312). They reference past research that suggests cortisol increases risk-taking while decreasing sensitivity to punishment. They indicated that “any

intervention that mitigates the physiological consequences of unfairness would also lessen the likelihood of deviant behavior” (p. 317).

The Crisis Prevention Institute® and Ukeru® are examples of two commercial programs that were developed for schools to manage difficult behaviors. These programs emphasize the importance of responding to students’ challenging behaviors in non-physical and therapeutic ways. If students’ challenging behaviors can be mediated by teachers early in the event, there is a likelihood of the student returning to a calm state. The effectiveness of de-escalation, therefore, resides in teachers’ understanding of the type of response to use and the timing of the response. Lane (n.d.) identifies the stages of a student’s acting out cycle as: calm, trigger, agitation, acceleration, peak, de-escalation, and recovery. According to Lane, “in general, teachers haven’t been taught that behavior problems or concerns actually happen much, much earlier within the cycle” (para 1). It may well be that teachers who have tried to de-escalate student behavior are reacting too late within the cycle.

**Restraint.** A more intrusive response to students’ challenging behavior is conducting a physical restraint. The Children’s Health Act of 2000 addressed the rights of individuals in nonmedical public or private facilities. This act defines restraints as, “a personal restriction that immobilizes or reduces the ability of an individual to move his or her arms, legs, or head freely” (Part I, §595, (d)) and that “the restraints or seclusion are imposed only in emergency circumstances and only to ensure the immediate physical safety of the resident, a staff member, or others” (Part I, §595, b). To be sure, the utilization of a restraint would mean that the student has reached the peak phase of the acting-out phases. At this point, de-escalation strategies are no longer useful and may even trigger an increase in the type or intensity of the challenging behavior.

There are also indications that use of restraints can have significant negative mental health impacts on students (Amos, P. A., 2004; Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders, 2009, July). Peterson, Ryan, and Rozalski (2013) reported several concerns about the use of physical restraints. These concerns range from concern for physical and emotional effects on the student being restrained and the individuals conducting the restraint, as well as the data that show a disproportionate and repetitive use of restraints in reaction to challenging behaviors. In December 2016, The Office of Civil Rights (2016, December) published a fact sheet about the use of student restraints and seclusion for student with disabilities. According to this report, “during the 2013-14 school year, students with disabilities were subjected to mechanical and physical restraint and seclusion at rates that far exceeded those of other students” (para 2). The authors of a report provided by the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (2009) stated, “while most professionals view restraint as an emergency procedure, little is known about its intended purpose or outcomes when it is employed, let alone whether it achieves that purpose or is effective in achieving the desired outcomes” (p. 7). Although physically restraining students is used by schools across the nation, it is not a response that creates a caring and safe learning environment.

**Seclusion.** Peterson, Ryan, and Rozalski (2013) defined seclusion as “the involuntary confinement of a student alone in a room or area from which the student is physically prevented from leaving” (p. 3). They state that there have been reports of significant physical harm and student death that have occurred as a result of seclusion. Children who are left unattended have come into contact with items such as electrical conduits and glass that has led to physical harm. The authors have also reported the disheartening truth that some students have committed suicide while in seclusion. While schools that use seclusion are doing so to protect others from possible significant injury, it cannot be disregarded that this method can have dire consequences for the escalated student. Peterson, Ryan and Rozalski included a discussion about the ethics of

professionals. Specifically referring to the teaching profession, the authors stated there are many ethical concerns that arise from the use of restraint and seclusion, among them are: possible physical harm to students, removal from access to education, and failure of programming. This statement places the onus of managing behaviors squarely on teachers' shoulders.

### **Proactive Techniques**

Although classroom management techniques are a necessary part of teachers' practice, it has been a more recent advent to use classroom strategies in a framework of positive behavior interventions and supports. According to North Dakota Multi-Tiered System of Support (NDMSS) (2018), Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is a framework to provide all students with the best opportunities to succeed academically, socially, emotionally, and behaviorally in school (para. 1). Using the framework of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) schools can effectively provide a level of MTSS for every students' behavioral needs. The foundational concept behind PBIS is to provide teachers with strategies to prevent and replace students' challenging behaviors (Peterson et al., 2013). In order to meet the requirements of being a PBIS implementing school, teachers and administrators must use evidence-based techniques that are shown to produce positive impacts in school settings. Peterson, Ryan, and Rozalski mentioned a few techniques that can be used to foster positive interactions with students. Among the strategies are classroom management (e.g. listening and responding to students and careful planning of activities), A-B-C Analysis, Functional Behavioral Assessments and Behavior Intervention Plans, social skills instruction, and SEL.

**Classroom management.** Public school teachers are expected to create positive learning environments in which all students can succeed. The many suggestions for teachers to accomplish this include physical arrangement of the classroom to required accommodations and modifications

for students who are in special education. Included in the classroom environment is teacher-student interactions. Some of the techniques used by teachers are not based in research. O'Grady (2011) iterated an all-too common theme for beginning teachers,

When the pre-service teachers are asked to describe the non-compliant behavior observed in the practicum classrooms they respond: 'irritating,' 'annoying,' 'disruptive.' When asked how to best intervene, the results are even more troubling: "...my supervising teacher is right, you better not smile until Christmas." "...you have to be like that –I mean - if you want them to do what they are supposed to. (p. 1)

O'Grady continued that teachers need more than superficial and short-lived strategies if they want to maximize the time they spend with their students. Ciuladiene and Kairine (2017) researched, from the student point of view, the methods teachers used to resolve teacher-student conflict. In their article, the authors reported "although there is a great concern about the way a teacher manages students' behaviour, there is very little relevant data concerning teacher-student conflict" (p. 107). The researchers labeled the types of conflict resolution as integrating, forcing, avoiding, and accommodating. They listed the following corresponding teachers' actions for each of the categories: "apologises, argues, no comment, and complies" (p. 113). The authors suggested that integration (i.e., both parties apologizing) would be the preferred method of conflict resolution as it requires the parties to acknowledge the situation to move past it. Spilt, Koomen, and Thijs (2011) used a theoretical model based on interpersonal relationships in their study to examine teacher well-being in relationship to teacher-student interactions. The authors' model indicated that teachers' response to students' challenging behaviors is based on the teachers' mental representations of their relationship with the student which in turn is a product of the teachers' perception of the student's behaviors. The perceptions of behavior and representation of the teacher-student relationship affects teacher emotions which then affects the interaction. This study

seeks to determine if teachers' knowledge of SEL impacts their perception of students' behaviors that would in turn allow for a positive teacher-student interaction. The National Education Association (NEA), with its three million members, makes up the largest professional employee-based organization. In the NEA publication *neaToday*, Foley (n.d.) offered six classroom management tips to teachers. Among the tips are taking charge of the class, focus on disruptive students, and establish consequences for misbehavior. Regarding disruptive students, it is suggested that teachers show disapproval through non-verbal communication and by addressing the student by name which "brings almost anyone out of his or her reverie" (para. 4). Foley continued to provide methods for establishing consequences that included writing the student's name on the board and having the student stay afterschool. The author indicated that teacher follow-through is vital to students taking teachers seriously. Clearly these tips do not consider the teacher-student relationship. It is disconcerting that teachers have access to superficial tips and suggestions without having to understand the critical nature of student-teacher interaction. Furthermore, do teachers know the most effective strategies to create a positive relationship, and does understanding SEL support teachers' acquisition of a positive relationship?

**A-B-C analysis.** A-B-C analysis considers the antecedent to and consequence of behaviors. Its roots are in applied behavior analysis which is part of the behavioral sciences. Those who use A-B-C analysis believe that manipulation of antecedents or consequences will result in a change in the behavior (Peterson, Ryan, and Rozalski, 2013). Using A-B-C analysis is more complex than one might think. To effectively use this model, it is critical that intensive observations of students are conducted in the classroom environment and that personal assumptions about behavior occurs are not accepted without scrutiny. Specific interventions plans need to be developed and followed with fidelity so that inadvertent reinforcement of a negative behavior does not occur. Use of this type of behavior modification requires intensive training.

**Functional behavioral assessment and behavior intervention plans.** In their 2017 article, Zoder-Martell, Dieringer, and Dufrene stated that functional behavioral assessments (FBAs) are a “cornerstone of ABA practice” (p. 329). As its name implies, the assessment is used to determine the function, or purpose, of behavior. According to Scott and Cooper (2017), “function matters, an FBA requires repeated observations of behavior, and the only purpose of an FBA is to develop an effective intervention” (p. 101). The authors also indicated that, “at its core, an FBA is a process of assessment to determine whether there is a relationship between a person’s behavior and the environment and, if so, to describe the nature of that relationship. FBAs are more intensive examinations of behavior than A-B-C in that they explore the purpose of the behavior, which A-B-C does not include.

Because FBAs require repeated observation of the behavior, it is unlikely that classroom teachers can effectively assess this on their own in real-time. There invariably would need to be an outside person following the student throughout various settings in the school to have an accurate understanding of the student’s behaviors. The intensity of the FBA means that it will not be used to assess behaviors for most students, but rather for those whose behaviors require specific interventions. As stated earlier, the only reason to conduct an FBA is so that an intervention can be designed to reduce or eliminate the challenging behavior. Scott and Cooper (2017) stated, “using the FBA process should result in instructional change on the part of the teacher” (p. 103). It is unlikely that the intervention created as part of the Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) would be as organic and easily applied as basic classroom management techniques. BIPs are often prescriptive and additional training is needed for teachers in order to effectively utilize the plan.

**Social skills instruction.** Social skills instruction is a direct intervention whereby students are directly taught self-regulation skills and replacement behaviors. According to Robinson-Ervin, Cartledge, Musti-Rao, Gibson Jr., and Keyes (2016), “social skill instruction is typically based on a social modeling paradigm where the desired behavior is demonstrated and students are provided multiple opportunities to practice the behavior and receive specific, immediate feedback and reinforcement for their performance” (p. 210). Given that the students require multiple opportunities to practice the behavior and receive specific and immediate feedback, this method of reducing challenging behaviors is not one that would typically be implemented within the general education classroom. It is also important to select instruction that matches student needs. There are some programs developed to teach students to think about social interactions while other programs teach students how to recognize their emotions and apply reactive strategies to increase self-management. Examples of such programs are Social Thinking® and Zones of Regulation® respectively.

### **Social Emotional Learning**

One way to affect change in students’ challenging behaviors is to create an environment that produces opportunities for students to learn expected behaviors in various situations. Teachers with high self-efficacy believe they can construct an environment that is conducive to optimal learning. Perceived self-efficacy, as proposed by Albert Bandura, is “a primary determinant of emotional and motivational conditions and behavioral change, a person’s subjective comprehension of their capacity for performance in a chosen environment or capacity to achieve favored outcomes” (Pam, 2013, April 7, 2013). This supports Bridgeland, Bruce and Hariharan’s (2014) claim that SEL can aid in teachers’ social emotional development providing them means to create an environment that would lead to changes in student behaviors.



Furthering this assertion, leaders of CASEL, Weissberg and Cascarino (2013), stated

Social and emotional learning — or SEL — involves acquiring and effectively applying the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (p. 10)

Zakrzewski (2015) stated that learning the skills within SEL will in turn create positive responses in emotionally difficult situations leading to a cycle of positive interactions. Students in P-12 are the focus of most research articles about SEL, however, SEL skills are needed by both children and adults to successfully navigate our world today. It is imperative that people learn to understand their own emotions, learn how to cope within the context of those emotions, and apply that understanding in social interactions.

Teachers' ability to maintain classroom management is paramount to assuring a positive learning environment. Teachers, as role models, demonstrate to students that they are in control of the environment. Teachers who rely heavily on principals to manage student behaviors risk creating a belief among their students that they do not have control of the classroom. This could compromise the perceived safety of classrooms by intensifying rather than diminishing emotional responses. When faced with students' challenging behaviors, rather than those that are merely disruptive, teachers might feel there is no alternative than to turn to the principal for harsher disciplinary actions. Would teachers perceive increased ability to respond in a positive manner to students' challenging behaviors if they had greater knowledge of SEL?

### **Self-Efficacy**

Bandura's social-cognitive framework, first published in 1977, stated that individuals have the ability to control their reactions. Self-efficacy is the component of the social-cognitive

framework that states if a person believes in his ability to achieve, he is more likely to act on that belief than if he does not believe he can achieve it. At first glance, this does not sound like a statement that should be questioned, however, there are paradigms that would not require belief in oneself as a necessary component to success (e.g., fate or luck).

Increased self-efficacy requires acquiring skills through intentional planning and action by teachers. According to Tschannen, Woolfolk, and Hoy (1998), "Teacher efficacy has been defined as the extent to which the teacher believes he or she has the capacity to affect student performance" (p. 202). The authors indicated that self-efficacy would drive the amount of effort an individual will put toward a situation, the length of time the person will exert the effort and their persistence to try to affect change with multiple efforts. Self-efficacy is also indicative of the resiliency an individual has and the stress that person experiences in a given situation. Teachers' self-efficacy includes their perception of their ability to affect outcomes of student academics and behaviors. Because of this, teachers' levels of self-efficacy influence the environment of the classroom due to its direct impact on how teachers provide for classroom management. Studies have shown that teachers who have a higher level of self-efficacy respond more effectively to students' challenging behaviors, and students who believe their teachers are effective at managing behavior will, in turn, believe they can better manage their own behavior (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gerino & Pastorelli, 2003; Gibbs & Powell, 2012) thus emphasizing the complexity of classroom management. Tschannen, Woolfolk and Hoy (1998) stated that researchers agree that self-efficacy is situational, that is, it is dependent upon the task at hand. While a particular teacher may feel a high level of self-efficacy in teaching math, that same teacher might not have the same level of self-efficacy regarding classroom management.

Klassen and Tze (2014) stated that most attempts to research teacher self-efficacy have used teacher characteristics (e.g., level of education and grade point average) and that the results of those studies were varied. They also indicated that a stronger link exists between teacher motivation and student outcomes than the effects of teacher personality and student outcomes. Motivation is a factor that can be found in the framework of self-efficacy. Because the results have been so varied, the authors stated there is a need for more research in the area of self-efficacy. Klassen and Tze (2014), in agreement with Tschannen, Woolfolk and Hoy (1998), confirmed that self-efficacy is not immune to change and that the context of events are important to perceived self-efficacy.

### **Intersection of Teachers' Responses, SEL, and Self-Efficacy**

A successful classroom is characterized by many variables. Teacher-student interaction is of particular importance as it is a constant variable that at its core depends upon the behaviors (i.e., actions and reactions) of teachers and students. According to PB, behaviors are learned through practice with individuals continuing to change behavioral responses throughout a lifetime. Teachers' reactions to behaviors are often based on their perception of the reason for student behaviors, but teachers may not have sufficient understanding of those reasons. According to CASEL, SEL is 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 (What is SEL, n.d.). If teachers who have a greater knowledge of SEL and self-efficacy respond to students' challenging behaviors using techniques that allow for positive outcomes for students, districts may choose to provide structured professional development that increases teachers' knowledge of SEL and supports them to continually build self-efficacy.

## **Statement of the Problem**

This study hypothesizes that teachers' knowledge of SEL and their perceived level of self-efficacy are correlated to their responses to students' challenging behaviors. Secondly, the study seeks to understand if certain teacher characteristics (i.e., year of experience and level of education) are also correlated to their response to students' challenging behaviors in relation to their knowledge of SEL and perceived self-efficacy. If there are correlations among these variables, the outcome may aid districts in determining types of professional development to provide that would increase teachers' ability to respond effectively to students' challenging behaviors.

Although teachers are not the only variable that impact student behavior, they are a key variable over which districts have some control to affect a change. As stated by Morrison (2012), "Observations in the past may enable them [positivists] to predict what will happen in the future, given similar circumstances and significant associations between variables" (p. 18). It stands to reason that if a variable is altered, it could change the course of events. Teachers are altered when they increase their teaching skills. Teachers need not only increase their ability to teach academics, they must also increase their ability to manage students' challenging behaviors.

The effects of students' challenging behaviors increasingly publicized and call districts to act. Take for instance a recent report in the Fargo Forum (2019) which included the story of a paraprofessional who sought medical attention due to the effects of student aggression. Narratives gathered from those close to the event indicated that the student was provided with positive behavioral supports prior to the escalation. In this case, educators used the tools they had in hand to effect change in the student's behavior, however the tools were not effective.

The article included information from a teacher survey that showed 63% of the respondents indicated there were no set procedures in their classroom when incidents [of student aggression] occur and 76% stated there was no consistency in district procedures for when such behaviors occur (para 4). The question remains, do teachers who have greater knowledge of SEL and higher perceived self-efficacy respond to students' challenging behaviors in a manner that averts or minimizes the effects of those behaviors?

Districts should provide PD opportunities that meet teachers' needs not only to teach academics, but also to improve classroom management skills. Rather than assuming all teachers can respond to students' challenging behavior effectively, district and building administration should spend resources on teacher development that improves the ability of teachers to respond to behaviors in ways that promote a safe and healthy learning environment.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This research topic resulted from personal experience with students' challenging behaviors and an increased understanding of the extent to which these behaviors occurs in elementary schools. Fargo Public School District (FPSD) created a reporting procedure that details the specifics surrounding student's challenging behaviors. Some of the effects of students' challenging behaviors (physical or verbal) that are noted in these reports are lost instructional time, physical and emotional injury, and requests to have students removed from the classroom. In the elementary setting, teachers and students spend a great deal of time together. Teachers are expected to maintain relationships with students that lead to positive developmental and academic outcomes. The teacher-student relationship can become strained when teachers are often dealing with student behaviors. Unfortunately, teachers who have experienced students' challenging behaviors may not only suffer from physical effects, but also

experience emotional harm which may lead to a loss of belief in their professional effectiveness. Given that elementary classroom teachers are the primary adult with students for the majority of the day, a decrease in their belief about their effectiveness as a teacher can impact several students daily.

If there are specific teacher characteristics that correlate with teachers' responses to students' challenging behavior, perhaps districts can design intensive and targeted PD to aid teachers in effectively minimizing negative behaviors and increasing positive student outcomes. These specific teacher characteristics include their knowledge of SEL, and their perceived level of self-efficacy. In the spirit of districts offering PD experiences that are tailored to teacher need, the study also examines whether years of teaching experience and teachers' level of education have an impact on the results.

### **Hypotheses and Research Questions Hypotheses**

#### **Null Hypothesis**

Knowledge of SEL and perceived self-efficacy are not correlated to teachers' responses to students' challenging behaviors.

#### **Alternative Hypothesis**

Knowledge of SEL and perceived self-efficacy are correlated to teachers' responses to students' challenging behaviors

#### **Research Question 1**

What is the level of correlation among teachers' knowledge of SEL, perceived level of self-efficacy and response to students' challenging behavior?

### **Secondary Research Question 2**

How does teachers' level of education impact the correlation among teachers' knowledge of SEL, perceived level self-efficacy and response to students' challenging behaviors?

### **Secondary Research Question 3**

How does teachers' years of experience impact the correlation among teachers' knowledge of SEL, perceived self-efficacy and their response to students' challenging behaviors?

## **Definition of Variables**

### **Social Emotional Learning**

Constitutive Definition: understanding human development of the ability to interact with others in an emotionally healthy way. According to CASEL, it is “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (What is SEL?, n.d.).

Operational Definition: the amount and the type of SEL training to which teachers have been exposed. Teachers will specify in which of the five SEL competency area they have been trained (e.g., social awareness, relationship skills) and how the training was provided (i.e., organization-sponsored, district-sponsored, or self-taught).

## **Self-Efficacy**

Constitutive Definition: “a primary determinant of emotional and motivational conditions and behavioral change, a person’s subjective comprehension of their capacity for performance in a chosen environment or capacity to achieve favored outcomes” (Pam, 2013, April 7).

Operational Definition: It is the extent to which teachers feel they use effective classroom management strategies, their ability to create engaging lessons, and their use of effective instructional strategies.

## **Teacher Response to Students’ Challenging Behaviors**

Constitutive Definition: It is the way in which teachers respond to student behavior in order to resume classroom instructions. Although teachers may have proactive techniques for managing student behaviors, there are times when they must resort to reactive techniques. The reactive techniques addressed in this study consist of de-escalation, applying physical restraints, and removal of student from classroom.

Operational Definition: Teachers perceived frequency of their ability to de-escalate students’ challenging behaviors (i.e., anti-social behavior, physical aggression, verbal aggression, and disrespectful behavior), the frequency of which they sought physical restraints for students, and the frequency of which they sought to have students removed from their classroom.

## **Significance of the Study**

Locally there has been a surge in reported incidences of students’ challenging behaviors. Within the second half of the 2018-19 school year, a local newspaper featured 10 columns on the rising concerns of student behaviors. There have been several letters to the editor that reflect the



emotional toll that this issue is taking on school personnel, parents, families, and the community. In previous years, the issues surrounding students' challenging behaviors were uncommon and not considered information that was meant for public consumption. Today, teachers are speaking out about the negative impact that students' challenging behaviors have on their ability to maintain a safe and effective learning environment.

Teachers cannot solve this issue alone. Solutions for this issue need to come from many stakeholders who can provide input for effective solutions. By studying this issue from the teachers' perspective, we can begin to look for solutions that school leaders can enact to effect positive change for teachers and students. If leadership can better understand teachers' perception of their ability to do their job well in spite of students' challenging behaviors, it could lead to more informed conversations with parents and community stakeholders about effective SEL training and trainings that build teachers' perception of self-efficacy. Building teachers' capacity would provide a holistic solution as opposed to purchasing programs without attempting to understand the important role that teacher characteristics have on student outcomes.

America relies on public education to support academic and social development of the majority of its children and students' challenging behaviors are negatively impacting that growth. If students do not complete their education with the skillset to create and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, our nation will not be able to compete in the global market. If teachers have the perception that they cannot meet the expectations of their job, they may leave the profession. Haydon, Leko, and Stevens (2018) indicated that stress is a major reason why teachers leave the profession and that "stress and frustration in response to managing chronic challenging behaviors in the classroom manifests in teachers as low self-efficacy and low job satisfaction" (p. 99). Other studies show that teachers cite stress as one of the major reasons for

considering leaving the profession (Haydon, Leko & Stevens, 2018; Mulvahill, 2019). With the current teacher shortage, districts are looking to find ways of retaining teachers. Perhaps equipping teachers with SEL knowledge and providing resources that increase their perceived self-efficacy is a way in which they could do so.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study measured teacher-reported knowledge of SEL and perception of self-efficacy via a Likert-type scale. To ascertain teachers' knowledge of SEL, they were asked to rate their level of SEL training from no training to a great deal of training in five areas of SEL (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, social awareness, and responsible decision-making). The survey did not gather intensive information about the content of the training, nor did it ask about the qualifications of the trainer. Teachers rated their perceived self-efficacy by responding to three questions that addressed classroom management, engaging lessons, and effective instructional techniques. The questions did not probe for specific strategies, only whether they were in place or not. These three areas of self-efficacy are just a small measure of what self-efficacy could include.

This study used convenience sampling of elementary general-education teachers from the Fargo Public School District (FPSD) and Moorhead Public School District (MPSD). It is not known how much, if any, professional development in SEL has been provided to the teachers in this district. It is also unknown if every teacher would have been faced with students' challenging behaviors. The study did not require teachers to indicate which grade they taught.

## **Conclusion**

This region has begun to experience the impact that students' challenging behaviors are having on teachers' ability to do their jobs effectively. The rise in such behaviors have left teachers asking for new policies and language added to their contracts that would ensure physical and emotional safety. It is a topic that has stalled contract negotiations for FPSD and has led to teachers stating they are unhappy in their career. The issue has begun to create a rift among teachers, parents, families, and school leadership.

This study examined if teachers' knowledge of SEL and self-efficacy are correlated to their responses to students' challenging behaviors. Results of this study may impact the type of professional development that districts provide to increase teachers' ability to respond to students' challenging behaviors thus creating a safe and effective learning environment for students and teachers.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

This literature review will provide practitioners with an understanding about the different ways in which teachers respond to student behaviors to maintain order in the classroom or resolve students' challenging behaviors. It highlights the types and prevalence of student behaviors before explaining in more detail about students' challenging behaviors. It will examine student and teacher characteristics and provide information about SEL and teacher self-efficacy. Because this study seeks to learn about the correlation among teachers' knowledge of SEL, their perceived self-efficacy and teachers' response to students' challenging behaviors, information from studies conducted to examine student behaviors directed toward teachers is also reviewed.

#### Review

Yee, Smit, and Johnston (2019) indicated that classroom management is a universal teacher tool to handle student behaviors. Typically, these techniques are used to maintain a state of relative calm in the classroom as to be conducive to learning. According to the authors, the most common types of behaviors that teachers see are "inattentive, hyperactive, and impulsive behaviors characteristic of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder" (p. 928). In their 2018 article, Gage, Scott, Hirn and MacSuga-Gage examined classroom management practices and their relationship to student behaviors. The authors included the term *disruptive behaviors* for those student behaviors that impeded students' ability to focus on the activities designed by

teachers. Alter, Walker and Landers (2013) reported that it is difficult to state with certainty which student behaviors are most prevalent because data from previous studies identified “fighting, defiance, disruption, and harassment” as the most challenging behaviors seen in elementary students (p. 52). The definitions of such behaviors are varied and do not include developmentally appropriate behaviors that can still challenge teachers during lessons.

There is a myriad of classroom management techniques that are available to teachers. To be sure, the evolution of these techniques is representative of the changes in a typical classroom. Evertson and Harrison (1992) stated “for the last 15 years Gallup polls have reported the public’s belief that the answer to many school problems is improved discipline” (p. 74). The authors cited classroom management techniques that were not directed toward specific students rather to the classroom as a whole. Example of group management techniques provided by the authors are use of instructional pacing (to include smoothness and momentum), keeping students attentive to each other and the lesson, and providing engaging lessons. At the time of their article, Evertson and Harrison (1992) asserted that teacher trainings for classroom management had little to do with the positive behavioral approaches. Lewis, Roache, and Romi (2011) related that teachers who used management techniques that included teaching the student about the impact of their behaviors were more effective than punishment techniques which tended to exacerbate the behaviors.

According to Ratcliff, Jones, Costner, Savage-Davis, and Hunt (2010), “management problems can affect the amount and quality of interactions in the classroom. It has been reported that teachers are less apt to have positive interactions with behaviorally challenging students and even avoid contact with these students as stress levels increase” (p. 307). Sprick (2009) stated,

“one disruptive student can negatively affect the learning of all the other students in the class” (p.

1). It is not only teachers whose interactions are affected by student behaviors, but student-to-student interactions as well. Today it is expected that students are learning 21<sup>st</sup> century skills which require that students communicate and collaborate with one another. Given the importance of students’ ability to collaborate it is easy to imagine effects that students’ challenging behavior can have on the learning outcomes in a typical classroom. Classroom management allows teachers to initiate and maintain structure over their classrooms which provides for an environment that is conducive to learning. Although these techniques are effective for the majority of student behaviors, they might not work for those student behaviors that are deemed more challenging by virtue of type (e.g., kicking, biting, profane language) and the persistence of the student exhibiting the behavior. Today’s teachers must be equipped to manage students’ challenging behaviors while improving learner outcomes in an environment that requires collaboration among students.

### **Response to Challenging Behaviors**

Much of the research to determine how teachers react to challenging behaviors is, rightly so, based on preventative measures. Fallon, Collier-Meck, and Kurtz (2019) stated “regardless of the specific definition [of high-risk school] applied, results from research have linked risk factors, particularly poverty, to low academic performance, higher rates of problem behavior, increased likelihood of school dropout, and challenges with social development” (p.3). The researchers discussed that,

Comprehensive classroom management may promote change in both teacher behavior (e.g., rates of praise) and student behavior (e.g., academic engagement). Results also

indicate that a booster training might assist teachers who are struggling to implement comprehensive classroom management. (p. 13)

In this study, the researchers were only able to recruit three teachers from a high-risk school to participate in the study, and of those three participants, only one conducted the behavioral intervention with fidelity. One might discern from this that it is difficult for teachers to maintain consistency in interventions across time. Given that many of the positive interventions for students' challenging behaviors require intensive teacher training and strict use of the program, there are high demands placed on teachers for effective use of the interventions.

Teachers responses to students' challenging behaviors are varied because, in general, people react differently to stressful situations. For example, firefighters are equipped to run into a burning building rather than away from it. In describing responses that teachers have to challenging student behaviors, Axup and Gersch (2008) stated, "constant conflicts can lead to both students' and teachers' emotional arousal, resulting in a 'combative struggle for verbal and emotional supremacy'" (p. 145). The varying levels of arousal and conflict can impact response to the situation. If teachers are faced with constant conflict and are unable to effectively use management strategies to initiate and continue classroom instruction without challenging disruptions, it stands to reason they would benefit in learning how to decrease emotions in stressful situations.

Nungesser and Watkins (2005) surveyed preschool teachers who worked in classrooms that served students with and without disabilities about their responses to students' challenging behaviors. The authors stated,

When asked to elaborate on intervention strategies and techniques they used within their preschool classroom to address challenging behaviors, teachers frequently responded

with reactive types of intervention approaches (e.g., time out, restraint, removal of privileges) as opposed to more proactive or prevention-oriented approaches. (p. 143)

Considering that students' challenging behaviors begin as young as preschool, how teachers choose to react to those behaviors can set the pattern for how students respond to teachers early on in their educational journey.

Some of the research about managing challenging student behaviors focused on students with disabilities (Evaldsson, and Melander, 2017; Lohmann and Barbara, 2006). Lohmann and Barbara (2006) conducted a qualitative study to learn about the behavioral supports that students with disabilities who exhibit challenging behaviors in the general education classroom needed. The authors reported that teachers in the study were "wanting to do what was best for their focus student, but at times, particularly in response to behavioral challenges, this even meant questioning inclusion" (p. 166). These teachers highlighted being flexible, looking for the positives of the student, understanding the student, and having expectations for classroom membership as ways in which they dealt with their frustrations that were due to the challenging behaviors. The impact that students' challenging behaviors has on teachers' perception of students with disabilities is sad and counter-productive to today's legal requirements to serve all students.

Evaldsson and Melander (2017) studied the effects of persistent student refusal to comply, specifically regarding instances of student anger, with the expected classroom rules in a special education classroom. The authors explored how this can impact teachers' reaction in terms of accountability and authority to manage student behavior. They indicated that most research in classroom management does not go beyond analyzing instructional activities such as turn-taking. The authors examined how negative affect and stance is produced in reproach-



response sequences. They found that when teachers verbally asserted that a student's behavior was a transgression, the behavior was likely to increase. The teacher-student exchanges that were examined in the study were lengthy before resolution of the conflict (p. 84). This type of interaction within a general education setting would halt the progress of the lesson while teachers place all attention on students exhibiting the behavior which can impact educational outcomes for all of the students in that classroom.

Espelage et al. (2013) indicated that teacher preparation programs are unlikely to focus on the issue of violence committed toward teachers. Learning techniques to deal with students' challenging behaviors would be training that teachers receive after having secured a teaching post. Teacher effectiveness at preventing and responding to student's challenging behaviors, therefore may be compromised until they have received on-the-job training on effective strategies to prevent challenging behaviors, and appropriate responses to these behaviors. Teachers, like other professionals, build skills on-the-job. When the issue is students' challenging behaviors, it is difficult to develop skills unless one is being directly exposed.

### **Types of Challenging Behaviors**

Violence in school is not a new phenomenon. Since 1984, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (MetLife) has surveyed American teachers about their classrooms. Their 1999 survey was the third survey that specifically sought information about violence in the classroom. In this study, Binns and Markow (1999) found that while teachers and students reported feeling safe at school, "one quarter of students have been the victim of a violent act that occurred in or around school" (p. 3). They also report that "one in six public school teachers report having been the victim of school violence" (p. 4). The study showed that there was an increase in teachers

reporting to be the victim of school violence with 90% indicating that a student was the aggressor. In a 2016 article, the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor noted, Students were the primary source of injury or illness in 92 percent (7,900 cases) of the 8,620 nonfatal violent events that educators experienced in 2014. The percentage of violent events involving students increased 23 percent since 2011 from 6,410 cases. (Sources of Violent Events section, para 3)

Mayer and Leone (1999) indicated that “school violence and disruption is a major concern of parents, students, educators, political leaders and others in the community” (p. 333). In their article, they posited about the effects of the school environment (e.g., physical environment, relationships between teachers and students, and type of student discipline), but did not examine the reasons why the violence was occurring. As Mayer and Leone continued to study violence in schools through the early 2000’s, they focused on student characteristics (e.g., poverty, family structure, and exposure to violence in the media), and incorporated solutions that are supported by behaviorism.

In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the topic of violent student behaviors directed toward teachers began to appear (e.g., Espelage, et al., 2013; Gregory et al., 2014; Wilson, Douglas, Lyon, 2011). Wilson, Douglas, and Lyon (2011) conducted their study to determine not only the prevalence of violence against teachers but also the consequences of the violent actions. They found that covert violence (e.g., insults, rude gestures and behaviors meant to intimidate) were more prevalent than overt violence (e.g., threat of physical violence, stalking, and sexual harassment). Their results paralleled previous studies’ findings that there is “a prevalence of violence within the school workplace” (p. 2365).

Mayer and Leone (2007) labeled school violence as acts ranging from being in fights at school to student's carrying weapons onto school grounds (p. 2). Wilson et al. (2011) stated that "Violence against teachers should be considered a salient and concerning problem" (p. 2354). They also cited the 2009 report by the National Center for Educational Statistics which indicated "7% of teachers reporting being threatened with injury by a student in the 2003-2004 school year and 3% reporting being physically attacked" (p. 2354).

The issue of violence toward teachers extends beyond physical harm that might be experienced. Teachers' fear of being harmed while doing their job has an impact on their desire to continue in their careers. Nicole Vettenburg (2002) stated, "Teachers feeling unsafe in front of their classes tend to show a reduced commitment to their educational task. This can have a negative effect on pupils' performance and may cause behavior problems." The cyclical nature and negative impact of student aggression toward teachers has multi-fold consequences. Student learning is impacted and "teachers have cited an unsafe work environment as a reason for leaving the profession completely" (Ingersoll as cited in Wilson et al, 2011). A pertinent question arises at this juncture. What if teachers felt they could positively impact students' challenging behaviors? Would that end the negative cycle of behaviors impacting teachers to the point of leaving the profession? Are there specific tools that teachers need to impact student behaviors, and does it matter how long teachers have been on the job or their level of education to be able to effectively use those tools?

Gregory, Cornell, and Fan (2012) examined the impact that school culture has on minimizing student aggression. They found a "substantial and consistent relationship between school climate and faculty safety across a diverse and nearly complete statewide sample of high schools" (p. 414). This study magnified the role that support for teachers has in their overall

feelings of safety. While there is little argument that positive school climate will have a direct impact on feeling of security, the inherent weakness of this position is that teachers are not necessarily in control of the consistency of the climate. This is often in the hands of school administration.

Triplett, Payne, Collins, and Tapp (2016) reviewed several sources to define the construct of “violence.” They asserted that there are three factors that contribute to the perception of violence: “characterization of the act and the actors involved, an individual’s socialization into, and experience with violence, as well as individual characteristics” (p. 336). With respect to the characteristics of the perpetrator, it is their intent and harm that aid in the definition of violence. For example, if the perpetrator meant to commit the act for reasons of good, the act itself might not be deemed violent. If, however, the act was intended to cause harm, then it would rise to the level of being violent. The authors go on to state that those that have been exposed to acts that are meant to cause harm with increased frequency will begin to normalize that behavior and no longer view it as violent. Although not all students’ challenging behaviors are violent, many times, it is perceived that the student intends to harm others and less thought goes into why the student exhibited the behavior.

Alvarez (2007) reported, “Although single instances of physical aggression, threatening and weapon possession, have reportedly decreased since the 1980s, the prevalence and of repeated aggressive behavior (i.e., more than one incident by the same person) has not” (p. 1113).

Although violence in schools has been a concern since the 1950’s, Ting, Sanders, and Smith (2002) called attention to the trend in teacher-direct violence perpetrated by students.

Half a century ago, teachers were concerned about students being late to class, chewing gum, and talking in class. Many of today's teachers report concerns about drugs and weapons in school; gangs; verbal, sexual and physical assaults; bullying; and robbery. (pp. 1006-1007)

In this study, which sought “the psychological impact of school violence on teachers” (p. 1008), the authors defined violence as “direct or indirect physical acts perpetrated by students” (p. 1009). Thomas, Bierman and Powers (2011) define student aggressive behaviors as “yells at others, fights, teases, breaks things, harms others” (p. 752). In the article by Espelage et al. (2013), the authors stated that “school violence takes on many forms and can include bullying, intimidation, gang activity, locker theft, weapon use, assault — just about anything that results in a victim” (p. 76). Espelage et al. (2013) stated that “Despite the fact that violence directed against teachers is a national crisis...it is rarely defined” (p. 76). Furlong and Morrison (2000) sought to clarify the history and definition of school violence. They wrote, “school violence is now conceptualized as a multifaceted construct that involves both criminal acts and aggression in schools, which inhibit development and learning, as well as harm the school's climate” (p. 71).

To be sure, the definition of school violence is broad. What can be taken from previous studies and articles on school violence is that it must be pervasive enough to have an effect on school climate. This assumes that a one-time act was significant enough in nature to cause concern among a school's staff, or there is a persistent nature to the act which causes school climate to erode.

## Types and Prevalence of Teacher-Directed Violence

Studies conducted to determine the type and prevalence of teacher-directed violence have found that 75-80% of violent student acts reported by teachers were non-physical, while 27-30% of violent student acts were physical (Wilson, Douglas, and Lyon, 2011; McMahon et al., 2014). Wei and collaborators (2013) conducted a survey of 4,731 Minnesota teachers “to identify educators’ potential risks for physical assault (PA) and nonphysical violence (NPV), based on hours exposed” (p. 73). The author-reported “The majority of respondents were female who were more likely to experience PA and NPV compared to male educators; however, other studies reported that males were more likely than female educators to experience violence” (p. 81). Results from studies conducted by McMahon et al. (2014) and Wilson et al. (2011) are in contrast with the findings of Wei (2013) in that these studies indicated more males than females experienced PA. However, all studies indicated some limitations due to response rates which affected the overall sample population.

Concerning gender differences of teachers involved in violent acts committed by students, the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor noted,

Using the median days away as a proxy for a measure of severity indicates that when male educators were hurt or injured during a violent event on the job, they sustained more severe injuries and thus required more days away from work. For example, in cases in which female educators required 3 median days away from work (4,140 cases) to recuperate because of hitting, kicking, beating, and shoving by students, male educators who experienced these same events (440 cases) required median of 8 days away from work (Distribution of Cases by Gender section, para. 2).

Although studies may differ as to the types and severity of violence committed toward male and female teachers, the evidence is clear that students are committing violent acts against teachers through a variety of methods and, at times, to the extent that medical aid is sought as a result.

### **Impact on Teachers**

Student aggression can have a significant impact on teachers. On the surface, it may seem that the job of teaching is like that of many other professions in that teachers learn a trade, fulfill the duties of the job, and continue to learn throughout their career. Shapiro (2010) indicated in her essay that when exploring teachers' negative emotions, anger is due primarily, in part, to student behaviors. "Central to this anger is a sense of powerlessness in accomplishing educational goals. This powerlessness, in turn, is tied in with a general anxiety about student achievement, the challenges of communication with various stakeholders, and ongoing self" (p. 617). From results of a qualitative study, Skåland (2016) reported, "teachers invest their 'selves' in their work, often so closely merging their sense of personal and professional identity that the school classroom becomes the main site for their self-esteem and fulfillment, and so too for their susceptibility" (p. 316). Skåland (2016) also cited the school-level variable of support from peers and superiors as being important components to the overall effect of violence on teachers' perception of self as a person and self as a teacher. Results found by Ting, Sanders, and Smith (2002) paralleled this concept when reporting that "Teachers affected by school violence have similar reactions to other victims of trauma, rape, assault, or natural disasters, but need additional coping mechanisms as they cannot avoid the situation or reminders of the situation easily" (p. 1008). Given that teachers cannot both do their job competently and avoid students, one can

easily see where a sense of self as a professional would be as profoundly affected as the sense of self as a person. Skåland (2016) indicated,

The themes of threatened, weakened and disrupted self-emerging from the study on Norwegian teachers signify varied outcomes of student-to-teacher violations. It is not possible to see from the incidents of violation that certain kinds of violation lead to certain kinds of reactions. (p. 316)

Management of student behaviors has always been a part of teaching. Teachers, however, are exposed to ever-increasing amounts and severity of violence. Espelage et al. (2013) stated “Surprising little research has been conducted on this growing problem despite the broad impact teacher victimization can have on schooling, recruitment, and retention of highly effective teachers and on student academic and behavioral outcomes” (p. 75).

Doumen, Verschueren, Buyse, Germeijs, and Luyckx (2008) researched the bidirectional relationship between kindergarteners’ aggressive behaviors and teacher-student conflict. Teachers completed questionnaires at the start of each trimester about students’ behaviors and teacher-child conflict. The results indicated that student aggression led to an increase in negative child-teacher interaction which in turn led to a further increase in students’ aggressive behaviors. This relationship is important to understand because it highlights that teachers are affected by student behavior. If teachers had more knowledge about methods to engage more effectively, perhaps the negative cycle would diminish. Research conducted by Boxer, Musher-Eizenman, Dubow, Danner, and Heretick (2006) found that “Most teachers reported inconsistent outcomes from policies and programs targeting aggressive behavior. Further, most teachers reported feeling unprepared to deal with student aggression” (p. 341). They also found



that “higher level of student aggression and aggression-supporting beliefs predicted higher level of teacher-perceived job interference” (p. 341).

It is possible that teachers who have experienced student aggression could become less effective, or even ineffective in their current setting. It is the duty of school and district leaders to provide teachers with an appropriate level of PD and supports to increase teachers’ capacity to respond effectively to student’s challenging behaviors. It is also clear that teachers’ reactions to students’ challenging behaviors have an impact on their perceptions to do their jobs and therefore on students’ outcomes. To make sure that this impact can remain positive despite students’ challenging behaviors, districts need to maximize their teachers’ understanding of their students’ social emotional development. Districts, however, do not have unlimited financial resources to implement every available method, but if responses to behavior are better understood, districts could possibly tailor PD to support effective teacher responses.

### **Student Characteristics**

Although this research is focused on teachers’ response to students’ challenging behavior, it is important to understand that student behavior can result from many student factors of which teachers are often unaware. According to the Child Mind Institute’s (n.d.) website, reasons for disruptive and aggressive behavior in children can manifest from anxiety, attention deficit disorder, learning disorders, and sensory processing problems. Thomas et al. (2008) also identified inattention as an early identifier for at-risk students developing behavioral problems in the school setting (p. 518)

The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (2015) indicated that violent behaviors can begin at a very young age. The article cited reasons such as exposure to abuse,

being a victim of abuse, stressful family socioeconomic factors, and genetic factors as risk indicators of children developing aggressive behaviors (para 1 and 3). There is no doubt that young children can be at risk for developing aggressive behaviors, and that the factors are most often something not within the child's control, nor are teachers always privy to this information. It is unfortunate that the aggressive actions of these hurting young children can have such a devastating impact on their ability to learn and teachers' ability to support a safe classroom environment.

## **Teacher Characteristics**

### **Teaching Experience**

Beginning a teaching career is daunting. A new teacher has studied for a minimum of four years to earn a teaching degree. Practical experience is limited to a few short weeks in an actual classroom. These moments are hardly representative of the vast nature of the job. Indeed, Zhukova (2018) noted, "the initial years on the job are generally characterized by novice teachers as the most challenging and intense in their career" (p. 100). The skillfulness of teaching is not one that is fully developed before entering into the classroom. As stated by Zhukova (2018),

These fundamental [teaching] skills and beliefs are developed gradually over time, influenced by teacher's increasing knowledge, personal and professional experience, personal maturity and inner growth. These skills and beliefs are also closely associated with teacher's adaptability capacities, and abilities to effectively cope with challenges and quickly adapt to complex dynamically changing open environments in school and beyond it. (p. 102)

Research has shown that novice teachers move through three stages in their career: survival and acceptance; student performance; and social and educational impact. The assumption is that these phases are linear, and novice teachers will not move from one stage until concerns at the previous stages are met (Zhukova, 2018). Novice teachers reported having feelings of inadequacy due to the stressful nature of the job and cited not realizing the difference between being in control of their own classroom versus having practiced in a controlled environment (Zhukova, 2018).

In their report for the U.S. Department of Education, Gray and Taie (2015, April) presented data that showed 17% of all teachers who began their career in the 2007-08 school year left teaching after the third year (p3). Clearly, the first few years of teaching are formidable and those that go on to teach longer have passed a critical juncture. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) reported that the teacher shortage is not due to fewer candidates graduating from universities, but that there is a “revolving door” created by teachers leaving within the first five years of their career. There are many factors that can influence teachers’ decision to leave the profession, however, in Caples and McNeese’s (2010) article this statement encapsulated the situation quite well, “We hire them, give them the worst schedules with very little meaningful support from administrators, and the culture of the school is if you ask for help, you are having trouble” (p. 427). Although teaching has begun the relatively new trend of providing mentoring and induction programs, the expectation of proving oneself as able to do the job or face the consequences of failure has not disappeared.

Admiraal, Veldman, Mainhard, and van Tartwijk (2019) stated that “relationships with students is one of the main sources of teachers’ job satisfaction throughout their career” (p. 337). Their study found that veteran teachers who reported they were satisfied with their job cited the

importance of their relationship with their students while those that were unsatisfied veteran teachers cited extrinsic factors to their current feelings about their job. Teachers who do not associate positively regarding their relationship with students, report feeling negative toward their job. According to Admiraal et al. (2019), self-efficacious teachers suffer less from stress and burnout” (p. 338).

The differences between veteran and novice teachers extend beyond how they determine job satisfaction. They also demonstrate differences in how they manage curriculum. In their article Burkhauser and Lesaux (2017) indicated that novice teachers “appreciate the support that curriculum materials can provide; however, they may be reluctant to adapt materials in substantive ways, even when student’ needs warrant it” (p. 293). They also stated that most experienced teachers “resisted using and learning from new materials...these teachers may have missed opportunities that the novice teachers were able to capitalize on” (p. 294).

Rockoff (2004) conducted a study about teachers’ fixed-effects and their impact on student achievement. This study did not consider environmental impacts that teachers face when providing instruction to students but did find that teachers with 10 years of experience had a greater impact on students’ achievement in vocabulary and reading comprehension. Rockoff found the effects of teaching experience on math to be the opposite, in that fewer years of teaching experience had more impact on student achievement.

It is known that the highest attrition rates for teachers is within the first few years of entering the career and within the last few years of the career but before retirement age. In their 2002 article, Tye and O’Brien stated, “The attrition of younger teachers naturally affects the... morale of those who stay. It has also been suggested that older teachers may be more prone to the accumulated effects of stress” (p. 9). According to research, the first three to five years

mark a critical stage in which teachers decide whether or not to remain in the profession (Gray & Taie, 2015; Tye & O'Brien, 2002). To analyze correlation for these variables, this study placed teachers into one of two categories, those with 1-6 years of teaching experience and those with 7-33 years of teaching experience. These groups were created based on the understanding that the early years of teaching are marked with an influx and outflow of teachers (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004) while maximizing the n-size of the novice group.

It is often said that teaching is both science and art. From this, one can surmise that as experience increases the ability to do the job more effectively also increases. There are many studies that examine teacher characteristics throughout their career (Burkhauser & Lesaux, 2017; Dicke, Elling, Schmeck, & Leutner, 2015; Hill, 2007). These studies paint a picture of novice teachers just getting by and veteran teachers as satisfied with relationships but unwilling to adapt to new needs. Teachers' feeling about themselves at various times in their career impact whether they feel able to address students' challenging behavior, their willingness to implement new strategies, and adjust curriculum to meet the needs of these students. All of these are factors in the culture and climate of a classroom and student learner outcomes.

### **Level of Education**

Fitchett (2018) stated "Researchers have consistently recognized teachers as the single most important within-school predictor of a student's future academic success" (p. 2). Research, however, has not been able to narrow down exactly what about individual teachers make them successful. One can imagine the infinite combinations of teacher characteristics and experiences that lead to success in the classroom. From types of experiences to years of experience, professional development opportunities, and higher-level degrees, no one variable can be pointed to as the key to success as a teacher. According to Hill (2007), "Most research finds no link

between teachers' graduate degrees and student learning unless the degree is in the teacher's primary teaching field" (p. 111).

Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2006) stated, "Nearly all observers of the education process, including scholars, school administrators, policymakers, and parents, point to teacher quality as the most significant institutional determinant of student achievement. Much less is known about how a teacher's quality is related to her credentials" (p. 655). Their study showed that "having a graduate degree is not predictive of higher achievement compared to having a teacher without a graduate degree" (p. 28). In her 2019 on-line article for the National Bureau of Economic Research, Gorman summarized studies about the impact of teachers' credentials. She stated,

Teachers who entered teaching with a master's degree, or who have earned it within five years of beginning to teacher, were as effective as teachers without a master's degree.

Teachers who earned a master's degree more than five years after they started teaching were less effective than those without master's degrees. (para. 2)

Although the studies conducted on the effectiveness of masters' level versus bachelors' level teachers show that teachers' credentials have little impact on student achievement, it may be a significant variable when examined from the standpoint of classroom management and teachers' ability to return a classroom back to normalcy after the occurrence of students' challenging behaviors.

### **Behavior Management Training**

At the onset of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), many researchers investigated what factors make teachers highly qualified. According to Huang and Moon (2009), "Identifying the

determinants of teacher quality in promoting student achievement, however, has been less clear and continues to be an important area of focus in educational research” (p. 210). While NCLB focused on students’ academic achievement, there were no mandates on what experience or education general education teachers must have in managing student behavior or teaching social emotional skills.

Alvarez (2007) found that “teachers’ response to aggressive behaviour in the classroom was impacted by their prior training in classroom behaviour management” (p. 1120). She also indicated that teachers’ responses to aggressive student behavior was a function of their confidence in being successful at interceding during such behaviors. The results of Alvarez’s study revealed that “advanced training in behaviour and/or emotional factors that impact classroom management may prove useful to general education teachers” (p. 1120).

With regard to the significance of disruptive behaviors in school Cochran, Gibbons, Spurgeon, and Cochran (n.d.) stated that “teachers were less comfortable with considering students’ need for control and power when making decisions about their reaction to child misbehavior” (p. 2). They also found that approximately half of their respondents indicated that they did not feel they had adequate preparation to work with students who exhibit disruptive behaviors. While most consideration for what makes teachers highly qualified is about their ability to teach academics, clearly it is equally important that teachers possess the ability to manage students’ challenging behaviors.

### **Teacher Self-Efficacy**

Because teachers are responsible for educating the youth of the world to prepare them for the future, they conduct their job under the microscope of society. Teachers will not always be

able to do this under the best of circumstances and their ability to manage in the face of problems rests on their self-efficacy (Alev and Bozbayindir, 2018). Hui, Hall, and Rahimi (2015) stated “teacher self-efficacy is best evaluated with respect to three underlying components: instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement” (p. 121). They iterated that “teachers with higher self-efficacy...persist longer when dealing with challenging students” (p. 121).

Vettenburg (2002) found that teachers do not feel they have the training to cope with student conflicts. Teachers blamed the need to keep with a pacing guide and students’ desires to slow down as one reason that student frustration arises (p. 43). Vettenburg quoted one of the study participants as saying,

I’m especially afraid of falling short in class, of losing my authority, not in the eyes of just one problem pupil but of the entire class. For instance, there’s this pupil who’s been taking drugs. The other pupils see this and know this, and I see this as well. But how am I to react? How do you react to a pupil who is crying? How do you intervene in a row among pupils? In such concrete cases, you realise that you’re a mere teacher, not an educator or psychologist. (p. 43-44)

According to Feng, Hodges, Waxman and Malatesha (2019), “Teacher self-efficacy is critical because it predicts teachers’ future behavior and impacts teacher turnover” (p. 80). They go on to state that never is a teachers’ self-efficacy higher than prior to the start of their first year of teaching. Although most first-year teachers would report a mid to high level of self-efficacy, this often falls after the first year. The authors reported that the level of self-efficacy rarely again rises to the first-year level (p. 80). Alvarez (2007) stated that “Student behavior and discipline problems (e.g., verbal disrespect, violence) are primary cited for teacher stress and burnout” (p.



1114). Zurlo and Pes (2015) did not report on teacher efficacy per se, however, they spoke to occupational stressors for teachers and indicated that among the top two teacher stressors was “interaction with challenging and problematic students” (p. 764). The authors indicated that left unidentified and therefore unmanaged, these teacher stressors could lead to teachers leaving the profession.

It is not easy to determine teachers’ perceived competence. According to Stranovská, Lalinská, & Boboňová, (2017), this is an “under-explored area” (p. 6). They indicated that some of the reasons for this is that the indicators are ill-defined, many of the tools used to assess this area are narrow in scope, and that they attempt to “quantify quality,” it classifies, but does not penetrate deeper to teacher’s individual characteristics and abilities and fails to capture the process of their changes” (p. 7). Indeed, Frey (2006) indicated that although time-consuming, developmental portfolios are best at showing growth over time. Because developmental portfolios are, in essence, a longitudinal study, and not standardized, they are less appealing for use in quantitative studies.

### **Social Emotional Learning**

Student mental health issues have become a prevalent topic of interest for communities in our region. Schools are an important subset of the community and are not immune to the emotional health needs of their students. Schools are referring students to community resources but often it is after the issue has manifested as behaviors in the classroom. Often students’ challenging behaviors have been present for some time before referrals for counseling are made, which delays building protective factors for students. SEL is a concept founded by members of CASEL in 1997. The then members of CASEL, along with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, published guidelines for educators in SEL. They defined SEL as a

process where people apply their knowledge and skills about emotions to maintain positive relationships.

It has been found that SEL can be effectively used within K-8 classrooms to decrease emotional stress and conduct disorders in children, and improve academic success (Payton et al., 2008). Not all teachers are enamored by the idea of incorporating SEL into the school day.

Payton et al. (2008) stated,

Although some educators argue against implementing this type of holistic programming because it takes valuable time away from core academic material, our findings suggest that SEL programming not only does not detract from academic performance but actually increases students' performance on standardized tests and grades. (p. 16)

Reports about teacher buy-in are scant. Indeed, in their 2019 review of a particular SEL program, the researchers indicated that out of nine elementary schools, only four teachers who were training in the program completed the research survey. Those that completed it perceived positive results, but also indicated that further training is needed, and guidance is still needed for student behavior issues (Dobia, 2019).

Poulou (2017) studied teacher and student perceptions of SEL in the preschool setting. She stated,

Teachers can teach children to relieve stress, manage anger and deal with social interactions, as well as foster a sense of safety and well-being in children. This assumes, however, that teachers are already socially and emotionally skilled, and also feel competent implementing SEL with their students. Nevertheless, there has been little research into teachers' perceptions of SEL skills. (p.428)

In a parallel comment, Collier, Shapka and Perry (2011) indicated, “Despite much recent interest in SEL research for students, very little research has been completed to see if SEL has any positive outcomes for teachers” (p. 1036). They further expressed that “research is needed to explore this proposition empirically and to examine whether SEL programs impact teachers directly” (p. 1036). In an era when teachers are expected to do more with fewer resources, it would be important to know if implementation of SEL would prove to be a psychological benefit (i.e., promote self-efficacy) to teachers. Ransford (2009) intimated that “despite the fact that increasing job demands may lead to burnout, teachers are being asked to deliver social-emotional curricula and other preventive interventions in school settings as part of comprehensive strategies to reduce barriers to learning” (p. 511). Ransford’s study is among the very few that explore teacher efficacy and implementation of SEL. Unlike this proposed study, Ransford examined the impact of teacher experiences and the administrative supports they received when implementing SEL curriculum. This current study is not attempting to examine the effects of teachers presenting SEL curriculum to students, rather it proposes to examine the correlation among teachers’ knowledge of SEL, their perceived self-efficacy and the relationship these have on their response to students’ challenging behaviors. These possible correlations will also be examined in regard to teachers’ years of experience and level of education.

### **Conclusion**

This research topic resulted from personal experience with students’ challenging behavior and an increased understanding of the extent to which student aggression occurs in elementary schools. The Fargo Public School District (FPSD) tracks written reports from teachers detailing the specifics surrounding incidents of student aggression. The reports describe the physical harm that is caused by students’ challenging behavior (physical and verbal). Teachers and

student, especially during elementary school, spend a great deal of time together and it is expected that teachers maintain relationships with students that lead to positive outcomes.

Unfortunately, teachers who have experienced students' challenging behavior may not only suffer from adverse physical effects, but also experience emotional harm which may lead to a loss of their belief in their professional effectiveness. It is known that teachers' self-efficacy impacts student learning and the desire to remain in the teaching profession. Hui, Hall, and Rahimi (2015) stated that "self-efficacy concerning classroom management refers to beliefs concerning one's ability to regulate students' behavior during class" (p. 121). Teachers who do not feel they have an ability to regulate students' behaviors may be at risk for feeling they have failed at their job. Although self-efficacy concerning classroom management implies the need for teachers to regulate students' behavior, typical classroom management techniques are aimed at behaviors that are more disruptive than aggressive. If teachers were able to aid in management of student behaviors through use of SEL, perhaps fewer teachers would consider leaving the profession.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Research Methods**

#### **Introduction**

This study used correlational research to examine the relationship among teachers' knowledge of SEL their perceived self-efficacy, and their response to challenging student behaviors. The belief was that results from this study would give administrators a better understanding about the possible impact that knowledge of SEL and teacher self-efficacy may have on how teachers respond to challenging student behavior, thereby providing direction on teacher professional development.

#### **Hypotheses and Research Questions**

##### **Hypothesis**

This study hypothesized that correlations exist among teachers' knowledge of SEL, perceived self-efficacy, and their responses to students' challenging behaviors.

##### **Null Hypothesis**

Knowledge of SEL and perceived self-efficacy are not correlated to teachers' responses to students' challenging behaviors.

##### **Research Question 1**

What is the level of correlation among teachers' knowledge of SEL, perceived level of self-efficacy and response to students' challenging behavior?

**Secondary Research Question 2**

How does teachers' level of education impact the correlation among teachers' knowledge of SEL, perceived level self-efficacy and response to students' challenging behaviors?

**Secondary Research Question 3**

How does teachers' years of experience impact the correlation among teachers' knowledge of SEL, perceived self-efficacy and their response to students' challenging behaviors?

**Research Design**

This study was designed in the paradigms of critical and pragmatism. Although there were some aspects to this study that suggested certain variables construct reality, it is not that simple. Teachers, as human beings, experience life uniquely. Whether the same information can be taught to them, or they have the same number years of experience, doesn't mean that the expression of that knowledge will manifest in a similar way or that their experiences paralleled each other. The questionnaire contained open-ended questions that allowed the researcher to report how the teachers felt when faced with student's challenging behaviors. From this standpoint, there are internal influences that can establish reality. These qualitative questions enabled the researcher to add personalized information to support quantitative findings.

## Setting

The study included teachers who worked for Fargo Public School District (FPSD) in Fargo, North Dakota and teachers who worked for Moorhead Public School District (MPSD) in Moorhead, Minnesota. Fargo, one of the largest cities in the state of North Dakota with a population of approximately 125,000, is surrounded on the east and west by two cities which creates a metropolitan atmosphere. Moorhead, which has a population of about 38,000, is a major Minnesota city to the east of Fargo. It is the largest city in Minnesota's northwest region. Fargo and Moorhead are separated by the Red River and are often referred to as "The Fargo Moorhead Area" which is known for its health care, higher education, technology, and retail businesses. Although the majority of the area's population was white, it is also a major relocation site for refugees from Somalia, Liberia, and more recently Nepal. A major hospital was recently built and is a Level I Adult Trauma Center and a Level II Pediatric Trauma Center.

FPSD consisted of 23 schools, 16 of which are elementary schools. Of the 11,000 students, 5,400 are K-5 students. The average class size in FPSD was 20 and had an average daily attendance rate of 95%. Approximately 10% of the student body received gifted and talented services while 15% received special education services. Sixty-eight percent of FPSD teachers held a masters' degree or higher. The majority of students were Caucasian (72%) with the next largest race represented were African-American (15%). Hispanic, Asian and Native American student populations created 10% of the school district's student population. Thirty-two percent of the overall students received free or reduced lunch (Fargo Public Schools Website, 2019, June 12).

MPSD served 6,400 students in across four elementary schools (K-4) 1 middles school (5-8) and 1 high school. The average class size in MPSD elementary schools was 27 and the daily attendance rate was 93.7%. Sixty-six percent of teachers in MPSD held their master's degree while 34% held their bachelor's degree. Special education programming was provided to 18.7% of the student population and 40.2% of the overall student population receives free and reduced meals. The majority of students were Caucasian (71.1%) with the next largest race represented was African American (8.3%). The Hispanic population was larger in MPSD (8.3%) than it was in FPSD (4%). There were fewer American Indian (2.9%), Asian (1%), and Pacific Islander (.1%) student in MPSD than in FPSD. (Moorhead Pubic Website, 2020, February 29).

### **Participants and Recruitment**

The teachers in this correlational study were elementary general education public-school teachers who worked in FPSD and MSPD. Teachers were recruited from the region through email requests by the researcher. There were more female (64) respondents than male (5) respondents. More teachers had their master's degree (54) than teachers with a bachelor's degree (15).

### **Instrumentation**

The survey (See Appendix A) was designed specifically for this research project. It consisted of 29 questions sought information about teachers' characteristics including training in SEL, perceived self-efficacy, and their responses to specific types of students' challenging behaviors. Teachers responded to Likert-type questions about their level of SEL training, their perceived self-efficacy, and their responses to students' challenging behaviors. The study relied on participants reporting whether trainings they have had fit under the categories of SEL. Definition for five categories of SEL There were five open-ended questions that sought



teachers' feelings about the impact that students' challenging behavior have on them and their classrooms. Three of the open-ended questions were optional out of respect for the teacher's privacy and to help maintain anonymity.

### **Procedure**

The survey and informed consent were emailed to all FPSD and MPSD elementary general education teachers in November through each district's email. Because the researcher did not have access to MPSD email addresses, the request for participation was sent through MPSD district of administration through their district email. Qualtrics® was used so that quantitative was easily transferred to a spreadsheet which minimized transcription errors. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS. The researcher collected qualitative responses to support findings of quantitative research.

### **Data Analysis**

The survey was created using Qualtrics® and the quantitative portion of the data was analyzed using SPSS using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. This study presented qualitative data alongside results of quantitative analysis which added depth to the statistical findings.

## Research Variables

Table 1

### *Description of Predictor and Outcome Variables*

Variable	Categorical or Quantitative	Predictor or Criterion	Manipulated or Selected	Moderator or Mediator
Self-efficacy	Quantitative	Predictor	Selected	Mediator
Knowledge of SEL	Quantitative	Predictor	Selected	Mediator
Teacher response to behaviors	Quantitative	Outcome	N/A	N/A

## Extraneous Variables

Table 2

### *Minimizing Extraneous Variables*

Extraneous Variables	How to eliminate or minimize the effect of variable
Types of SEL training	Include questions that ask about sponsorship of training and clearly define components of SEL for this study.
Level of exposure to students' challenging behaviors	Only include teachers who currently general education teachers.
Teachers' Subject Area	Include only teachers who are responsible for core curriculum (math, reading, social studies, and science).

## Threats to Internal Validity

Listed below are possible threats to the internal validity of this study. Ideas to counterbalance the possible impact of these threats are provided.

## **Subject Characteristics**

It was possible that variables not accounted for in this study affected correlation results, therefore explaining any relationships found. This was controlled for by including only elementary general education teachers in the study.

## **Location**

Teachers received the survey via email and responded at a time and place chosen by each individual. The researcher was not able to control for items such as quality internet connection or environmental conditions of the teachers when they responded to the questionnaire. The researcher also could not control whether the participants were able to complete the questionnaire without interruptions (e.g., a returning student, colleague, phone call).

## **Researcher Characteristics and Bias**

Teachers may have been affected by knowing the researcher was the Director of Special Education. This position does come with positional power above that of classroom teachers. The Director of Special Education might have been seen as having a positive bias toward students with disabilities or those students not receiving special education but who are involved in intensive interventions through MTSS. This internal threat to validity was minimized by assuring the respondents that the survey is anonymous.

## **Ethical Considerations**

It was imperative that the survey remained anonymous. All respondents were adults who were provided with informed consent. There were no repercussions to teachers who did not

participate. It was not expected that the survey would elicit emotions that were not previously experienced by the teacher, however, teachers were told they could discontinue the survey if they felt discomfort. Several of the open-ended questions were optional because the information could have led to teacher identification.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to determine if there was a correlation between teachers' knowledge of SEL, their perceived self-efficacy and their responses to students' challenging behavior. Secondary research questions included teachers' years of experience and level of education. Although the study was quantitative, qualitative data were also collected to lend support for correlation findings.

## CHAPTER 4

### Findings

#### Introduction

This correlational study examined teachers' knowledge of SEL, their perceived self-efficacy and their response to students' challenging behaviors. It was hypothesized that teachers with higher levels of SEL knowledge and self-efficacy would respond to students' challenging behaviors differently than those teachers who have less knowledge of SEL and lower perceived self-efficacy.

A questionnaire that was sent to the work emails of 641 general education teachers in the Fargo Public School District (FPSD) and the Moorhead Public School District (MPSD). Three reminders were sent one week and five weeks after the initial invitation, resulting in 52 completed surveys which represented an 11% return rate. As outlined in Figure 1, most teachers worked for the FPSD (75%) in schools with a student population of 500 or greater (30%).

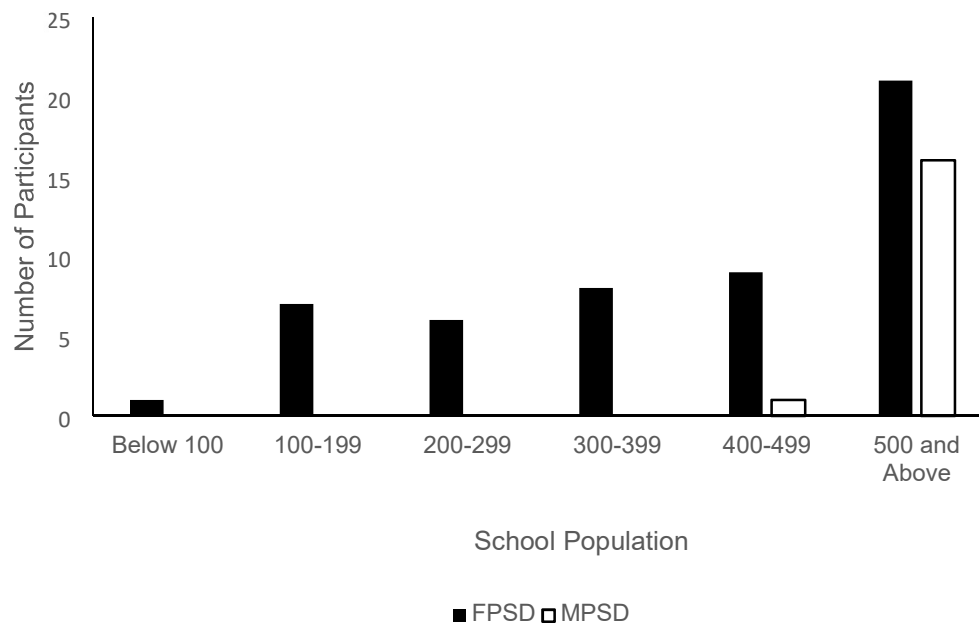


Figure 1. *Number of Teachers by School Size and School District*

Teachers that worked in MPSD (25%) worked in schools with a student population of 400 or greater. A disaggregation of teachers' demographics (see Table 3) shows that most teachers were female (93%) and from FPSD (75%). Demographic data showed that, on average, teachers have been in the profession for 14.78 years.

Table 3

*Number of Teachers by Years of Experience, Level of Education and School District*

Years	FPSD <sup>a</sup>					MPSD <sup>b</sup>			
	Bachelor's		%	Master's		%	Master's		%
	Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female	
1-5	0	9	17	0	2	4	1	3	23.5
6-15	0	4	8	2	9	21	1	6	41.1
16-25	0	0	0	1	12	25	0	4	23.5
26-35	0	2	4	0	11	21	0	2	11.7

Note: Years = Years of teaching experience. All teachers from MPSD have their master's degree. n<sub>a</sub> = 52, n<sub>b</sub> = 17.

Thirty-seven teachers (54%) worked in schools with a total student population above 500. Of those 37 teachers, 22 (59%) worked in schools that receive Title 1 funding (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Number of Teachers by School Size and Title 1 Status*

	Title School	Non-Title School
Below 100	0	1
100-199	6	1
200-299	3	3
300-399	6	2
400-499	7	3
Over 500	22	15

Note: Title 1 Status is assigned to buildings where at least 40% of the student population qualifies for the free and reduced lunch program. Title 1 funds are federal grant dollars meant to ensure that all students have access to equal, high-quality education regardless of their socio-economic status.

## Hypotheses and Research Questions

Below are the study's guiding hypotheses and research questions. This study used Pearson's product moment correlation to determine whether a correlation existed among the variables. Correlations that are found would allow for the researcher to accept the hypothesis finding of no correlation would result in an acceptance of the null hypothesis.

### Hypothesis

This study hypothesized that correlations exist among teachers' knowledge of SEL, perceived self-efficacy, and their responses to students' challenging behaviors.

### Null Hypothesis

There are no correlations among teachers' knowledge of SEL, perceived self-efficacy, and their responses to students' challenging behaviors.

## Overview of Findings

### **RQ1: What is the level of correlation among teachers' knowledge of SEL, perceived level of self-efficacy and response to students' challenging behavior?**

Table 5 shows descriptive data for each one of the three variables involved in this RQ. Regarding SEL knowledge, teachers' scores ranged from 36-114 ( $M = 43.43$ ,  $SD = 18.19$ ). Regarding self-efficacy, no participant reported a score below 17 and four teachers reported a score of 30 ( $M = 24.81$ ,  $SD = 2.78$ ). Finally, regarding teachers' response to challenging behaviors, some teachers scored zero. A score of zero for this variable means that they did not feel able to effectively use de-escalation techniques to manage students' challenging behaviors.

Table 5

*Descriptive Analysis of Teachers' Scores for SEL, Self-Efficacy, and Response to Students' Challenging Behaviors*

SEL Knowledge <sup>a</sup>		Self-Efficacy <sup>b</sup>		Response to Behavior <sup>c</sup>	
<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
54.97	32.32	24.81	2.78	43.43	18.19

Note: SEL<sup>a</sup> Knowledge: Minimum possible score of 0, maximum possible score of 130, Self-Efficacy<sup>b</sup>: Minimum possible score of 0, maximum possible score of 30, Response to Students' Challenging Behavior<sup>c</sup>: Minimum possible score of 0 (lower ability to adequately respond), maximum possible score of 120 (higher ability to adequately respond).

Three Pearson's product moment correlations were run to address this question. The results (see Table 6) showed no statistically significant correlation between SEL Knowledge and teachers' responses to students' challenging behaviors; no statistically significant correlation between self-efficacy and teachers' responses to students' challenging behaviors, and no statistically significant correlation between SEL knowledge and self-efficacy. When correlation was conducted on a subset of teachers who reported that they had sustained physical or emotional injury caused by students' challenging behaviors, a moderate negative correlation ( $r(67) = -.523, p < .01$ ) was found in relation to their response to students' students' challenging behaviors.

Table 6

*Correlation among SEL knowledge, Self-Efficacy, and Response to Students' Challenging Behaviors*

	1	2	3
1. SEL	—	.12 (.320)	.05 (.703)
2. Self-Efficacy	.12 (.320)	—	.02 (.845)
3. Response	.05 (.703)	.02 (.845)	—

The questionnaire included open-ended questions exploring teachers' narratives explaining how they feel when faced with students' challenging behaviors. One teacher indicated, *"I feel anxiety. I want to de-escalate but do not want to get into a power struggle. I*



*don't want to set a precedent that this type of behavior will get you what you want"* (Respondent 22). Here was a teacher with nine years of experience reporting experiencing professional anxiety and that the tools at hand (i.e., interventions) are not working. While knowledge of SEL allows for application of classroom strategies create a positive learning environment and consequently the understanding of emotion and management of behavior (Poulou, 2017 & Weissberg and Cascarino, 2013), this teacher is not approaching the situation from that angle.

**RQ 2: How does teachers' level of education impact the correlation among teachers' knowledge of SEL, perceived level self-efficacy and response to students' challenging behaviors?**

The study had a total of 69 participants of which more were females than male. All male participants had their master's degree while 77% of female participants held their master's degree. In all, seventy-one percent of participants had their master's degree (see Figure 2).

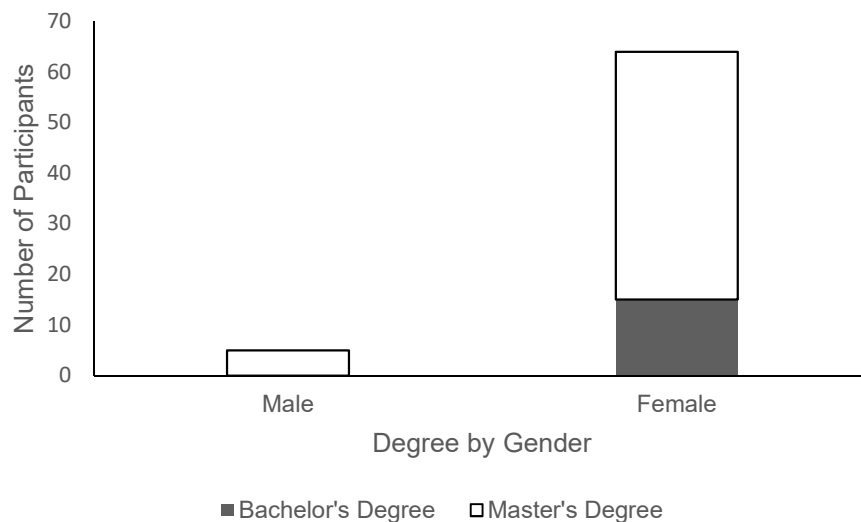


Figure 2. *Number of Participants by Degree*

Table 7 shows descriptive data for each one of the four variables in this RQ. The highest scores for knowledge of SEL and perceived self-efficacy were reported by master-level teachers. Teachers with a master's degree have a larger range of scores (high scores and low scores) than those with a bachelor's degree.

Table 7

*Descriptive Analysis of SEL, Self-Efficacy and Response to Students' Challenging Behaviors by Teachers' Degree*

Variable	Bachelor's Degree <sup>a</sup>				Master's Degree <sup>b</sup>			
	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
SEL Knowledge	0	110	44.8	26.79	0	130	57.8	33.57
Self-Efficacy	18	27	22.8	2.98	17	30	25.4	2.47
Response to Behavior	0	72	31.7	20.08	1	85	46.7	16.39

Note: Min = minimum score; Max = maximum score. <sup>a</sup>n = 15, <sup>b</sup>n = 54.

No correlations were found to be statistically significant when controlling for level of education.

**RQ 3: How does teachers' years of experience impact the correlation among teachers' knowledge of SEL, perceived self-efficacy and their response to students' challenging behaviors?**

Figure 3 represents the distribution of participant by years of experience grouped by decade. There was a fairly even distribution in experience for teachers having worked 1-9 years (33%), 10-19 years (25%) and 20-29 years (35%). There were only five teachers (7%) who have 30-39 years of experience.

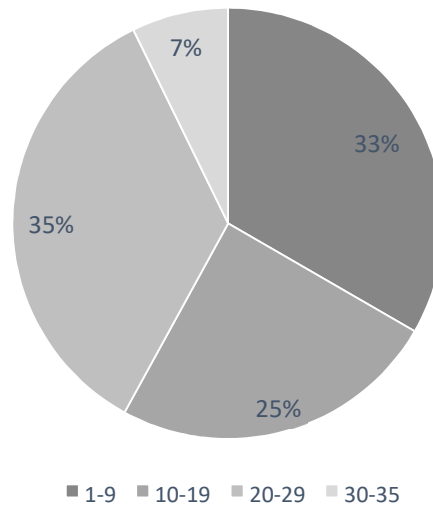


Figure 3. *Percentage of Teachers by Years of Experience*

Table 8 shows descriptive data for each one of the four variables in this RQ. Descriptive analysis of teachers' scores for knowledge of SEL, self-efficacy and response to students' challenging behaviors as well as years of teaching experience reveal little variance among the variables. Regarding SEL knowledge, teachers with 1-6 years of experience scores ranged from 0-110 ( $M = 50.5$ ,  $SD = 28.0$ ) and teachers with 7-33 years of experience scores ranged from 0-130 ( $M = 56.3$ ,  $SD = 33.7$ ). Regarding self-efficacy, teachers with 1-6 years of experience scores ranged from 17-27 ( $M = 22.2$ ,  $SD = 2.8$ ) and teachers with 7-33 years of experience scores ranged from 21-30 ( $M = 25.6$ ,  $SD = 2.3$ ). Finally, regarding teachers' response to students' challenging behaviors, teachers with 1-6 years of experience scores ranged from 47-108 ( $M = 83.3$ ,  $SD = 16.3$ ) and teachers with 7-33 years of experience scores ranged from 36-114 ( $M = 75.2$ ,  $SD = 17.0$ ).

Table 8

*SEL, Self-Efficacy and Response to Challenging Behaviors Scores by Participants' Years of Experience*

Experience	SEL				Self-Efficacy				Response to Behavior			
	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1-6 <sup>a</sup>	0	110	50.5	28.0	17	27	22.2	2.8	47	108	83.8	16.3
7-33 <sup>b</sup>	0	130	56.3	33.7	21	30	25.6	2.3	36	114	75.2	17.0

Note: Experience is years of teaching experience.  $n_a = 16$ ,  $n_b = 53$ .

A Pearson's product moment correlation was run to examine the relationship between SEL Knowledge and teachers' responses to students' challenging behaviors; between self-efficacy and teachers' responses to students' challenging behaviors, and between SEL knowledge and self-efficacy controlling for years of teaching experience. As Table 9 shows, there was a moderate statistically significant correlation ( $r(14) = .5$ ,  $p < .05$ ) between novice teachers' perceived level of self-efficacy and their response to students' challenging behaviors.

Table 9

*Correlation among SEL Knowledge, Self-Efficacy, and Response to Students' Challenging Behaviors Controlling for Years of Experience*

	Novice <sup>a</sup>			Veteran <sup>b</sup>		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
1. SEL	—	-.02 (.951)	.26 (.327)	—	.13 (.350)	.02 (.891)
2. SE	-.02 (.951)	—	.50* (.048)	.13 (.350)	—	.05 (.742)
3. Response	.26 (.327)	.50* (.048)	—	.02 (.891)	.05 (.742)	—

Note: Novice Teacher represents 1-6 years' teaching experience. Veteran Teacher represents 7-33 years' teaching experience. <sup>a</sup> $n = 16$  <sup>b</sup> $n = 53$ .

\* $p < .05$

The scatterplot shown in figure 4 demonstrates the trendline for this correlation. No other correlations were found to be statistically significant.

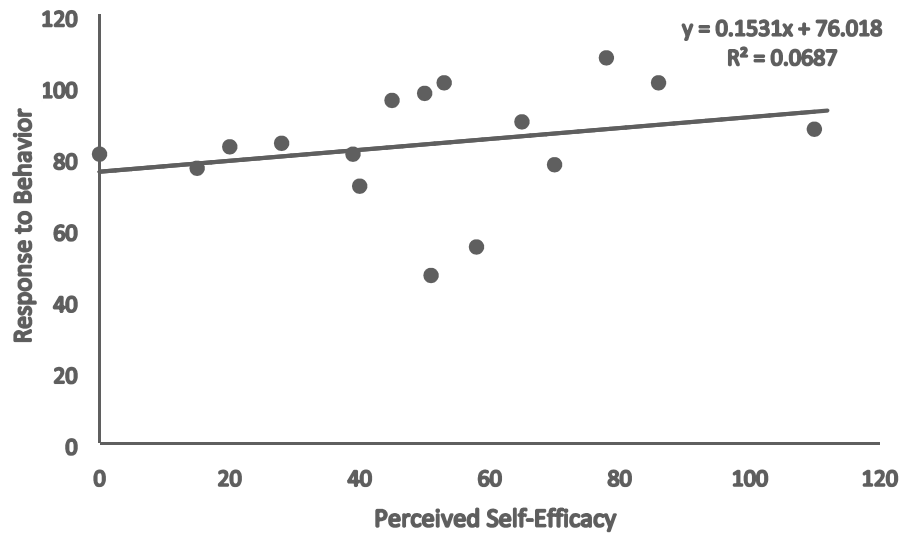


Figure 4. *Correlation among SEL Knowledge, Self-Efficacy, and Response to Students' Challenging Behaviors for teachers with 1-6 years of experience.*

While it may be surprising that no correlation was found between teachers' self-efficacy and their response to students' challenging behaviors when those teachers have greater number of years of experience, narrative responses explain why this might be the case. When asked to provide descriptions about how they feel when personally faced with students' challenging behaviors, one teacher who has over 20 years of experience stated,

*There are days that I really question WHY I continue to teach as I question whether or not I am effective anymore. I am frustrated by challenging behaviors. I am angered that one child can continue to cause issues and subject other students to TRAUMA and nothing is done about it. Why does IDEA allow those children with issues continue to introduce trauma to others? It is NOT okay (Respondent 47).*

This participant clearly has grown tired of having to cope with students' challenging behaviors and stated a loss of self-efficacy. Another participant, who has over 25 years of experience, commented about the impact on other students, *I don't understand why a child is no*

*longer removed from the classroom, but the class is removed, and that student is left in the room and often destroys the room (Respondent 68).*

Some veteran teachers reported feeling anxiety when faced with students' challenging behaviors and are conflicted about the tools they are expected to use to handle them. A 9-year veteran who works in a smaller school (student population 100-199), stated, *I feel anxiety [when faced with students' challenging behaviors]. I want to de-escalate but do not want to get into a power struggle. I don't want to set a precedent that this type of behavior will get you what you want* (Respondent 24). Yet another teacher expressed concerns about how one student's challenging behaviors may lead to other students acting out and the doubt it is casting on her ability to appropriately respond,

*I worry that there will be a "domino" effect...that students will see a classmate acting out and think they can do the same. I sometimes feel anxious, wondering if I am reacting appropriately for the student for the class, for the situation* (Respondent 51).

Other comments echo the sentiment that there is little control to stop students' challenging behaviors. One teacher indicated, *[I feel] like a failure. Heart racing. Disappointed that no matter what you do they find a way to continue the behavior. Frustrated. Have to think of new ideas all the time. Constantly on your toes* (Respondent 23).

It is not only veteran teachers who are feeling defeated by the situation. A teacher with four years of experience stated, *I feel like a failure. I am frustrated and not sure what the next steps are in dealing with the issues when they continue when interventions are not working* (Respondent 14). One can almost hear the disillusionment in this teacher's voice about interventions not working. The current belief that if teachers can just provide the right

intervention, then students will change their behavior does not seem to be unfolding in “real life.” Another novice teacher stated [I feel] *Powerless. And even though I have worked closely with peers and parents I feel like I don’t know how to really solve the issue* (Respondent 4). A teacher who has six years of experience and works in a school which received Title 1 funding indicated just how unempowered he feels to handle students’ challenging behaviors. *Sometimes [I feel] helpless. I feel like there is little I can do really* (Respondent 16). Another male teacher who is in his fourth-year reported about what happens to him physically and mentally when faced with student’s challenging behaviors, *I feel like I am in a situation where adrenaline is released-constantly watching the student and trying to decide how to keep my students safe while also trying to keep them focused on something besides the student* (Respondent 7). This teacher articulated the balancing act that is required of classroom teachers and how they need to formulate “action plans” while they are under duress.

Attempts made by district leaders to help teachers understand the needs of those students who are exhibiting challenging behaviors may be inadvertently compounding the issue. Take, for instance, the comment made by this teacher who has worked for three years in the field,

*I feel confused a lot of the time. I am told to give consequences, but I am also told they [students exhibiting challenging behaviors] are expressing trauma and that consequences will make it worse. So, I am never sure what to do about it* (Respondent 5).

This teacher seems to be pulled between responding to behavior (i.e., providing consequences) and showing compassion (i.e., not applying consequences). This teacher has just begun her career and already is facing circumstances that might challenge the development and maintenance of her self-efficacy. Another teacher, who has 26 years of experience, spoke to having had training, but the feeling of defeat has remained despite that training.

*It is a combination of compassion, helplessness, and responsibility to maintain control of the situation. We have been training in ACE factors, and I understand that we need to work with students who carry these factors. However, when objects are thrown, torn and broken, that comes out of my time and pocket to remake or repurchase the items* (Respondent 61).

Other teachers' responses spoke to a lack of training. This 28-year veteran expressed concerns that could lead to diminished self-efficacy and her lack of training to change the situation. *I feel frustrated and like a failure. We are not trained on how to deal with students that have these behaviors* (Respondent 56). Another teacher's comment paralleled this *I feel sad about it. I'm not always sure what to do* (Respondent 63). A 20-year veteran indicated that students' challenging behaviors has had a direct impact on her feelings of self-worth. *I feel low and disrespected and don't know how to fully help the students* (Respondent 42). From feelings of sadness to frustration, teachers indicated that students' challenging behaviors were affecting their self-efficacy. Whether male or female teachers, their comments spoke about the emotional toll that students' challenging behaviors were taking on them. This comment from a male, 12-year veteran teacher shows the array of emotion that can arise following the escalation of students who exhibit challenging behaviors, *I feel scared sometimes. Very frustrated. Mad. Challenged. I feel like I have failed. I feel like I want to go home. Escalated. Shaky* (Respondent 25).

The resulting emotions that teachers have when faced with students' challenging behaviors can have a negative impact on themselves, but also lead to erosion of school and district climate. As the following quotes demonstrate that sometimes teachers blame others for what is occurring and are concerned that they themselves will be blamed for their actions. A



novice teacher (1 year of experience) stated *It is exhausting and frustrating, but it is part of the job. Sometimes I feel isolated with lack of support from others in the building* (Respondent 10).

Just one year into her career and this teacher seems to be resigned to the fact that “this is just the way it is.” Another teacher, a 21-year veteran spoke to the significant negative impact that students’ challenging behaviors are having on her, emotionally, *I feel afraid to act or react. I feel I do not have the support of my district with these issues* (Respondent 54). It would be hard pressed to believe that this issue is not taking a toll on her feelings about her ability to do her job. And finally, one teacher’s statement radiated guilt over not knowing what to do,

*My anxiety raises because I take a lot of personal responsibility for the actions of the child. I worried that I “triggered” the child or that I will be judged by administration, counselors, or social worker because of the child’s reaction. I also struggle to know the balance of when to remove the student, ignore the behavior or remove the rest of the student* (Respondent 33).

There are indications that some teachers will have competing feelings while experiencing students’ challenging behaviors. The following quotes from two teachers, one with seven years of experience and the other with eight, reported an outward demonstration of characteristics which are indicative of high self-efficacy, but commented on having opposite feeling on the inside. *On the outside, [I am] calm and collected. In the inside, frustrated and defeated* (Respondent 17) and *Confident in my response, but still anxious for helping the student* (Respondent 18).

Several teachers indicated concern for other students who are present during an episode of another students’ challenging behaviors. Teachers are concerned about the impact this issue is

having on the other students' learning as well as their safety. A teacher with 30 years of experience stated, *[I] Feel like behaviors take away from the rest of the classroom students. Lots of time is consumed with trying to help student calm down* (Respondent 69). Another veteran teacher expressed concern for other students learning, *[I am] Frustrated. [I am] Worried about the learning of other students* (Respondent 43). Still another veteran teacher indicated the effect that students' challenging behavior has on her self-efficacy as well sharing her concern for other students,

*I often feel threatened due to the behavior of the "single" student taking away so much time from the "group." I spend a great deal of time on de-escalation techniques and problem-solving with the one student that is struggling with high behaviors that I don't give the rest of the class the time and attention they deserve* (Respondent 30).

It is clear that teachers are concerned about the impact that students' challenging behaviors have on other students. It is also clear that teachers are worried about the safety of other students. *Anxiety with these students elevates the mood of the room*, stated Respondent 49. Whether it is this teacher's anxiety or other students' anxiety is unclear, yet the meaning of "elevates the room" is a universal euphemism for concern over losing control of the classroom. Another veteran teachers' comments are analogous to the previous teacher's comments, *[I am] Afraid of the other students being hurt. The trauma, the disruption can affect the class* (Respondent 66). Finally, one teacher's heartfelt comment that sums up the emotional toll that students' challenging behaviors are having on many teachers, *I feel a lot of empathy for the children who have the aggression and also a lot of sad for the kids who witness this behavior* (Respondent 41).

## **Conclusion**

This study was conducted to determine if correlations existed among teachers' knowledge of SEL, perceived self-efficacy and their responses to students' challenging behaviors. Secondary research questions sought to explore whether correlations among those same variables existed relative to teachers' level of education and years of experience. It was hypothesized that SEL knowledge and self-efficacy would have a positive correlation with teachers' response to challenging behaviors. It was also hypothesized that teachers with higher levels of education and more years of experience would show stronger correlations among these variables. There was a strong positive correlation between Self-Efficacy and teachers' response to students' challenging behavior among novice teachers only. No other correlations were identified.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

This study was conducted to determine whether there were correlations among teachers' knowledge of SEL, their perceived self-efficacy as well as their responses to students' challenging behaviors. It also considered these factors in relation to level of education and teachers' years of experience. Lately, students' challenging behaviors have been receiving much attention by schools, parents, and media. Teachers' ability to maintain a positive learning environment is imperative for student learning, and commonly teachers use many strategies to create a positive learning environment. Of these strategies, knowledge of SEL, self-efficacy, and teachers' response to students' challenging behaviors were researched by this study. Given the rise in amount and types of students' challenging behaviors (Amundson, April 29, 9PM; Binns & Markow, 1999; Connecticut Education Association, 2018; Polochko, 2018), it is important to understand if teachers would benefit from specific professional development in the areas that were a focus of this study.

It was hypothesized that teachers with greater knowledge of SEL and higher perceived self-efficacy would respond to students' challenging behavior in a manner that allowed students to remain in the classroom so that student learning could continue. To study the interconnectedness of these variables, this researcher created a questionnaire which was emailed to 641 elementary general education teachers in the Fargo Public School District (FPSD) and Moorhead Public School District (MPSD). There were 69 fully completed surveys, with an 11% response rate. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an interpretation of the findings, state the implications for social change, and make recommendations for action and the need for further study. Possible changes that should be made to methodology will also be discussed.

### **Interpretation of Findings Research Question 1**

What is the level of correlation among teachers' knowledge of SEL, perceived level of self-efficacy and response to students' challenging behavior?

This question examined teachers' knowledge of SEL, their level of self-efficacy as well as their responses to students' challenging behaviors. Data analysis showed no correlation among these variables. This result contradicts Payton et al. (2008), who found that teachers' knowledge of SEL can be used to decrease conduct disorders in students. Recalling Payton also reported that teachers felt adding SEL into their repertoire takes away from their time allotted to teach academics, it is possible that the current results were impacted by teachers feeling they need to focus on academics rather than using time to directly implement SEL. It would be a misunderstanding to think that SEL needs to be taught by teachers in order for it to have a positive impact on the classroom. As noted by Weissberg and Cascarino (2013), teachers' knowledge of SEL allows them to apply strategies that aid in classroom management thereby promoting a creating a positive learning environment. Because SEL is new to this region, teachers may understand the concepts found within SEL, but do not see how to embed those concepts within their teaching repertoire. Instead, they may be seeing SEL as a separate curriculum that is taught to students, but not a construct that they can utilize when designing delivery of lessons. Currently, teachers in our region have many new initiatives that they are being asked to embrace (e.g., utilizing standards-based instruction, reporting on standards-based instruction) which can take time away from their ability to deeply embed SEL into their teaching repertoire. Without intentional practice, teachers may not benefit from the positive impact that SEL may have on how their students' behaviors.

The educational system has put more expectations onto teachers. Where once teachers needed only to be concerned whether they taught their curriculum, our nation has moved to ensuring that students understand what has been taught. The expectations of how and what teachers communicate to parents has also changed. Now, teachers need to respond to stakeholders' queries when students do not demonstrate understanding of the material. Previously, teachers needed only to report whether students demonstrated knowledge in a *postmortem* type way (i.e., summative evaluation of student progress). Now, teachers need to perform frequent real-time assessment of student learning (i.e., formative assessment) and are accountable for reporting that to stakeholders. This reporting requires that teachers know what they will do differently in the immediate future to ensure all students are learning. This takes an extraordinary amount of self-confidence and removes teachers from the pedestal they were once on as the experts in their field. As teachers are adjusting to this re-defined role, they may see any new initiatives as "something more" rather than "something to complement" their current practice.

As noted previously, this study was conducted because teachers have increased concerns about the impact that students' challenging behaviors have on their classrooms. Teachers are concerned about delivery of curriculum, and physical and emotional harm to themselves and other students. Their minds are not on the role that they may have to play in turning this issue around, rather, they are seeking action from leadership that will take care of the issue by other means (e.g., removal from classroom, moving student to different school, assessing for special education). To be fair, the issue of students' challenging behaviors is having a negative impact on teachers and, not unlike other professions, when you feel you cannot do your job, you stop waiting for or accepting less than desirable action from leadership and start looking for another

career (Caples & McNeese, 2010; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; and Zhukova, 2018). It cannot be discounted that the design and delivery of the questionnaire could have impacted the results. Guided by information from Hui et al. (2015), the current study's survey included three questions to encapsulate perceived self-efficacy: using effective classroom management strategies, creating engaging lessons and using effective instructional strategies. A limitation of this study is that teachers ranked their perception of self-efficacy through a Likert type scale with only one question in each of the three areas (i.e., classroom management strategies, engaging lessons, and effective instructional strategies). Regarding the complexity of collecting personal perception, Stranovská, Lalinská, & Boboňová (2017) indicated that it is very difficult to measure personal perception in a quantitative fashion as doing so rarely captures the essence of individual teacher's characteristic. For this very reason, the measurement of self-efficacy in this study could have fallen woefully short of reality.

While there may have not been enough questions in this survey to provide an adequate assessment of teachers' self-efficacy, the attempt to "quantify quality" is wrought with imperfections because it cannot possibly capture the full impact of an individual's contribution to their profession. For these reasons, the data gathered to rate self-efficacy may not have been sufficient enough to determine correlation to other knowledge of SEL and teachers' response to students' challenging behaviors.

Knowledge of SEL was gathered through Likert-type scales in a series of questions separated by the method used to acquire such knowledge. SEL, in this region, is fairly new. Teachers may not have rated themselves as having a great deal of SEL knowledge simply because they may not have categorized some of their knowledge specifically as SEL. Teachers are exposed to professional development that is often multi-categorical. As an example, a

teacher may attend training on Autism Spectrum Disorders and within that training there could have been an SEL component. When completing the questionnaire, that teacher may have categorized that training as an Autism training but not as an SEL training. Teachers indicated their training in five areas of SEL (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, social awareness, and responsible decision-making) and scores in each of these areas were combined to create a composite SEL score which was used to calculate correlation. It is possible that teachers ranked themselves lower in one area than in others which would have had the effect of lowering the composite score. Perhaps if the survey would have asked only for a composite SEL score, teachers may have ranked themselves higher by considering the broad nature of SEL.

Teachers' scores for response to students' challenging behaviors were combined into one score gathered among six other scores across four different types of student behaviors. Because responses to students' challenging behaviors were listed along other questions (e.g., "I have sustained emotional injury due to students' physical aggression") their response may have been impacted by the teacher's feelings of their ability to de-escalate those behaviors. In other words, the emotion of one question could have impacted the response for another question. When considering teachers' responses to students' challenging behavior, it is important to understand that it positions teachers in a reactive state. It is possible that teachers were thinking about the most aggressive student behaviors when reporting their responses to students' challenging behaviors which may have impacted scores. It is also possible that a teacher may have been recently involved in or witnessed a students' challenging behavior which could be impacting their own perceived ability to handle such an incident.

The researcher attempted to control for these types of factors by providing clear definitions of the various types of students' challenging behaviors, but there is no way to



determine what incidences a teacher might be recalling or how recently they had to deal with students' challenging behaviors before responding to these questions. Blanton, Axsom, McClive, and Price (2001) offer direction about how people perceive their ability to cope with negative life events. They found that most people will rank their ability to cope with a negative life event worse than they would rank others' ability to cope with that same negative life event, especially for events that are rated as severe (e.g., contracting cancer). There are studies suggesting that stress can have an effect on memory depending upon the phase of memory a person was in (i.e., encoding, retention, retrieval) when the stressor occurred. It is also known that if an old memory is reactivated after being consolidated, the reactivation will make the memory susceptible to modification (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Campos, Holden, Caçador, Fragata, and Balezão (2018) stated "The more negatively significant, intense, and unexpected these life events are, the greater degree of distress that may be potentially experienced" (p. 145). Given that teachers do not expect students to exhibit challenging behaviors in the classroom, when they do, the emotion that it causes the teacher could lead to a high degree of stress, which in turn, could affect teachers' ability to encode, store, and retrieve memories about the event. Recalling what Skåland (2016) indicated, teachers exhibit a merging of personal and professional identities, it can be extrapolated when negative experiences occur to teachers while they are on their job it places their professional identity at stake. These events would also have a strong impact on their personal identity. It is not difficult to believe that the stress of recalling students' challenging behaviors could have impacted teachers' responses about their perceived ability to cope with them.

Another way that the survey design may have impacted results is that it separated teachers' response into three different categories (ability to de-escalate, seeking physical

restraints, and seeking student removal from classroom). First, one of these (de-escalation) is considered a preferable and positive response to students' challenging behaviors. It implies the student exhibiting the behavior was able to remain in the classroom and that the student-teacher relationship was not negatively impacted by it. Seeking student restraint or removal from the classroom, although sometimes necessary, implies that the behavior impacted the student negatively and most likely had a negative impact on the student-teacher relationship. For those reasons, physical restraint and removal are less preferred. Combining preferred strategies into a score with less-preferred strategies most likely impacted the score that was derived. Although the values were re-coded to adjust for this, it may not have sufficiently corrected the issue. It would have been better to ensure that the methods by which this data were gathered paralleled each rather than competed with each other.

The response rate had a definite impact on this study. There were only 69 completed evaluations. It may have been enough had some of the questions not allowed for a large range of responses. That is, when the range of scores could be 0-120 and only 69 people are responding, there is bound to be a large standard deviation around the mean. It may be that more reminders or perhaps the possibility of receiving a tangible could have encouraged more teachers to participate. Regardless of the reason, perhaps more could have been done to gather additional data.

The results from this study were not able to disprove the null hypothesis, which was that knowledge of SEL, teachers perceived self-efficacy, and teachers' response to students' challenging behaviors are not correlated. It is entirely possible that it doesn't matter how much a teacher knows about SEL and how highly they regard their ability to teach, responding to students' challenging behaviors is beyond characteristics inherent in teachers as a whole.

### **Interpretation of Findings Research Question 2**

What is the impact that teachers' level of education has on the relationship among teachers' knowledge of SEL, perceived level self-efficacy and response to students' challenging behavior?

The analysis of this question sought whether a correlation existed among teachers' knowledge of SEL, their reported self-efficacy, and their responses to students' challenging behaviors based on teachers' level of education. Results showed no correlation exists among these variables. While it may be thought that a higher level of education would impact the effectiveness of teachers, studies have yet to show that obtaining a higher degree has a discernable effect on student outcomes (Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor, 2006; Gorman, 2019; Hill, 2007). Although not mutually exclusive of teachers' degrees, Oliver and Reschly (2007) reported "only a handful of states require special and general educators to have knowledge of statewide behavioral support" (p. 11).

### **Interpretation of Findings Research Question 3**

What is the impact that teachers' years of experience has on the relationship among teachers' knowledge of SEL, perceived self-efficacy and their response to students' challenging behaviors?

The relationship examined in this question was whether correlation exists among teachers' knowledge of SEL, their reported self-efficacy, response to students' challenging behaviors in relationship to their years of teaching experience. Strong and statistically significant correlation ( $r(14) = .5, p = .048$ ) was found between novice teachers (i.e., 1-6 years of

experience), their perceived level of self-efficacy and their response to students' challenging behavior.

Because SEL is a relatively new concept in this region, it is not too surprising that teachers with less experience would have reported scores similar to those teachers who have more experience. Both of these groups would now be receiving specific training on SEL at the same time, placing them in similar circumstances. That being said, it was possible that teachers would have thought about some of their past training that would have included information about SEL as secondary information. Because this study did not specifically ask teachers about other trainings and how they related to SEL, it would be speculative at this time to determine the possible impact it had on this study.

It is possible that the results found for this research question were impacted by other factors. One possible explanation for the correlation between self-efficacy and teachers' response to behaviors for teachers with 1-6 years of experience could be that they do not wish to seek outside help to manage students' challenging behaviors so that they are not seen as incompetent. Given that Zhukova (2018) indicated that teachers' skills develop over time these become closely associated with their ability to effectively cope with challenges in their environment, it is somewhat surprising not to see a correlation among self-efficacy and response to student's challenging behaviors for those teachers with more experience.

If one considers, however, that Feng's et al. (2015) findings countered this reasoning by showing that teachers reported self-efficacy is at its highest just before starting their career. It could be that teachers who have been in the profession longer feel they meet the level of expectations they have set for themselves and that they are in a "mature level" of self-reflection to know that they cannot be everything to all students. Teacher candidates, prior to their first

year of teaching, have fewer experiences on which to base their perceptions. This is probably a good protective factor given the saying “what you don’t know won’t hurt you.” It is difficult to imagine that after going through the challenges of getting a teaching degree, one is not prepared to teach. There is no way, however, that pre-service experiences can provide the full range of experiences that teachers will have across their careers. As noted earlier, in this study there was little variance across teachers perceived self-efficacy in relation to their years of experience. Because of this, it is unlikely that among teachers’ years of experience there would have been differences in their response to students’ challenging behaviors.

It was considered that the reported types of students’ challenging behaviors and frequency to which teachers were exposed to those particular behaviors might provide some insight into the results for this research question. Specifically, it was thought that perhaps students with challenging behaviors were more often placed with teachers who had more experience. If that were the case, it could be that more intensive exposure had an impact on teachers’ perceived ability to respond to behaviors in a manner that kept students in the classroom. A descriptive analysis of the data did not find this to be the case.

As a matter of fact, teachers with more than six years of experience reported scores of five or lower (on a scale of 0-10) when indicating their exposure to students’ anti-social (45.3%), physical (47.2%), and verbal (28.3%), behaviors than those teachers with 1-6 years of experience did for anti-social (37.5%), physical (37.5%), and verbal (6.3%) behaviors. Exposure to students’ disrespectful behaviors was the only students’ challenging behavior where teachers with 7-33 years of experience reported more exposure to the behavior than those teachers with 16 years of experience. Thirty-four percent of teachers with 7-33 years of experience ranked their exposure to disrespectful behavior with a score of five or less while 45.3% of teachers with

1-6 years of experience rated their exposure to disrespectful behavior with a score of five or less. It is difficult to tell from this study the exact nature of the students' challenging behaviors which could have affected how teachers perceived their effectiveness.

Results of this study may have been impacted by teachers' belief systems. It could be that more experienced teachers have different beliefs about the responsibility of schools to teach students who exhibit challenging behaviors. It is a relatively recent movement that teachers are expected to engage learners of all levels (i.e., differentiated instruction) and removal of a student from the classroom is not a practice that is considered to be effective in changing students' behaviors. It is expected that teachers will use strategies to engage all learners, thereby effectively reducing the likelihood of students exhibiting challenging behaviors.

### **Implications for Social Change**

A better understanding of what factors are related to teachers' beliefs that they have the ability to successfully manage students' challenging behaviors could have a large impact on the climate and culture of schools and a district. While this study did not find strong and significant correlations among most of the variables, that is not to say that they are not important areas to consider.

If district and building level administration used these findings to create teacher buy-in about SEL knowledge and the possibility it could aid in their ability to de-escalate students, then teachers may find they have another tool to use when faced with students' challenging behaviors. District and building leadership often receive feedback from their teachers that they want meaningful professional development. Improving teachers' ability to de-escalate students could have an overall positive effect on district and school culture and the relationships that district and schools have with their parents.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Given the results of this study, it would be premature to suggest that districts proceed with professional development to increase teachers' knowledge of SEL or improve self-efficacy in order to improve teachers' responses to students' challenging behaviors. The positive impact of SEL knowledge and teachers' self-efficacy has been proven through other studies (Bandura et al., 2003; Bridgland et al., 2014; Gibbs and Powell, 2012; Zakrzewski, 2015) and therefore a commitment to train teachers in either or both of these areas would be valuable.

Although this study was a correlational study, some qualitative data were gathered to learn more about how teachers feel about the impact of students' challenging behaviors. The responses are poignant and informative. Regardless of the lack of significant correlations among the variables in this study, district and building leaders could do well with examining the responses and creating a platform in which teachers can share their experiences. This type of sharing can lead to learning which would only benefit those that work in the field of public education today.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

There were several limitations to this study. The relatively small sample size ( $N = 69$ ) may have impacted the results of the study. With secondary research questions splitting the data into even smaller units, it creates doubt about the findings. This research did not ask about specific types of SEL training which may have skewed the responses. With SEL being a relatively new concept in the region, teachers may not have included all the types of trainings that could have been categorized as SEL.

Although the study used the components that best encapsulate self-efficacy as denoted by Hui et al. (2015), there were only three areas in which teachers reported their self-efficacy. This could have had the effect of lowering teachers scores due to fewer areas in which to report. As stated previously, using quantitative methods to encapsulate what is essentially qualitative information can cause individual teacher characteristics to be left out of the equation (Stranovská et al., 2017). It would be beneficial to find other ways to capture teachers perceived self-efficacy.

Determining the perception and impact of students' challenging behaviors is a complex task. There are many factors beyond those that are unique to teaching that informs whether teachers see a behavior as aggressive, dangerous, or disrespectful. How people perceive a behavior will impact their response to that behavior. This study attempted to define students' challenging behavior to increase the validity of the study, however, it did not attempt to determine if teachers were more or less sensitive to behaviors. The types of behaviors the students demonstrate are rarely limited to one category (e.g., physical, verbal, disrespectful) which may have impacted how teachers rated their response.

If further study were to be conducted on these variables, it is recommended that the researcher seek to narrow SEL by specific trainings and increase the variety of self-efficacy components. This study also was limited to general education elementary teachers. Because responses to students' challenging behaviors can be very different from elementary to secondary settings (e.g., in school suspension, allowing student choice to leave the building), it would be beneficial to continue to collect data from elementary only settings, and increase the pool by including special education teachers. This would create the opportunity to enlarge the sample size and increase the range of professional experiences that are represented in the study.



## **Conclusion**

Discussions about students' challenging behaviors can be emotion-laden and therefore difficult. Parents send their children to school so that they can have access to a high-quality education and teachers arrive to work wanting to impact student achievement. There are too many instances of teachers having to stop instruction to manage students' challenging behaviors and solutions that existed in the past (i.e., sending a student home for the day) are no longer supported practices. This means that teachers need to learn new ways of managing students' behaviors. If we cannot find effective methods by which teachers can do so, we may continue to see teachers leaving the profession and students being taught by underqualified individuals. Our nations students deserve better than that and district and building leadership need to work toward finding viable solutions to the issue.

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## Appendix A

### Impact of Social Emotional Learning on Teacher Response to Students' Challenging Behavior

Q1 Thank you for participating in this short survey. This survey will be used to complete dissertation research. It is intended that results of this study could help districts address professional development needs around students' challenging behavior. Your responses are anonymous and will not be used for purposes other than this research project. There are 31 questions and it is estimated that it will take 10 minutes to complete.

Q2 Please indicate your gender.

☐ Male

☐ Female

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Q3 Indicate your highest completed level of education.

☐ bachelor's degree

☐ master's degree

☐ doctoral degree

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Q4 Counting the current school year, indicate your years of teaching experience at each level.

Elementary : \_\_\_\_\_

Middle School : \_\_\_\_\_

High School : \_\_\_\_\_

Higher Education : \_\_\_\_\_

Total : \_\_\_\_\_

Q5 Do you work in a school that receives Title 1 funding (i.e. "a title school")

☐ Yes

☐ No

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Q6 The number of students in my school is. If you are a traveling teacher, select the school with the larger population.

☐ Below 100

☐ Between 100-199

☐ Between 200-299

☐ Between 300-399

☐ Between 400-499

☐ 500 or above

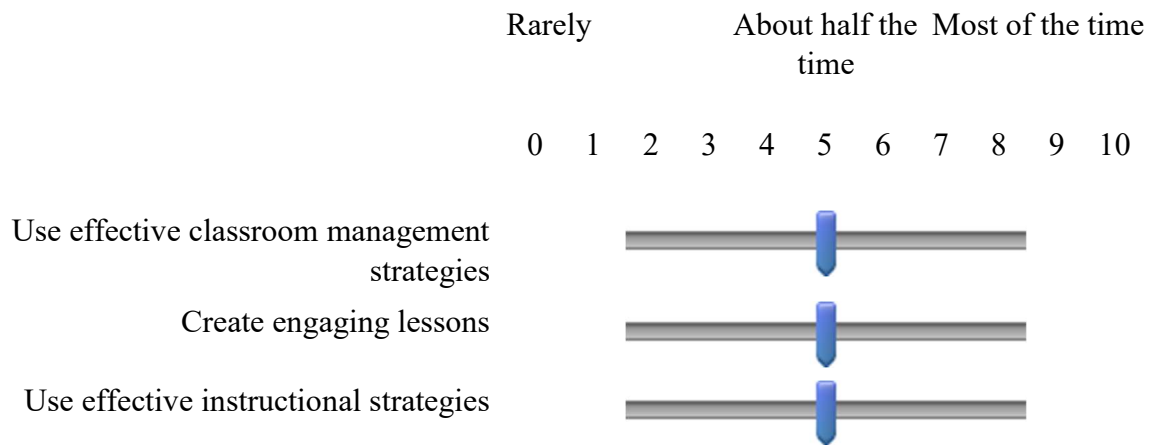
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Q7 In which district are you currently employed?

☐ Fargo Public School District

☐ Moorhead Public School District

Q8 Please rank yourself for the following items using the starter phrase: "I believe that I..."



Q9 The next four questions are about your knowledge of the areas of Social Emotional Learning (SEL). There are five areas you will be asked about. The following are definitions for each of the SEL areas to consider when answering the questions:

**Self Awareness:** Know strengths and limitations, having confidence, optimism, and a “growth mindset.”

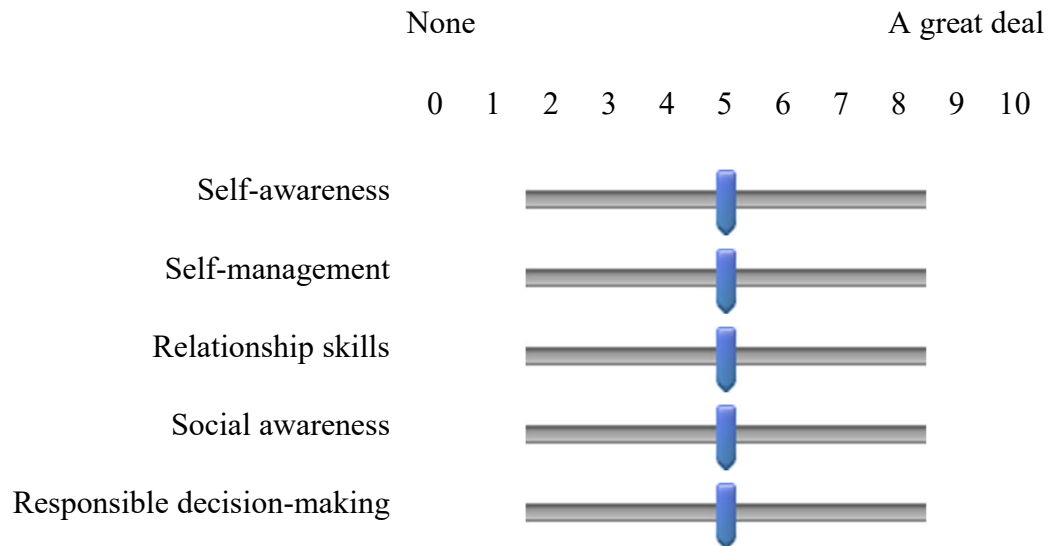
**Self-Management:** Effectively manage stress, control impulses, and motivation to set and achieve goals.

**Social Awareness:** Understand the perspectives of others and empathize with them.

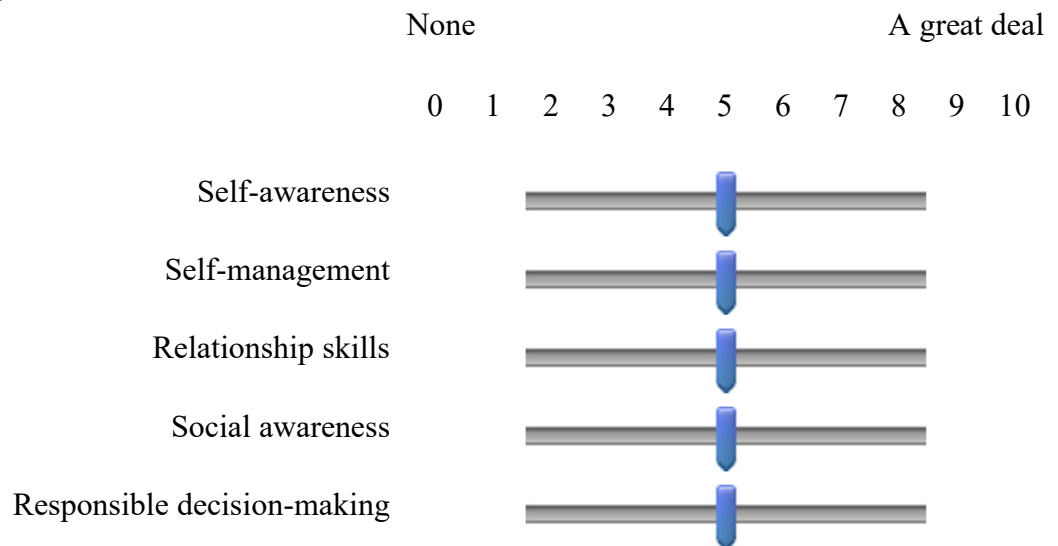
**Relationship Skills:** Communicate clearly, cooperate with others, negotiate conflict constructively.

**Responsible Decision-Making:** Choosing behavior and interactions based on safety, and social norms.

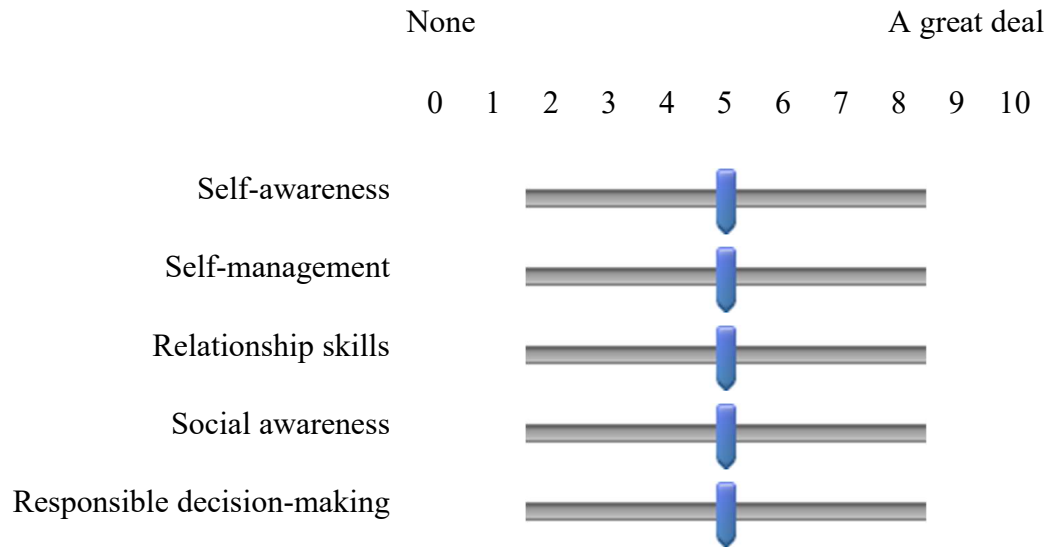
Q10 For each of the SEL areas, describe the amount of training you have had through an organization-sponsored conference (e.g., Counsel for Exceptional Children, National Education Association, ASCD).



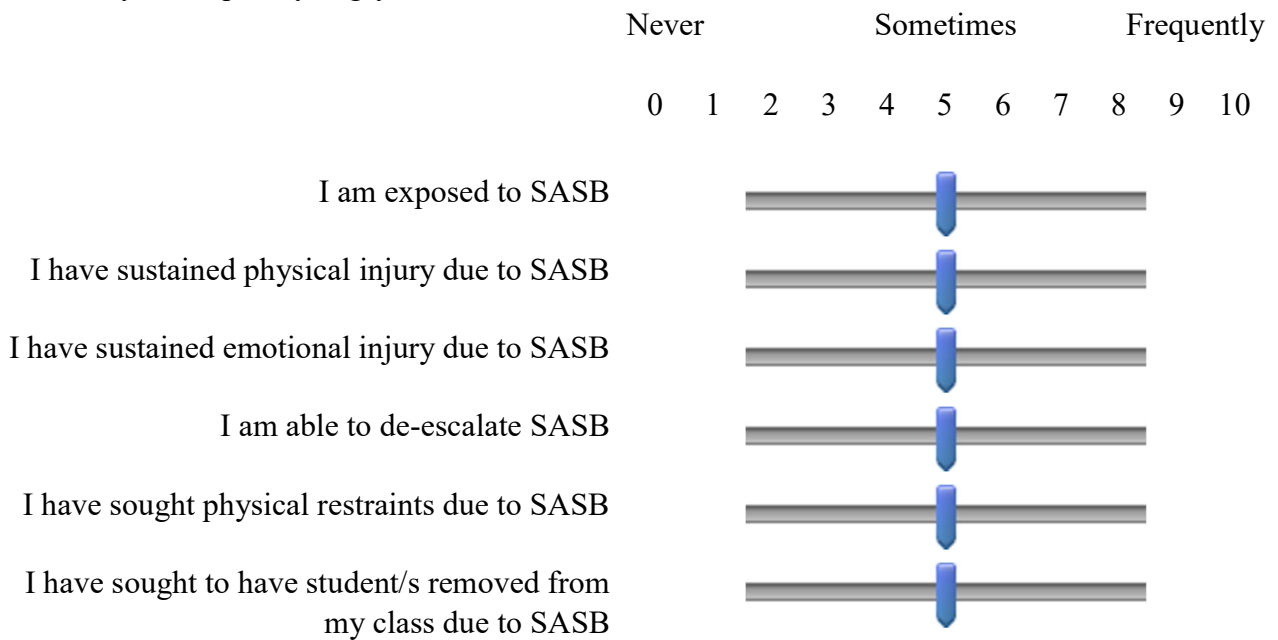
Q11 For each of the SEL areas, describe the amount of training you have had through district-sponsored training.



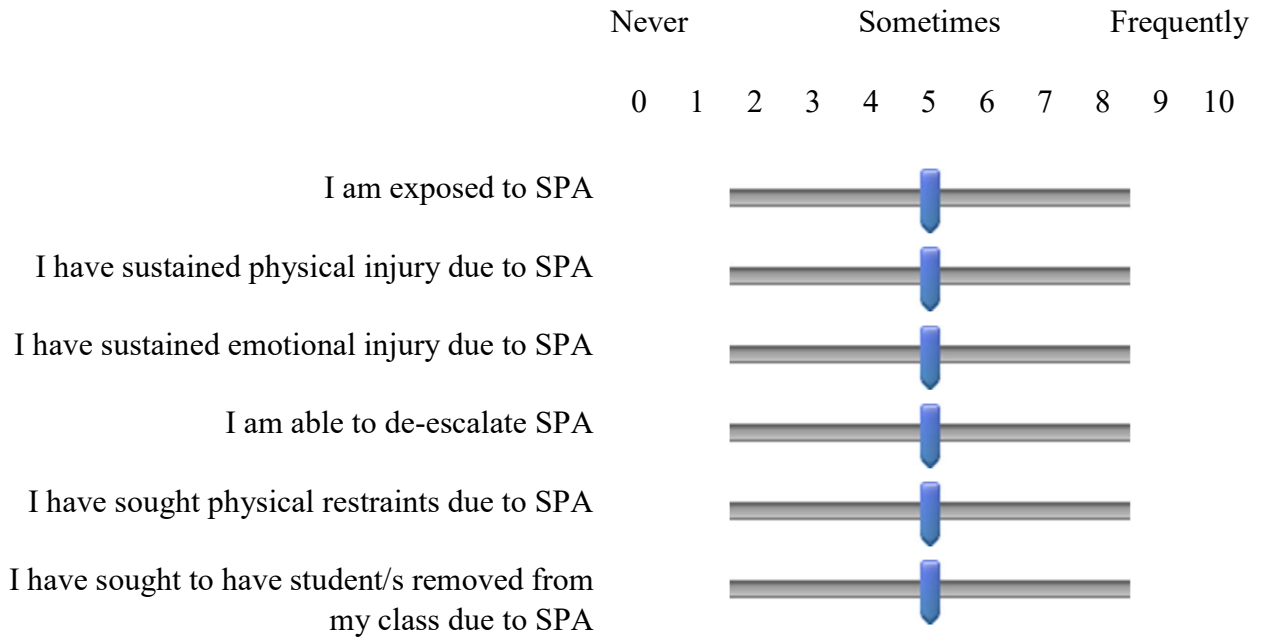
Q12 For each of the SEL areas, describe the amount of training you have had through self- taught methods (e.g., books, article, blogs)



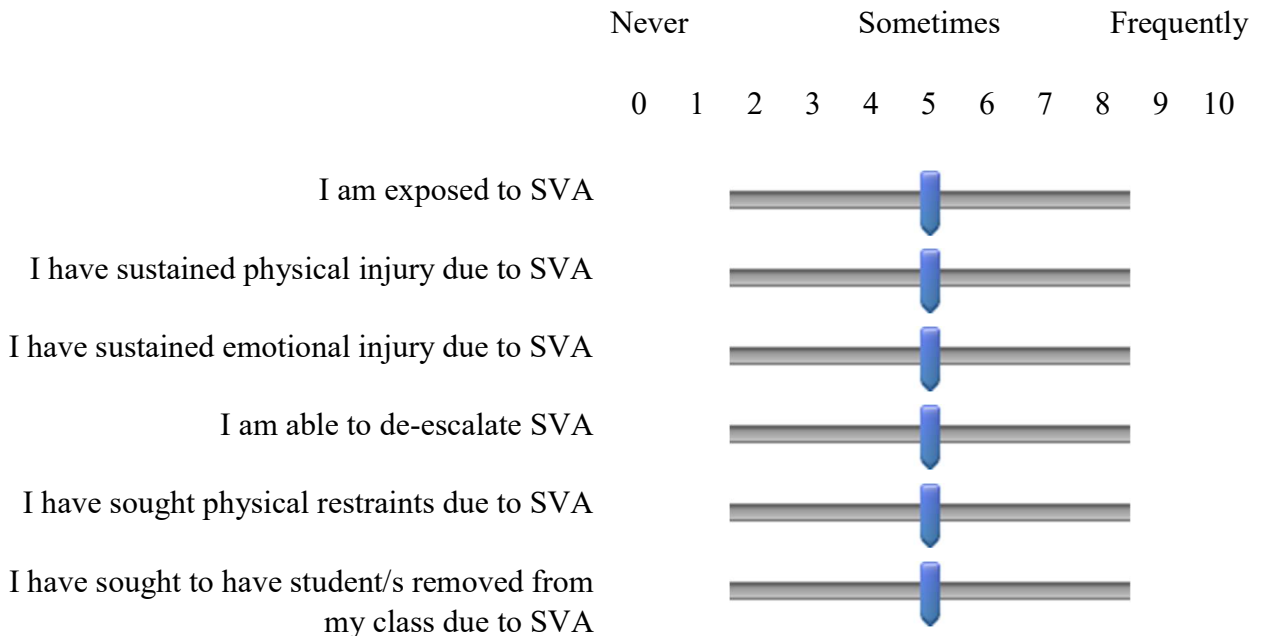
Q13 Student antisocial behavior (SAB) is defined as lack of concern for feelings, needs, or suffering of others; lack of remorse after hurting or mistreating another. The individual is persistently or frequently angry.



Q14 Student physical aggression (SPA) is defined as behavior that has the potential to cause harm to another (e.g., kicking, hitting, biting).



Q15 Student verbal aggression (SVA) is defined as temper tantrums, tirades, or verbal argument. It may or may not include swearing.





Q16 Student disrespectful behavior (SDB) is a social construct defined as behavior that intentionally shows lack of courtesy for others. It includes conveying that another is beneath consideration. Responses to this question should not include acts of physical or verbal aggression.

	Never							Sometimes					Frequently
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
I am exposed to SDB													
I have sustained physical injury due to SDB													
I have sustained emotional injury due to SDB													
I am able to de-escalate SDB													
I have sought physical restraints due to SDB													
I have sought to have student/s removed from my class due to SDB													

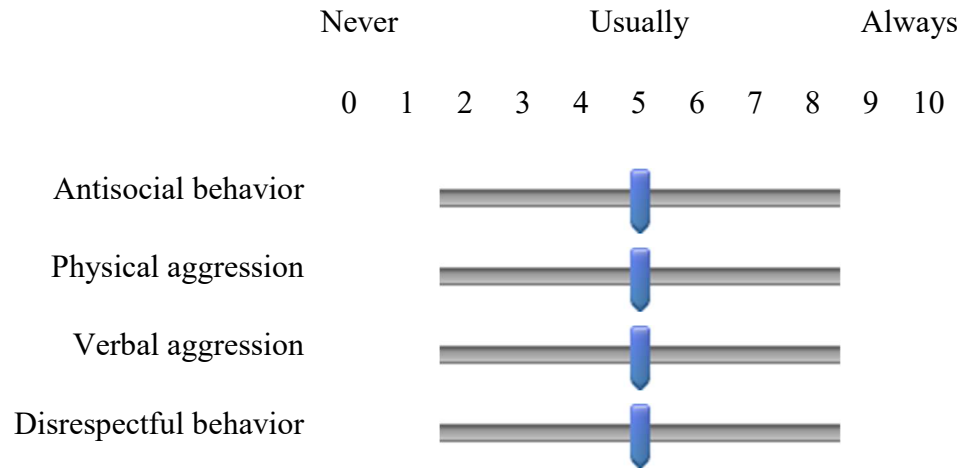
Q17 OPTIONAL: If you are willing, please describe the types of physical injury you have received as a direct result of students' challenging behaviors.

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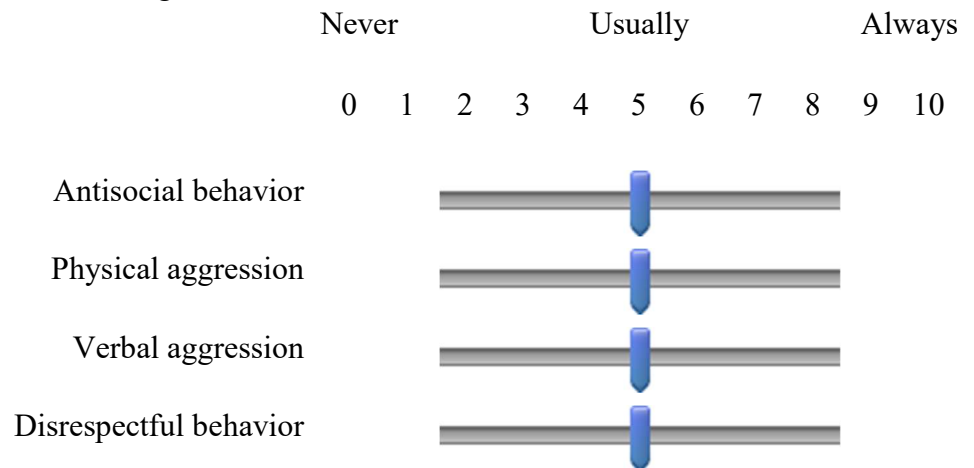
Q18 OPTIONAL: If you are willing, please describe the types of emotional injury you have received as a direct result of students' challenging behaviors.

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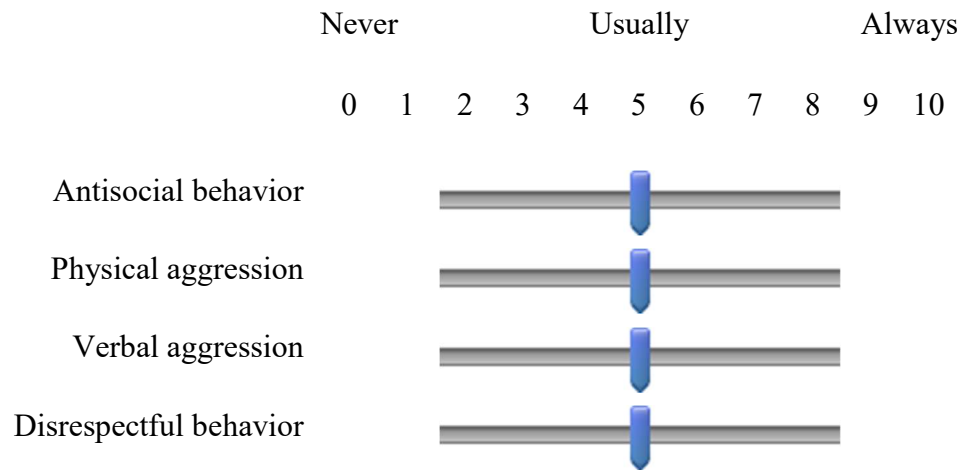
Q19 I feel confident in my ability to de-escalate the following types of challenging students' behaviors.



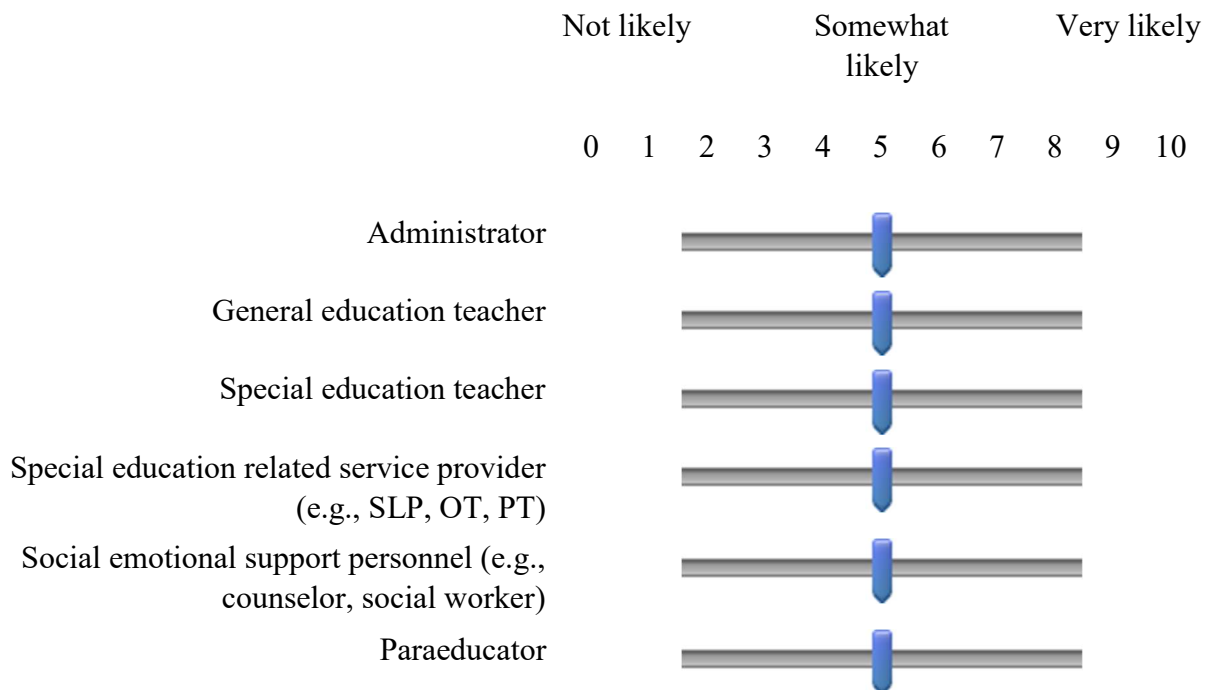
Q20 If de-escalation of students' challenging behavior fails, I would seek to have the student physically restrained for the following behaviors.



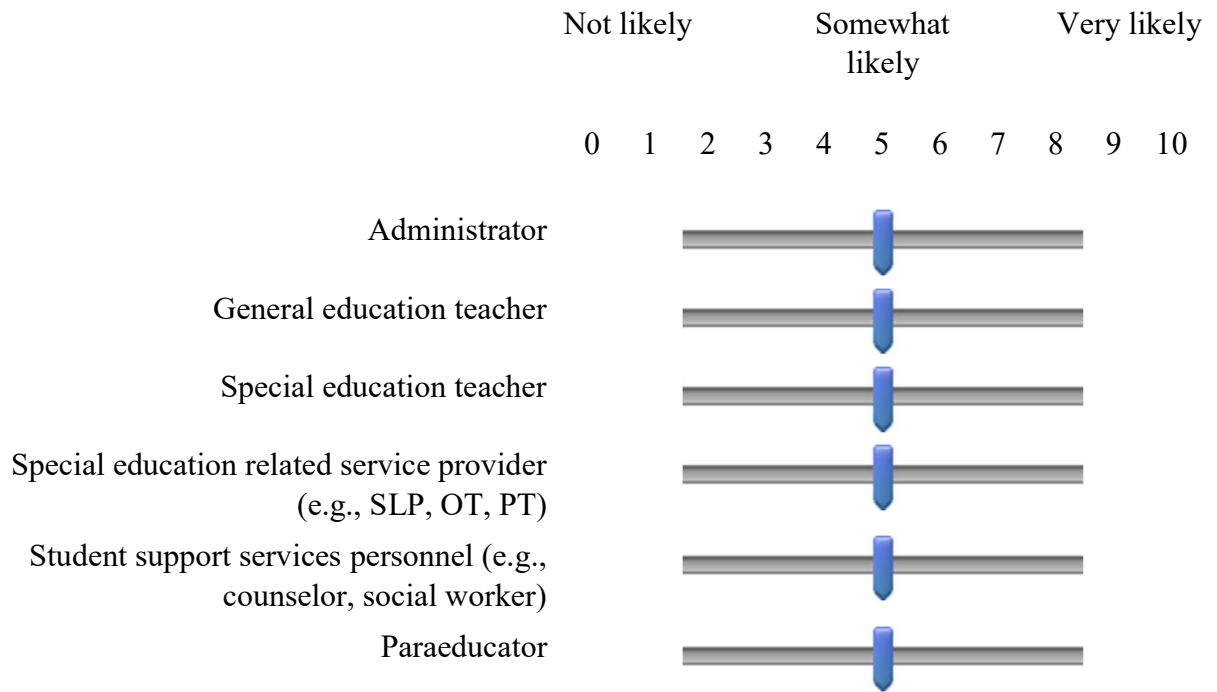
Q21 If de-escalation of students' challenging behavior fails, I would seek to have the student removed from my classroom even for a short time for the following behaviors.



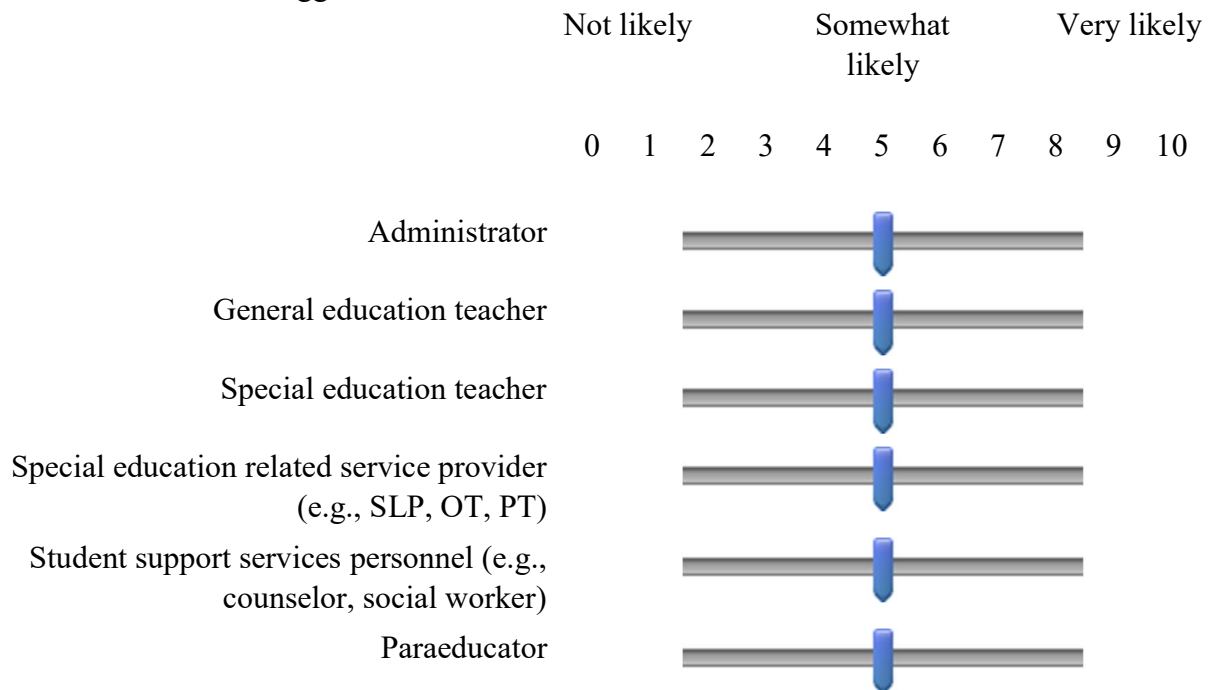
Q22 Please rate the likelihood of contacting the following people for aid when you are unable to de-escalate students' antisocial behavior.



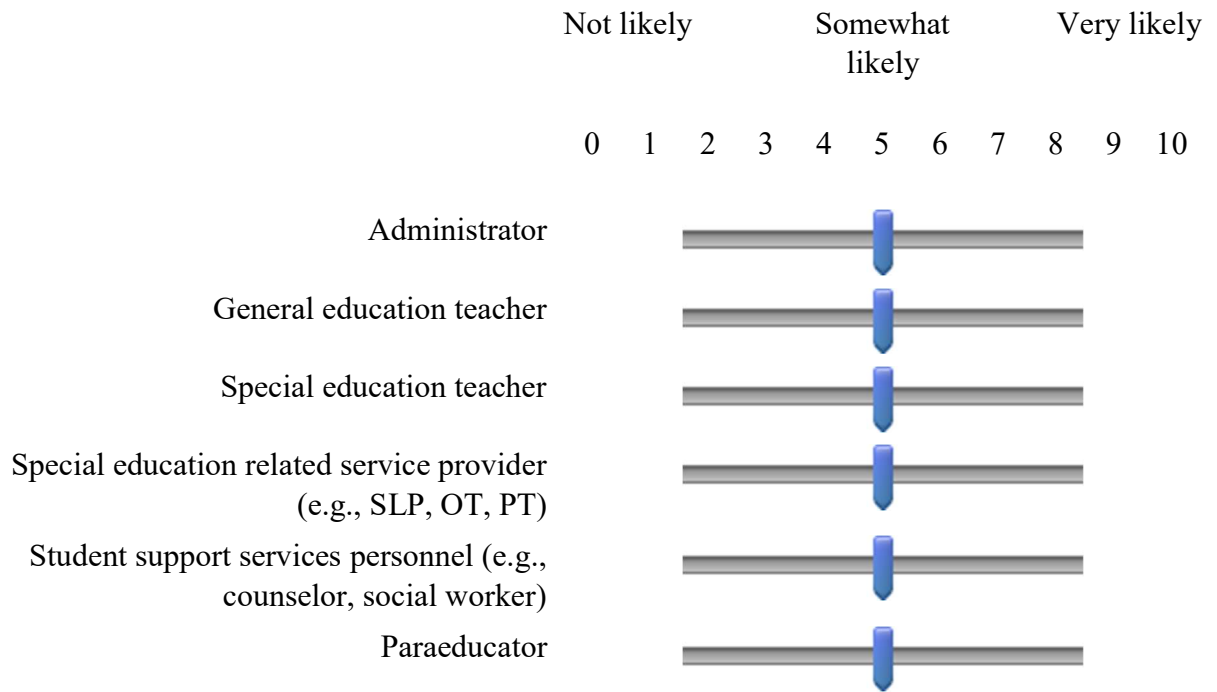
Q23 Please rate the likelihood of contacting the following people for aid when you are unable to de-escalate students' physical aggression.



Q24 Please rate the likelihood of contacting the following people for aid when you are unable to de-escalate students' verbal aggression.



Q25 Please rate the likelihood of contacting the following people for aid when you are unable to de-escalate students' disrespectful behavior.



Q26 I am trained in de-escalation techniques.

☐ Yes

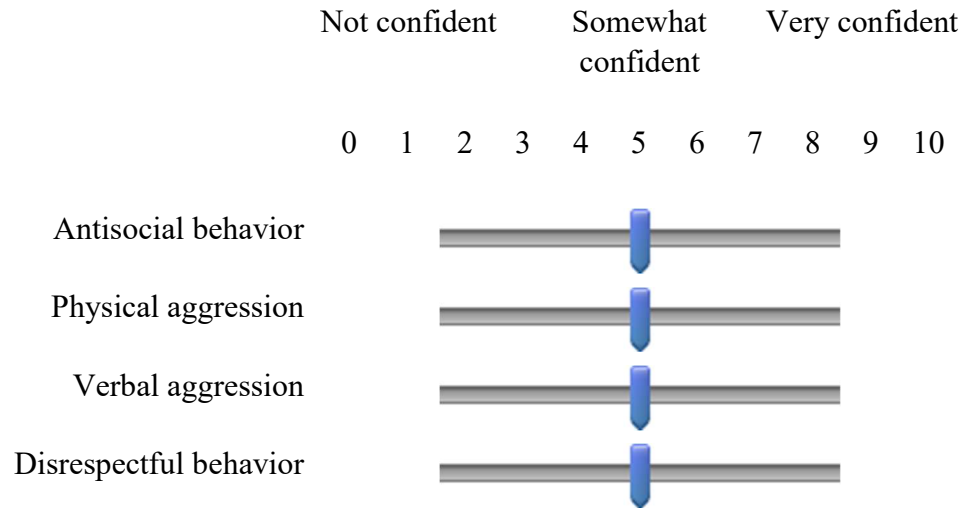
☐ No

Q27 I am trained in physical restraints.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Q28 Rank your confidence in returning your classroom to normalcy after the occurrence of each type of students' challenging behavior.



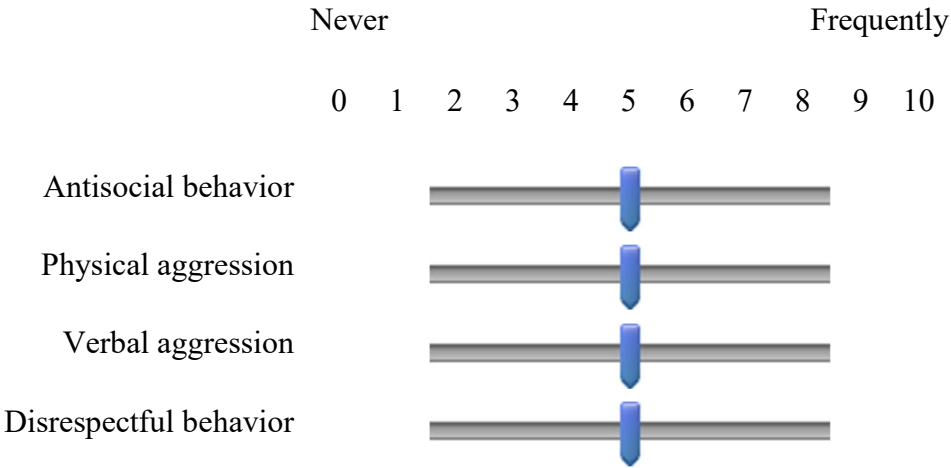
Q29 Please describe how you feel when directly faced with students' challenging behaviors.

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Q30 Please describe how you feel when after hearing a colleague was faced with students' challenging behaviors.

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Q31 OPTIONAL: For each of the following student behaviors indicate whether it has caused you seriously to consider leaving the teaching profession.



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## Appendix B

### *Participant Demographics*

Respondent	Gender	Education Level	Years of Experience	Title 1 <sup>a</sup> Status	Student Population	District <sup>b</sup>
1	Female	Master's	3	Yes	500+	MPSD
2	Female	Master's	3	Yes	100-199	FPSD
3	Female	Bachelor's	2	Yes	300-399	FPSD
4	Female	Bachelor's	1	Yes	400-499	FPSD
5	Female	Bachelor's	3	Yes	500+	FPSD
6	Female	Bachelor's	4	Yes	500+	FPSD
7	Male	Master's	4	Yes	500+	MPSD
8	Female	Bachelor's	3	No	100-199	FPSD
9	Female	Bachelor's	1	No	0-99	FPSD
10	Female	Bachelor's	1	No	500+	FPSD
11	Female	Master's	3	No	500+	MPSD
12	Female	Bachelor's	4	No	500+	FPSD
13	Female	Master's	4	No	500+	MPSD
14	Female	Bachelor's	5	Yes	400-499	FPSD
15	Female	Master's	5	Yes	500+	FPSD
16	Male	Master's	6	Yes	100-199	FPSD
17	Female	Bachelor's	7	No	400-499	FPSD
18	Female	Bachelor's	8	Yes	300-399	FPSD
19	Male	Master's	8	Yes	500+	MPSD
20	Female	Master's	8	Yes	300-399	FPSD
21	Female	Master's	8	Yes	400-499	FPSD
22	Female	Bachelor's	9	Yes	100-199	FPSD
23	Female	Bachelor's	9	No	400-499	FPSD
24	Female	Master's	10	Yes	500+	MPSD
25	Male	Master's	12	Yes	400-499	FPSD
26	Female	Master's	15	Yes	500+	MPSD
27	Female	Master's	12	Yes	300-399	FPSD
28	Female	Master's	12	Yes	500+	FPSD
29	Female	Master's	15	Yes	500+	MPSD
30	Female	Master's	11	Yes	400-499	FPSD
31	Female	Master's	12	Yes	500+	FPSD
32	Female	Master's	15	Yes	500+	FPSD
33	Female	Master's	14	Yes	500+	MPSD
34	Female	Master's	14	Yes	500+	MPSD
35	Female	Master's	14	No	500+	FPSD
36	Female	Master's	12	No	500+	MPSD
37	Female	Master's	12	No	400-499	FPSD
38	Female	Master's	16	No	500+	FPSD
39	Male	Master's	17	No	500+	FPSD
40	Female	Master's	16	No	500+	FPSD



41	Female	Master's	20	Yes	500+	FPSD
42	Female	Master's	20	Yes	200-299	FPSD
43	Female	Master's	20	Yes	500+	FPSD
44	Female	Master's	20	Yes	500+	MPSD
45	Female	Master's	20	No	500+	FPSD
46	Female	Master's	22	Yes	100-199	FPSD
47	Female	Master's	22	Yes	400-499	FPSD
48	Female	Master's	21	Yes	500+	MPSD
49	Female	Master's	21	Yes	300-399	FPSD
50	Female	Master's	24	Yes	400-499	MPSD
51	Female	Master's	21	Yes	500+	MPSD
52	Female	Master's	21	No	300-399	FPSD
53	Female	Master's	24	No	200-299	FPSD
54	Female	Master's	21	No	500+	FPSD
55	Female	Master's	27	Yes	100-199	FPSD
56	Female	Master's	28	Yes	200-299	FPSD
57	Female	Master's	26	Yes	500+	FPSD
58	Female	Master's	26	Yes	500+	FPSD
59	Female	Master's	29	No	200-299	FPSD
60	Female	Master's	26	No	300-399	FPSD
61	Female	Master's	26	No	500+	FPSD
62	Female	Master's	27	No	500+	FPSD
63	Female	Master's	28	No	500+	MPSD
64	Female	Master's	28	No	500+	MPSD
65	Female	Master's	32	Yes	500+	FPSD
66	Female	Master's	33	Yes	100-199	FPSD
67	Female	Master's	31	Yes	300-399	FPSD
68	Female	Bachelor's	30	Yes	200-299	FPSD
69	Female	Bachelor's	30	No	200-299	FPSD

Note: Title I Status<sup>b</sup> is assigned to buildings where at least 40% of the student population qualifies for the free and reduced lunch program. Title I funds are federal grant dollars meant to ensure that all students have access to equal, high-quality education regardless of their socio-economic status. District<sup>bc</sup>: MPSD = Moorhead Public School District, FPSD = Fargo Public School District.

## Appendix C

### *Transcription of Teachers' Responses to Survey Question 29*

Participant	Response
	Survey Question: How Do You feel When Faced with Students' Challenging Behavior?
1	Frustrated.
2	Disheartened.
3	I don't know what to do.
4	Powerless. And even though I have worked closely with peers and parents I feel like I don't know how to really solve the issue.
5	I feel confused a lot of the time. I am told to give consequences, but I am also told they are expressing trauma and that consequences will make it worse. So I am never sure what to do about it.
6	I feel like I don't have enough help.
7	I feel like I am in a situation where adrenaline is released-constantly watching the student and trying to decide how to keep my students safe while also trying to keep them focused on something besides the student.
8	Frustrated.
9	Nothing seems to work, and I tried the whole spectrum of strict to listening. Defeated. Students don't care because they don't get consequences.
10	It is exhausting and frustrating, but it is part of the job. Sometimes I feel isolated with lack of support from others in the building.
11	I feel very supported by other staff such as our behavior strategies or paras.
12	Frustrated.
13	Overwhelmed.
14	I feel like a failure. I am frustrated and not sure what the next steps are in dealing with the issues when they continue when interventions are not working.
15	Torn.
16	Sometimes helpless. I feel like there is little I can do really.
17	On the outside, calm and collected. In the inside, frustrated and defeated.
18	Confident in my response, but still anxious for helping the student.
19	Frustrated, challenged, sad.
20	Concerned as to the reasons why.
21	I feel they need something they don't currently have whether it be skills or a basic need.
22	I feel anxiety. I want to de-escalate but do not want to get into a power struggle. I don't want to set a precedent that this type of behavior will get you what you want.

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- 23 Like a failure. Heart racing. Disappointed that no matter what you do they find a way to continue the behavior. Frustrated. Have to think of new ideas all the time. Constantly on your toes.
- 24 Feel like I don't have support from administration but also that I will get questioned for every decision I make.
- 25 I feel scared sometimes. Very frustrated. Mad. Challenged. I feel like I have failed. I feel like I want to go home. Escalated. Shaky.
- 26 I do not take it personally. Once I know that something is going on with that student and they just need extra support from me that day.
- 27 Exhausted. heartbroken for the child.
- 28 Anxiety. Fear. Exhaustion.
- 29 I feel like it is part of everyday teaching and other students just move on with their day.
- 30 I often feel threatened due to the behavior of the "single" student taking away so much time from the "group". I spend a great deal of time on de-escalation techniques and problem-solving with the one student that is struggling with high behaviors that I don't give the rest of the class the time and attention they deserve.
- 31 Disheartened. Scared. Frustrated. Uncertain.
- 32 Thoughtful. Try to maintain deep breathing.
- 33 My anxiety raises because I take a lot of personal responsibility for the actions of the child. I worried that I "triggered" the child or that I will be judged by administration, counselors, or social worker because of the child's reaction. I also struggle to know the balance of when to remove the student, ignore the behavior or remove the rest of the students.
- 34 Stressed. Sad.
- 35 Stressed. Anxious. Apprehensive.
- 36 Empathetic toward the child. Stressed.
- 37 I usually feel okay about it. I feel I can handle it. When behaviors become very large, I know the steps to take to get them assistance. I can also feel very overwhelmed or evendown on myself for not knowing how to help the. [sic]
- 38 Overwhelmed. I have no support and 5 students on MTSS B and 1 IEP for behavior.
- 39 Tense.
- 40 Anxiety.
- 41 I feel a lot of empathy for the children who have the aggression and also a lot of sad for the kids who witness this behavior.
- 42 I feel low and disrespected and don't know how to fully help the students.
- 43 Frustrated. Worried about the learning of other students.
- 44 Most of the time I am pretty effective of redirecting. I don't usually get too rattled. My chief concern is the safety of that child and other children. If the challenging behavior allows most to ignore and continue work that I the path I try to follow.
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- 45 Disgusted that the child is allowed to behave inappropriately, and then come back to class with no consequences. We tell everyone to walk, but at my school, those in Level C, run a lot, and no one tells them to stop.
- 46 Initially I feel that the student is acting out towards me, but when I stop and figure out (or try to figure out) the underlying causes it makes me what to help the student even more.
- 47 There are days that I really question WHY I continue to teach as I question whether or not I am effective anymore. I am frustrated by challenging behaviors. I am angered that one child can continue to cause issues and subject other students to TRAUMA and nothing is done about it. Why does IDEA allow those children with issues continue to introduce trauma to others? It is NOT okay.
- 48 Overwhelmed. Frustrated
- 49 Anxiety with these students elevates the mood of the room.
- 50 Anxious.
- 51 I worry that there will be a “domino” effect...that students will see a classmate acting out and think they can do the same. I sometimes feel anxious, wondering if I am reacting appropriately for the student for the class, for the situation.
- 52 Try to assess whether offering choices will aide in a reversal. It depends where I am: Hallway in a transition, in class, exiting class. I feel like we should [have] safe classrooms, safe schools and our School Board members should work more willingly with our Union, Educators, and Administration to draft policies that will finally make a positive change in how students and families perceive and respond while actively attending our District.
- 53 Calmly breathing.
- 54 I feel afraid to act or react. I feel I do not have the support of my district with these issues.
- 55 Anxious.
- 56 I feel frustrated and like a failure. We are not trained on how to deal with students that have these behaviors.
- 57 I wish I had more training or more support.
- 58 I feel nervous and scared.
- 59 Frustrated.
- 60 Hard to isolate students’ issues with other students present in the room.
- 61 It is a combination of compassion, helplessness, and responsibility to maintain control of the situation. We have been training in ACE factors, and I understand that we need to work with students who carry these factors. However, when objects are thrown, torn and broken, that comes out of my time and pocket to remake or repurchase the items.
- 62 That it is unacceptable. I always contact the parent and make sure we are working as a team.
- 63 I feel sad about it. I’m not always sure what to do. I wonder about the parenting of the child.
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- 64 Angry. Hopeless. Defeated. Students rule everything. Everybody is so worried about lawsuits that a student can DESTROY a classroom, shout obscenities, SCREAM, run up and down the hallways yelling, slam doors and cupboards, and adults just stand there and watch until it's "over." I have hundreds of dollars of items I have personally purchased for my classroom destroyed by students.
- 65 I don't stress about it and usually just breath and walk away until I am calm.
- 66 Afraid of the other students being hurt. The trauma, the disruption can affect the class.
- 67 I feel I have the ability to work with these students and help them work through their issues.
- 68 Right now, very frustrated with the state on how student behaviors and destruction of property are being handled. I don't understand why a child is no longer removed from the classroom, but the class is removed, and that student is left in the room and often destroys the room. The destruction happening to school property is unacceptable in my eyes, I understand college and career ready, and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills but how about getting along socially in a community.
- 69 Feel like behaviors take away from the rest of the classroom students. Lots of time is consumed with trying to help student calm down.
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Note: All transcriptions kept participant's use of grammar, punctuation, and emphases.