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## Fostering Resilience of Latinx Youth Within School Environments

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Fostering Resilience of Latinx Youth Within School Environments

By

Savannah Martinez

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the Discipline in Social Work and the Elizabethtown College Honors Program

May 1, 2020

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Fostering Resilience of Latinx Youth Within School Environments

Savannah Martinez

Honors in the Discipline – Social Work

Elizabethtown College

May 1, 2020

Exposure to adverse experiences such as violence, discrimination, extreme poverty, or loss of a loved one can be traumatic for children, resulting in lower mental and physical health over the course of their lives (Bartlett & Steber, 2019). Schools have opportunities to foster resilience among those facing adversity and positively impact student growth by providing resources that serve as protective factors to ensure safety, social and emotional well-being, and academic success (Dutil, 2019; Theron, 2016). Therefore, schools must recognize their capacity to promote holistic well-being and academic progress in conjunction with the larger communities surrounding youth (Theron, 2016). To begin this process, educators must be trained to appropriately use accessible resources to foster student resilience.

Among youth, exposure to adversity is more common among both Black and Latinx populations (Bartlett & Steber, 2019). Fostering the resilience of Latinx youth is important because of the significant challenges and adversity they are likely to face in their lives. The Latinx community is continuing to grow, yet there is a lack of research on the resources needed to support Latinx youth. Fostering resilience is projected to be most beneficial when using school-based interventions because of the supports that already exist within the school environment (Ungar, Connelly, Liebenberg, & Theron, 2019).

The Latinx community is the largest ethnic minority group in the United States, making up 18% percent of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Additionally, the Latinx community consists of a large younger population given that one in four children under the age of 18 are Latinx (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). By 2050, it is expected that one in three Americans will be Latinx (Bordas, 2013, p. 9). In comparison to Black and White youth living in the United States, Latinx youth have higher rates of attempted suicide, cocaine use, unprotected sex, teenage pregnancy, and have the highest rates of dropping out of school (Reyes & Elias, 2011). This can

impact the student, family, and community resources available to an individual facing adverse conditions.

Historically, Latinx people have been identified by the terms Hispanic or Latino. Hispanic and Latino are commonly used interchangeably to describe people of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (Reyes & Elias, 2011). Added to the dictionary in 2018, “Latinx” is becoming more common as it promotes inclusivity by challenging the traditionally gendered “Latino” or “Latina” (Merriam-Webster, 2018). Latinx serves as a gender-neutral term in order to capture the complexity of the community. As Bordas (2013) states, “Latinos are diversity” (p. x). They vary in race, national origin, education level, socioeconomic status, immigration, and culture. As a result of this, it is important to note that the lived experiences of individuals within the Latinx community can be vastly different and providing gender-neutral language helps to encompass some of that diversity (Reyes & Elias, 2011). Past research has found that 33% of people in the Latinx community prefer the term Hispanic, 14% prefer Latino/a, while 51% of people have no preference (Bordas, 2013, p. 3). This lack of preference within the community provides an opportunity for “Latinx” to spread widely throughout the literature and within the changing social environment.

### **Resilience**

Trauma is described as experiences of adversity – actual or threatened negative events. For children, these events can affect their ability to overcome the negative effects of the situation (Bartlett & Steber, 2019). Resilience is the dynamic process that encompasses positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity (Bartlett & Steber, 2019; Jain & Cohen, 2013; Sanders, Munford, & Boden, 2017). Within a school setting, resilience can be described as a student’s ability to continue engaging and maintaining academic success after experiencing

adversity, thereby demonstrating positive adaptation to negative life circumstances (Ungar et al., 2019). Resilience is neither a personal nor a fixed trait, but rather a strength that can be fostered and developed (Archdall & Kilderry, 2016; Bartlett & Steber, 2019; Reyes & Elias, 2011). As the context of an individual's environment changes from childhood to adulthood, the effectiveness of resilience skills may vary, illustrating the importance of developing these skills during childhood (Jain & Cohen, 2013).

Much of resilience research is informed by ecological systems theory which proposes that factors within an individual's environment are impacted by the larger societal environment, thus influencing a child's development (Bartlett & Steber, 2019; Bronfenbrenner, as cited in Ernestus & Prelow, 2015). Ecological systems theory is composed of four systems that interact with each other starting with the individual and extending through to the larger society (Duerden & Witt, 2010). The first is the microsystem, which in this context is the child and their roles and relationships to their immediate environment (Rogers, 2016). This can include places like their school, or their home and neighborhood.

The mesosystem is made up of the people and places the child regularly interacts with such as their family and their school and focuses on the interactions among the microsystems (Duerden & Witt, 2010; Rogers, 2016). For example, violence in a child's neighborhood can affect a child's ability to sleep within their home which can impact school performance, thus showcasing the complex dynamic between multiple environments. The exosystem is described as the social settings where actions or relationships can occur that may affect people even when they are not directly a part of the social setting (Rogers, 2016). This contains systems that impact the child's outcomes, although the child is not directly interacting with them. An example of this is the relationship between a child's teacher and their parents in which a positive relationship can

co-contribute to the child's academic motivation and success (Duerden & Witt, 2010). Lastly, the macrosystem encompasses all the other systems named, but focuses on the broad society consisting of culture and norms as well as laws and societal attitudes that impact the functions of the preceding systems interacting within the macrosystem (Duerden & Witt, 2010; Rogers, 2016).

No single system functions independently from other systems impacting a child's environment. Ungar (2013) argues that to some degree, resilience is less about the individual and their ability to overcome adversity, but that it is more about the social networks in a child's life that work to foster more positive development in response to stress and other adversity. Additionally, ecological systems theory emphasizes the student's perception of their environment and what occurs within them because people can have varying reactions to the same experience (Rogers, 2016). This supports the notion that an individual's social ecology at the meso- and macrosystem may carry more importance in improving resilience than individual traits and that emphasis should be put more heavily on changing the social ecology impacting a student (Sanders et al., 2017; Theron, 2016; Ungar, 2013).

This understanding of resilience is helpful because it implies that the multiple levels that influence childhood development have an impact on the child's risk for not only experiencing trauma but also for how their response to trauma can manifest (Bartlett & Steber, 2019; Ungar et al., 2019). School systems make up a significant portion of a child's social ecology throughout all systems as policies and daily interactions can impact the child. Because of this connection, it is imperative that educators and other school staff know best approaches to support students' development of resilience to overcome adversity.



### **Youth Protective and Risk Factors**

Factors influencing the development of resilience within youth are typically categorized in two types: protective factors and risk factors. Protective factors are those that promote positive developmental outcomes while minimizing the negative outcomes of risks in a child's life, such as connections to supportive adults or education. In contrast, risk factors may increase the likelihood that a person will experience adverse events and be impacted by the negative outcomes of those events (Bartlett & Steber, 2019). Because individual experiences vary, some factors can serve as either protective or risk factors. For example, it is possible that while obtaining an education may be protective, an educational setting like a school may also be an environment where youth face discrimination thus becoming a part of the student's experience of adversity. Therefore, care must be taken to assess protective and risk factors in the context of the environments in which they exist for youth.

#### **Discrimination.**

Ethnic and racial discrimination are factors that directly impact Latinx youth. The prevalence of discrimination can exist within the macrosystem as negative rhetoric continues to permeate the larger society; however, it also exists within the microsystem because it may impact the child's perception of their own identity. One study of roughly 250 Puerto Rican students found that nearly 50% of participants experienced discrimination both inside and outside of school; the other 50% were worried about potential discrimination (Szalacha as cited in Reyes & Elias, 2011). This discrimination can lead to lower self-esteem; however, the impact that discrimination has on resilience can be unclear because resilience is difficult to measure (Reyes & Elias, 2011; Sanders et al., 2017).

Self-identity forms in adolescence according to Erikson's model of development. During this time, Latinx youth are beginning to explore what their identity looks like for themselves in the context of dominant White society and that alone can be a very difficult process (Dutil, 2019; Torres & Santiago, 2018). Discrimination can further negatively impact this sense of self because it can be seen as a direct attack on the individual. However, a strong sense of ethnic or racial pride can moderate the impact of discrimination because a strong positive sense of self-identity promotes belonging to a group and thus serves as a protective factor for Latinx youth (Sanders et al., 2017; Torres & Santiago, 2018; Wadsworth et al., 2018).

### **Educational attainment.**

Successfully progressing with education serves as a protective factor for most youth. Educational attainment resides within the microsystem because the title of student serves as an individual role that impacts their own future outcome. When students are able to complete age-level goals, they have smoother transitions into adulthood post-graduation such as getting a job or pursuing further education (Sanders et al., 2017). However, in 2017 nearly 80% of Latinx eighth graders scored below proficient in math for their age-level (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019). Additionally, 78% of Latinx fourth graders in public schools in 2017 were not proficient in reading. This is concerning because children who are unable to read proficiently by fourth grade are more likely to struggle academically as they move towards high school graduation (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019). Compared to the national averages of non-proficiency, 67% and 65% respectively, these rates indicate that Latinx students are more likely to struggle in subject areas required for graduation as a result of their progress in their elementary education. If students are not getting the assistance they need to be proficient in key subject areas, they may

continue to fall behind their peers academically and have reduced career success later in life (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019).

Additionally, students who experience multiple forms of adversity are more likely to fail and drop out of school (Hansen, 2018). Even if they do remain in school, one in five Latinx students do not graduate on time (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019). Because of this, it is imperative that schools work to assist Latinx students who are struggling in their academics and celebrate student efforts by acknowledging the successes they are able to achieve while potentially experiencing significant adversity during the time of their education (Jain & Cohen, 2013).

### **Supportive relationships.**

Supportive relationships with adults such as parents, teachers, or mentors matter to students (Bartlett & Steber, 2019; Reyes & Elias, 2011; Sanders et al., 2017). Respect for others is a common value that is present within the Latinx community. Many Latinx youth are raised to be especially courteous and respectful to those who are older than they are, which can include those in positions of power such as teachers, counselors, and social workers (Reyes & Elias, 2011). Respect can promote resilience combined with supportive relationships because it provides Latinx youth with someone they can trust and rely on to help make positive decisions (Ungar et al., 2019). Supportive relationships function at the mesosystem for youth because these are the relationships they build with people they engage with most often. Through building meaningful connections, teachers and other school staff are able to provide understandings of new or past experiences, overall support, and teach strategies to help students cope with adverse experiences (Hansen, 2018; Theron, 2016). In addition to adults, positive peer relationships are

also important because belonging to a group helps to mitigate risks and promote prosocial behaviors (Bartlett & Steber, 2019; Sanders et al., 2017).

Supportive relationships at the mesosystem also include the child's relationships within the family. Familialism is an important Latinx value that prioritizes the family by placing emphasis on the support that family members owe to each other (Reyes & Elias, 2011).

Supportive relationships within the family are significant because they enhance family ties and identity, which have been shown to lead to higher self-esteem among Latinx youth (Jain & Cohen, 2013; Torres & Santiago, 2018). Within the realm of education, familialism can be academically motivating because Latinx children want to do well to benefit the family through educational attainment (Reyes & Elias, 2011). However, strong family ties may also lead to greater obligations to support the family emotionally or financially and therefore may create greater stress for youth in the household (Jain & Cohen, 2013; Reyes & Elias, 2011; Torres & Santiago, 2018).

### **Neighborhoods.**

Neighborhoods are an important part of a youth's social ecology. Neighborhoods can be analyzed at both the meso- and macrosystem, but function primarily within the macrosystem because they are influenced by the larger cultural society which can impact all other systems. Neighborhoods provide a sense of identity, much like families and other relationships (Sanders et al., 2017). When neighborhoods are safe and foster a welcoming environment, they can serve as positive communities for youth where they are able to connect with others and potentially create an extended familial group. This can contribute to the strong sense of pride and self that continue to be a protective factor for Latinx youth.

In comparison, in neighborhoods with a prevalence of violence, youth are at higher risk for behavioral problems, truancy, and dropping out of school as a result of decreased levels of school engagement (Dutil, 2019; Jain & Cohen, 2013). Community violence can also increase gang involvement among youth who identify with a cultural minority group because gang participation serves as an adaptive skill to avoid violence from those in the cultural majority group (Ungar, 2013). However, despite the high prevalence of community violence among urban youth, there is little known about how resilience is developed or maintained by affected communities (Jain & Cohen, 2013).

### **Poverty.**

Poverty is a common risk factor for Latinx communities. Poverty functions within the macrosystem and impacts children and their families as a result of its broader impact on multiple ethnic minority populations. With 26% of Latinx children living in poverty and 19% living in high-poverty areas in 2017, it is clear that poverty poses risks for a significant amount of Latinx youth when the national average is nearly 10 points lower (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019).

Children living in poverty are at higher risk for poor academic achievement, lower mental and physical health, family conflict, and experiencing stress and violence (Wadsworth, Ahlkvist, McDonald, & Tilghman-Osborne, 2018). Other factors disproportionately affecting children living in poverty are exposure to toxins, noise pollution, and overcrowding. The hidden impact of facing poverty is that it can affect a child's neurological development by impairing stress responses and restructuring the brain to best cope in their negative environment (Bartlett & Steber, 2019; Reyes & Elias, 2011; Wadsworth et al., 2018). Community poverty can also impact other systems. For example, families living in high-poverty areas may experience a lack of government resources that help fund schools and social services in their neighborhoods. This

can create a situation in which schools lack important resources such as low student-teacher ratios and overall support for students.

### **How Schools Can Foster Resilience**

Schools can assist students in fostering their resilience with social and emotional learning (SEL) programs. SEL is a systematic process utilized to help both students and adults improve at communicating, empathizing, and goal setting. A metaanalysis conducted found that SEL training led to lower rates of drug usage, internalization of problems, behavior issues, criminal behavior, teenage pregnancy, and students dropping out of school (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Additionally, there were improvements in students' mental health, prosocial behaviors, and overall academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011). This supports the notion that SEL is effective in fostering resilience because it helps to alleviate some of the effects associated with the risk factors that commonly affect Latinx youth.

SEL strengthens the same school resources that are found to serve as protective factors for Latinx youth: supportive school communities, engaging classrooms, and positive teacher-student relationships. Teaching SEL skills to Latinx youth provides them with interpersonal approaches for coping with adversity they may face, which can both buffer the negative effects of trauma and foster resilience within themselves (Reyes & Elias, 2011).

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has developed a *Guide to Schoolwide SEL* which focuses on a systemic approach to SEL implementation. The first two foci of SEL implementation are building a foundational support and plan for SEL and strengthening adult SEL competencies and capacity. Building foundational support within the school can be achieved through increasing SEL knowledge and devising a shared vision and set of goals for implementing SEL among all school staff (CASEL, 2019a).

Strengthening adult SEL is achieved through providing resources to help educators and other school staff reflect on their personal SEL skills while examining and correcting cultural biases in order to recognize their own strengths and challenges to be more effective in building a shared vision of SEL implementation (CASEL, 2019a).

When staff members are able to be supported in their own SEL and their understandings of it, they can model the SEL competencies throughout their work. While educators find the work of fostering resilience to be important, they often have many difficulties naming and identifying resilience in children because they are unsure of what it is (Archdall & Kilderry, 2016). Among school staff, these difficulties can be mitigated by placing a priority on providing them with more knowledge about resilience so that they know how to recognize it among their students.

As demonstrated by these foci, schools have to have both a desire and a clear vision to implement schoolwide SEL in order to promote student SEL. Promoting SEL includes elevating student voices and creating a supportive school climate that emphasizes community-building and engagement in the classroom as well as belonging and emotional safety through explicit SEL instruction (CASEL, 2019a; Durlak et al., 2011). Successful student SEL is reliant on having a school environment that supports SEL and explicit lessons from teachers that encourage development of students' SEL competencies.

As mentioned, education can serve as a protective factor providing structure, boundaries, and an environment that can foster student exploration and growth (Hansen, 2018; Ungar et al., 2019). Using CASEL's review of evidence-based programs, a variety of school approaches have been successful in teaching SEL to middle and high school students (Dusenbury, Calin, Domitrovich, & Weissberg, 2015). The first approach is to create a schoolwide SEL initiative

(Dusenbury et al., 2015). This can be done by using CASEL's *Guide to Schoolwide SEL* in which implementation incorporates foundational support for SEL, promotion of SEL for adults and students, and continuous improvement of SEL services to foster student resilience because the structure of the school environment and intentionality of the services it provides impact how students learn.

CASEL stresses five core SEL competencies – relationship skills, social awareness, self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision making – to create an environment that benefits students' social, emotional, and academic growth. Relationship skills focus on building and maintaining healthy relationships through communication and engagement with others. Social awareness is the ability to understand social-behavioral norms and empathize with others whereas self-awareness is the ability of an individual to recognize their own thoughts and values and how they influence behaviors. Self-management is the ability to set goals and regulate emotions. Lastly, responsible decision-making is about making constructive choices by considering the consequences of decisions and considering others' well-being. The purpose of these competencies is to improve the skills, attitudes, and behaviors used to complete tasks and work through challenges (CASEL, 2019a).

Research has found that teachers want resources that help them integrate resilience building into their classroom curricula (Archdall & Kilderry, 2016). This benefits their classrooms by allowing them to be more intentional about teaching social and emotional skills. A successful approach suggested by Dusenbury et al. (2015) is implementing SEL into everyday teaching practices. Much like neighborhoods, schools provide a community to students. Within a school, networks are built from peer supports as well as adults such as teachers. This provides a



sense of group solidarity which fulfills common needs such as agency, belongingness, and hope which can buffer the effects of violence (Jain & Cohen, 2013; Wadsworth et al., 2018).

Building on case studies of students whose primary language was Spanish, Hansen (2018) highlighted the importance of supportive student-teacher relationships in fostering resilience and effective ways to build them. The development and maintenance of a positive relationship with an adult is a strong protective factor and helps to ensure competency in relationship skills (Durlak et al., 2011). More specifically, supportive relationships with teachers promotes higher school engagement and academic success because, like with familialism, when youth respect adults who respect them in return, they are more empowered to succeed (Ungar et al., 2019).

Teachers are able to foster positive relationships with their students through the language they use to praise individual learning because of its ability to encourage students to make mistakes and learn from them (Hansen, 2018). When a teacher focuses on their students' efforts rather than solely their ability to complete a challenging task, students are able to build the confidence to attempt more challenging tasks in the future. If the teacher does not emphasize effort, the student might internalize their current inability to complete a task and not learn how to overcome the challenge at hand. Through setting consistent yet appropriate challenging expectations for students, teachers are able to create a classroom environment in which students are able to learn from their mistakes (Archdall & Kilderry, 2016; Durlak et al., 2011; Hansen, 2018). Realistic yet high expectations for academic achievement can make students feel as if they are worth being challenged and invested in (Hansen, 2018). This type of support from teachers empowers students to continue learning new things (Durlak et al., 2011). By incorporating general teaching practices such as setting shared classroom rules, maintaining high

expectations for academic achievement, and creating space for students' stories as well as their feedback, educators are able to establish positive classroom environments, positive teacher-student relationships, and positive, on-going support for all of their students (Dusenbury et al., 2015).

Another way to improve student SEL is to incorporate it into classroom curricula (Dusenbury et al., 2015). Often teachers utilize spontaneous strategies to support the resilience of children by using day-to-day interactions such as disagreements between students to model how to talk through those difficult situations (Archdall & Kilderry, 2016). While this may help to strengthen students' core competencies in SEL, it is more of a reactive process rather than proactive approach to learning. A proactive example of integrating SEL into curricula is incorporating historical examples of racism and prejudice in a social studies class to promote the development of social awareness (Dusenbury et al., 2015).

Additionally, the use of free-standing SEL lessons by teachers is beneficial because these lessons proactively and explicitly teach SEL competencies through discussions and group-based activities to help students practice the skills they have learned (Dusenbury et al., 2015). Examples of free-standing lessons include building vocabulary for talking about complex feelings, teaching strategies like deep breathing or mental rehearsal for coping with stress and anxiety, or encouraging students to set goals and see them through to completion (Dusenbury et al., 2015). These lessons improve student competencies in self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making by providing the language and skills to address challenges presented to them in a positive manner.

For successful implementation of SEL, it is highly recommended for teachers and other school personnel to practice continuous improvement to SEL programs. This can be done by

assessing the shared vision and evaluating the progress gained on the goals established in the foundation building process and making changes as needed (CASEL, 2019a). This can also be done in the classroom by requesting student feedback and through self-evaluation as an educator of improvement in their own SEL competencies.

### **Implementing These Ideas**

A school-wide understanding of resilience and the factors impacting it is necessary to help students develop the skills they need to do well after facing adversity (Dutil, 2019). A school system's understanding of resilience can be improved through consultation between social workers and teaching staff about trauma, adversity, and social and emotional learning to further build upon prior understandings of student development and the adversity they may experience during their school years.

Promoting SEL is critical for both students and staff when it comes to fostering resilience with a school setting. The aim of this project was to begin the conversation with current and future educators about what they can do to best support their students while maintaining a focus on fostering resilience in Latinx youth. Latinx youth make up a significant portion of the United States' population, but the information necessary for educators to support Latinx youth is lacking. There is potential for school environments to improve their services to students by recognizing SEL as a tool for fostering resilience in schools.

It was conceptualized that by training them on the concepts of how to best support Latinx students through social and emotional learning, educators would be able to improve services to foster resilience from a Latinx youth perspective. This training should include research detailing protective and risk factors for Latinx youth that impact resilience and the supports currently established within most schools. This training should also be based on information on developing

approaches for school wide SEL provided by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning for strengthening adult SEL and promoting student SEL.

### **Methodology**

To achieve the above noted aims, a 90-minute training was developed. The first 35 minutes was an introduction of Latinx youth and discussed the risk and protective factors that can impact Latinx youth. The next 25 minutes detailed the importance of schools and SEL in fostering resilience. The last 30 minutes were dedicated to allowing participants to engage in activities that foster personal growth in SEL competencies. This training aimed to help participants achieve five learning outcomes – that participants would be able to:

- define resilience and its importance,
- identify risk and protective factors influencing Latinx youth,
- understand the role of social and emotional learning in schools,
- recognize their own SEL strengths and challenges as well as the strengths and challenges within the school environment, and
- identify preliminary actions that will help them begin implementing SEL in their own work.

Two training sessions were expected to occur in March 2020. The first training took place as planned on March 9, 2020 during an in-service training session at River Rock Academy in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. A total of 10 (4 female-identified; 6 male-identified) participants were present. Participants included educational, clinical, and behavior management staff, as well as the campus director. The four educational staff members had teaching backgrounds varying from special education in science and math, history, social and living skills, and English.

Educational staff also included a youth service specialist who works on daily academic interventions with students. Clinical staff was comprised of the two counselors who provide counseling services to all students. Behavior management was comprised of two staff members who help monitor and mediate student behaviors as they arise. Only two River Rock Academy staff members were not present. This included the administrative associate and a behavior manager who also serves as a van driver for the students. Given the small school environment, each staff member interacts with all students daily.

A second training had been planned to take place on March 23, 2020 during a senior seminar course for student teachers. Expected participants would have included current senior education students at Elizabethtown College in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania. As a result of the college's physical closure due to COVID-19, the second training did not take place.

### **Presentation**

The first half of the training included an introduction of the Latinx youth focusing on the use of the term, 'Latinx,' population growth predictions for the Latinx community, and common adverse experiences among Latinx youth, such as attempted suicide and dropping out of school. This portion of the presentation also included the importance of fostering resilience and how protective and risk factors may impact the social ecology and lives of Latinx youth. To define resilience, educators were presented with two definitions. The first was the traditional definition of resilience, summarized as the positive adaptation to adverse events. The second definition focused on resilience in the school context, which looks at the student's ability to continue engaging with others as well as their ability to maintain academic success and progress after experiencing adversity, thus demonstrating positive adaptation. This complementary

understanding of resilience provided school staff with a functional definition that may help them better identify and improve the resilience of students within the classroom.

The ecological systems theory was utilized to help conceptualize the potential risk and protective factors that influence Latinx youth: discrimination, educational attainment, supportive relationships, neighborhoods, and poverty. This theory is commonly used to inform research on resilience because it suggests that an individual's direct environment is influenced by the larger societal environment. It is an important theory to include in this training because it emphasizes that care must be taken to identify factors from various system levels and that resilience is not reliant on the personal aspects of an individual. Discussion of the ecological systems theory included how each factor can function as a risk or protective factor. For instance, a neighborhood can be a source of community and connection to supportive relationships (serves as a protective factor). Alternatively, they can be a source of violence or discrimination (serves as a risk factor). The impact the neighborhood has on the individual student depends on the personal experiences they have had with that factor. The factors discussed also impact a variety of different populations and can impact school resources available to students.

The second half of the presentation was focused on what SEL is and its role within the school environment. This half of the session began with a mindfulness exercise adopted from CASEL's *SEL 3 Signature Practices Playbook*. The goal of the exercise, known as a mindful minute, was to have participants take a minute to focus on their breathing and refocus their attention (CASEL, 2019b). This helped break up the presentation topics in addition to demonstrating an exercise that can easily be integrated into their classrooms (Appendix A).

It was explained that schools are important in the effort to foster student resilience because they make up a significant portion of the student's social ecology and are typically

designed to support a variety of student needs. SEL is a process that helps both students and staff improve their ability to communicate, empathize, and set goals while also strengthening school resources that have the capacity to serve as protective factors for youth. Participants were provided an overview of SEL core competencies as presented by CASEL (Appendix B): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies inform the ways that SEL is integrated into a school approach. Additionally, they are the skills that adults can model to the students with whom they work through everyday SEL practices.

Following the PowerPoint presentation, educators reflected on their own SEL competencies using worksheets provided by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. The first worksheet had staff reflect on their personal self-care strategies (Appendix C). After a few minutes, they were asked to share their answers with those around them and choose a new self-care activity to try. Many participants said they would try meal-prepping or making better efforts to eat healthy. Others said they would try to exercise more or treat themselves to a massage. While some participants said they wished they had better self-care routines, others felt satisfied with the routines they have in place. This exercise was aimed at highlighting care for the self because it allows people to be more prepared and available for the needs of their students.

The second worksheet was a personal assessment and reflection on their individual SEL competencies (Appendix D). While participants were not required to share their specific responses, participants were asked to identify which areas they were surprised they ranked themselves lower in. Many were surprised that they ranked lower in self-management, which focuses on the ability to manage stress, set goals, and utilize organizational skills. One

participant indicated that this may be a result of working to address the needs of all their students all of the time. This highlights the importance of a self-care routine to both regulate and motivate oneself.

Participants were asked what steps they could take in the near future to help them improve their SEL competencies in relationship to their professional roles at River Rock Academy. Many participants discussed focusing on better self-management which would inform the other competencies. Other participants discussed exploring social awareness and improving relationship skills by finding a time for the entire staff to be together. They described how it is difficult to learn about each other or share ideas as their school schedules can be different and they do not have strong communication outside of the school setting. They believed that improving relationships would lead to a more cohesive team mindset among the River Rock staff.

From a facilitator standpoint, each of the training objectives were met. However, the extent of the long-term effects of the training is difficult to establish. Following the training session, there were originally plans for an evaluation to be conducted to determine if participants felt as if the training objectives were met. Based on the swift closure of schools due to COVID-19 following the training, a formal evaluation was not conducted. This is a limitation to this research as it is based on observations from the facilitator during the presentation rather than on the participants' reflection of the ability to utilize the information from the training within the classroom.

### **Conclusion**

The topic of resilience is important now more than ever as the world is filled with uncertainty and uncharted territories. One future recommendation for resilience research is to



continue research on best practices to intervene with diverse communities facing adversity. Additionally, researchers should aim to discover interventions that can be implemented proactively to reduce the experiences of adversity among youth. Lastly, further researchers should aim to explore the relationship between resilience and schools by exploring the availability of school resources as it relates to a student's ability to overcome adversity.

Schools will be one of the largest communities to which students return following the nationwide closures as a result of COVID-19. While this time is difficult for everyone, educators have the opportunity to utilize this time to take care of themselves, assess how they can improve their own SEL competencies, and plan for how to support students remotely and in-person. It is possible for educators to continue modeling the SEL core competencies and to continue developing supportive relationships with their students during this time in efforts to foster students' resilience as a way to address the uncertainty of the current environment. The impacts that the pandemic will have on a youth's ecology is unknown, but educators should work to ensure their school is a welcoming and supportive environments in their schools to which students can return when it is safe to do so again.

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## Appendix A

## Mindful Minute Exercise

**Engaging Strategies****Brain Break: Mindful Minute****Time:** 1-3 minutes**Overview:**

*Oftentimes our bodies can be present but our minds are elsewhere. Asking participants to focus on a simple action helps everyone become fully present.*

**When and Why:**

This activity works well both to start a meeting—to help participants focus—and as a classroom “brain break”—to allow participants to decompress and refocus so they’re ready to re-engage with learning.



**SEL Focus:** This activity promotes both *Self-Awareness (Identifying Emotions)*, and the *Self-Management* skills of *Stress Management* and *Self-Discipline* as participants practice ownership of regulating themselves.

**Steps:**

1. Explain that our breath can be used to calm our bodies and steady our minds.
2. Ask participants to bring awareness to their breathing when you sound a tone. It may be helpful for participants to place their hands on their bellies and notice the gentle rising and falling of their breath.
3. Invite them to either close their eyes or to rest them by looking at a spot they choose across the room. Remind them there is no need to try to breathe in any special way, but to just notice how their own breathing is happening right then.
4. Gently sound a triangle or bell or verbally signify the end.



Debrief the experience by asking participants to share how the activity felt to them and when they might use this in their lives, and/or to share similar ideas like this that help them stay present and focused.

**Modifications and Variations:**

For an energizing mindfulness activity, choose something that involves concentration. For example, ask participants to pat their heads while they alternately tap opposite shoulders.

Appendix B

SEL Core Competencies

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) COMPETENCIES

**SELF-AWARENESS**

The ability to accurately recognize one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one’s strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a “growth mindset.”

- IDENTIFYING EMOTIONS
- ACCURATE SELF-PERCEPTION
- RECOGNIZING STRENGTHS
- SELF-CONFIDENCE
- SELF-EFFICACY

**SOCIAL AWARENESS**

The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

- PERSPECTIVE-TAKING
- EMPATHY
- APPRECIATING DIVERSITY
- RESPECT FOR OTHERS

**RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING**

The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.

- IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS
- ANALYZING SITUATIONS
- SOLVING PROBLEMS
- EVALUATING
- REFLECTING
- ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

**SELF-MANAGEMENT**

The ability to successfully regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.

- IMPULSE CONTROL
- STRESS MANAGEMENT
- SELF-DISCIPLINE
- SELF-MOTIVATION
- GOAL SETTING
- ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

**RELATIONSHIP SKILLS**

The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.

- COMMUNICATION
- SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT
- RELATIONSHIP BUILDING
- TEAMWORK



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Appendix C

Self-Care Activity Sheet

**Give 1/Get 8 Self Care Activities**

Activity courtesy of Chicago Public Schools

1. Answer one of the questions in the grid below.
2. Mingle with others to share your activity and hear about theirs. Write their ideas into your grid.
3. Circle your favorite ideas and plan to incorporate them into your week!

<p><b>How do you make time for exercise, and what kind of exercise do you like to do?</b></p>	<p><b>What do you do during the week to nurture your spiritual health?</b></p>	<p><b>How do you carve out “me time” during the work day, and what do you do?</b></p>
<p><b>How do you unwind and recharge after work?</b></p>	<p><b>How do you care for yourself when you have had an upsetting or stressful day?</b></p>	<p><b>What strategies do you use to eat healthy?</b></p>
<p><b>What morning routine helps you prepare emotionally for the day?</b></p>	<p><b>What do you do with your friends or family that re-energizes you?</b></p>	<p><b>Other: What’s your favorite self-care activity that doesn’t fit into any of these boxes?</b></p>



Appendix D

Personal Reflection Assessment

**TOOL: Personal Assessment and Reflection—SEL Competencies for School Leaders, Staff, and Adults**

This tool was designed for self-reflection. It should not be used to evaluate performance. Principals, administrators, SEL team members, and staff members can use it to assess their personal strengths and think about how they can model those strengths when interacting with others. The tool also offers prompts that encourage thinking about strategies to promote growth across areas of social competence.

Insights gained from this personal reflection tool can be effectively used during SEL professional learning. After individuals privately complete the tool, they can discuss general themes and examples of strengths and challenges with partners or in small groups. During regular staff meetings, staff can revisit personal goals to mark progress and update.

Here's how to use this tool:

1. Read each statement and think of related specific situations, then rate yourself on the statement by marking the appropriate box (rarely, sometimes, often). If a statement does not apply to you, draw a line through the rating box.
2. When you finish, search for patterns of strengths and challenges to guide your personal social-emotional growth process. This information is for you, so answer accurately without judging responses as "good" or "not as good."
3. After completing the reflection, take action in light of what you learned.
  - a. Reflect upon the results to draw conclusions about your progress.
    - i. If you consider that statements marked as "often" could be indicators of personal strengths:
      1. How do these strengths affect your interactions with students and peers?
      2. What competencies do your strengths relate to?
      3. Which of your strengths do you believe will help you guide schoolwide SEL?
      4. Which are you most proud of?
    - ii. If you consider that statements marked as "rarely" could be considered as current challenges:
      1. How might enhancing this area benefit your interactions with students and/or peers?
      2. To which competency or competencies do your challenges relate?
      3. Select one or two areas you believe would help you promote schoolwide SEL.
      4. Develop a strategy to remind yourself to practice this new behavior, or bring it up as something to work on with a mentor or a coach.
    - iii. When looking at your responses, were there things that surprised you? Were there things that confirmed what you already knew about yourself?
  - b. List ways you can model your strengths for others and embed them throughout the school day.
  - c. List ways you can improve on any challenges you currently face.

**TOOL: Personal Assessment and Reflection—SEL Competencies for School Leaders, Staff, and Adults**

Self-Awareness		Rarely	Sometimes	Often
EMOTIONAL	I am able to identify, recognize, and name my emotions in the moment.			
SELF-AWARENESS	I recognize the relationship between my feelings and my reactions to people and situations.			
ACCURATE	I know and am realistic about my strengths and limitations.			
SELF-PERCEPTION	I encourage others to tell me how my actions have affected them.			
	I know how my own needs, biases, and values affect the decisions I make.			
SELF-CONFIDENCE	I believe I have what it takes to influence my own destiny and lead others effectively.			
	I feel confident that I can handle whatever comes along with calm self-assurance and a relaxed presence.			
OPTIMISM	I believe that most experiences help me learn and grow.			
	I can see the positive even in negative situations.			
Self-Management		Rarely	Sometimes	Often
SELF-CONTROL	I find ways to manage my emotions and channel them in useful ways without harming anyone.			
	I stay calm, clear-headed, and unflappable under high stress and during a crisis.			
SETTING AND ACHIEVING GOALS	I have high personal standards that motivate me to seek performance improvements for myself and those I lead.			
	I am pragmatic, setting measurable, challenging, and attainable goals.			
ADAPTABILITY	I accept new challenges and adjust to change.			
	I modify my thinking in the face of new information and realities.			
ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS	I can juggle multiple demands without losing focus or energy.			
	I balance my work life with personal renewal time.			

**TOOL: Personal Assessment and Reflection—SEL Competencies for School Leaders, Staff, and Adults**

Social Awareness		Rarely	Some-times	Often
<b>EMPATHY</b>	I listen actively and can grasp another person's perspective and feelings from both verbal and nonverbal cues.			
<b>RESPECT FOR OTHERS</b>	I believe that, in general, people are doing their best, and I expect the best of them.			
<b>APPRECIATION OF DIVERSITY</b>	I appreciate and get along with people of diverse backgrounds and cultures in my school community and utilize inclusionary practices to ensure all voices are represented.			
<b>ORGANIZATIONAL AWARENESS</b>	I am astute in organizational situations and am able to identify crucial social networks.			
	I understand the organizational forces at work, guiding values, and unspoken rules that operate among people.			
Relationship Skills		Rarely	Some-times	Often
<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	I foster an emotionally nurturing and safe environment for staff, students, families, and community members.			
	I am open and authentic with others about my values and beliefs, goals, and guiding principles.			
	I communicate with and encourage interaction with staff, students, parents, caregivers, and community members.			
	I can articulate ideas that are important to me in ways that motivate others to become involved.			
<b>BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS</b>	I have a genuine interest in cultivating people's growth and developing their SEL skills			
	I am able to openly admit my mistakes and shortcomings to myself and others.			
	I try to understand the perspective and experiences of others before I offer suggestions.			
	I give timely and constructive feedback as a coach and mentor.			
<b>CONFLICT MANAGEMENT</b>	I am comfortable dealing with conflict, listening to feelings from all parties and helping them understand different perspectives.			
	I am able to guide conflicting parties to find a common solution.			
<b>TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATION</b>	I am good at teamwork and collaboration and generate a collegial atmosphere that inspires us all.			
	I build relationships with members of diverse groups.			
	I involve key stakeholders in important decision-making tasks to ensure we are making wise choices.			



**TOOL: Personal Assessment and Reflection—SEL Competencies for School Leaders, Staff, and Adults**

	I embody teamwork in my leadership style and personal behaviors as a role model to staff, students, and the school community.			
Responsible Decision-Making		Rarely	Some-times	Often
<b>PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND SITUATION ANALYSIS</b>	I am able to define the core of the problem and differentiate it from solution options.			
	I recognize the need for change, to challenge the status quo, and to encourage new thinking in my school.			
	I conduct a needs analysis and involve the staff to identify problems before starting a new initiative.			
<b>PROBLEM-SOLVING</b>	I involve others to generate multiple solutions and predict the outcome (of each solution) for key problems.			
	I find practical and respectful ways to overcome barriers, even when it comes to making decisions that may not be popular.			
<b>EVALUATION &amp; REFLECTION</b>	I use more than one measure to assess progress toward social, emotional, and academic goals.			
	I provide opportunities for self-reflection and group reflection on progress toward goals and the process used.			
<b>PERSONAL, MORAL, &amp; ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY</b>	I treat other people in the way I would want to be treated.			
	I encourage community service activities for students, staff, and the community			

