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Entry-Level Occupational Therapy Doctorate -  
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## **The Role of School-Based Occupational Therapists and Social Determinants of Health in Social Emotional Learning Programming**

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# The Creation of a Summer SEL Enrichment Program for Low-Income Students, Negatively Impacted by Social Determinants of Health

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# Background

A literature review was conducted to reveal...

- A lack of available research on the role of SDOH in SEL program creation and implementation for lower-income schools.
- An unidentified professional responsibility for SEL programming for K – 12<sup>th</sup> grade schools in the United States.
- Summer learning as a critical time for knowledge retention and enhancement in preparation for the coming school year (Webber-Bey, 2019).
- Established importance of emotional regulation in preparation for mental readiness to learn in the classroom (Córdova et al., 2023).
- Children from higher risk backgrounds (low-income, urban, minority status) benefit from a holistic, school-wide, approach to SEL instruction (Duncan et al., 2016).



# Key Terms

## Social Emotional Learning (SEL):

“The process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the **knowledge, skills** and **attitudes** to develop **healthy identities, manage emotions** and **achieve** personal and collective **goals, feel** and **show empathy** for others, **establish** and **maintain supportive relationships** and make **responsible** and **caring decisions**” (CASEL 2024).

- SEL is typically comprised of 5 core competences including **Self-Awareness, Social-Awareness, Self-Management, Relationship and Responsible Decision-Making Skills** (CASEL 2024).

## Social Determinants of Health (SDOH):

“**Conditions in the environments** where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks.” Some examples are “**Economic** Stability, **Education** access and quality, **health care** access and quality, **neighborhood** and built **environment, social** and **community context**” (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion 2024).

# Project Purpose and Aims

The purpose of this project is to address social determinants of health within an urban, low-income community in Charleston, SC, and evaluate the effectiveness of a summer enrichment program on the acquisition of key Social Emotional Learning competencies.

## Aims:

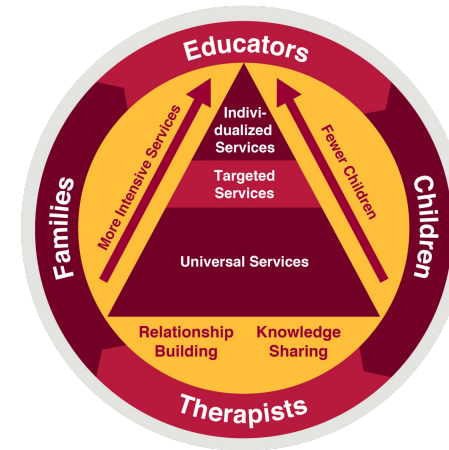
- Identify the presence and role of Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) in Social Emotional Learning (SEL) program implementation within an urban, low-income elementary school in Charleston, SC.
- Develop an educational tool integrating SEL core competencies, state education standards and Occupational Therapy pediatric developmental milestones, as appropriate for age/grade levels.
- Partner with an SEL non-profit organization to advocate for the role of school-based Occupational Therapists in SEL program creation and implementation.
- Educate school staff members on the role and importance of school-based Occupational Therapists and SEL.

# Theoretical Foundations

## Partner 4 Change Model:

- › Emphasizes partnership between the Occupational Therapist, parents and educators with the intent to change the daily environment and life of children (Missiuna, 2012).
- › Tiered service delivery system model
  - › Allows for OTs to provide services to the whole school community in addition to individual students.

**PARTNERING FOR CHANGE: P4C**  
Building Capacity through Collaboration and Coaching in Context



© Missiuna, Pollock, Campbell, Levac and Whalen, *CanChild*, McMaster University, 2016

# Stakeholders and Project Timeline

- Meeting Street Brentwood families and school staff
  - Title 1 PK3 – 8<sup>th</sup> Grade School in North Charleston, SC
    - More than 40% of students are considered to live in poverty
  - Student Demographics: estimated 70% African American, 30% Hispanic/Latino
- Kindergarten – Fifth grade students
- Community Organizations in the greater Charleston, SC area
- School based Occupational Therapists

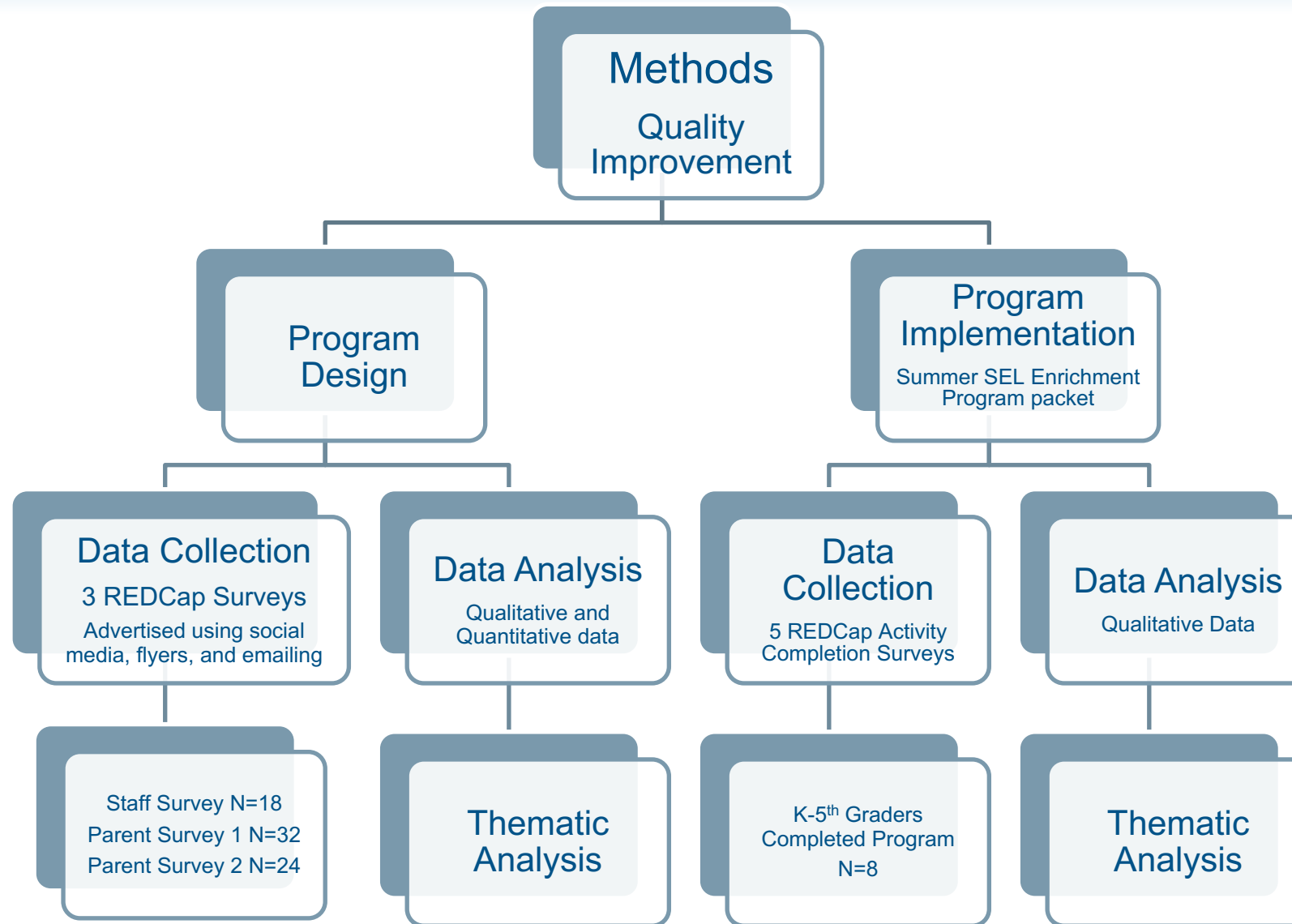


# Capstone Experience and Project Deliverables

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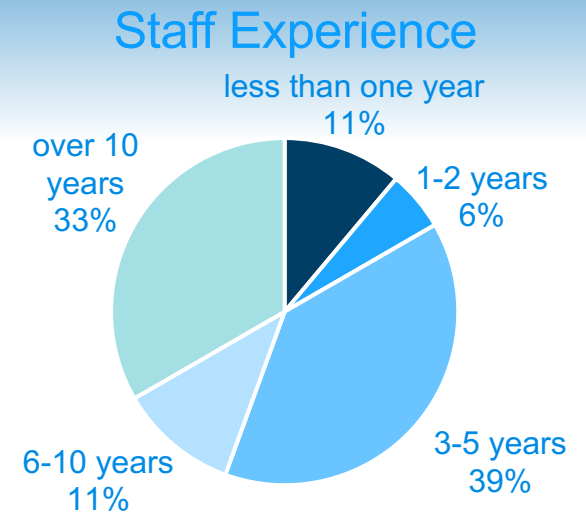
# Primary Deliverable: Summer SEL Enrichment Program



# Preliminary Survey Methods

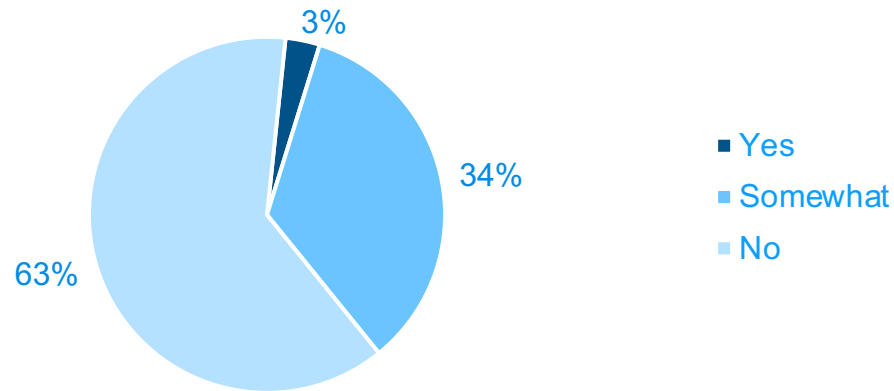
## Participants

- Teacher SEL/SDOH Survey: 18 total participants
  - MSB Staff Members including general and special education teachers, academic and behavioral interventionists, a school psychologist, OT, SLP and guidance counselor.
- MSB Family Surveys
  - Survey 1: Anonymous SDOH Survey
    - 32 Parents/Caregivers
  - Survey 2: SEL and Summer Enrichment Program Sign-Up Survey
    - 24 Surveys -> 35 students, however 3 students excluded due to grade level criteria (Current K-5<sup>th</sup> Graders as of May 2024).

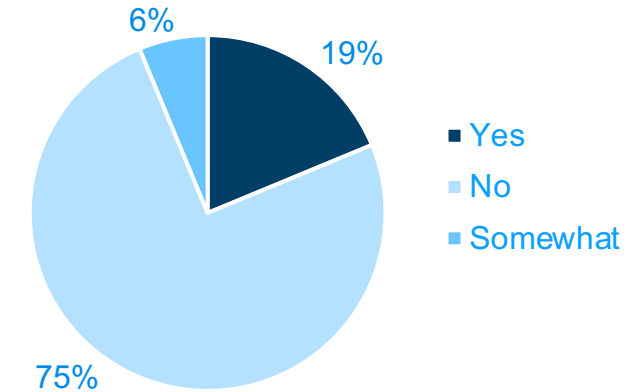


# Preliminary Data Analysis: Parent/Caregiver Surveys

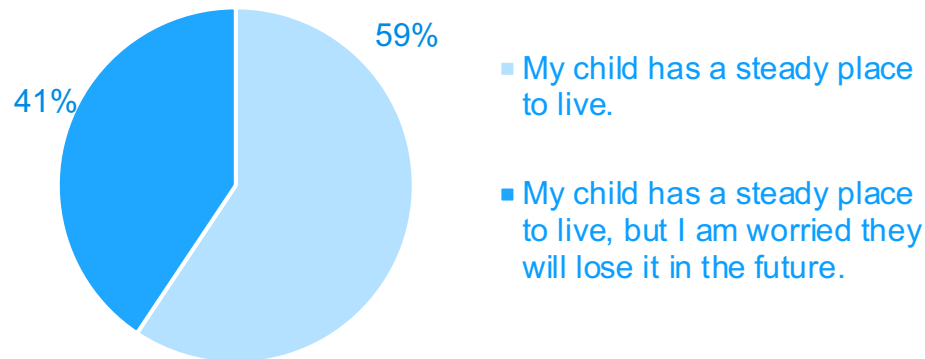
In the last 12 months, has a lack of access to transportation affected your child's ability to attend school?



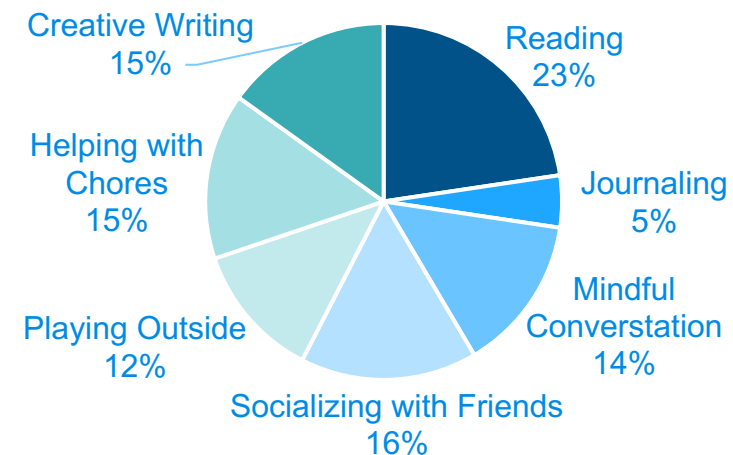
In the last 12 months, were you worried that food would run out before you got money to buy more?



Please describe your child's primary living situation



What activities would you like your child/children to participate more in this summer?



# Preliminary Data Analysis and Key Findings

- An average of 34.4% of participating MSB families indicated concerns about food, housing and/or transportation insecurity influencing their child's ability to attend school.
- 100% of participating MSB staff believe that the students they teach/interact with:
  - Would benefit from SEL enrichment activities to complete during the summer.
  - Are negatively impacted by social determinants of health.
    - Reported Examples: Gun and domestic violence, high neighborhood crime rates, discrimination, food, housing, transportation and financial insecurity.

# Primary Deliverable: Summer SEL Enrichment Program

- Free and fun, at-home summer enrichment program comprised of **5 core and 3 bonus, age-appropriate activities**.
- Each activity is comprised of SEL core competences, SC education standards and OT developmental milestones, as appropriate for age/grade level (K – 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grade as of May 2024).
- Program activities designed to limit reported social determinants of health.
- Community based prizes to encourage community integration which previously may have been limited by reported SDOH.
- Program packet, all surveys and program communication available in English and Spanish.
- Packet also included coloring pages corresponding to activities, and a summer calendar for suggested activity completion timeline.



# Summer SEL Enrichment Program

## Kindergarten – 2nd Grade Activity Guide

1. **Play Outside Challenge:** Over the next 2 weeks, play outside for 30 minutes, at least 5 times! Encourage your child to try something new like playing a new game or playing with a friend or family member that you may not normally play with! Encourage younger students to engage in pretend play like princesses, spies, ninjas, or whatever their minds can imagine! You can also take your children to a new playground, park, or beach!

See the bonus activities list on page 9 for a nature scavenger hunt that can also be completed while doing this challenge!

Activity Completion Survey: <https://redcap.link/Activity1>

2. **Local Library Challenge:** Take your child to a local library and encourage them to pick out an age-appropriate book to read during the summer. You may need to provide more assistance to younger children to pick an appropriate book. For younger children, plan time, a few times a week, to read their chosen book with them. After reading the entire book, have your child draw a picture describing the book. This can include the main character, the plot or even a conflict or triumph. In addition, depending on your child's age, have them write a few (1-2) sentences about the book, or label the photo.

See page 11 for how to open a library card, rent a book, and which libraries are closest to Meeting Street Brentwood.

Activity Completion Survey: <https://redcap.link/Activity2>

3. **My Summer Journal:** Help your child create their own diary using the journal provided with this packet or create one using several pieces of paper, stapled or glued together. Children can decorate their journals however they want, with markers, paint, crayons, or stickers.

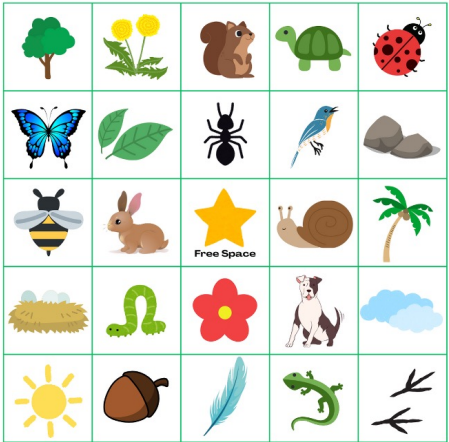
Encourage your child to use this journal throughout the summer to express their emotions regarding different things they experience. This can be something fun, exciting, or upsetting. Younger children can draw pictures to describe their experiences (sentences, depending on their age). Next, discuss with your child what picture, how the situation made them feel, how they reacted, and his their reaction if applicable.

Activity Completion Survey: <https://redcap.link/Activity3>

4. **Lights, Camera, Action!** For this activity encourage your child favorite story. This can be from an age-appropriate book, movie, or Have your child create costumes and dress up (old clothes or even Encourage your child to put on their play with a sibling, friend or f



## Nature Bingo



# Community Partners



South Carolina  
Aquarium

40 community-based  
experiences donated!

# Summer Program Key Findings

- Total participation
  - 35 students initially enrolled, however 3 not eligible due to age/grade criteria.
  - 25% of enrolled students completed the program (4 or more activities and corresponding survey).
- Families asked to complete 1 brief survey after completing each activity- 5 surveys total
  - 100% of participating families reported "yes" or "maybe" when asked if they would complete the activities again.
  - 100% of participating families reported "yes" or "somewhat" when asked if their children benefited from completing the individual activities.

# Deliverable 2 & 3: Advocacy and Education

- Partnered with SEL4SC, a local SEL non-profit organization, to advocate for SEL and OT
  - Statewide chapter of SEL4US (Social Emotional Learning Alliance for The United States) - SEL non-profit advocating for SEL programming in schools.
  - Collaborated with organization officials to outline future professional advocacy goals and design “Thought Piece” article to be published on the organization’s website and social media.
    - The article ponders the current design of the K – 12 public school system in the US and the responsibility for integrating SEL into schools. It also encourages parents, teachers, and OT practitioners to advocate on behalf of millions of students to improve the educational system.
- Creation and distribution of MSB Staff educational In-service
  - Educates staff on the role of Occupational Therapists in the school setting and importance of Social Emotional Learning programming.
  - Disseminates Capstone Project key findings.

# Project Strengths, Weaknesses and Sustainability

## - Strengths

- Meets a reported need from school families and staff
- Program designed to limited SDOH reported barriers
- Available in multiple formats- Spanish, English, print and digital
- Community based incentives

## - Weaknesses

- Limited parental engagement despite initial interest in the summer program
- Survey completion requirement- number of surveys required
- Speculation on the accuracy of reported SDOH survey perception of neighborhood safety as survey was not a representative sample
- Paper packet format sent home with students

## - Sustainability

- 100% of MSB participating families reported they would complete the activities again
- Future advocacy efforts will continue to promote the program with the hope that other OT practitioners and researchers will adapt the program to their region, school or district
- Opportunity for future students at the capstone site, to adapt the program



# Site Recommendations and Impacts

## - Recommendations for the Site

- Incorporate more grade levels into the program including 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade with necessary adaptation of program activities
- Decrease number of required surveys to promote increase participation
- Provide in-person presentations to educate staff on the program
- Increase in-person program advertisement to school families
- Extend the timeline for program advertisement to increase sign-ups and participation

## - Current and Anticipated Impacts

- Increased family engagement in the greater Charleston area
- Increased family and staff knowledge on the role of OT, importance of SEL and impact of SDOH on learning
- Future researchers, OTs, parents and school staff will read about the program and choose to adapt it to their school, district or region

# Potential Impact on Occupational Therapy Practice

This project sought to advocate for the increased scope of practice for school-based OT's including increased employment and contracted hours (to include summer months) and the adoption of a workload model practice standard.

- The potential impact of this project for school-based Occupational Therapists includes:
  - Increased employment opportunities
  - Improved clinician to student ratio
  - Higher take-home pay (More contracted employment hours- summer months)
  - Opportunity to provide skilled OT services to more students, school wide

# Conclusion

- This project allowed for increased community integration for lower-income students.
- Future projects should explore alternative platforms for implementation of summer SEL programs, such as a website or phone application, to increase participation.
- Occupational Therapists should be responsible for SEL programming for K-12th graders in the United States.
- Social Determinants of Health affect all children, especially those who are “at risk,” therefore should be considered when designing and implementing educational programming.
- Social Emotional Learning is critical for academic success for all children in the United States.

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# Thank You!

This concludes my doctoral capstone defense presentation. I invite you to offer feedback or ask questions.

Special thanks to Dr. Cristina Reyes Smith, Mrs. Christine Ramsey, Mrs. Shakira Harrell and the teachers and families of Meeting Street Brentwood