



# Transformative Social-Emotional Learning for Teachers Critical and Holistic Well-Being as a Marker of Success

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Résumé de l'article

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## **Transformative Social–Emotional Learning for Teachers: Critical and Holistic Well-Being as a Marker of Success**

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### **Abstract**

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a crucial part of student wellness and academic achievement, but teachers' own SEL is often overlooked. This qualitative study examines educators' perceptions of their own university-level teacher preparation programs to better understand the ways in which teacher educators can support pre-service teachers' well-being, preparedness, and longevity in the field. Findings reveal that teachers saw their own transformative SEL—a form of SEL committed to equity and social justice (Jagers et al., 2019)—as a key factor for their success, highlighting the importance of critical and holistic preparation that focuses on the social–emotional development of teachers themselves. Implications focus on practical ways transformative SEL can be infused into teacher preparation programs including redefining success beyond student academics alone, focusing on teacher well-being in a way that does not ignore systemic oppression and school-level barriers, preparing teachers for the realities of roadblocks and ethical dilemmas they may face, and examining syllabi and coursework for the development of transformative SEL competencies.

### **Introduction**

Even before COVID-19, teachers were reporting increasingly high levels of stress (Eva & Thayer, 2017; Srinivasan, 2018), and every year, teachers leave the profession for a host of different reasons (e.g., Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Indeed, more than 44% of new teachers (in public and private schools) leave teaching within the first 5 years (Ingersoll et al., 2018). Compounded with the effects of the pandemic, teacher job satisfaction has now reached an all-time low (EdWeek Research Center, 2022; Will, 2022). According to a nationally representative poll of more than 1300 teachers, only 12% of teachers are very satisfied with their



jobs, and more than four out of 10 teachers stated that they were very or fairly likely to leave their positions within the next 2 years (Kurtz, 2022).

Although several scholars are working to combat these trends by supporting teachers through burnout and demoralization (e.g., Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Santoro, 2018), researching teacher turnover trends and making policy recommendations (e.g., Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll, 2001; Sutcher et al., 2016), improving recruitment and retention strategies for teachers of colour (e.g., Bristol & Shirrell, 2019; Carver-Thomas, 2018), and trying to better understand the root causes of teacher dissatisfaction in order to provide more targeted interventions and supports (e.g., Will, 2022), many questions remain about how to promote teacher longevity and well-being.

How can teachers be holistically supported, and what role do teacher educators play in this kind of support? What does success actually look like for teachers? The present research draws on teacher interviews to first hear how teachers themselves define success and then synthesize these perspectives into recommendations for teacher educators. This qualitative study seeks to answer two primary research questions:

1. How do classroom teachers define their own preparedness and success?
2. How can teacher educators effectively and holistically prepare teachers to be successful in these specifically identified ways?

While the teachers we spoke with certainly talked about the ways in which they defined preparedness and success in terms of their *students'* well-being, our findings reveal that participants also consistently defined success in terms of their *own* social–emotional wellness. More specifically, the teachers' responses were aligned with Jagers et al.'s (2019) conceptualization of *transformative* social–emotional learning, which is specifically focused on the intersection of social–emotional learning and social justice.

Despite a large body of extant literature on social and emotional learning (SEL) itself, it is not yet clear how SEL can most effectively be incorporated into teacher preparation programs to support both student and teacher outcomes. A 2017 national exploration of teacher preparation for SEL reported that SEL is given limited attention in required courses in education colleges in the United States, leaving teachers not only to chart their own path in supporting their students' social–emotional wellness but also to navigate their own strategies for well-being (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Indeed, one of the report's primary recommendations is to advance research that examines the impact of promoting teachers' SEL in teacher preparation programs on both student *and* teacher growth and wellness (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017).

The literature review below begins by defining SEL and briefly summarizing its evidence base. It then details some of the primary scholarship on *teacher* SEL as well as holistic teacher supports in adjacent and overlapping fields, with a focus on how these kinds of supports connect to success and well-being. The final section outlines the research on transformative SEL to illustrate the benefits of supports for teachers that are grounded in equity and justice. By centring the voices of teachers sharing their perspectives on how success and preparedness are defined, this paper ultimately explores the ways in which teacher preparation programs can work to cultivate teacher transformative social–emotional learning and examines the ways in which these approaches may connect to longevity, critical and holistic teacher well-being, and success.

## Literature Review

### *Social and emotional learning*

SEL can be defined as “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” (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2022a). SEL is often understood as being comprised of five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. *Self-awareness* includes a capacity to recognize one’s own strengths and limitations as well as the possession of a sense of confidence and purpose; *self-management* includes the ability to manage stress, feel motivated, be resilient through hardships, and accomplish goals; *social awareness* encompasses recognizing strengths in others and expressing gratitude and concern; *relationship skills* include the ability to listen and communicate effectively and problem solve collaboratively; and *responsible decision making* encompasses the capacity to consider ethical concerns and apply critical thinking to a range of situations (CASEL, 2022a). SEL is associated with a host of positive outcomes for students, including stronger relationships with peers and teachers (Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, 2019); an ability to regulate stress (CASEL, 2022b; Durlak et al., 2011); positive attitudes towards one’s self and others (Mahoney et al., 2018); improvements to well-being, emotional regulation, and cognition (Immordino-Yang et al., 2018); and academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011; Mahoney et al., 2018).

### *Social and emotional learning for teachers*

SEL is most often discussed in terms of student outcomes, but a growing body of research now also focuses on the importance of SEL for teachers. Jennings and Greenberg (2009), for example, have put forth a model of a prosocial classroom that emphasizes the connection between teachers’ social–emotional competences and the building of teacher–student relationships, effective classroom management, and effective SEL implementation. They posit that these three primary components comprise a healthy classroom climate that positively influences students’ social–emotional outcomes. They also note that each of these areas then circles back to positively impact teachers’ social–emotional competence and well-being; this positive feedback loop helps to cultivate teachers’ overall wellness and avoid burnout (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, p. 493).

Similarly, Collie and Perry (2019) have created a “Framework for Cultivating Teacher Thriving” that aims to both reduce harm and promote wellness by focusing on both social–emotional competence and Ryan and Deci’s (2000, 2017) self-determination theory. Self-determination theory posits that three primary psychological needs are required for self-motivation and well-being: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Collie and Perry (2019) argue that fostering perceived social–emotional autonomy, social–emotional competence, and social–emotional relatedness is critical for teachers to thrive. They also note that developing these social–emotional and self-determination competencies involves ongoing and iterative processes that should be nurtured intentionally through professional learning (Collie & Perry, 2019).

In fields adjacent to social–emotional learning, there are bodies of literature that highlight the impact of characteristics related to SEL on teacher success. For example, *teacher self-efficacy* has been widely shown to bolster teacher—and student—outcomes (e.g., Collie et al., 2012;

Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Teacher self-efficacy can be defined as teachers' beliefs about their abilities to impact desired student outcomes (e.g., Bandura, 1977; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) and is directly aligned with the SEL competencies of self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision making. Self-efficacy is widely understood to develop through four central levers (mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological responses [Bandura, 1977]), and there have been considerable efforts to study how it impacts students and teachers and how teachers can develop a strong sense of self-efficacy. Zee and Koomen (2016), for example, synthesized 40 years of research on teacher self-efficacy and reported that teacher self-efficacy is associated with a number of factors related to teachers' psychological well-being, including job commitment and satisfaction, personal accomplishment, and lower levels of burnout. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007) specifically looked at the antecedents for self-efficacy beliefs of both experienced and novice teachers, noting similarities (e.g., that both groups' efficacy is most heavily influenced by mastery experiences) and differences (e.g., since novice teachers have fewer mastery experiences, they rely more on emotional responses, vicarious experiences, and verbal persuasion) in terms of how efficacy beliefs develop. When considering teachers' holistic well-being and success, such research is useful for teacher preparation programs when considering what approaches to use to cultivate teacher self-efficacy beliefs.

Other researchers have looked at the impact of *collective* efficacy, the belief that the faculty *as a whole* have the ability to positively impact students (Bandura, 1997; Goddard et al., 2000). Hattie (2016) synthesized more than 1,500 meta-analyses to examine the different factors that influence student achievement and found that collective teacher efficacy was at the top of the list. His research revealed that collective efficacy is over three times more predictive than socioeconomic status in predicting student achievement, has twice the effect of prior student achievement, and is more than three times as predictive as student motivation (Donohoo et al., 2018; Hattie, 2016). Importantly, though, this sentiment of collective efficacy is also important for *teacher* well-being, as low levels of collective efficacy are associated with higher levels of stress (e.g., Klassen, 2010; Lim & Eo, 2014) and high levels are associated with community and parent involvement and optimism (Kirby & DiPaola, 2011). Fostering a sense of collective efficacy is perhaps more challenging at the pre-service level, but its profound impact on teacher and student outcomes raises important questions about how to foster these kinds of social–emotional, holistic strengths in teachers.

Finally, several scholars have focused on the benefits of teacher mindfulness, which is directly connected to the SEL competencies of self-awareness and self-management. For example, in a randomized control trial of 113 elementary school teachers, Crain et al. (2017) found that mindfulness training positively impacted teachers' sleep (both in quality and quantity), mood, and satisfaction related to both home and work. Analysis from the same study found that the intervention also influenced reductions in stress, burnout, and anxiety (Roeser et al., 2013). Similarly, Braun et al. (2019) investigated whether middle school teachers' mindfulness skills were related to their professional health and well-being and found (using multivariate regression analyses of 58 middle school teachers) that teacher mindfulness was significantly associated with outcomes such as lower levels of burnout and job stress and higher levels of emotionally supportive interactions with students. Findings such as these highlight the ways in which such holistic supports for teachers are mutually beneficial for educators and students alike.

### ***Transformative social and emotional learning***

Despite these reported benefits of SEL, a growing number of scholars advocate for the importance of conceptualizing and implementing SEL through an equity lens. They argue, for example, that SEL programs can place the sole onus of responsibility on individuals to combat systemic inequality (e.g., Kirshner, 2015; Rose, 2013). Many note that well-intentioned SEL programs can actually be harmful for students if not approached with a critical lens (e.g., Kaler-Jones, 2020; Love, 2019; Soutter, 2019) and that they often overemphasize being “nice” while ignoring the realities of racism (e.g., Simmons, 2019, 2021). In response to these calls, scholars such as Seider & Graves (2020) have advocated for a culturally competent approach to SEL that leverages tenets of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) and supports students in developing social-emotional wellness that is grounded in social justice and cultural and racial identity development.

The work of Jagers et al. (2019) offers a particularly useful framework for understanding how social-emotional learning can be understood and leveraged from a critical, social justice standpoint (e.g., Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 1970). Their vision is that SEL is “intended to promote equity and excellence among children, young people, and adults” (p. 162), and they refer to it as *transformative SEL*. Transformative SEL (Jagers et al., 2019) parses CASEL’s five core competencies into three tiers: *personally responsible* (a responsible citizen who contributes to one’s own community), *participatory* (one who is involved in activism and service), and *transformative* (one who critically analyzes inequality and seeks social justice and collective well-being). For example, instead of only working to build *self-awareness* of one’s strengths and weaknesses, Jagers et al. (2019) advocate building a *critical self-awareness* that includes examining one’s biases and privileges and their impact on others. Rather than only focusing on self-management for one’s own ability to be *resilient*, Jagers et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of also building skills to *resist* injustice. Instead of only focusing on *social awareness*, Jagers and colleagues (2019) advocate for a *critical social awareness* that is also cognizant of systemic inequalities. Looking beyond the importance of *relationship skills* alone, these authors incorporate *multicultural competence* in the building of such relationships. Finally, *transformative responsible decision making* looks beyond making smart choices that positively impact only oneself and toward making choices that consider collective well-being.

### ***Transformative social and emotional learning for teachers***

While there is limited research that explicitly leverages the transformative SEL framework for teachers, there is a body of literature that focuses on the value of preparing teachers to approach their SEL efforts in equitable, critical ways that are aligned with the transformative SEL values and framework.

For example, in a conceptual exploration of how to support teachers in implementing ethnic studies pedagogies in the classroom, Tintiango-Cubales et al. (2015) identified three specific patterns that were effective: culturally responsive pedagogy (aligned with transformative social awareness), community responsiveness (aligned with transformative relationship skills), and teacher racial identity development (aligned with transformative self-awareness). Based on these three areas, Tintiango-Cubales et al. (2015) put forth recommendations for teacher preparation programs, including creating space for teachers (particularly White teachers) to reflect on their own biases and positionality and to engage in critical self-reflection.

Similarly, Ullucci (2010) conducted qualitative research in which elementary teachers were

interviewed about their perceptions of what works in “race-conscious teacher education” (p. 138) and subsequently advocated for a series of recommendations that focus on teachers’ critical self-awareness and social-awareness. Some of these recommendations include student-teaching and fieldwork experiences to cultivate racial awareness; support for pre-service teachers in recognizing and challenging harmful narratives, including explicit guidance to avoid developing a White savior complex; and increased coursework focused on multicultural development.

In a similar vein, Matias and Mackey’s (2016) work on Critical Whiteness Theory highlights the ways in which White ideologies and White supremacy permeate the field of teaching and emphasizes the need to address them in teacher preparation programs. These scholars argue that teacher educators must challenge White teacher candidates to gain a clear understanding of their own privilege and how they must actively work to not further entrench these inequalities (Matias & Mackey, 2016). Again, we see the importance of teacher SEL—in this case, with a strong emphasis on transformative self-awareness and social awareness.

Importantly, though, most of this scholarship focuses on the ways in which this critical self-awareness and critical social-awareness approach supports *students*. This is of course fitting, given teachers’ roles and priorities, but fewer studies examine the impact of transformative SEL on *teacher* success and well-being. There are some notable exceptions, including the work of DeMartino et al. (2022), who present the narratives of teachers who found traditional SEL interventions to be harmful for both students and the teachers themselves. Grounding their findings in a conceptualization similar to that of the transformative SEL framework, they propose that schools adopt a transformative abolitionist social–emotional approach in order to avoid the harms of SEL and to centre equity and justice in this work. Similarly, in a mixed methods study exploring the SEL self-efficacy beliefs of novice teachers—with a focus on teachers of colour—White et al. (2022) reported that teachers of colour held stronger self-efficacy beliefs in SEL than White teachers. The authors attributed this finding to participation in social justice learning communities which allowed them to centre SEL practices grounded in equity in their classrooms (White et al., 2022).

There is also some literature that challenges traditional mindfulness approaches to be grounded in critical social justice perspectives, noting specifically how this can impact teachers’ well-being. For example, Kim et al. (2021) conducted a mixed methods study (including quantitative surveys and qualitative focus groups) of 112 educators to investigate the impact of a trauma-informed mindfulness training intervention on teacher attitudes and burnout and found that teachers in the intervention group reported significant improvements in their attitudes related to trauma-informed care and significant decreases in emotional exhaustion. This kind of mindfulness specifically recognizes the reality of students’ lives and supports teachers in improving not only the way they teach but also their own well-being.

Santoro (2018) also challenges conventional interventions aimed at reducing teacher burnout, arguing that they place the onus for fixing educator exhaustion and solving the teacher shortage on teachers themselves and that they also overlook the root causes of teacher dissatisfaction. Her research distinguishes between *burnout* and *demoralization*, noting that demoralization is a deeper, systematic problem where teachers—who are often experienced and experts in their fields—are faced with consistent challenges to their own personal values (Santoro, 2018). Teachers grapple with a disconnect in their profession because of countless administrative roadblocks, ranging from high prioritization of standardized tests to de-professionalization and disrespect for the field (Santoro, 2018). Santoro (2018) posits that one way to support teacher longevity and satisfaction is to directly address this persistent demoralization. This does not necessarily mean *fostering* teacher SEL (to do so focuses more on burnout, which again often

blames the teachers) but rather *honouring* teachers' holistic selves, including their ethical and moral values (aligned with self-awareness and social awareness).

While Santoro's (2018) suggestions largely fall on administrators (e.g., listen to teachers' moral concerns, be curious rather than judgemental about teacher resistance, problem solve with teachers), and while many of the examples above similarly focus on in-service teacher support, there are also lessons to be learned by pre-service teachers regarding how to build a foundation comprised of their own ethical and moral selves (see also Blumenfeld-Jones et al., 2013; Kasalak, 2020) and to be prepared (rather than caught off guard) when this kind of self-awareness and these ethical values are challenged. Nonetheless, the question of how teacher preparation programs can support teachers to these ends remains a more elusive question.

In sum, both SEL and critical SEL grounded in justice can be important indicators of—and levers toward—teacher well-being. What remains unclear, however, is how teacher educators can make sense of all this scholarship. Based on participant reflections on definitions of preparedness and success below, this paper ultimately argues that the transformative SEL framework is a useful guide for teacher educators to help teachers develop tools to support not only their students' overall wellness but also their own success, critical and holistic wellness, and longevity.

## Method

This research employs a collective case study approach, which describes and compares multiple cases to gain insight into a particular issue (Stake, 1995). The benefits of case studies include their ability to explore phenomena in their everyday contexts (Yin, 2009) and to capture nuanced understandings from different perspectives (Stake, 1995). Both of these were guiding principles for this study for seeking to understand the reality of teachers' experiences and the ways in which they felt their preparation programs did—or did not—set them up for success, as defined by the teachers themselves. Interviews (described in greater detail below) were selected as the method of data collection because of their ability to centre individual's experiences (e.g., Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) and to highlight the voices, beliefs, and perspectives of the teachers themselves. An important limitation of case study methodology is that the findings cannot necessarily be aggregated or generalized (Bazeley, 2013). As such, the patterns and findings described below should not be interpreted as generalizable results but rather as key perspectives to keep in mind that lend contextualized insights into the lived experiences of teachers in the field.

## Participants

Participants included eleven teachers from across the United States, recruited through a purposeful sampling approach (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). We intentionally spoke with teachers who had been in the field for at least three years (participants ranged from having 3–19 years of experience, with an average of 6–7 years) in order to hear perspectives on teachers' needs that were not from a complete novice teacher perspective (scholarship marks the end of the novice period in a variety of ways, ranging from pre-service and first year [e.g., Latt & Thompson, 2010] to three years [e.g., Wolff et al., 2020] to five years [e.g., Çakmak et al., 2019]; three years was selected so as to include teachers who were still relatively new but who were seasoned enough to have a few years of perspective). We also intentionally spoke with teachers who received their training from different types of universities, ranging from graduate to undergraduate to alternative certification programs, in order to hear from teachers with a varied set of experiences. Finally, we limited our selection process to elementary teachers to focus on the experiences of preparation for



teachers working with young children. Demographic information about the participants is included in Table 1 below (all names are pseudonyms/chosen by participants).

Table 1: Teacher Demographics

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender Identity	Race/ Ethnicity	# Years Teaching	State	Type of Institution
Isa	Female	White European	6	CA	Grad: small, private
Vida	Female	White	3	CA	Grad: alternative certification and masters
Catherine	Female	White Jewish	6	Undergrad: International Grad: CA	Undergrad: large public Grad: small private
Mary	Female	Latina	5	CA	Grad: private
Julie	Female	White Italian	4	MA	Grad: large private
Wyatt	Male	White	10	IL	Grad: alternative certification and masters
Kyle	Male	White	19	PA	Undergrad: public
Carmen	Female	Black African American	6	MA	Undergrad: public state school Grad: accelerated alternative certification
Tina	Female	White	14	NY	Undergrad: private Grad: private
Dolores	Female	Black African American	7	CA	Grad: small, private
Phoebe	Female	White Russian Jewish	7	NY	Grad: alternative certification and masters

***Data collection***

Interviews were approximately 45–60 minutes, conducted via Zoom from January to July of 2020. A semi-structured interview protocol (Seidman, 1991) with open-ended questions was used as a guide for the interviews to allow researchers to remain open to participants’ reflections on their own definitions of success. Some examples of queries included, “How would you define success in terms of the teaching profession? What does it mean to you to be a successful teacher?” and “How would you define being well-prepared as a teacher? What elements have been most important to you in terms of being well-prepared to teach?”

***Data analysis***

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and data were analyzed primarily through a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clark, 2013; Maxwell, 2013); we relied on both deductive (emic) and inductive (etic) coding to inform our findings (Maxwell, 2013). A qualitative codebook was created consisting of larger etic themes drawn from the scholarship and also inspired by initial impressions from the teacher interviews, such as “social–emotional learning” and broad codes such as “teacher definitions of success.” Second, drawing on elements of “open coding” from Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) grounded theory approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Charmaz, 2006), the author and a graduate assistant coded the data, noting areas that did not ascribe to these

larger etic codes. When possible, we applied “in-vivo” codes (Charmaz, 2006) that allowed themes to come from the voices of the teachers themselves (e.g., “longevity” and “balance”). All interviews were double coded by the author and the same graduate assistant, and any disagreements and additional coding suggestions were resolved through discussion. Next, etic and emic themes were grouped into a conceptually clustered matrix (Maxwell, 2013) in order to look for patterns in the data.

Through this process, teacher SEL and teacher SEL grounded in justice were identified as clear themes. Transformative SEL (Jagers et al., 2019) then emerged as a potential way of synthesizing these overlapping findings given its emphasis on justice-oriented SEL as well as its clear framework. To explore the extent to which this critical conceptualization of SEL could indeed serve as an organizational principle, a new matrix was created with each SEL competency on the y-axis (self-awareness, self-management, etc.) and each tier of transformative SEL (personally responsible, participatory, transformative) on the x-axis. Participant responses were then grouped accordingly. This final matrix provided an opportunity to revisit the data looking for commonalities and differences among participants’ comments and also an opportunity to synthesize the data using transformative SEL as an analytical framework.

## Results

When defining perceptions of success and preparedness, participants consistently spoke of the importance of supporting teacher well-being and longevity in ways that were aligned with the five CASEL competencies. As noted below, this alignment fell into a range of tiers in the transformative SEL framework, emphasizing the importance of supporting not only teacher SEL but specifically teacher SEL grounded in equity considerations.

### *Self-awareness*

Teachers spoke about the connection between self-awareness and success in two primary ways: self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and self-awareness of their racial identity and blind spots.

#### *Self-awareness about one’s own strengths and weaknesses*

First, participants reflected on the importance of teacher preparation programs for helping to build teachers’ self-awareness of their strengths and areas for growth in order to be successful in the long-term. For example, one teacher, Carmen, a Black teacher who attended a public state university for her undergraduate degree and an accelerated alternative certification for her Master’s, shared how she felt it would have been beneficial to have had an opportunity to reflect upon her own strengths early in her teacher preparation program because it might have led her down a path that was more aligned with her skills and interests:

At a certain point, maybe beyond the first year, evaluating your placement, I think people have such different strengths, and for me, I probably would have been more effective as someone who was like a counsellor or someone who worked on social-emotional needs. And to take maybe some PD that related to that and to think about this during a teacher program to figure it out. Then I know some of those options versus being in teaching and feeling like okay, this is not for me. Very early on. And I think there’s many teachers who feel that way, but they stay for various reasons. So, I’m just looking into what are other

options? I also think part-time teaching is something I wish I had known more about, like teaching half the day, and then having another teacher teach the other half of the day, because I think, especially for elementary teachers, they are burnt out teaching the entire day.

Carmen’s comments reflected a deep commitment to students and to education but also a desire to have had more opportunities in her teacher preparation program to reflect on her own strengths and her path as an educator in order to set her up for success. Wyatt, a White teacher who received his Master’s degree through an alternative certification program, shared a similar perspective:

I’m a big proponent of finding your passion and your purpose. In a preparatory program, it would be cool to have that space for teachers to figure out how they can integrate who they are into their teaching, like, the things that they love to do. My own interests and my hobbies ultimately influence my instruction, and it’s important that I’m doing things away from school in order for me to be a better teacher.

Wyatt’s point about having the time and space in a teacher preparation program to reflect on one’s own interests and sense of purpose also illustrates the value of developing self-awareness as an educator even early on in the teacher development process.

*Self-awareness about one’s own racial identity and blind spots*

The second way that teachers made the connection between self-awareness and successful teaching was in the ways that they spoke about the importance of having a clear sense of their own racial identities in order to be successful teachers. Vida, for example, who also attended an alternative certification for her Master’s degree in education, spoke about the ways in which her own self-awareness and identity as a teacher—specifically her White racial identity in relation to teaching in a school that predominantly served students of colour—impacted her preparedness:

There are instincts that you lack, and I think your own insecurity about it can definitely crop up. I think it’s important to be aware of it but not feel insecure about it. You’re there as a teacher, and you need to know who you are. And granted, that takes a long time to develop who are you as a person and who are you as a teacher. But how do you make sure you’re honouring your students and honouring yourself and giving space for that? And also being aware, if you mess up and you make a mistake, how do you address that? And that’s what’s really tough, when tough conversations come up in the moment, say conversations that involve race, discrimination.

Similarly, Phoebe, a White teacher who received her Master’s through an alternative certification program, reflected on the importance of having a diverse faculty as a key element in setting students up for success by ensuring that teachers do not enter the workforce with a *lack* of self-awareness and unaddressed blind spots:

Having a larger percent of Black and Brown professors, I think, is key. I realized I’ve never had a non-White teacher, from pre-K all the way through college and maybe even grad school. I never had a non-White teacher. Not one. Not even one. And think about what that does to you? All the blind spots you end up with, the lack of awareness and lack of perspectives.

Phoebe's comments clearly speak to the damage that a lack of critical self-awareness around issues of race and diversity can have on students, but her reflections also illustrate the ways in which this kind of awareness is also crucial for the teachers themselves.

What is particularly notable about these contemplations is that the teachers do not simply indicate that self-reflection is important, they also make the connection between their own self-awareness and overall success as a teacher. In addition, these comments highlight the importance of *transformative, critical* self-reflection on one's own racial identity and the ways in which this is certainly crucial for students as well as for teachers themselves.

### ***Self-management***

Participants also spoke about the value of building their own self-management skills, specifically around self-care, and how this kind of self-care is a necessary factor for teacher preparedness and overall success. This showed up in two primary ways: the importance of *resilience* in the face of stress and obstacles and the importance of *resistance* as a way of challenging injustices within schools.

#### *Self-management: Teacher resilience*

First, Carmen spoke about the importance of being prepared for the stress of teacher evaluations and learning how to manage those emotions:

Preparing for teacher evals. Not to get a high score, but how can you use what your strength is to help you be able to meet standards? Not how do you create a SMART goal that looks good that your principal will feel is okay because that feels very empty, and it will lead you into a place where you're feeling like you regret putting whatever goal you've put because it's not about you, it's about just meeting the requirement. How do you prepare for the anxiety or the overwhelm that comes with getting ready for evaluations? How do you build a support system around that? How do you make it work for you?

She went on to talk about the importance of teachers learning how to take care of themselves amidst this kind of stress:

When you feel overwhelmed about meeting expectations or planning to meet curriculum requirements, what are you doing in that off time? Because I think constantly being held to such rigid structures can decrease a teacher's confidence. Because part of the reason why I had gone into teaching was because I felt like I would have creativity in what I would be sharing with my students, but I found that it was very much scripted: here's what you're teaching, or you have to follow this style. How do you adapt when the style is not working for you? And practical resources, whether it's websites to be a little more creative, different thoughts of schooling and how to incorporate that in a more traditional way.

Carmen's reflection here illustrates the way that scripted curricula and rigid expectations can have a negative impact on teachers' stress levels, and her suggestion to explicitly support teachers in developing strategies in response to moments when an initiative or directive is not working for them is an important consideration when thinking about how to best support overall well-being for teachers in the field.

Phoebe made aligned comments, citing teacher resilience as a marker of a well-prepared, successful teacher:

I know there's so much talk about grit and resilience, but it's very true. You just need to have it. The burnout rate is high. Somebody who knows how to take care of themselves—I think it's really important. If you're not taking good care of yourself, and you're not having a personal life or learning about yourself, then I don't think you can really make it for the long haul. I know that from personal experience.

This emphasis on learning how to take care of yourself as a part of building resilience was seen as a key piece of teacher well-being and longevity.

*Self-management: Teacher resistance*

Some participants also spoke about success in terms of resistance. For example, Wyatt viewed teachers' abilities to speak up for themselves as an indicator of success:

I think for personal success, just feeling confident to voice your opinions within your school. The principal I currently work for always said, "I don't care if you're a first-year teacher or it's your 10<sup>th</sup> year, I want to hear what you have to say. And I'm going to consider your voice as much as the next person." Just having the confidence to be able to assert yourself.

Wyatt was fortunate to be working for a principal who encouraged his teachers to have a voice in this way, but he shared that he also worked in other environments where this was not the case, and he valued his ability to share his perspectives and noted the benefit of this kind of confidence to speak up if needed.

Julie, a White teacher who received an undergraduate education degree from a private university, reflected more directly on the importance of teachers knowing their value and standing up for what is right in the face of systems that are not supporting students or faculty. She did so in part by sharing a story that exemplified this:

It's so hard to value yourself when you're not paid very well and you're not respected by parents, you're not respected by the public. Think about valuing yourself and what you bring. We were sitting in a staff circle a couple weeks ago, and one of the benefits of [my charter school] is they provide us with supplies which is great. But we were talking about how to order supplies, and people were giving suggestions, and one teacher stood up and was like, "Well, I don't know why you guys are all complaining because if you taught at this other school, you wouldn't have wipes. So why don't you just go buy them yourself?" And I was like, "Whoa, like, no! That might be true, but it's not okay." So, I feel like it is important for a teacher to *not* be a rule follower. I think that's fine. I don't think that means that they have to not follow district protocols. But we're all very used to being martyrs and being like, "I'm in this because I'm a good person, and I love people, and I care, and I don't offend anyone." But it actually harms your fellow teachers when you're forgetting yourself.

Julie's remarks highlight the importance of teachers taking care of and standing up for themselves not only for their own wellness but also for the benefit of other teachers. While it is important for teachers to be flexible and adaptable to circumstances, Julie makes the point that if all teachers see themselves as martyrs, then all teachers will be expected to act similarly instead of demanding that the system itself change. She went on to explain some of the other examples of this that are surely not unfamiliar to many educators:

At my school, there's never enough substitute teachers. So constantly, they asked, like, the Special Ed teacher to cover a class, and one time she said no, because she had progress monitoring to do. And people talked about her and were like, she's not a team player and this and that. It was like, "Whoa, no!" We have to be able to say, "No, I have a professional duty that I must do. No, I can't watch your class watch a movie. No, I can't do an extra lunch duty." I think we rely on the Union for those things and to know our rights would maybe be important, but also having a unified, "What do I believe is important for teachers to have access to, and how am I gonna come together with others to rally for that and get that?"

Julie's words are indicative of broader, systemic barriers that teachers often face, and throughout her interview, this common thread of supporting teachers in knowing how to value themselves as whole people and to learn how to resist injustices—for both students and teachers alike—shone through. This conceptualization of self-management as both resilience and resistance is also aligned with Jagers et al.'s (2019) transformative self-management, again pointing to the importance of not only developing social-emotional learning for teachers as individuals but also as collective advocates for their students and themselves.

### *Social awareness*

Recall that one of the ways in which Jagers et al. (2019) define transformative social awareness is through *critical* social awareness: the ability to not only be aware of one's social surroundings but to do so with a critical eye in order to recognize systemic inequality and roadblocks to success. Participants in our study defined successful and well-prepared teachers as possessing this kind of critical social awareness. That is, they discussed the importance of having the ability to recognize and critically analyze schoolwide and systemic forces that could impact their teaching so as not to be blindsided by these kinds of challenges. For example, when asked to define a successful teacher, Mary, a Latina teacher who received her Master's from a private university, immediately talked about the importance of being able to understand and navigate the difficulties of teaching itself:

I think the first thing that comes to my mind is being able to find a solution to your challenges as a teacher without getting burnt out or feel[ing] like it's not going well. That might be more of a mindset, and I think it's maybe part of the job of teacher preparation programs, but I think that's what makes you successful. Can you stay in the trenches and figure it out? And of course, you find a way to help your students grow, obviously.

Mary of course recognizes the importance of supporting her students—and spoke eloquently in her interview about the many ways she does so—but she emphasized the connection between being a successful teacher and the ability to stay in the profession, navigate challenges, and not get burnt out.

Isa, a White teacher who also received her Master's degree from a private university, made a similar comment, noting the connection between sustainability and success and the ways that her own teacher preparation program supported her in developing this mindset:

Looking back on [my teacher prep program], it was just one of the best years for learning and just being—such a peaceful time, and I learned so much. We were in the classroom from the second week until the very end of the school year, but it was never overwhelming.

And I feel like that's what gets teachers the most is just getting too overwhelmed. There's too much to do, taking on so much, and so people burn out, and then they leave. And I feel like the ways that [our program] showed us how you can be in the classroom, and you can care about all these things, but you also can not make it your whole life. The teachers who I know who have done my program, all of them are still in the classroom, which I feel like is pretty rare when I think about who was in my school in [City] and how many teachers are still there, which is not that many. Have teachers recognize how hard it's going to be, and help them not take on so, so much right at the beginning. Make it a career track. From the beginning [in our program], the focus was, we're going to make this a sustainable job for you.

Isa's program was a rigorous, R1 institution, but the teachers in this program still found ways not only to make their program feel sustainable but also to communicate the importance of this kind of sustainable lifestyle to their students.

Dolores, a Black teacher who received her Master's from a small private university, also reflected on the importance of being upfront with teachers about the difficulties of teaching while also preparing them with some tools: "Just be honest with people. It's gonna look different in different areas, and depending on who you're teaching, I think it would be helpful to touch on some of the trauma-informed teaching."

Each of these comments point to the importance of fostering teachers' social awareness so that they can have the critical analytical skills to understand the structures and systems of schools and be better prepared when difficulties arise.

### ***Relationship skills***

Participants also shared the benefits of relationship skills, specifically building authentic, collaborative relationships with colleagues, and how this connects directly to their own overall success as teachers. Phoebe, for example, mentioned that part of being a successful teacher is being someone who not only is "intellectually curious" but also "wants to learn from colleagues." Similarly, Dolores advised, "In terms of planning, I would encourage collaboration, letting teachers know they shouldn't be doing everything by themselves, and they really can't do everything by themselves." Dolores's comments speak to the importance of preparing teachers to learn not only how to work productively with others but also to know that they do not need to—and indeed should not—work in silos.

Similarly, when reflecting on the definition of a well-prepared teacher, Tina, a White teacher who received her undergraduate and graduate education degrees at two different private universities, responded,

A well-prepared teacher is someone who obviously has pedagogy and background on how to teach and how to manage a classroom but also has the resources to go back to for support when needed and knows who to ask for support and frequent feedback.

Carmen also reflected on the importance of finding support systems, especially when feeling overwhelmed:

One thing that was really helpful was I was in one school that actually was very supportive; the staff was very nurturing, and there was a really good camaraderie, and I had an excellent principal. When I was struggling, the principal stepped in and said, "Hey, I see that things

are not going too well, but I really need you to complete this thing because we're held to certain standards," and then she came in, and she helped me. I had a level of comfortability, where I was able to let her do that. That was helpful. I know that's not a situation that is guaranteed every time someone's in a school, but I think having a nurturing relationship or finding someone who you can connect with that can give you that support is good. So, I guess, letting teachers know, if there's someone that you feel close to, to be able to go to that person. And if it's an administrator, you should use them; it's to your advantage to be able to go.

The concept of collaboration and relationship building is certainly not new or surprising, but what is notable is the consistent ways in which participants spoke about relationship skills as specifically relating to well-preparedness and success as a teacher, speaking to the importance of this SEL competency in overall teacher well-being.

### ***Responsible decision making***

Finally, teachers repeatedly mentioned the value of developing responsible decision-making skills, especially in terms of personal well-being. That is, they spoke of the importance of making informed decisions about their own health and wellness in order to be able to take care of themselves so that they could be successful educators who remain in the field. For example, Tina shared that, to her, part of being a successful teacher is

Finding a balance. I didn't really work out in my first two years, but then I finally joined a gym, and I started doing yoga my third year of teaching. And I even got to teach a yoga club with my class. Being a whole person is really important to me. I'm not sure I would have been able to stick with it otherwise.

Similarly, Dolores noted,

Just the whole idea of burnout, this idea of like, in order to be a good teacher, you have to have long hours and respond to everything and stay on top of it. I think making sure they know they don't have to. You can peace out when the bell rings if that's what you need to do. So, balancing, taking care of yourself but then also handling instructional responsibilities.

Mary shared how an explicit emphasis on teacher wellness during her teacher prep program helped remind her to bring balance and care into her own practice:

We all looked forward to Fridays. And [the professor] was just so happy all the time. And it was definitely a check-in emotionally for everybody. And he always reminded us to take care of ourselves. It was very clear to us that if we were having a meltdown or breakdown or were getting sick, if we felt like we couldn't handle it emotionally, we needed to take a day off, and you would email your professor with these reasons. And most people didn't do it because we were very much invested, but there were times where we did. And so that was really helpful for us to know that they understood that. And also, it made you aware to check in with yourself. So, it was very much an awareness. And then when I would go back to my students, it reminded me how good I feel on Fridays. So, you want to bring that into your own teaching, you know, like how I felt on Fridays. I want it to be Fridays every day. It definitely influenced how you managed your class and how you taught your kids.



Here, we see how this approach to teacher education that models and emphasizes self-awareness and self-care also encouraged responsible decision making about one's own health and well-being (in addition to the well-being of students).

Julie spoke about a slightly different kind of responsible decision making related to preparing teachers to navigate complex ethical dilemmas in order to be and feel successful as educators:

I do think just a little less talk of burnout and a little more talk of what you're up against. It's not like I just burn out, and I quit, and I didn't make it, and I'm one of those statistics that I just didn't make it my five years. I think having more of a discussion about a plan and talking about what you're up against and being clear on your stance on testing and you know, censorship, and some of these hot things that come up. Then suddenly you are in a personal dilemma where you're like, what do I do between what's best for my students and what I'm technically supposed to do?

Julie went on to talk about how these kinds of moral dilemmas were a huge factor in her own decision-making dilemmas and ultimate demoralization. Here she reflected on a podcast she had recently listened to that featured Doris Santoro's (2018) work on teacher demoralization:

Burnout is like you didn't go to yoga class, and you stayed up too late, and you worked yourself too hard sort of. Versus the *demoralization*, which is like, I'm coming in trying to do my best every day, and you're telling me that I have to give these kids who can't even sit in a chair a two-hour test four times a week? Because you *say* so? It's the value compromise. What are you going to prioritize and what are you going to let go of? Because the teaching to-do list is never ending. And you can never get through it all. So how are you going to prioritize what you do and what you don't do? And that would have been good during student teaching time.

Julie's reflections highlight the importance of supporting teachers in considering how they might handle such moral dilemmas and potentially giving pre-service teachers opportunities to practice making responsible decisions when faced with certain ethical and moral quandaries.

## **Discussion**

One primary takeaway from these data is simply how teachers defined success. Rather than focusing on test scores or student achievement alone, teachers saw their own critical and holistic well-being as inextricably linked to their success as educators. They emphasized the need for teacher preparation programs to support teachers in developing each of these SEL competencies not only as personally responsible individuals but also through a critical, transformative lens. Given the intersection of teacher SEL and social justice present in these educators' responses, the transformative SEL framework emerged as a useful organizational principle for teacher educators. It provides a structure for understanding the value of both SEL for teachers as well as the importance of a transformative conceptualization of SEL itself.

The discussion below outlines three overarching ways in which the transformative SEL perspective is useful for teacher educators: for critical and holistic teacher well-being, for teacher longevity, and for teachers' critical social awareness. It concludes by weighing the benefits of

traditional SEL versus transformative SEL, noting that while transformative SEL is crucial, supports for educators are not unidimensional, and elements of each framework can be beneficial.

### ***Transformative teacher SEL for critical and holistic teacher well-being***

As noted in the literature review, while there do exist several interventions and research studies focused on teacher social–emotional development (e.g., Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Collie & Perry, 2019), there is less of an emphasis on programs that situate teachers within the broader contextual reality of systemic inequality and the roadblocks that teachers face every day. Many teachers are disillusioned with the wellness supports that their schools are giving them; they are told to prioritize their own mental health and wellness but are either not supported in any concrete ways to do so, or this advice is seen as rooted in a complete misunderstanding of teachers’ realities and what they actually need (e.g., Gonzalez, 2021; Torres, 2019).

Responses from teachers in this study, along with the transformative SEL framework, can give teacher educators and administrators some guidance for considering how to support their teachers through an equity lens. For example, rather than suggesting that teachers prioritize building self-awareness (teachers know when they are exhausted), administrators might offer to help in a concrete way such as subbing for a class in recognition of all the systemic factors (e.g., COVID-19, teacher shortages, teacher burnout) that are impacting teacher well-being (see also Gonzalez, 2021). This idea was reinforced by Carmen, as quoted above, who noted that her principle held her to high expectations but also stepped in to help her with her tasks when she was falling behind.

In terms of what this can mean for teacher preparation programs, Julie’s perspectives point to some action steps. Recall that she suggested “having more of a discussion about a plan and talking about what you’re up against ... what do I do between what’s best for my students and what I’m technically supposed to do?” Teacher educators might create simulations for teachers to consider the different decisions and ethical dilemmas that they will face (e.g., Shapira-Lishchink, 2011) and to help them find their voices as teachers and practice speaking up against injustice (e.g., Levinson, 2015). Through such discussions in the classroom, we might better prepare our pre-service teachers by cultivating their transformative self-awareness (e.g., What do I believe, and what is important to me and my students?), transformative social awareness (e.g., What is the contextual landscape of my school? What ethical and systemic inequalities might I face?), transformative self-management (e.g., What options do I have to be resilient in the face of this challenge? Is this a time to just do what is asked or to question and resist the status quo?), and transformative responsible decision making (e.g., What are my different options in this dilemma? How will my decisions impact me? My students? The school?) Teacher SEL cannot be just about individual coping mechanisms but rather must recognize the realities of the challenges teachers face. This does not mean overburdening pre-service teachers with horror stories but rather responsibly building the transformative social–emotional tools they will need to navigate the complexities and realities of the profession.

### ***Transformative teacher SEL for teacher longevity***

It is also notable that teachers made connections between SEL and teacher longevity. That is, teachers leveraged different elements of social–emotional learning not only for their current well-being but for their long-term success as well. Preparing teachers for success and longevity is not an easy task, especially given the winding nature of teaching careers, replete with hundreds of

different students and families, changing policies, rotating administrations, and so on; what does it mean to prepare teachers—in the beginning and middle of their careers—for long term success and to thrive? Teacher voices from this study provide some insight into what this could look like. Consider Isa’s description of her teacher preparation program that emphasized balance and well-being throughout; she credited to this time in her program the lessons she learned about checking in with herself emotionally, making wise decisions around when to take a break, and learning how to transfer these messages and feelings to her own teaching.

Similarly, despite the argument made above about not placing the sole responsibility to prioritize self-care on teachers, teachers did speak about the importance of knowing how to take care of yourself (e.g., Phoebe: “If you’re not taking good care of yourself, and you’re not having a personal life or learning about yourself, then I don’t think you can really make it for the long haul”), recognizing the importance of not overworking (e.g., Dolores: “You can peace out when the bell rings, if that’s what you need to do”), and remembering to ask for help when needed (e.g., Tina: “A well-prepared teacher knows who to ask for support and frequent feedback”). These are teachers who are deeply committed to their students but who also know that their own well-being matters. These messages can be centred in our teacher educator programs; we must model for and support pre-service teachers in beginning the process of learning how to reflect on their own well-being for long-term success.

However, it is crucial to remember that these messages of self-care, as noted in the section above, can also be harmful and misleading if not done with a critical framing. It must be acknowledged that there are systemic-level policies that need to be addressed by administration and policymakers. As Gonzalez (2021), editor in chief of the *Cult of Pedagogy*, aptly stated to teachers in an article on how to support faculty well-being: “If you’re still hanging in there, but you’re about at the end of your rope, hear this: The problem is not you. It’s not you.”

### ***Transformative SEL***

Transformative SEL for *students’* well-being also benefits *teachers*. As noted above, teacher self-efficacy is associated with teacher well-being and job satisfaction (e.g., Zee & Koomen, 2016). If teachers feel that they cannot meet their students’ needs or cannot teach effectively, they are more likely to be emotionally exhausted (e.g., Collie et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2021) and burned out (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Teacher perspectives from the current study reinforce this idea. Recall Vida’s reflections about the importance of being prepared to address issues of race and discrimination, Phoebe’s comments on the blind spots that so many teachers have by not being exposed to enough (or any) teachers of colour or conversations about race and biases, and Dolores’s note about the importance of exposing new teachers to trauma-informed practices. Indeed, these perspectives illustrate that while the literature on social justice and anti-bias work for teachers (e.g., Matias & Mackey, 2016; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015; Ullucci, 2010) is certainly focused on the positive impact on students, this work is important for teachers’ success and well-being too. Teacher educators must not stop at developing SEL alone but rather must lay a foundation where teacher candidates can reflect on their biases and blind spots, grapple with privilege and racism, and feel prepared to navigate and challenge roadblocks.

### ***SEL and transformative SEL***

Despite this paper’s emphasis on *transformative* social–emotional learning, it is important to note that elements of traditional SEL were also seen as key elements of success by teachers we

spoke with. It is notable, for instance, that examples of transformative SEL were not found alongside *relationship building* or *responsible decision making*. That is, the ways in which teachers defined success in relation to those competencies were more in line with a “personally responsible” understanding as opposed to a “transformative” conceptualization. It is not clear whether this transformative conceptualization was something that teachers were unaware of, whether they didn’t see these areas as important, or whether this is an area that needs to be focused on with teachers in the future. However, given the scholarship on the importance of multicultural competence (e.g., Muhammad, 2020), culturally sustaining relationship building and community building (e.g., Singleton & Hayes, 2013; Weinstein et al., 2004), and collective well-being (e.g., Jagers et al., 2019; Love, 2019), it is critical to emphasize the importance of these areas as well.

Finally, another participant’s reflections speak to the complexity of this issue and complicate these findings further. Recall that earlier, Julie spoke of the importance of teachers *not* always following the rules; however, she also noted that perhaps the teachers who do just follow the rules may find it easier to stay in the field:

I know a lot of teachers who are just rule followers, and they’re like, “I’m just gonna do whatever I need to do,” and that’s okay. And you know what? They sleep better at night than I do. And they’re gonna stay longer because they’re gonna last longer because it doesn’t get them the same way.

Julie’s comment speaks to how difficult teacher SEL, well-being, and longevity really are. She believed in the importance of teachers *not* following the rules with her colleagues’ and students’ best interests at heart, but she also acknowledged that this very act can also contribute to deeply felt stress that can even force skilled teachers out of the field. Teaching in the current sociopolitical environment that increasingly questions teachers’ professionalism, judgement, and expertise is extremely difficult (e.g., EdWeek Research Center, 2022; Harris et al., 2022). Transformative teacher social–emotional learning must be coupled with strategies, supports, and preparation for navigating these kinds of inevitable challenges.

## Limitations and Future Research

This study’s small sample size of eleven teachers is a limitation of our research because the results are not generalizable to the broader population. Nevertheless, this small, in-depth sample was drawn from across the United States with participants who attended a range of teacher preparation programs, and the commonalities among participant responses are instructive in considering how to support teacher well-being. Additional research is needed to investigate teacher perceptions of well-being, preparedness, and success; investigations into the impact of leveraging the transformative SEL framework (Jagers et al., 2019) are also needed to see if this approach can effectively prepare teachers in the way our results suggest.

## Conclusion

While a host of research and educational philosophies advocate for whole child education, in order to effectively prepare teachers to be successful in their work, we must not forget that teachers are whole people themselves. Consistent responses from participants point to the importance of supporting teacher’s critical and holistic well-being as crucial markers of teacher preparedness and success.

Given these teachers' insights, Jagers et al.'s (2019) transformative SEL framework emerges as a practical tool to organize concepts that are not always so tangible. A teacher educator might use this framework to review their own syllabus and ask the following questions: To what extent does a syllabus cultivate each transformative competency? Are elements of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making present? To what extent are teachers developing each of these competencies at the transformative level? Which competencies are missing that should be included? A group of syllabi could also be examined as departments could explore how their program unites to support teachers in these ways.

Preparing pre-service teachers for longevity in the field during teacher prep programs is a challenging task; anticipating every eventuality in the short and long-term is clearly impossible. Nonetheless, given the value that these teachers placed on their own critical social–emotional wellness when defining overall success, this holistic approach to teacher preparation cannot be overlooked.

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