Promoting educator social emotional competence, well-being, and student–educator relationships: A pilot study

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ABSTRACT

Educator mental health and well-being have received increased attention in response to the additional stress experienced during the coronavirus pandemic. Cultivating mental health and well-being can be facilitated by enhancing adult social emotional competencies. However, relatively limited research has explored how prevention programs promoting social emotional competencies have enhanced educator well-being and related attributes of self-care, efficacy, and skillful interactions with students. In this pilot study, we implemented and evaluated an innovative prevention program called Resilience in Schools and Educators (RISE) in eight Colorado schools with 53 educators. RISE builds knowledge and skills that promote educator social-emotional competencies, trauma responsivity, cultural responsivity, resilience, and well-being. The first study aim was to explore the fidelity and feasibility of the RISE program implemented in a school-based context. The second study aim was to explore whether RISE is associated with increases in educators' self-reported social emotional competencies, well-being, self-care practices, self-efficacy, and quality of interactions with students. As compared to field standards, facilitators reported high levels of fidelity and feasibility of RISE. Educators' pre- and post- self-report measures indicate significant improvements in social emotional competencies (emotional awareness, emotional clarity, non-reactivity, nonjudging), self-care practices, well-being, and student-educator conflict, with effect sizes indicating small to medium impacts. No findings emerged for self-efficacy or perceived closeness of student-teacher relationships. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

1. Introduction

Educator mental health and well-being has been an important area of focus nationally and globally given the persistent high rates of burn out and turn over (Gewertz, 2021) and low job satisfaction ratings among K-12 educators in American public schools in 2020 (Chen, 2020). While there are many factors driving burnout and attrition (e.g., workload, staffing, performance targets, accountability structures, low resources), the added layers of stress and adversity due to the Coronavirus pandemic have challenged educators' sense of safety and well-being, impacting morale and increasing likelihood to exit the profession (Cooper-Gibson Research, 2018; Grubic et al., 2020; Jerrim, et al., 2020; Kaufman & Diliberti, 2021). There are regional differences, however, Colorado provides a snapshot of the enormous impact of the pandemic citing 38% of educators considering leaving the field (Colorado Education Initiative, 2020).

Although teaching can be highly rewarding and meaningful, educators frequently report a sense of isolation (Graham et al., 2011), a struggle to meet job demands (Carlson & Kees, 2013), low confidence (Walter et al., 2006), feelings of incompetence, frustration, and helplessness (Rothi et al., 2008), occupational burnout (Braun et al., 2019) and psychological distress (Borntrager et al., 2012). Educators are also at risk for experiencing secondary traumatic stress given that they support students struggling with adversity and trauma exposure (Hydon et al., 2015, Stamm, 1995). Learning effective ways to support educator well-being to navigate stressful times is relevant and timely, especially as guidelines for re-opening include additional emotional and mental health supports for school staff and students (Cardona & McHugh, 2021; Colorado Education Initiative, 2020; Grubic et al., 2020; National Association of School Psychologists, n.d.).

Cultivating mental health and well-being requires enhancing adult social emotional competencies (e.g., self-awareness, emotion regulation,

empathy, and relationship skills) as well as an ability to experience a healthy balance of positive and negative emotions, self-care, and self-efficacy. Social emotional competencies are known to buffer against the impact of stress and are positively correlated with mental health (Gross & Munoz, 1995; Nelis et al., 2011). Research indicates that educators with stronger SEC have more positive student-teacher interactions and more effective classroom management (Dorman, 2015; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jennings et al., 2017). In addition, they are better equipped to teach and model social-emotional skills for students and to help students with emotional challenges (Braun et al., 2019; Jennings, 2018; Roeser et al., 2013). Several mental health promotion programs have been developed to enhance educator SEC, mindfulness, self-care, and well-being with the explicit aim of improving classroom management, instructional effectiveness, and quality of classroom interactions (Braun et al., 2019; Hirshberg et al., 2020; Hwang et al., 2017; Jennings et al., 2017). A few of these programs have been rigorously evaluated in experimental trials, including SMART-in-Education (Roeser et al., 2013), Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) (Jennings et al., 2013), and adapted programs for Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) (Frank et al., 2015). This research, combined with case studies, suggests positive benefits for educators on outcomes related to mindfulness, emotion regulation, well-being, psychological distress, and time urgency; greater educator confidence in addressing challenging student behaviors, with somewhat smaller impacts on classroom climate and instructional practices (Hirshberg et al., 2020; Jennings et al., 2017; Klingbeil & Renshaw, 2018; Powell & Bui, 2016; Shamblin et al., 2016).

The RISE program builds and expands on these programs by not only building adult SEC but by teaching behavioral specific, emotion-focused relationship skills (e.g., connection, emotion support, emotion coaching skills) through active role-play and live coaching of educator skills. Additionally, RISE builds educator knowledge and skills in designing trauma-responsive and resilience promoting classrooms, including equity-centered, culturally responsive routines, rituals, roles, responsibilities, and order. The RISE approach is highly interactive, based on adult learning theories and related research that indicate that active learning strategies promote behavior change and skill development (Humair & Cornuz, 2003; Joyner & Young, 2006; Killion et al., 2020; Killion & Crow, 2012). We join the SEL researchers and advocates (e.g., CASEL, n.d.) that recognize school adult SEL and ability to support student SEL in behaviorally specific ways, separate from discrete lesson instruction, has largely been overlooked for the first 20 years of SEL implementation and research. RISE uses a relationship-based approach to build student SEL skills through everyday interaction with teachers and other adults in the school community.

1.1. RISE program content

Resilience in Schools & Educators (RISE) (Fitzgerald et al., 2018) is a school-based program led by a trained facilitator (e.g., a school-based or district-level educator or mental health professional). The RISE program targets adult skill-building to improve educators' ability to embody, model, and scaffold skills with youth in moment-to-moment interactions every day. RISE is grounded in theory and research in the areas of emotional development and emotion socialization, contemplative science, the study of trauma and resilience, and best practices for adult professional learning. The RISE theory of change model presented below demonstrates research-based program components, the educator knowledge and skills targeted, and expected short- and long-term outcomes for educators, classrooms, and schools.

The RISE theory of change and content of RISE is consistent with other work in education (CASEL, n.d.), including the prosocial classroom model (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), now called CARE for Teachers (Jennings et al., 2013, 2017), Roeser et al.'s (2013) model integrating a social-cognitive perspective of how individuals assess and cope with stress with mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), and

Schonert-Riechel (2017)'s three-component framework for social emotional learning. RISE is aligned with trauma-informed/trauma-sensitive, resilience-promoting school environments, such as the NCTSN's Trauma-informed Schools system framework (2017), Trauma-Sensitive Classrooms (Jennings, 2018), Trauma-Sensitive Schools (Craig, 2015), and Fostering Resilient Learners (Souers & Hall, 2018).

The RISE program is unique in that it offers continuous, embedded professional learning and consultation for the facilitators and educators across the year, for multiple years, through whole school professional development sessions, small group workshops and individual coaching. More specifically, RISE facilitators work with small cohorts of educators focusing on several key areas: (a) knowledge of the prevalence and impact of trauma, well-being, and social-emotional skill development; (b) strategies for increasing educator social emotional competencies and well-being; (c) practicing educator emotion-focused relationship skills; and (d) designing intentional trauma responsive school environments. Each of these areas are described below in more detail. RISE is distinctly different from many existing programs that focus on student learning and skills because it targets adult SEC, self-care, well-being, and behaviorally specific skills for strengthening connection and relationships with students. RISE has a strong trauma-responsive, culturally responsive, and resilience-promoting lens that guides the design of classroom structures and systems as well as interaction with youth, emphasizing the need for supportive classroom practices embedded in supportive environment.

1.1.1. Building Knowledge of mental health, trauma, resilience, and social-emotional competencies

RISE builds educators' knowledge of mental health, trauma, resilience, and social emotional learning to help educators recognize pathways for support when students exhibit symptoms potentially associated with trauma and related mental health challenges (e.g., anxiety, depression, physical complaints). Often, student behaviors that educators interpret as challenging are related to underlying needs that may remain invisible if educators lack the knowledge base to recognize actions as communication of needs. RISE defines terms such as stress, trauma, adverse life events, posttraumatic stress, and resilience and describes important developmental considerations. RISE offers a trauma-responsive lens to promote use of skillful, supportive responses to youth mental health and behavioral challenges that mitigate the impact of trauma on youth (Jennings, 2018). Resilience offers an important counterbalance to the impact of trauma. RISE introduces the science behind cultivating resilience, key protective factors, and describes how RISE skills and strategies promote resilience in self and students through relationship building and designing trauma-informed classrooms. RISE also builds educators' knowledge of SEC and introduces practices and strategies for building adult and student SEC (described in next section).

1.1.2. Strategies for increasing educator social emotional competencies and well-being

RISE teaches a range of strategies that increase educators' emotional awareness, acceptance, and regulation; relationship skills of connection, support, empathy, and perspective taking; and perspectives and practices to enhance well-being and self-care. RISE offers an experiential approach that includes didactics, self-reflection, and practice (see Table 1 for information regarding the RISE workshop content and well-being components). For example, a core strategy used during RISE is a mind-body, three-step process called Hand-to-Heart which involves a brief, guided introspective practice that encourages participants to first 'tune into' themselves, next 'reach out' to consider others' feelings, needs, and perspectives, and then 'connect' to self and others in a way that builds connection and strengthens relationships. Each of the Hand to Heart steps is paired with a physical gesture and breath (see Table 2 for details). Hand-to-Heart teaches educators to pause, notice their

Table 1
Content and core components of RISE workshops.

	Workshop 1: Tuning in and Tuning Up	Workshop 2: Connection Skills I	Workshop 3: Connection Skills II	Workshop 4: Emotion Support	Workshop 5: Emotion Coaching	Workshop 6: All Skills Application
Opener with Well-being strategy	Hand-to-Heart/Debrief and Norm Setting	Hand-to-Heart/Debrief and Norm Setting	Hand-to-Heart/DebriefShare out about skills used since last workshop	Hand-to-Heart/Debrief Share out about skills used since last workshop	Hand-to-Heart/Debrief Share out about skills used since last workshop	Hand-to-Heart/Debrief Share out about skills used since last workshop
Mini-Lesson	Review of Hand-to-Heart and Setting up the Environment	Introduction to Connection Skills	Listening and labeling skills, Turn and Talk cultural context	Reflection on Support with video, Introduction to Emotion Support Skills, Video, Turn and talk (role play and discussion)	Emotion Coaching Example Video	Positive Narrative Video
Active Engagement	Function of Emotion, Automatic default responses, Setting the Environment	Interactive Activity for Notice and Appreciate (Role Play)	Student Scenario Role Play (in pairs, each Person Practices Connection Skills)	Video and discussion, Student Scenario role play using Connection and Emotion Support Skills	Student Scenario Role Play using Emotion Coaching skills	Student Scenario Role Play to Address the Issue of concern
Focus on Well-being	Hand-to-Heart Breathing	Treehouse Visualization	3-part breath	Hand-to-Heart Breathing	Meditation	3-part breath, self-care survey
Reflect, Plan, Share	Proactive Plan for the environment	Proactive Plan Notice and Appreciate	Proactive Plan for using Connection Skills	Breath work reflection, plan and share	Plan for Intensity talk	Reflection of Skill Use
Close	Coach-led Notice and Appreciate	Coach-led Notice and Appreciate	Coach-led Paraphrase/Summary	Whole group phrase share	Educator leads Hand-to-Heart	Educator leads Hand-to-Heart

Table 2
RISE hand-to-heart three step practice.

Physical Gesture	Introspective Prompts
1. Tune In (placing hand to heart)	"What am I feeling?", "What do I need?"
2. Reach Out (holding hands out with palms up)	"How are others (e.g., students) feeling?" "What is their experience and perspective?" "What do they need?"
3. Connect (placing hands together)	"How can I meet my own needs and my students'/others' needs?", "How can we connect and build our relationship?"

feelings and thoughts, and biases, without judgment and with compassion, tune-in to what they need, engage in deep breathing, and then return to the student with responsivity. The Hand-to-Heart three-step strategy aims to build educator social emotional competence, in particular *self*-awareness (e.g., labeling feelings, emotional understanding, underlying needs), mindfulness and well-being (step 1); social emotional awareness of others, perspective taking, empathy and compassion (for students/colleagues) (step 2); and felt interpersonal connection, warmth and relationships with students and colleagues (step 3). Educators are also offered a brief one-step version called *Hand to Heart Belly Breathing* with the focus only on the first step of *tuning in*, bringing breath in and out of the belly and noticing, and then returning to the situation or person at hand. Combining visual, verbal, and physical cues allows for different types of learners to remember and encode
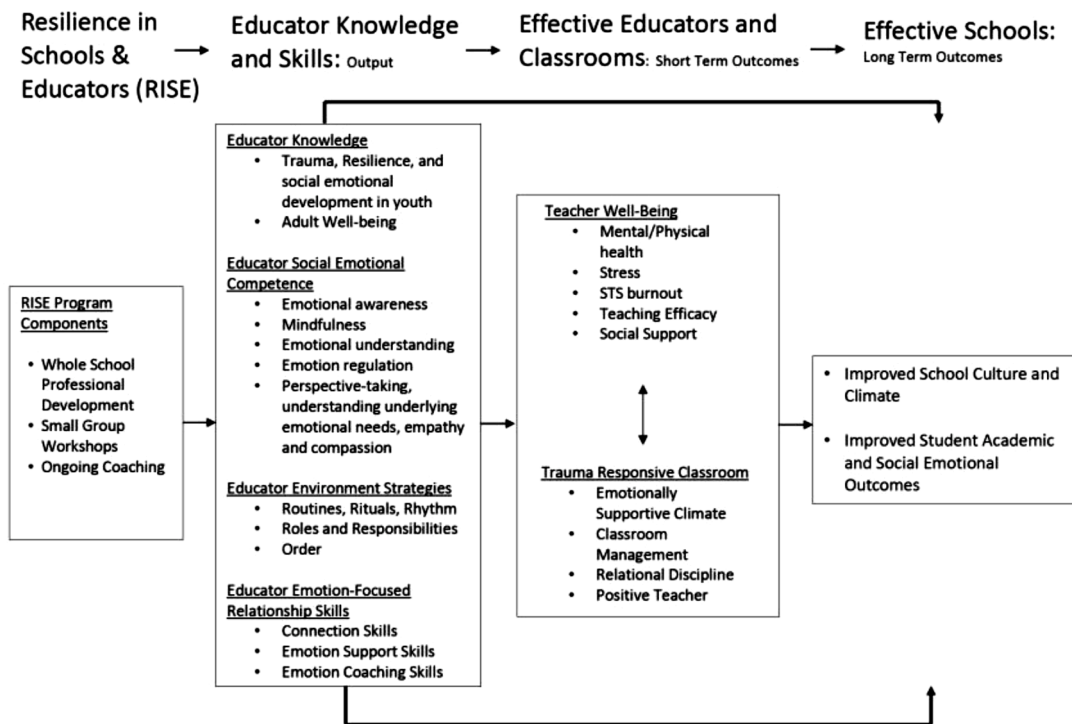

Fig. 1. Resilience in Schools & Educators (RISE) Theory of Change Model.

the steps. The pairing of the steps with diaphragmatic breathing aims to promote self-regulation. The Hand-to-Heart strategy targets RISE skill areas shown in the theory of change model (see Fig. 1).

In professional learning workshops, RISE facilitators share the empirical basis for the Hand to Heart practices to provide a strong rationale and motivation to try these practices. Specifically, they highlight neuroscience and other related research that demonstrates that (a) diaphragmatic breathing promotes vagal tone, calming, and emotion regulation, (b) emotion labeling promotes emotion regulation and coping and reduces trauma-based fight or flight responses, and (c) gentle touch, including the hand to heart gesture, activates the vagal system, slows breathing and heart rate, releases oxytocin associated with bonding and stress reduction, and activates the orbitofrontal cortex associated with greater emotional awareness and compassion (Keltner, 2010; Maciuika, 2011; Shah et al., 2017; Singer & Klimecki, 2014; Uvnäs-moberg et al., 2015).

1.1.3. Effective emotion focused relationship skills

RISE builds relationship skills that are key to enhancing warmth, positivity, and connection in teacher-student relationships as well as to promoting social emotional skill development in students. These skills include *Connection Skills, Emotion Support Skills*, and *Emotion Coaching Skills. Connection Skills* help educators build positivity into daily interactions, demonstrate genuine interest in their students, and gain understanding about students' emotional experiences and perspectives. The explicit skills related to connection encompass noticing, appreciating, listening, and labeling emotions. Noticing and appreciating involves words and actions that convey appreciation of a student's unique qualities, experiences, and interests, as well as their prosocial behaviors. Listening skills include positive body language, reflecting and summarizing what the student says, asking open-ended questions that focus on understanding the student's experience, and going slowly to give youth time to respond. RISE also encourages educators to label students' emotions; reflecting emotions that youth share, labeling emotions, and hypothesizing about how youth might be feeling.

Emotion Support Skills validate student emotional experience and communicates support and acceptance of student feelings, experiences, and perspectives. Emotion support skills include perspective taking, empathy or shared emotional experience, normalization of feelings (e.g., "that makes sense", "others feel that way too"), and demonstrations of care and kindness in response to students' emotional displays. Using *Emotion Support Skills* conveys an openness and comfort with emotional expression and sends the message that feelings are natural, acceptable and a valuable source of information. Implementing these skills promotes supportive teacher-student relationships, promotes the development of student social emotional learning, and increases adult well-being (Shanafelt et al., 2005).

Emotion Coaching Skills focus on strategies to increase students' understanding of emotion in self and others. These skills include supporting emotion regulation, perspective taking and empathy, building coping strategies and collaborative problem-solving skills. Specific skills encompass building emotion knowledge, identifying feelings in context, understanding causes and consequences of emotions, and labeling mixed feelings and feeling intensity. RISE teaches how to support students' development of coping skills (e.g., deep breathing, asking for help, distraction) and collaborative problem-solving (e.g., brainstorming solutions, evaluating, trying out a strategy, refining). Finally, RISE teaches common traps that interfere with connection and support in relationships, including distraction, focusing on situational details rather than the student's emotion and/or experience, minimizing student emotional experience, criticizing, lecturing, and attending primarily to disruptive behavior.

1.1.4. Designing trauma-responsive school environments

RISE considers the powerful role of the environment and the potential for designing supportive emotional climates in schools. The RISE

trauma responsive lens encourages intentionally designed school environments that organize space, time, materials, and interactions by using supportive, recurring structures. These structures include routines, rituals, and attention to rhythm, roles, responsibilities, and order. Integrating routines, rituals and intentional rhythms into school environments promotes predictability, consistency, warmth, and opportunities for connection throughout daily interaction, promoting trauma-responsivity (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Schools Committee, 2017). Routines and smooth transitions also promote student achievement by increasing time on task, increasing motivation and engagement levels, and promote resilience by increasing student well-being (Lester et al., 2017; Scully & Howell, 2008; Wright, 2014). These trauma responsive structures also increase educator retention (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

1.2. RISE program implementation and fidelity monitoring

Districts interested in implementing RISE identify a school and/or district-based professional(s) to become RISE facilitators for their schools. In addition, individual school professionals may communicate interest in becoming facilitators and receive support from their administrators to implement the program. RISE facilitators are trained by RISE developers and receive ongoing monthly consultation and technical assistance throughout implementation. Educators in RISE schools receive a combination of whole school professional development focused on topics of trauma, resilience, and social emotional development and small group workshops in which RISE skills are presented and practiced. RISE workshops are delivered in the context of small-group professional learning communities where educators practice skills and learn via modeling, active role play, and feedback from peers and facilitators. All workshops include six parts (see Table 1 for detailed information); they are highly interactive, based on adult learning theories and related research that indicate that active learning strategies promote behavior change and skill development (Humair & Cornuz, 2003; Joyner & Young, 2006; Killion et al., 2020; Killion & Crow, 2012). Facilitators are encouraged to conduct live classroom observations and provide individual coaching in between the workshops to reinforce educators' use and generalization of RISE skills and to help them to navigate challenges (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Killion et al., 2020). During RISE coaching sessions, the facilitator and educator develop a brief list of RISE-specific, actionable goals and monitor progress towards those goals.

Fidelity monitoring is built into the program to document the extent to which RISE can be implemented with high fidelity (i.e., as intended) in school contexts. This is important given that information on school-based program implementation fidelity is often unknown or lacking (see review by Rojas-Andrade & Bahamondes, 2019). Extensive research documents the challenges with adopting research-based programs in school settings given the complex and heterogenous contexts of schools and the limited resources and time for fostering these types of competencies and well-being in their educators (Gottfredson et al., 1998; Rojas-Andrade & Bahamondes, 2019; Waxman et al., 1999; Weist et al., 2014).

1.3. The present study

Our study aims were to explore: (a) the feasibility of the RISE program and (b) changes in self-reported social emotional competencies, well-being, self-care practices, self-efficacy, and quality of interactions with students among educators receiving the RISE program. In this pilot study, we evaluated only part of the RISE theory of change model that focused on Educator Knowledge and Educator Social Emotional Competence (see the second box of the model in Fig. 1).

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Participants

Eight Colorado schools participated in RISE pilot evaluation during the spring of 2018. Schools were selected using purposive sampling and represented small or medium sized schools invited to voluntarily participate in the evaluation. This evaluation was deemed exempt from review by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The eight participating public schools (four Elementary schools, two Middle Schools, one K–8, one K–12 school) were located in both suburban and rural areas of Colorado in seven school districts with varying ethnic/racial diversity (non-white/minority students, M = 35.7%) and socio-economic status [e.g., 54.7% of the students received free and reduced-price lunch].

Fifty-nine educators participated in the RISE program and 53 of those educators completed the pre- and post-surveys. From 46 responses, educators reported identifying as predominantly White/Caucasian (91.5%) and female (82%), with 2% of educators identifying as American Indian and Asian respectfully and 4.5% reporting other, which is consistent with percent demographics identified ethnicity/race and gender of educators in Colorado (Colorado Department of Education, 2020). These demographics were representative for educators in the specific districts included in the sample at the time of data collection in 2018, as well as educator demographics in the larger state of Colorado currently (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Educators included a mix of subject area and classroom educators and other school staff such as a coach, mental health professionals, administrators, and instructional leaders.

Each RISE facilitator delivered RISE in their respective school. Facilitators had a variety of roles within the school (e.g., trauma informed care or intervention coaches, school psychologists, social emotional school counselor), had 9-34 years of work experience in the field, and approximately two thirds held a master's degree.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Program feasibility and fidelity

We operationalized *feasibility* as the extent to which facilitators were able to complete all required pre-implementation training and consultation (2.5 days of initial training, 1-1 monthly consultation with RISE developers and monthly group consultation with RISE developers) and schools completed all RISE program components (3-h schoolwide training, 6 small group workshops and up to 7 individual coaching sessions). We operationalized *fidelity* by having facilitators document the extent to which the core components of RISE were implemented as intended (i.e., by tracking the number of workshop hours provided and the core content delivered in each workshop). Facilitators completed a fidelity sheet after each workshop (see Table 1), including qualitative notes (e.g., reasons for not completing all core components, activities that were well received, observations). RISE Developers coached facilitators to prioritize delivery of the 3 core components: 1) Opener with Well-being, 2) Mini-lesson and 3) Active Engagement described in Table 1. These are considered core given that they include practicing the core well-being strategy (Hand-to-Heart) and teaching and active practice of core RISE skills (Connection, Emotions Support, and Emotion Coaching skills). Facilitators also documented the coaching sessions provided in between workshops. Coaching sessions were typically 15–30 min in duration.

2.2.2. Educator social emotional competence

Two scales of the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (i.e., Nonreactivity, Nonjudgement; FFMQ; Baer et al., 2006) were administered to assess educator mindfulness. Educators were asked to describe their opinion of what is generally true for them on a 5-point scale (1 = *never or very rarely true* to 5 = *very often or always true*). Cronbach's alphas were

.80 and .91, respectively. Sample items include "I perceive my feelings and emotions without having to react to them" (nonreactivity) and "I tell myself I shouldn't be feeling the way I am feeling" (nonjudgment, reverse scored).

Two scales of the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (i.e., Emotional Awareness, Emotional Clarity; DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004) were administered to assess aspects of educators' social emotional competencies. Educators were asked to indicate how often the following statements apply to them by writing the appropriate number from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*) for each item. Cronbach's alpha values were .79 and .72, respectively. Sample items include "I pay attention to how I feel" and "I have difficulty making sense out of my feelings." Some items were reverse coded so that increases in subscale scores reflect improvement in the measured constructs.

2.2.3. Educator well-being

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988), which is an indicator of well-being, was administered to assess how often educators experienced positive and negative affect *when at school*. The scale consists of 20 positive (e.g., interested, excited, attentive) and negative (e.g., irritable, nervous, angry) words that represent different emotions. Educators indicated to what extent they felt this way over the past week using a 5-point scale (1 = *very slightly/not at all* to 5 = *extremely*). Cronbach's alphas were .90 and .86, respectively.

2.2.4. Educator self-care satisfaction

Educators' self-care satisfaction was measured using a single, global item: "Overall in the past week, how satisfied are you with your self-care?" rated on a 5-point scale (1= *Not at all*, 2= *A little*, 3 = *Somewhat*, 4 = *Very*, 5 = *Almost Completely*).

2.2.5. Educator self-efficacy

The Teachers Sense of Efficacy Scale-Short Version (TSES; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) was administered to assess educators' perception that they have influence over things that create difficulties for them in their school activities. This included the scale that assesses teacher efficacy with regard to classroom and behavior management. Educators were asked to give their opinion of four statements on a 5-point scale (1 = *nothing* to 5 = *a great deal*). Cronbach's alpha was .91. A sample item is, "How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?"

2.2.6. Student–educator interactions

Two scales of the Student/Teacher Relationship Scale (i.e., Closeness, Conflict; STRS; Pianta, 2001) were administered to assess student-educator interactions. Educators were asked to reflect on the degree to which each of the 15 statements currently applied to their interactions with children in their classroom using a 5- point scale (1 = *definitely does not apply* to 5 = *definitely applies*). Cronbach's alphas were .74 and .79, respectively. Sample items include, "I share an affectionate, warm relationship with the child" and "This child and I always seem to be struggling with each other."

2.3. Data analysis

To understand the feasibility of RISE (Study Aim 1), descriptive statistics were used to determine the extent to which core components of the RISE program and each workshop were implemented as intended and the dosage of coaching[1]. To explore pre-post changes in self-report outcomes among educators receiving the RISE program (Study Aim 2), repeated measures t-tests were conducted to determine differences

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[1] A general guideline in the field is to aim for a minimum fidelity score of 60–80% of core components being implemented as intended (IRIS Center Peabody College Vanderbilt, n.d.).

between pre- and post-assessment items (Self-care Practice Checklist), scale scores (PANAS, FFMQ, STRS, DERS), and composite scores (TSES). Analyses were performed using IBM SPSS 24 (IBM Corp, 2016). Given difference in standard deviation from pre- to post-assessment we opted to use Glass' Δ to calculate effect size which uses the pre-standard deviation and is appropriate for our sample size (Ellis, 2009; Glass et al., 1981). There was limited missing data for all outcomes (generally between 2 and 4 percent) so missing data was not imputed.

3. Results

3.1. Program feasibility and fidelity

With regard to feasibility, all RISE facilitators were able to complete the required pre-implementation training and consultation from RISE program developers. All schools received the 3-h PD focused on content knowledge development (trauma, resilience, social emotional development). Within each school, small cohorts of educators (5–12 per group) received six, 60-minute workshops led by a RISE facilitator over a four-month period and a sub-set of educators received individual coaching sessions with the RISE facilitator between workshops

With regard to fidelity, facilitators documented their delivery of the Content and Core Components of RISE Workshops (see Table 1), with a priority on delivering the three core components of the program (Opener with Well-being, Mini-lesson, and Active Engagement) described in Table 3. The remaining three components described in Table 1 offer additional opportunities to reflect on skills and practice well-being strategies but do not introduce new RISE content. A high percentage of RISE core components were completed overall (86%), with some variation in terms of facilitators completing the core components for each workshop (Opener with Well-Being Practice, 90%; Mini-lesson, 90; Active Engagement, 78%). The data also suggested that facilitators completed somewhat more core components for Workshop 1, 2 and 3 (average 95%) versus Workshop 4, 5, and 6 (average 77%). When activities were not completed, facilitators typically indicated in fidelity logs that this was due to lack of time.

3.2. Coaching dosage

Thirty eight of the 59 educators (64%) received coaching in between the six workshops. There was an average of five educators coached per school ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.83$; Range 1–7) and educators who were coached received an average of 2.6 coaching sessions. Coaching sessions lasted 15–30 minutes.

3.3. Educator social emotional competence

As shown in Table 4, analyses indicated significant improvements in self-reported measures assessing emotional awareness, emotional clarity, $t(50) = 4.07$, $p < .001$; nonreactivity, $t(50) = 3.36$, $p = .002$; and nonjudging $t(51) = 3.05$, $p = .004$. These effects were of medium size (range of .40 to .54).

3.4. Educator self-care satisfaction

As shown in Table 5, analyses indicated significant improvements in educators' perceived satisfaction with their self-care.

3.5. Well-being, self-efficacy, and student–educator interactions

As shown in Table 4, analyses indicated significant improvements in self-reported positive and negative affect, corresponding to medium sized effects (range of .42 to .49). Analyses showed no effects on self-reported measures of educator self-efficacy but indicated significant improvements in self-reported student-educator conflict, corresponding to a small effect size. There was no effect, however, in self-reported closeness of student-educator relationships.

4. Discussion

This study suggests promising results of a 6-session school-based prevention program, RISE, designed to facilitate educator social emotional competencies, self-care practices and well-being, self-efficacy, and positive student-educator relationships. RISE targets adult skill-building to improve educators' ability to recognize and address their own social emotional needs and to embody, model, and scaffold youth social emotional skills with students. RISE teaches behaviorally specific skills to increase positive interactions with students in moment-to-moment interactions every day. Although this pilot study was not able to determine causality, the preliminary pilot findings suggest that RISE is feasible to implement in a school setting and it is a promising program for educator well-being promotion and skill development.

4.1. Program feasibility and fidelity

We determined that facilitators can successfully implement RISE with high fidelity; 86% of the core components were completed and an average of five educators per school received some individual coaching sessions. Given the field's standards of high-fidelity implementation ranging from 67% to 100% of all program components, this suggests that RISE can be implemented with fidelity in a K-12 American school context. Schools and districts were willing and able to allocate time for continuous professional learning, delivered in a variety of learning approaches for both school-based facilitators and the educators participating in RISE. This is notable given that schools are challenged to allocate money, time, and other resources for extensive training for individuals or teams for social emotional development (Bridgeland et al., 2016).

Establishing program feasibility in real world settings is extremely important given the wide research-practice gap and lack of guidance for schools regarding how to adopt research-based programs in ways that provide sufficient dosage but are still feasible for educators themselves to implement (Crosse et al., 2011; Weist et al., 2014). RISE is specifically designed to be facilitated by trained educators or school staff (e.g., counselor, social worker, social emotional learning coordinators) already staffed by schools or districts. This model explicitly seeks to develop capacity among current educators, schools, and districts so that

Table 3
Percent of core components completed for each RISE workshop.

Core Component	WK 1: Tuning in and Tuning Up/ Setting Environment	WK 2: Connection Skills I	WK 3: Connection Skills II	WK 4: Emotion Support	WK 5: Emotion Coaching	WK 6: All-Skills Application	Total
Opener with Well-Being	100	100	100	88	88	63	90
Mini-Lesson	100	100	100	88	75	75	90
Active Engagement	100	88	75	63	88	63	78
Total	100	96	92	80	84	67	86

Note. WK=Workshop.

Table 4

Means and standard deviations for target outcomes: educator social emotional competencies, well-being, self-efficacy, student-educator interactions.

	Pre		Post					95% CI		
	M	SD	M	SD	t	Df	p	LL	UL	Glass' Δ
	Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire									
Nonreactivity	22.33	4.47	24.35	3.70	3.36	50	.002**	0.16	0.92	0.45
Nonjudging	28.80	6.21	31.00	6.33	3.05	51	.004**	0.03	0.78	0.35
	Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale									
Emotional Awareness	22.78	3.71	24.14	3.34	2.57	43	.014*	0.01	0.79	0.37
Emotional Clarity	20.05	2.75	21.24	1.97	4.07	50	.001**	0.11	0.87	0.43
	Positive and Negative Affect Schedule									
Positive	32.95	7.34	35.88	7.02	3.45	50	.001**	0.04	0.80	0.40
Negative	19.79	6.60	17.33	5.49	−3.24	48	.002**	−0.87	−0.10	−0.37
	Educator Self-Efficacy									
Sense of Self Efficacy Scale	28.20	5.05	29.05	4.88	1.62	51	.112	0.14	0.61	0.17
	Student/Teacher Relationship Scale									
Closeness	30.96	2.78	31.26	2.69	1.10	48	.276	0.19	0.57	0.11
Conflict	19.95	5.19	18.33	5.15	−2.82	47	.007**	−0.75	−0.02	−0.31

Note. CI = Confidence Interval; *LL*=lower limit; *UL*=upper limit. Some individuals did not complete all measures and scales so the degrees of freedom for a specific scale is sometimes lower than 52.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 5

Means and standard deviations for educator self-care satisfaction.

	Pre		Post				95% CI		
	M	SD	M	SD	t(46)	p	LL	UL	Glass' Δ
Self-care Satisfaction	2.49	.99	3.09	.80	6.15	.000***	.40	.79	0.61

Note. CI = Confidence Interval; *LL*=lower limit; *UL*=upper limit. ***p < .001.

professional learning and school improvement can be sustained over-time, without the continued expenditure of fees and associated support of program developers.

The slightly lower completion rates for core components in the final skills application workshop made sense given that RISE facilitators had to balance teaching, live coaching of RISE skills in an everyday scenario with a debrief, and skillfully close the group experience. Fidelity levels were encouraging, given the considerable content and experiential components in each workshop and unanticipated school demands that occasionally altered workshop times.

4.2. Educator social emotional competencies

Consistent with hypotheses, results indicate pre-post changes on several aspects of educators SEC, which are theoretically and empirically linked with increased adult well-being and reduced mental health challenges. Specifically, pre-post improvements were indicated in areas of emotional awareness and emotional clarity, related to accurate identification, description, and acceptance of different feelings. This is a foundational building block of SEC, strongly linked to emotion regulation, well-being, and healthy adjustment (John & Gross, 2004; Subic-Wrana et al., 2014).

In addition, findings showed pre-post improvement on educator ability to avoid judging their feelings and thoughts and to perceive and identify feelings without immediately reacting to them. These skills are critical for educators who are navigating challenging situations with students, among peers, or with other staff at school (Jones et al., 2013). Pausing to evaluate and label how one is feeling and thinking activates the prefrontal cortex (Lieberman et al., 2007) which can help educators to respond in a more intentional and skillful manner in the classroom and prevent conflict and escalation (Dorman, 2015). This is consistent with the present study finding of educators reporting reduced conflict in interaction with students following the RISE intervention. These findings are also consistent with the specific skills taught in RISE. For

example, educators in RISE often anecdotally note that the Hand-to-Heart practice is a simple, yet powerful practice to cue them to increase self-awareness, self-nurturance, and regulation as well as awareness of others' perspectives and needs. Similarly, Elreda et al. (2018) found that educator mindfulness was significantly associated with increased emotionally supportive interactions with students. Additionally, considerable developmental research demonstrates that the RISE connection skills (e.g., notice, appreciate, listening) and emotion support skills (e.g., validation) increase support and reduce conflict within adult-youth relationships (Hastings, 2018; Katz et al., 2012).

Importantly, this professional learning experience provided educators with the time for authentic connection with a community of colleagues; during the workshops, educators shared challenges and successes as they navigated the complexities of their own social emotional evolution and the social emotional learning of students. Time deeply sharing and actively learning with colleagues is a rare commodity in schools. Given the widespread sense of isolation associated with career teaching (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016), it is possible that the learning community established through RISE was influential in the promotion of educator SEC and well-being.

4.3. Educator self-care, well-being, and efficacy

Findings related to the increased self-care satisfaction also align with the aims of RISE practices explicitly taught. Specific techniques such as Hand-to-Heart, reflection and meditation, and intentional relaxation taught in the whole school professional development sessions and reinforced in every small group RISE workshop may have contributed to the significant and large effect (based on Glass' Δ) observed for educator self-care satisfaction. RISE aims to build educator self-awareness of personal needs and potential resources meet those needs. RISE aims to expand educators' range of activities and practices to increase their self-care and well-being. Building a repertoire of self-care skills is critical for

educators since they often feel the impacts of isolation in their class-rooms, stress and burn-out, and challenges supporting students with mental health challenges (Carlson & Kees, 2013; Graham et al., 2011; Rothi et al., 2008; Walter et al., 2006). This is consistent with our findings that suggest a significant increase in educators' self-reported positive affect (e.g., enthusiasm, interest, joy) and decreased negative affect (e.g., distress, fear, and frustration) during the school day. Finally, with regard to teacher self-efficacy with classroom/behavior management, there was not a significant shift from pre- to post-intervention. It may be that educators need time to master RISE skills and strategies in real life practice before they are able to use them fluently to increase efficacy and skill responding to behavioral challenges. Additionally, they may have benefited from more direct instruction about how RISE skills directly support behavior management which is something we have added to RISE training and coaching in subsequent work.

4.4. Limitations and future directions

Findings from this pilot study are promising, yet several limitations warrant mention. Causal inferences cannot be made given we used a pre-post repeated measures, single-group design. Therefore, the effect sizes reported in this manuscript cannot be compared to other studies of effect sizes that are drawn from studies including comparison groups and we cannot draw causal conclusions regarding intervention impact. It is important to note, however, that we reviewed several research studies (Bosman et al., 2021; Frank et al., 2015; Harris et al 2016; Kerr et al., 2017; Roeser et al., 2013) that assessed our core constructs using the same or similar measures (e.g., mindfulness, positive/negative affect, emotion dysregulation, teacher-student relationships) and found that scores tend to remain consistent over time for teachers without inter-vention. A quasi-experimental study is currently under way in a Colo-rado school district during the 2020–2021 school year and additional randomized or quasi-experimental studies should be conducted to un-derstand the observed changes relative to a comparison group. Another limitation was our modest sample size and the exclusive reliance on self-report outcome measures. Future research should evaluate effects with larger and more diverse groups of educators and incorporate a mixed-methods approach, including observational methods and school record data on school climate and culture, student perspective, and educator morale, burnout, and retention. Additionally, future research should consider the impact of developmental level of youth on program feasibility and impact. Future research should also provide more infor-mation about educator demographic characteristics including educator experience (age, years in career, compatible training experience) to understand the representativeness and potential sample bias. Finally, a few of our implementation measures were limited, such as collecting information about the completion of coaching sessions but not the content or quality of each session. In addition, coaching directives and scaffolds were limited; the current RISE program highlights coaching during training with direct instruction, modeling, scaffolded practice, and feedback; current RISE offers ongoing support through a resource guide and consultation. The updated RISE program also collects more nuanced fidelity and implementation information, including how par-ticipants respond to different workshops and coaching sessions and application of skills in the classroom and school setting. These data will allow us to explore in future studies the relationship between fidelity of RISE implementation and educator outcomes. Finally, the RISE program has expanded emphasis on preventing and addressing behavioral chal-lenges with RISE skills and strategies, to increase educator self-efficacy addressing classroom disruptions in this study.

5. Conclusions

This pilot study provides initial evidence that the RISE program can be implemented as intended and has significant promise for enhancing educator well-being and mental health promotion. The results suggest

that RISE promotes educator social emotional competencies, self-care satisfaction, well-being, and reduces student-educator conflict. RISE supports key constructs that underly well-being, mental health, and the ability to engage supportive student relationships that lead to reciprocal well-being and an effective learning environment. Further, the structure and content of RISE workshops have the potential to create professional learning communities that build skills while offering ongoing social networks that build relational trust. This opportunity to connect meaningfully with colleagues around social emotional aspects of self and students has promising potential to ameliorate educator isolation and increase workplace well-being in systems currently inundated by increasing rates of stress-related burnout and attrition.

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