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Collaborative Partnerships in Social and Emotional Learning Practices: A Case Study of Rural TK Stakeholders in California

Xueqin Lin & Ruizhe Xiong

University of California, Berkeley

Chunyan Yang

University of Maryland - College Park

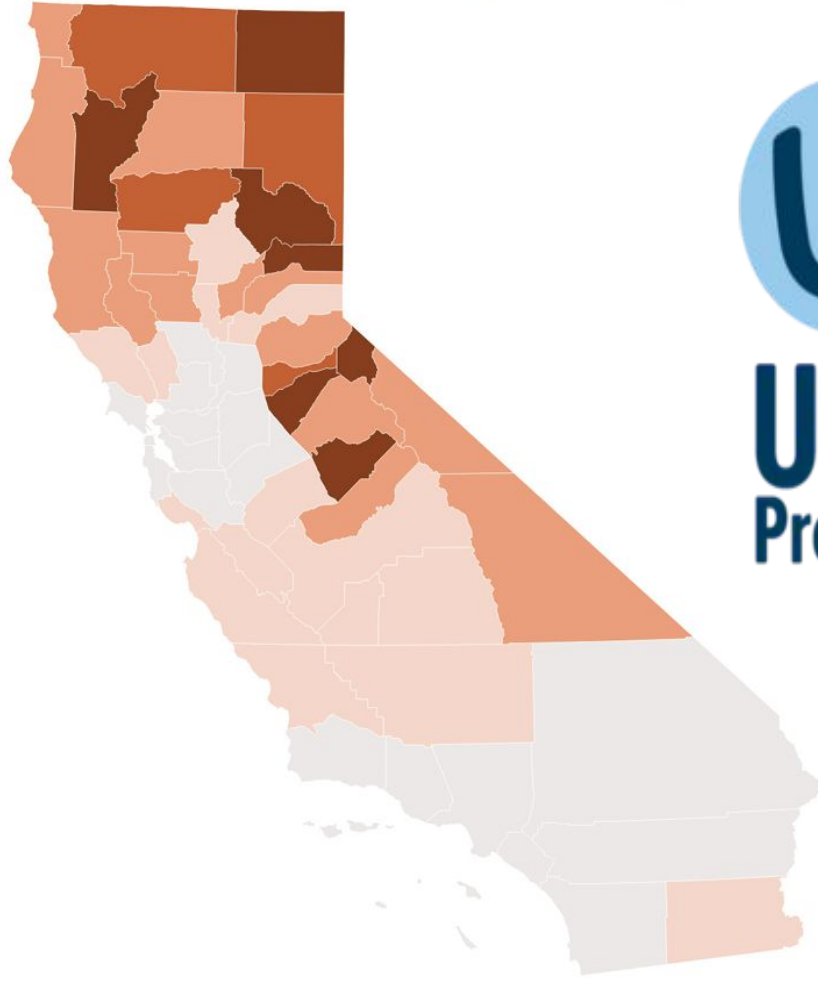
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Background and Context

Percent rural population in the county

 < 10% 10–25% 25–50% 50–75% ≥ 75%



Source: Authors' calculations using 2020 Decennial Census.

Note: Percent of the 2020 Census population in the County within rural blocks.

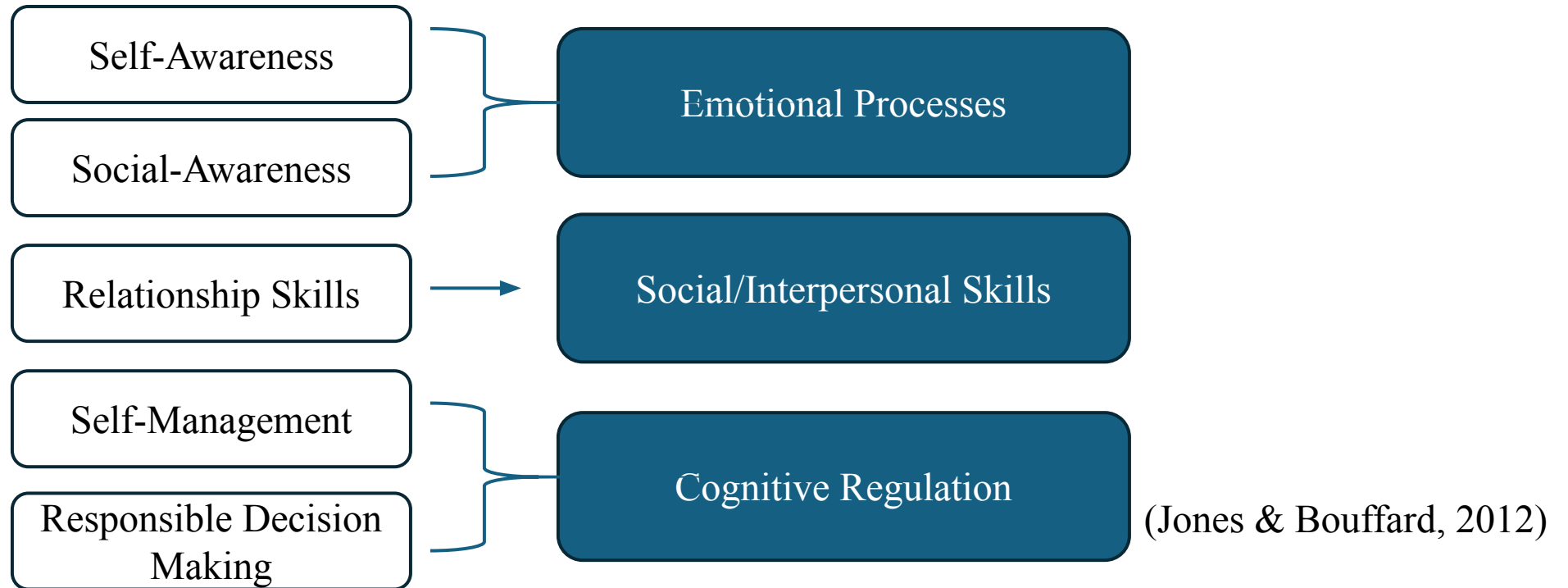
Research Questions

RQ1: How do rural TK stakeholders conceptualize early SEL practices?

RQ2: How do rural school leaders and TK teachers collaborate in early SEL practices?

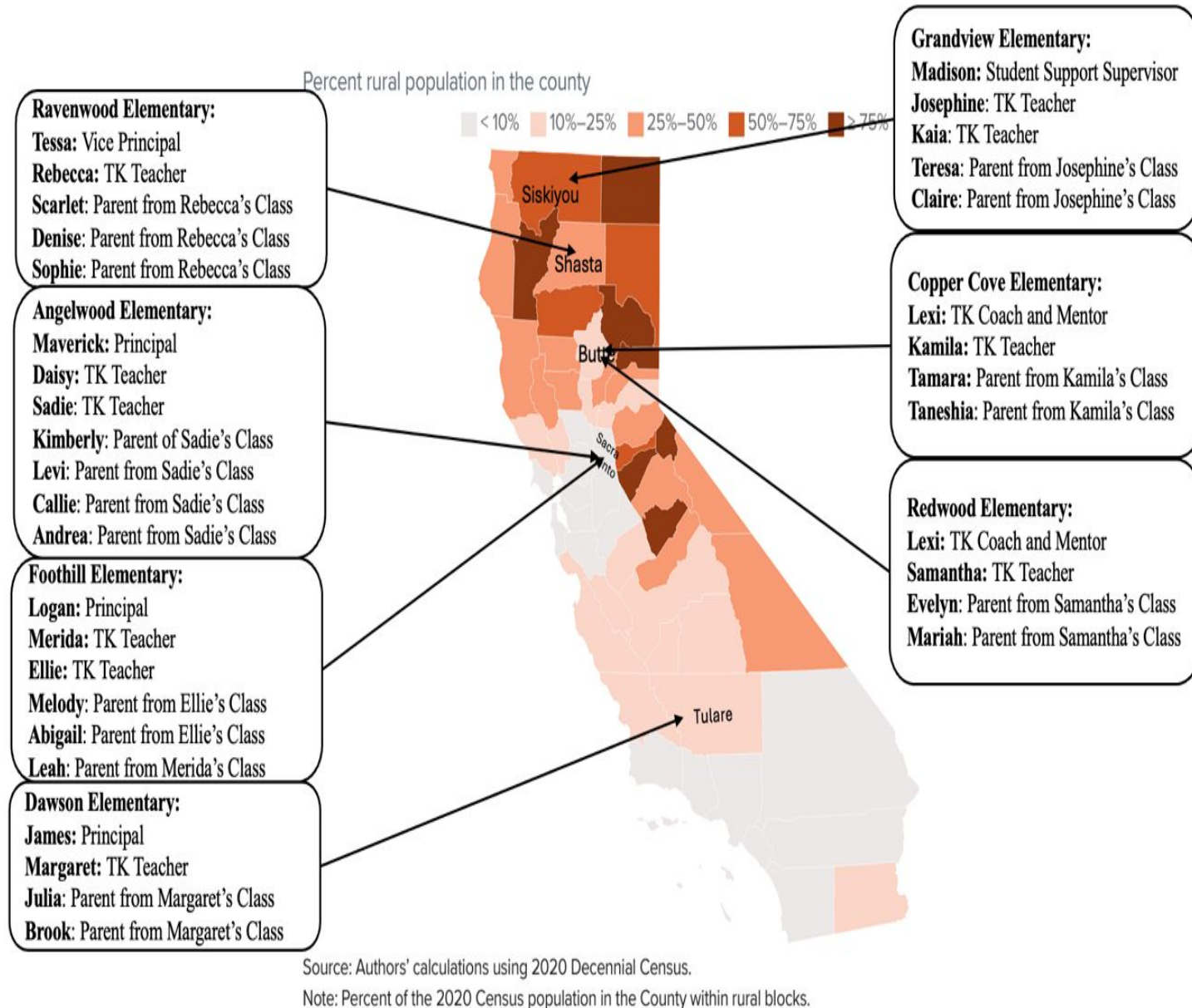
RQ3: How do rural schools establish partnerships with TK families in early SEL practices?

Definition of Early SEL Practices



Methodology

- A Case study Design
- Convenience Sampling
- School and Participants
 - 7 rural schools (10 TK classrooms)
 - 6 school leaders
 - 10 TK teachers
 - 18 TK parents
- Data Analysis
 - Semi-structured Interview:
Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2018)

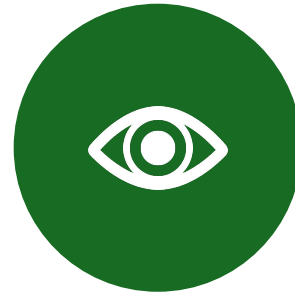


RQ1: How do TK
stakeholders conceptualize
early SEL practices?

Findings of RQ1: Rural TK Stakeholders' Conceptualizations of Early SEL Practices



Different definitions of early SEL practices



Stakeholders seeing eye to eye on the importance of early SEL practices



Different SEL practices between home and school



Varied schoolwide SEL design and practices

Finding 1: Different Definitions of Early SEL

Parents' Definition

- Emotional Processes
- Social/Interpersonal Skills

Teachers and School Leaders' Definition

- Emotional Processes
- Social/Interpersonal Skills
- Cognitive Regulation

That's kind of a big rainbow. It's anything from knowing like where they fit into the classroom to where they fit in society, knowing how to do things like make friends, how to talk to people, how to interact in in a positive way. When they get upset about something, how to be able to solve that problem (Merida, Foothill TK teacher)

Foundation

Prevention

Finding 2: All School Stakeholders Agreed that Early SEL is Important

*...these different social skills that they learn right now is what's really going to **set them up for how they are in different social situations**, as they get older, as they age through different grades. (Claire, TK parent at Grandview Elementary)*

***These kids grow into adults who are then that much more well adjusted** because now they have the skill set that's taught and ingrained in them so early whether it's like, “Hey, I really didn't like that you brought that for me that that made me feel sad or that made me feel mad,” (Callie, TK parent at Angelwood Elementary)*

Finding 3: Different Approaches of Early SEL Practices at Home and at School

Implicit SEL Teaching at Home

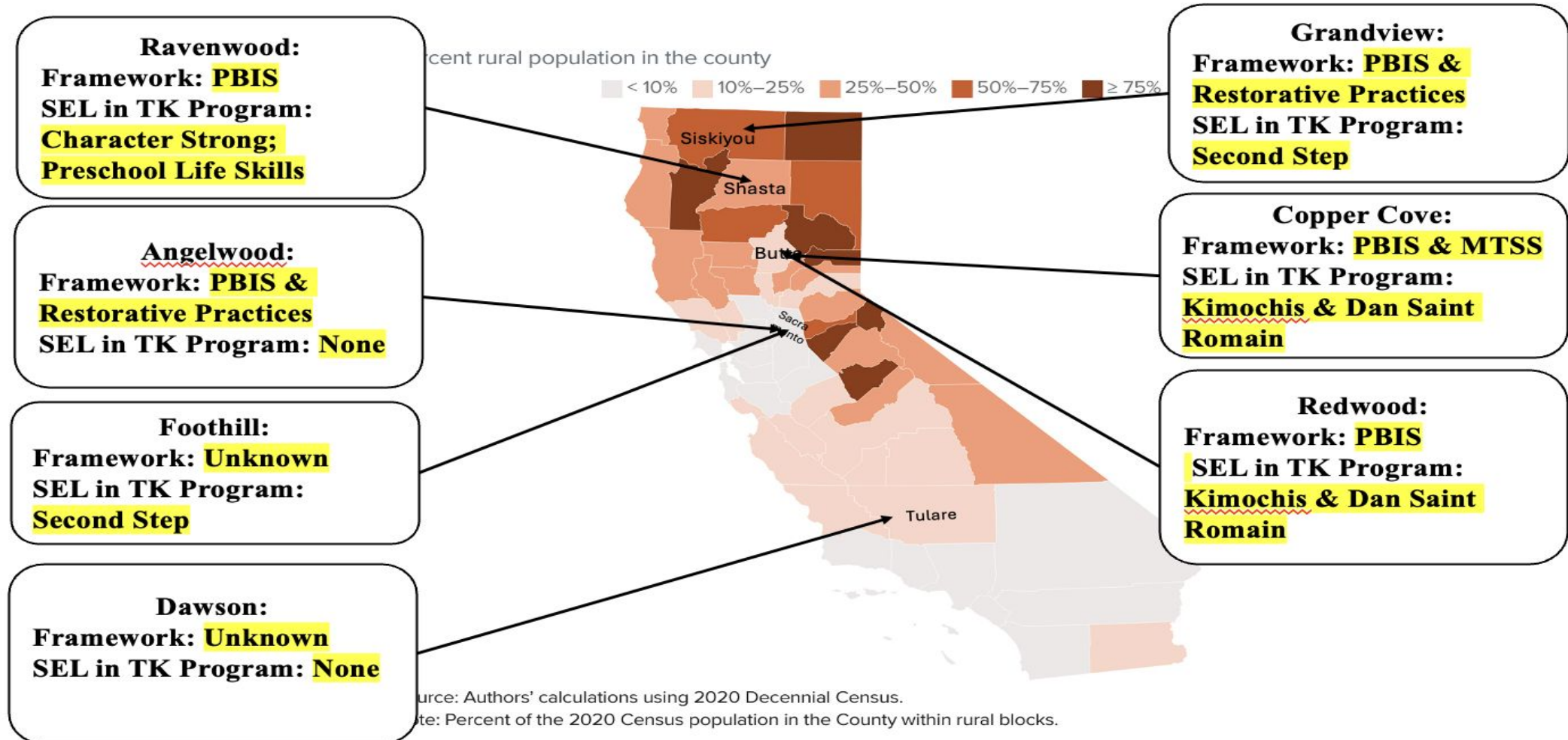
- Creating community and opportunities (e.g., extracurricular activities, playdates, book reading, social events)
- Modeling and scaffolding
- Managing parents' own emotions
- Parents' self-learning

The Integration of Implicit and Explicit SEL at School

- Designing classroom to create opportunities
- Modeling and scaffolding
- Designating time to deliver SEL lessons (e.g., Kimochis, Second Step, Character Strong)

*When you have one curriculum that you're using in your classroom, so all of your students have the same vocabulary that they're using. Instead of this kid gets this lesson from home, and they're coming with these different strategies. When you teach it in class, **they all have the same vocabulary, the same strategies.** So, it makes your job as a teacher, you can say, talk it out, figure like you can tell them to turn and talk to somebody, and they can problem-solve before coming to you.*

Finding 4: Different Schoolwide SEL Design Across Rural Schools



Finding 4: Different Schoolwide SEL Design Across Rural Schools

- **Educators had various opinions about PBIS and MTSS implementation in TK classrooms or ECE**
 - *“We joke that if all the grades have an MTSS backpack, as they refer to it, as we have the one that's from Dollar Store, and it has a hole in it, things are falling out, and we're missing a bunch of stuff that we need.”*
- **Over half of them stated that schoolwide SEL policy and guidelines were present at their schools.**
 - “We struggle, though, that we don't have enough support here at school. It's gonna bring everything in like you have all kinds of resources, whether it's like a program, counseling program here, or personnel to run things. We're more limited on that scale for real schools that we just don't have personnel.”
- **Only two schools did not adopt an SEL curriculum, and some educators were concerned whether Second Step is age appropriate for TK students.**

RQ2: How do rural school
leaders and TK teachers
collaborate in early SEL
practices??

RQ 2: Within School Collaboration in Early SEL Practices

Opportunities

- Professional Development
- Classroom/Behavioral Management Support
- Teacher/Staff Well-being Support
- Collaborative Decision-Making
- **Effective Use of Specialized Support Personnel**

Challenges

- **School Personnel and Leaders Insufficiently Trained in ECE and SEL**
- **Supporting Neurodiverse Students**
- Overwhelmed Teachers and Leaders
- Win Over Teachers and Gather Resources

Examples of Opportunities Within School SEL Collaboration

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- *My aide pulls [the student] aside and goes outside, and they read this book together, and she tells her, and I walked her through what to tell her like, this is your special book. We're gonna talk about how to use kind words. And the difference between being bossy and being a leader...and my aide will also add in comments on the back sticky notes, so that I'm aware of the conversations they had, and during that time she also reflects with her any moments, maybe, that she use bossy words, and then talks about what she could do in the future in that same situation, but with using different words or actions.*

Examples of Challenges Within School SEL Collaboration

I think that probably more people need to be trained on it. I like, I said, as grownups like our initial instinct is to just, you know, you guys are fighting. Okay, you over there, you over there, you know, and then but that doesn't solve it. That might stop the argument or the fight. But it doesn't solve the problem because they're still mad at each other. And it's just gonna be revisited later. So, like more training on de-escalation techniques, more training on just how to navigate that. (Sadie at Angelwood Elementary)

She is lovely and wonderful. But she doesn't have a ton of experience with TK. And obviously most people don't in higher up things because we are very much more like preschool than we are kindergarten. And so it's been a bit challenging teaching people that TK's are not little kindergartners. We are more like slightly taller preschoolers, if anything. But we are not little kindergartners, and we can't be treated the same as kindergarten (Kamila at Copper Cove).

It's a little difficult, just cause, I know admin has a lot on their plate as well. So unfortunately, I do think sometimes if we're having severe social emotional issues in our classes, there's really not a point person we could be like, "Hey, I need someone right now to come to my room and help me with this kiddo," you know. A lot of it is kind of put on us as the teachers to kind of help that kiddo in that scenario. And like I said, I don't think that it's because they don't want to help them. I just think they don't have enough time in the day to help. (Daisy at Angelwood Elementary)

RQ3: How do rural schools
establish partnerships with
TK families in early SEL
practices?

Finding 1: Challenges in Early SEL Family-School Partnerships

Parents' Family/work Responsibilities and Psychological Beliefs

- *I'm the only parent around and with her, and I don't get no one with her. And I just got too much to do. While my child's at school....I can't take the time and be there, even though I would love to.*

Lack of Opportunities and Access

- *I'm not sure that we actually encourage them to be part of the SEL growth. But we do encourage them to come in and be part of the classroom environment. We have a lot of parents, especially in the under grades, that volunteer once a month doing reading groups or doing math groups.*

Home-School Mismatch

- *The biggest challenge is that the community does not come with the same mindset that SEL is important, and you could talk to your counselor making sure things are okay. So, sometimes you have, we have parents, not all, who sabotage some things you're doing, just lack a better word. I don't fully support, or if they have needs for counseling, if we have a school-based counseling on site and they get support through us.*

Overwhelmed School Personnel

- *Because we're a small staff and the way our teacher contracts work, we really can't ask a whole lot of the whole preschool team, so that's just for the TK team and me. So that, you know, puts a heavier load on a group of teachers because the other ones we can't expect them. It's their job and their schedules.*

Finding 2: Opportunities in Early SEL Family-School Partnerships

Structural Approach

- Volunteering and Participating at School Events
- Parenting/Coaching
- Collaborating with Community

Inter-relational Approach

- Two-way Communication
- Collaborative Problem-Solving
- Building a Welcoming Environment and Trust

Discussion of Findings of RQ1

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- **Consensus on the Importance of Early SEL:** The foundational and preventive role of early SEL
 - **Different Definitions and Approaches of Early SEL**
 - Parents lack familiarity with SEL and lack knowledge in explicit SEL instruction
 - Varying context between home and school environment
 - Cultural and practical considerations
 - **Different Schoolwide SEL Design Across Rural Schools**
 - School and community characteristics influenced the design
 - The lack of formalized SEL can be problematic

Discussion of Findings of RQ2



The significant role of specialized personnel/aides and paraprofessional



Professional development as an opportunity and a challenge



The importance of School leader and educator well-being



Collaborative decision making to win teachers buy-in

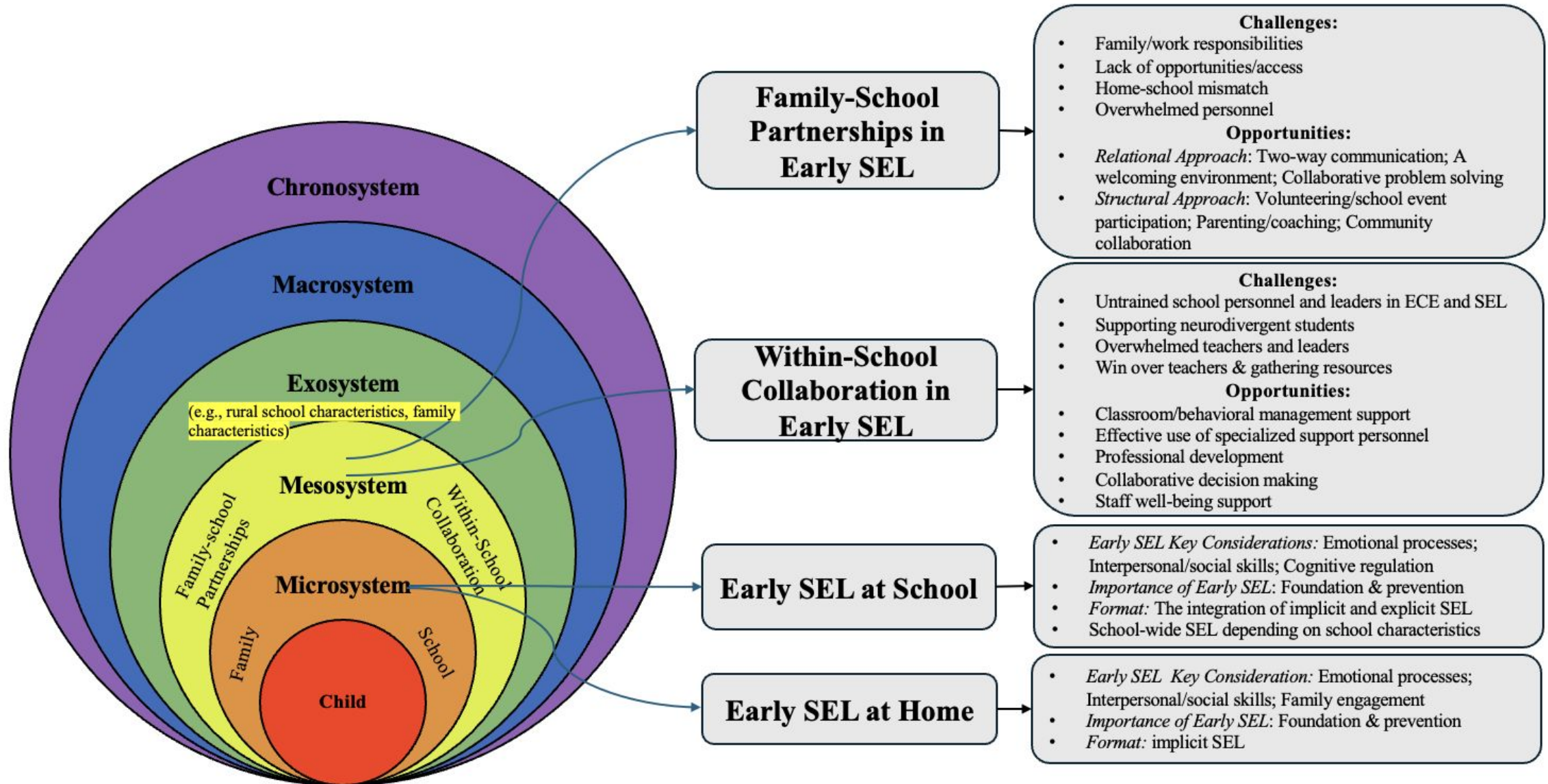
Discussion of Findings of RQ3

Home-School Mismatch

- The need to dismantle school-centered and involvement-oriented approaches
- More opportunities provided to proactively educate parents about SEL and effective strategies to practice SEL at home
- Engaging families in designing SEL curriculum and activities at school and getting to know families' SEL approaches

Importance of Integrating Structural and Interpersonal Approach

- Open two-way communication is fundamental
- Importance of creating welcoming environment, building trust, and engaging in collaborative problem-solving
- Encouraging parents' involvement in classroom observation and other structural approaches as a channel to learn SEL



Integrated Model of Collaborative Partnerships in Early SEL

Practical Implication



The background is black and features several abstract geometric elements. A large circle with a thin white outline and a thicker light green inner border is centered on the left. To its left, two white zigzag lines extend from the edge. Below the circle's left edge is a small solid light orange circle. In the top right corner, there is a light orange ring. To the right of the large circle, there are five parallel white diagonal lines. In the bottom right corner, a large solid light orange circle is partially visible.

Questions?