Abstract

The primary purpose of this study was to examine educators’ perceptions of how students’ social and emotional needs impact the educational environment and to determine if participating educators felt prepared to meet their students’ social and emotional needs. The research was conducted in two Midwestern states using an online survey instrument. The study participants included in-service teachers, former educators, college faculty, and graduate-education students, all of whom were solicited using a convenience sample method. Participants were solicited from graduate-level education classes and from a public school system. The participants varied in numerous ways including age, gender, educational training and teaching experiences.

Data gathered in the study was used to examine the relationships between the educators’ initial teacher training and the educators’ perceptions concerning the importance of meeting students’ social and emotional needs in the classroom. The majority of educators (93%) ranked meeting students’ social and emotional needs in their classrooms as either important or very important. Many educators reported that they believed meeting students’ social and emotional needs impacted the students’ learning. Most educators (81%) indicated that their initial teacher did not properly prepare them to meet their students’ social and emotional needs. Additionally, 75% of the educators reported that they would be interested in receiving more training in this area.

Some of the educators’ responses appeared to be related to their education, experience and training. Special education teachers were most likely to suggest that meeting students’ social and emotional needs would improve their students’ learning. Early childhood educators ranked the importance of meeting students’ social and
emotional needs significantly higher than did their colleagues who were working with older students. Educators trained during or after 2002 felt better prepared in areas concerning social and emotional needs than those trained before 2002.

The results of this survey indicate that educators perceive social and emotional learning to be an important topic and are interested in receiving more training in this area. More research is needed to solicit opinions from educators across the United States on how to best prepare and support classroom teachers in the area of meeting students’ social and emotional needs.