

# The power of preparation and leadership: Strengthening teacher self-efficacy in schools

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## **Abstract**

This study explores factors influencing teacher self-efficacy among preservice teachers and principal candidates. Through qualitative focus groups, findings highlight the significance of relationship building, social-emotional learning, and support systems in enhancing preservice teacher confidence, emphasizing the principal's role in fostering a supportive educational environment.

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## Introduction

The exploration of teacher self-efficacy reveals critical insights into the beliefs and experiences of preservice teachers and principal candidates, highlighting the profound impact of supportive educational environments on their professional development. Teacher self-efficacy refers to educators' beliefs in their ability to effectively manage and influence student learning and classroom dynamics. Self-efficacy is a critical factor in influencing the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs. Research indicates that high teacher self-efficacy is linked to greater motivation, persistence, and successful implementation of teaching strategies, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Bandura asserts that teacher self-efficacy significantly shapes how teachers perceive their own capabilities. In particular, he argues that self-efficacy influences an individual's approach to challenges and tasks, often determining the level of effort and persistence they exhibit. To foster a positive sense of teacher self-efficacy, Bandura highlights three interrelated components: (1) confidence in one's abilities, (2) a perceived capacity to create meaningful change, and (3) a strong belief in one's professional performance. Collectively, these factors encourage teachers to set ambitious goals, tackle difficult situations, and interpret setbacks as opportunities to learn and grow.

Teacher self-efficacy is deeply intertwined with social and emotional learning (SEL), as both concepts emphasize the importance of interpersonal relationships and emotional awareness in educational spaces. Teachers with high self-efficacy believe in their ability to influence student learning and classroom dynamics effectively, and SEL serves as a foundational skill set for fostering such confidence (Bandura, 1997). For example, SEL equips teachers with tools to build trusting relationships, manage classroom behavior constructively, and empathize with diverse student needs (Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak et al., 2024). This relational and emotional competence enables teachers to create supportive and engaging learning environments, which reinforces their confidence in their ability to have a meaningful impact (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Furthermore, SEL supports teachers' resilience by promoting a growth mindset, allowing them

to view challenges as opportunities for development rather than obstacles (Bandura, 1997; Goddard et al., 2000; Sodergen, 2023). In this way, SEL acts as both a catalyst and a sustaining force for teacher self-efficacy, ultimately enhancing student outcomes and the overall classroom experience. Building on Bandura's work, Tschannen-Moran, and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) elaborated on the idea that teachers' confidence strongly influences their development and classroom practices. Teachers with higher self-efficacy perceptions tend to be better prepared to enter the field.

Bandura (2019) stated that self-efficacy is difficult to measure because it is not unidimensional. Preservice teachers often have mixed feelings about the multifaceted activities and skills needed to be a successful teacher. Self-efficacy is more than simply one skill or emotion but can fluctuate depending on the moment. Both principals and teachers are expected to develop complex skills, including high social-emotional awareness and strong relationship-building with students and their communities.

Additionally, principals are instrumental in nurturing teacher self-efficacy by creating environments that encourage professional growth. Research examining principal leadership demonstrates that a principal's own self-efficacy can influence both their leadership style and their support for teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Further studies show that principals who exhibit higher self-efficacy are more likely to adopt innovative strategies, foster ongoing teacher development, and enhance student success (Winn et al., 2021).

Moreover, principals assume the responsibility of attracting, supporting, and retaining effective teachers within their schools (Kardambikis and Tepe, 2023). Part of this responsibility involves dismantling silos and forging communities of practice that unite principal candidates with preservice teachers, thereby modeling and promoting meaningful collaboration and shared learning. Research on principal self-efficacy and the development of a strong community of practice highlights the interconnectedness of a principal's belief in their abilities and the collaborative culture within their school. The principal is the one individual uniquely positioned in the school as the formal leader whose influence is directly tied to teacher performance (Hipp,

1996, as cited by Prelli, 2016).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study investigated how preservice teachers and principal candidates at Robert Morris University (RMU) perceive the demands and challenges of their respective preparation programs. The project centered on two main objectives. First, it sought to understand preservice teachers' beliefs about self-efficacy in tackling the complex elements of teacher development, particularly their confidence, their ability to engage students, and their access to support networks during the student teaching semester. Second, it aimed to examine principal candidates' perspectives on strategies to bolster novice teachers' self-efficacy as they transition into full-time classrooms.

### **Method**

This qualitative study explored the perceptions and experiences of five student teachers and two principal candidates enrolled in education and special education certification programs in Western Pennsylvania. To gather detailed insights, the researchers employed two semi-structured focus groups at the end of the 2023–24 academic year, after final grades had been submitted. Preliminary findings suggested that preservice teachers regarded social and emotional learning, classroom management, and strong support systems as central to building teacher self-efficacy. Meanwhile, principal candidates identified leadership, school climate, and SEL as central to fostering a sense of capability among novice educators.

### **Participants and Programs**

Participants were recruited through Robert Morris University's (RMU) student teacher seminar and principal candidate courses. A total of seven students agreed to participate in the virtual focus group. A total of five preservice teachers of eighteen were recruited for the preservice teacher focus group, including two early childhood education/special education majors, one early childhood and, one middle level major and one secondary major. Additionally, two of eight principal candidates were recruited for the principal candidate focus group.

Preservice teachers attended the student teacher seminar weekly throughout the professional year, which

spanned both the pre-student teaching and student teaching semesters. The seminar classes were held for 15 weeks each semester, totaling 30 one-hour sessions. The seminars were structured to provide instruction on various aspects and challenges of the teaching profession.

The principal preparation program followed a hybrid model of synchronized online sessions throughout the fifteen-credit course sequence. Incorporated within the coursework was the required 360 hours of internship with a building principal mentor along with university faculty support. Integrated throughout the program was a development of a community of practice and leadership support.

Instructors from each program collaborated by attending each other's seminars addressing relevant issues encountered by both sets of students separately. This collaboration culminated with a mock interview, which facilitated interactions between the two groups and supported the professional development of future educators that allowed for the two groups to interact and support teacher development. In addition, the instructors met to talk about important challenges that each group faced over the course of the professional year.

### **Procedures**

This study relied on two focus groups to better understand how both preservice teachers and principal candidates experienced self-efficacy development. Researchers used email invitations to recruit participants for online sessions, each of which lasted about an hour. Prior to the discussions, consent forms were collected, and participants consented to audio recording and transcription. To minimize bias, the instructor from the alternate seminar served as a moderator. Therefore, the principal candidate seminar instructor led the preservice teacher focus group, and the preservice teacher seminar instructor led the principal focus group. Each focus group also had a designated note taker who documented key points. The moderators discussed research objectives, neutral facilitation strategies, and effective questioning techniques beforehand. By using semi-structured interview prompts (Mason, 2002) and open-ended questions (see Appendix A), the sessions offered a deeper look into the participants' perceptions of teacher self-efficacy.

## Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using an interpretive phenomenological approach, which enabled the researchers to better understand the lived experiences of the participants across the focus group discussions. Initially, researchers independently developed a coding framework applying codes to significant phrases within the transcript. The analysis followed a systematic coding procedure which allowed recurring ideas to emerge. More specifically, each researcher independently developed a coding scheme through line-by-line analysis and comparative evaluation of the transcripts. The steps included multiple readings of the data to identify recurring words and ideas, which were then grouped into meaningful categories. Researchers were divided into two coding groups, with each group applying their coding schemes to the transcripts. Inter-rater reliability was established within each team to ensure consistency and accuracy in the coding process.

After initial coding, the two groups compared their findings, reconciling discrepancies and refining the coding schemes. This collaborative effort allowed for a comprehensive phenomenological interpretation and deeper understanding of the data. Once finalized, the themes were quantified through word counts to provide additional insights into the prevalence and significance of the identified patterns. Table 1 illustrates the developed broad themes that highlight the participants' perceptions of lived experiences.

**Table 1**  
*Developed themes*

Preservice Teacher Developed Themes	Principal Developed Themes
Social and emotional learning	Relationship
Classroom management	Leadership support
General Support	Community and climate
Curriculum/Fields	Empathy and love
Co-op and mentors	Boundaries
Relationships	General support
Behavior	

Finally, the researchers created general categories by collapsing the broad themes into three main categories (See Table 2 and 3).

**Table 2**  
*Preservice teacher collapsed themes*

Collapsed Topic	Overall Theme
Relationship building and social and emotional learning	SEL, love, trust, empathy, boundaries, relationships, time, building relationships
Classroom management/behavioral challenges	classroom challenges, behavioral support, trauma, home life
General support	peers, mentors, friends, seminar, supervisors

## Results

Based on the analysis of the data obtained from the focus groups, the researchers developed two sets of themes that are detailed in Tables 2 and 3. The results are consistent with existing research (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Darling-Hammond; 2006, Miller & McKenna, 2016), that emphasizes the importance of social and emotional learning in teacher development during the professional year. Through examining themes, the researchers linked preservice teacher and principal candidate perceptions to the development of teacher self-efficacy. The findings align with Bandura's (1997) theory that links positive self-efficacy development to (1) confidence in one's abilities, (2) a perceived capacity to create meaningful change, and (3) a strong belief in one's professional performance.

**Table 3**  
*Principal collapsed themes*

Collapsed Topics	Overall Theme
Leadership support	Retention, boundaries, support
Social and emotional learning	Empathy, love, relationships
Community and climate	Community, climate, classroom

## Preservice Teacher Focus Group Findings

The preservice teacher focus group results, while consistent with existing research (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Miller & McKenna, 2016), emphasized relationship building and social and emotional learning during the professional student teaching semester. The three main themes, in order of importance, included: 1. Relationships and Social and Emotional Learning, 2. Classroom Management and Behavior Challenges, and 3. General Support (See Table 2).

### ***Relationships and Social and Emotional Learning***

The most frequently discussed topic for preservice teachers was relationship building and social and emotional learning for both the students and teachers. Concepts such as love, empathy, trust, and healthy boundaries were highlighted. Student teachers connected social and emotional learning directly to relationship building. For instance, participant 4 stated, "The relationships drove me. Once I got them (students) to understand that I wanted to be there and that I was someone they could trust, then they bought in." Further, most participants agreed that building positive relationships with students was the first step to fostering connection and belonging in the classroom community. For example, participant 1 stressed, "I do think even as a student teacher we have a good amount of ability to motivate our students, especially through positive relationships with the other students and then through their view on school."

The preservice teachers stressed that while they were in the classroom for a limited amount of time, social and emotional learning and positive relationships were essential to their successful teaching practices. The preservice teachers felt a sense of growing confidence as they phased into the classroom. This confidence provided a collective belief that they have the power to make positive changes.

### ***Classroom Management and Challenging Behaviors***

Not surprisingly, the participants expressed concerns about their ability to manage classroom behavior effectively, especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic. Participant 4 noted, "I felt like I had spent so many years learning all of these good things, but I didn't really have the time to apply them and work out the kinks." Participant 3 further explained the struggle with gaining power to support student behavior to take full responsibility for classroom management. The participants discussed how difficult it was for some cooperating teachers to let the preservice teacher practice classroom management strategies. Participant 3 provided an explanation, "I feel like I didn't really get those classroom management skills and maybe that was out of me and my co-op teacher, but she kept kind of hopping in, maybe too early and kind of took over the classroom management part." When discussing class-

room management, participants agreed that relationship and trust were the most important. Participant 1 stated, "They're not really used to you very much, but then I think once I start probably around three weeks of constantly being in the classroom. I think they are like, okay she is gonna be here a while and we were building relationships, and I think that helped with motivation."

Many preservice teachers in this study expressed concerns about student trauma and lack of control that extended beyond the school environment. Participants highlighted the need for more strategies to support students who are facing external stressors. Participant 1 shared, "I think sometimes especially with students who have [like you said] been beaten down or damaged by someone, maybe a previous teacher or something that's going on outside of school...I think a lot of the times those students just want to know that somebody cares about them and somebody actually genuinely wants to see them happy and successful and I think a lot of the time with those students who struggle actually taking the time to speak with them one-on-one can mean a lot to them." Collectively, the participants stressed the need for more understanding of trauma informed teaching practices.

### ***General Support***

Preservice teachers exhibit higher self-efficacy when they feel confident in their relationship with their peers (cohort), cooperating teachers, and university supervisors. This research indicated similar results, with three main themes highlighting the importance of strong mentorship and support. Preservice teachers stated that support from their peers/cohort, cooperating teachers and university supervisor/seminar were most important. Participant 1 noted, "My cooperating teacher/mentor helped me a lot. We had a great relationship. I would go to him after class and say, 'That was terrible,' and he would provide feedback and reassurance, which was invaluable." Conversely, when the student teacher did not feel supported, it was difficult to phase into the classroom community. The overall support and mentorship were imperative for the development of confidence and belief in one's abilities.

Additionally, many participants discussed the complexities of being included in the school community and

how this affected their overall confidence and development as classroom teachers. For example, Participant 2 stated, "Building community within your school building was an important part of observing all those classrooms when I first started." Further the seminar class was discussed as being part of the overall cohort and university support framework. The researchers in this study emphasized a peer community of practice during the seminar classes. Participant 2 expressed the benefit of the dedicated time to come together as a community: "Seminar is like getting to see them [friends] and debrief about everything that was going on...solve problems together and then of course the professors because they walked us through everything." The connection to support networks was emphasized as a vital component to the development of positive teacher self-efficacy.

### **Principal Candidate Focus Group Findings**

Findings from the principal candidate focus group largely paralleled those of the preservice teacher group, particularly with respect to leadership support as a dominant theme. Three core areas emerged: leadership practices, social and emotional learning, and the overall school community and climate (see Table 3). Consistent with existing scholarship (McBrayer et al., 2020), these outcomes highlight the significant influence of principal leadership on novice teachers' confidence and self-efficacy.

### **Principal Leadership**

Effective principal leadership support was identified as crucial for cultivating a supportive environment that enhances teacher self-efficacy. The results of this study align with Tschannen-Moran & Wollfolk Hoy (2001). For example, participant 8 emphasized the significance of recognizing traits that predict high teacher self-efficacy: "Personality, empathy, and a willingness to learn are critical qualities for new teachers. A passion for teaching and intrinsic motivation are essential for sustaining long-term commitment and enthusiasm in the profession." By fostering a leadership approach that encourages risk-taking and learning from failures, principals contribute to a culture of continuous improvement. This supportive environment promotes collaboration among educators, leading to a cohesive and effective teaching approach.

### **Social and Emotional Learning**

The principals in this study valued social and emotional learning and linked teacher self-efficacy to the overall SEL practices that were implemented in the school community. This is aligned with existing research, for example, the assertion that "Principals who demonstrate empathy and understanding create an environment where teachers feel valued and empowered to take risks in their teaching" highlights the importance of emotional intelligence and social-emotional learning (SEL) in leadership (McCarthy, 2010). This sentiment was highlighted by participant 7 who noted that "I don't want them [teaching staff] to be afraid to come to me if they made a mistake or didn't handle something the way they should." Principals who practice empathy not only support teachers on a professional level but also acknowledge their personal challenges.

Principal Participants in this study valued and discussed SEL. For example, participant 7 explained how her relationships with teachers evolved once she became a principal: "I am now a principal of my former co-workers. So, I'm changing my attitude. Now my teachers who were peers are coming to me with questions, and I must use my principal brain – still being able to answer questions and build relationships." Principals similarly noted their desire to support others' professional growth, stating that "I had a great mentor - and I hope I can be that to somebody else."

### **Community and Climate**

By establishing a positive school culture, demonstrating empathy, promoting collaboration, and prioritizing supportive leadership practices, principals can significantly enhance teacher morale and effectiveness. As educational leaders, principals are uniquely positioned to influence not only the professional growth of their teachers but also the overall success of the school. Participants stressed the importance of providing a supportive and engaging school climate for new teachers and the entire school community; participant 8 acknowledged the unique challenges of an online learning environment but stressed that, "I want to create a community feel even though we are all over the world. That is my biggest goal right now."

Participant 8 also summarized the importance of community: "Effective principal leadership is a key deter-

minant of teacher self-efficacy, as it shapes the school culture and provides necessary support for teachers." This emphasizes that principals are not merely administrative figures but are integral to establishing a positive school culture. A principal's leadership style directly influences the morale and motivation of teachers (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). When principals actively engage in fostering a culture that values collaboration, innovation, and risk-taking, they create an environment where teachers feel safe to experiment with new teaching strategies.

### Discussion

Analyzing the student teacher and principal candidate focus groups data revealed significant insights into how both preservice teachers and principal candidates perceive the connection between social emotional learning, relationship building and teacher preparation programs. Several patterns have emerged from the data that can provide insights for teacher preparation and principal candidate leadership programs to support and develop positive teacher self-efficacy in higher education institutions. The preservice teachers identified a need for systematic and layered support and mentorship that can improve learning outcomes for both student teachers and principal candidates. This is consistent with past research that indicated preservice teachers learn and develop best with systematic and layered supports and mentorship (Wang, et al. 2020; Harrison & Lee, 2022). Furthermore, principal candidates who participate in structured and systematic supports, foster a positive school community which ultimately builds teacher self-efficacy (Moller, et.al., 2020; Smith & Wei, 2022). Both preservice teachers and principal candidates agree that building social and emotional learning and strong relationships are key to teacher self-efficacy. What sets this research apart is the integration of both the preservice teacher and the principal candidate perceptions of building teacher self-efficacy through SEL. By offering a dual perspective provides a unique understanding to the importance of building preservice teacher self-efficacy.

A key area for growth in teacher preparation programs is the need for systematic and layered support and mentorship for both student teachers and principals. The collapsed themes for both preservice teachers and principals identified an on-going need for relationships

that build collaboration and support learning. The complex relationship building that occurs during the student teaching semester creates a valuable school climate that requires collaboration, caring, and continued growth. By establishing strong community of practices during seminar and course work that include the student teacher, principal candidates, university supervisor, and cooperating teacher, seminar faculty can facilitate meaningful exchanges that create learning spaces to support trust and reflective practices. This support framework not only enhances teaching practices but also fosters a deeper understanding of the challenges educators are faced with, ultimately contributing to increased teacher positive self-efficacy. Not only does this framework bring the principal and teachers together but it also requires higher education faculty to break down silos to plan and implement layered support in seminar and course work.

In addition to formal mentorship and support during seminars and coursework, informal support systems play a significant role in helping teachers navigate their professional journeys. The findings highlight the importance of fostering peer relationships between preservice teachers that can strengthen professional growth. By taking the time to build collective professional relationships, student teachers can build patterns of professionalism that can enhance confidence and increase self-efficacy. Surrounding these future educators with a supportive network enables them to build greater belief in their teaching abilities. Seminars and courses become opportunities to practice soft skills and problem solve together to build long-term teacher confidence and resilience, helping them to develop more belief in their professional identity and skills.

Preservice teachers expressed concerns about classroom management and supporting students with behavioral challenges. Analyzing the collapsed themes in Table 2 reveals challenges related to behavioral supports and trauma outside of the school community are significantly impacting preservice teachers. The need to process and reflect on behavioral challenges is intertwined with the broader discussion about social and emotional learning (SEL), which is ultimately rooted in the goal of building teacher confidence.

Participants in the study collectively emphasized the importance of integrating social and emotional learn-

ing (SEL) into educational practices as a key component to teacher preparation. Promoting a positive learning environment, whether in the student teaching placement, the seminar class or principal candidate program, requires embedding empathy, kindness and caring into our educational spaces. This supports the need for strategies that foster supportive and trusting relationships that contribute to the development of resilient educators. The alignment of mentorship and support with SEL principals can lead to more effective teacher practices and improved student outcomes. Moreover, the focus on SEL initiatives in higher education enhances the overall emotional health and wellness of educators and principals throughout their teaching career.

There are no better ways to begin developing a supportive community of practice than to model and embed SEL practices into teacher preparation programs. The establishment of formal collaborative communities of practice (CoP) is vital for enhancing both teacher and principal self-efficacy. Research indicates that collaboration among educators leads to shared learning experiences, which can significantly bolster self-efficacy beliefs (Goddard et al., 2000). By creating structured opportunities for teachers and principals to work together, teacher preparation programs can foster an environment of mutual support and professional growth that emphasizes support and SEL practices. This collaboration can take the form of multilayered support systems and mentoring, peer mentoring, co-teaching, and professional learning communities. Development of CoP through the student teaching seminar and principal candidate courses not only enhances self-efficacy but also promotes a sense of belonging and community among educators, which is crucial for job satisfaction and retention. Being creative and looking to include not only leaders, but cooperating teachers, university supervisors, and mentors into the higher education community of practice can build strong relationships that will ultimately affect new teacher identity and development.

### **Study Limitations**

This study provides valuable insights into the perceptions of preservice teachers and principal candidates regarding teacher self-efficacy; however, several limitations must be acknowledged. The study included seven

participants, which limits the broader applicability of its findings. Although the sample size is small and may not contribute to the broad applicability, it identifies important challenges faced by preservice teachers. It provides a foundation to build on future research and replication to gain deeper and ever-changing perceptions in order to build innovative support systems in teacher preparation programs.

Since the data were collected at a single private university, there is a risk that shared institutional norms influenced participants' responses. The relatively homogeneous composition of the group may have also increased the likelihood of conformity or social desirability bias during the focus group discussions. Consequently, these findings should be interpreted with caution and further verified through research involving larger, more diverse populations. Furthermore, the timing of the focus groups, conducted at the end of the academic year, may have skewed perceptions based on recent experiences. The qualitative nature of the data analysis introduces subjectivity, despite efforts to establish inter-rater reliability. Lastly, while the study focuses on teacher self-efficacy and principal support, it does not measure the direct impact of these factors on student outcomes, indicating a need for future research to explore these connections more comprehensively.

### **Future Implications**

The findings from the focus groups, combined with teacher self-efficacy research, highlight several key points for teacher and principal preparation programs. Both preservice teachers and principals value positive self-efficacy and perceive it to be important to the development of new teachers. There is a need for more research that aims to understand and support preservice teachers' growth and learning to continue to attract and retain new teachers to the field of education. By prioritizing self-efficacy development in teacher preparation programs, enhancing principal leadership practices, promoting collaborative communities of practice, and emphasizing social and emotional learning, educational institutions can create a supportive and layered framework that empowers educators. In addition to individual needs, it would be beneficial to begin to understand the collective self-efficacy (Donohoo, 2017) that begins to develop in teacher prepara-

tion programs. This, in turn, leads to improved teacher retention, enhanced student outcomes, and a more positive school climate.

As we move forward, it's essential to recognize the interconnectedness of self-efficacy, teacher preparation, and principal leadership. By investing in these areas, we can cultivate a thriving educational community that benefits all stakeholders. Fostering self-efficacy should be an ongoing commitment, supported by the rapidly changing educational expectations to ensure that the strategies in place are effective and responsive to the evolving needs of principals, educators, and students. The following action items outline key directions for future research in Educational Preparation Programs:

### **1. Build a Framework of Formal and Informal Support:**

Mentorship plays a significant role in leadership development, especially for those transitioning from being a peer to a leader. This shift requires not only managing relationships but also developing confidence in one's leadership abilities. To support this transition, it is essential to integrate opportunities for mentorship and leadership development throughout the professional year for both principal candidates and preservice teachers. This can be achieved through seminars and communities of practice that connect student teachers with supportive mentors and principals. By doing so, we foster individual growth while building a thriving, engaged educational community.

In addition, further research is needed to explore the insights of not only preservice teachers and principals but also cooperating teachers and university supervisors. Supporting and developing a preservice teacher requires a network of mentors, each playing a vital role in their growth. Therefore, it is imperative to include all these voices in the future development of a comprehensive support framework.

### **2. Process Experiences and Healing Centered Teaching:**

Encouraging an environment where making mistakes is seen as part of the learning process is essential. This mindset helps teachers embrace new teaching strategies and learn from their experiences without fear of failure. This is particularly important when it comes to classroom and behavior management skills.

Integrating opportunities for teachers to process and reflect on their experiences, including any challenges or secondary trauma, can support strategies that enhance self-efficacy and foster a stronger sense of teacher self-worth. Providing interdisciplinary support throughout the program—through seminars, coursework, and classroom experiences—can significantly improve the overall health and well-being of teachers. This approach fosters a healing-centered environment, enabling student teachers to process, reflect, and grow throughout the professional year.

### **3. Embed and Embrace Kindness, Joyfulness, Empathy and Love (Social Emotional Learning):**

A passion for teaching and intrinsic motivation are essential for maintaining long-term commitment and enthusiasm in the profession. When teachers are passionate about their work, it fosters a more engaging classroom community. This positivity is contagious, significantly enhancing students' learning experiences and outcomes. Incorporating activities into seminars and coursework that prioritize the health and wellness of both student teachers and principals is crucial for building healthy school communities. Future research and practice should focus not only on building the confidence and development of individual teachers, but also on cultivating collective self-efficacy—an essential factor that shapes the broader educational landscape.

### **4. Mutual Trust Through Community of Practice**

Fostering a safe and respectful community of practice is built on the foundation of mutual trust. When teachers, students, and families trust each other, it enhances communication, cooperation, and overall satisfaction. Principals play a crucial role in cultivating this trust by being transparent, consistent, and fair in their interactions and decision-making. Incorporating activities throughout the professional year that bring preservice teachers and principal candidates together can help expand the community of practice and strengthen trusting relationships, which allow for deeper reflective practices and discussions that include tough topics and strong patterns of trusting collegial relationships.

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## Appendix A

### Focus Group 1

#### *Preservice Teachers Guiding Questions*

1. What was the most challenging aspect of being a student teacher?
2. How much influence do you believe you have had in motivating your students to learn?
3. How much influence do you believe you had in managing challenging behavior in the classroom?
4. Please share a situation that you felt demonstrated how a student struggled in the classroom and how you supported that student?
5. In what ways were you able to connect and build relationships with your mentors (cooperating teacher, university supports)?
6. What do you think was your greatest support to develop confidence as a teacher?
7. How connected did you feel to your principal?

### Focus Group 2

#### *Principal Candidates Guiding Questions*

1. What was the most challenging aspect of being a leader to teachers/school community?
2. How much influence do you believe you have in motivating teachers to thrive/build confidence in the classroom?
3. Please share a situation that you felt demonstrated how a teacher struggled in the classroom when they felt that they were not being effective in their practice.
4. In what ways were you able to connect and build relationships with new teachers to support their needs.
5. What do you think was your greatest support that helped you feel confident as a school leader?
6. What is your idea of a strong school community?