Building Skills for School Success: Improving the Academic and Social Competence of Students

The focus of this article’s study was to evaluate the impact of the school counselor-led Student Success Skills program on the academic and social competence of students. A randomized comparison group design was used to measure treatment outcomes for students in grades 5, 6, 8, and 9 from six schools using state-mandated achievement tests in math and reading and a measure of social competence. Achievement outcomes were measured for comparison group students in schools matched for key demographics. An analysis of covariance was used for the analysis. Students who received the intervention scored significantly higher in math achievement and showed substantial improvement in behavior.

A project was undertaken as the first of a four-part series of studies that investigated the impact of Student Success Skills (SSS). The SSS program is designed to teach academic, social, and self-management skills. The intervention includes both classroom and group counseling components. The goal was improved student behavior associated with school success and higher student achievement in math and reading as measured by state-mandated standardized tests. In a subsequent study, Brigman and Campbell (2003) found significant gains in targeted skill areas for students receiving the SSS intervention in grades 5, 6, 8, and 9. In addition, Webb, Brigman, and Campbell (2005) and Campbell and Brigman (2005) used the SSS approach to improve the academic achievement and behavior of students in grades 5 and 6. The SSS approach used in each of these studies was built on a set of skills and strategies consistently correlated with positive social skills and academic achievement (Eisenberg et al., 1997; Elias et al., 2003; Hattie, Biggs, & Purdie, 1996; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).

This series of SSS studies grew out of previously reported research showing improved academic and social competence in younger learners whose teachers used the Ready to Learn curriculum (Brigman, Lane, Lane, & Switzer, 1994; Brigman, Lane, Switzer, Lane, & Lawrence, 1999; Brigman & Webb, 2003).

The SSS studies were designed to meet several needs. In 1998, a local school district invited a partnership with counselor educators at one of the state universities to assist the district in securing a grant aimed at evaluating the impact of school counseling interventions on student behavior and achievement. This partnership came at a time when educators and counseling professionals were responding to the widespread call for educational accountability as measured by improved student outcomes. This trend began to gain significant momentum for counselors with the development of the National Standards for School Counseling Programs in 1997 (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). These standards connected school counseling to education initiatives and the educational mission of schools and districts. As a result of these trends within the school counseling profession and the larger educational community, school counselor outcome data aimed at improved student learning began receiving increased amounts of attention (Carey, 2004; Dahir, 2004; Green & Keys, 2001; Gysbers, 2001; House & Hayes, 2002; Isaacs, 2003; Lapan, 2001; Myrick, 2003; Paisley & Hayes, 2003; Sink & Stroh, 2003; Whiston & Sexton, 1998). The SSS model also aligns directly with the ASCA National Model® (American School Counselor Association, 2005) with its focus on academic and social competence.

In addition to responding to the needs of educators in the field and the counseling profession, the SSS studies provide the type of empirical research being called for by education and government leaders. The U.S. Department of Education, driven by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. De-
partment of Education, 2001), calls for the use of programs and interventions that have demonstrated effectiveness through empirically based research. To support this directive, the U.S. Department of Education (2003) has issued guidelines for educators to use as they evaluate programs aimed at improved academic achievement. These guidelines describe criteria for research designs that result in strong evidence of effectiveness. The criteria include randomized controlled trials utilizing comparison groups across multiple settings. The SSS studies were designed to meet Department of Education criteria for strong evidence of effectiveness. In addition, the SSS program research has been independently reviewed by the National Panel for Evidence Based School Counseling, which found strong and promising evidence to support the use of the program as an intervention affecting student achievement (Carey et al., 2005).

The consistency of results across this study and three subsequent SSS studies provides further support for the observed positive relationship between the SSS intervention and student achievement outcomes. Researchers (Gay, 1996; Schafer, 2001; Sidman, 1960) have suggested the need for replication using strong research designs in multiple field contexts as evidence that an intervention works. According to Gay, the need for replication is especially great when the treatment being investigated might have practical significance or far-reaching impact. The current SSS study was the first of a series of studies aimed at meeting the needs of local practitioners and the counseling profession while responding to the demand for rigorous research standards with replicable results. The current study, along with those previously reported, provides evidence that school counselors can significantly contribute to improved student outcomes by targeting the academic, social, and self-management skills of students.

The specific skills selected for the SSS intervention were based upon three comprehensive reviews of research. Masten and Coatsworth (1998) reviewed 25 years of research to determine the most critical factors associated with children and adolescents developing the academic and social competence needed to be successful. Hattie, Biggs, and Purdie (1996) reviewed 10 years of research on the effects of learning skills interventions on student learning. Wang et al. (1994) reviewed 50 years of research looking at what helps students learn. All three reviews found a very similar collection of skills that were considered to be most critical to student success. These skills include (a) cognitive and metacognitive skills such as goal setting, progress monitoring, and memory skills; (b) social skills such as interpersonal skills, social problem solving, listening, and teamwork skills; and (c) self-management skills such as managing attention, motivation, and anger.

Current research continues to support the relationship between the social-emotional and academic needs of students in improving achievement. Shechtman (2002) reviewed outcome research on group psychotherapy with children and found that in order to improve achievement it is important to address the social, emotional, and academic needs of students. Zins et al. (2004) make a strong empirical case linking social-emotional learning to improved behavioral and academic performance. Elias et al. (2003), in a large review of school-based prevention programs, found school-based interventions built on coordinated social, emotional, and academic learning to be critically linked to positive social and academic outcomes. Other researchers also support a link between social-emotional learning and academic achievement particularly among students at risk for academic failure (Arbona, 2000; Daly, Duhon, & Witt, 2002; Fad, 1990; Kamps & Kay, 2001).

**PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY**

The development of the standardized SSS curriculum was based upon research identifying skills related to academic achievement and social competence and is in response to the need for school counselors and educators to use empirically proven approaches that promote student success. Three similar studies have been published (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Campbell & Brigman, 2005; Webb et al., 2005). The purpose of this study was to evaluate SSS program impact on achievement and behavior trends by answering two research questions: (a) What are the performance trends regarding reading and math achievement for students who participate in school counselor-led groups and classroom guidance lessons using the Student Success Skills program versus comparison students who do not participate? And, (b) what are the performance trends regarding behavior for students who participate in the SSS program?

**METHOD**

**Participants**

The current study involved 220 students from 12 schools. Students in six schools received the treatment. Students in grades 5, 6, 8, and 9 participated in the study. Fifty-four percent of students were female while 46% were male. Fifty-two percent of participants identified as Black (predominantly African American and Haitian), 29% as Caucasian, and 18% as Hispanic American. These students were randomly selected in treatment schools from among those students who scored between the 25th and
50th percentile in reading on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) Norm Referenced Test (NRT). Comparison group students also were randomly selected from a pool of students scoring between the 25th and 50th percentile in reading on the FCAT NRT. Comparison group students were in six nontreatment schools that were matched with the treatment schools regarding geographic proximity, race, and socioeconomic data as provided by the school district.

**Research Design**

Students were randomly assigned to treatment and comparison groups in an experimental design. Standardized math and reading scores from the FCAT and a teacher rating of classroom behavior, the School Social Behavior Scale (SSBS), were used as the dependent variables. The independent variable was the counselor intervention using the Student Success Skills program. An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to examine FCAT results to account for differences between treatment students and comparison students at the beginning of the study.

**Instruments**

Reading and math scores from the state’s norm referenced achievement test, the FCAT (Florida Department of Education, 2002), were used to measure academic outcomes. Every March the FCAT is given annually throughout the state of Florida. FCAT scores preceding the intervention in 2000 were used as a covariate with scores from 2001 following the SSS intervention. Norming of the FCAT involved 5,171 students. The FCAT technical manual states the Cronbach’s alpha reliability between .86 and .88 for reading and between .91 and .92 for math. The manual also provides evidence of adequate criterion-related and construct validity. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2003), real world objective measures, such as the FCAT, are important when collecting outcome data and evaluating the effectiveness of different interventions.

A behavior rating scale, the SSBS (Merrell, 1993), was used to measure social and self-management skills. The SSBS was chosen because it measured student behavior in the three research-supported skill areas critical to school success—academic, social, and self-management skills. Teachers used the SSBS to rate treatment students in September and again in April. Comparison students were not rated. The technical manual for the SSBS provided information regarding norming, reliability, and validity. The SSBS was normed using ratings from 688 teachers rating 1,858 students in grades K–12. The sample represented a mix of urban, suburban, and rural communities in 18 states. Ethnicity and socioeconomic status were not critical factors in influencing scores, as they were controlled for. Regarding reliability of the SSBS, the internal consistency was .96 to .98, test-retest reliability .76 to .82, and interrater reliability .72 to .83. The technical manual reported evidence of adequate to good content, criterion-related, and construct validity.

**Student Success Skills Implementation**

In treatment schools, school counselors implemented the SSS curriculum in both classroom and small group formats. The intervention focused on cognitive, social, and self-management skills that have been shown through research to be related to improved academic achievement. Several methods were used to ensure the fidelity of treatment across schools. Methods included counselor training sessions, peer coaching, monitoring of implementation, and the use of a standardized curriculum.

Counselors attended three full days of training in August 2000 followed by three half days of training in October, January, and March related to leading classroom and small group sessions with a specific focus on improving student academic, social, and self-management skills. The training consisted of demonstrations of classroom lessons and group sessions by the trainers using a structured format followed by practice and feedback to school counselors. To strengthen fidelity of treatment, counselors also met in September and November 2000 and in February 2001 for half-day peer coaching sessions to review videotapes of intervention sessions and to share ideas about implementing the project. Structured verbal and written feedback was provided by counselors in these peer coaching sessions, which focused on the skills and format taught by the researchers during the August training sessions.

In addition to training in group facilitation specific to the academic, social, and self-management needs of students, counselors implementing the SSS intervention were instructed in the use of a structured, standardized manual (Brigman & Goodman, 2001). More recent SSS research has featured updated group manuals (Brigman, Campbell, & Webb, 2004) along with a new classroom manual (Brigman & Webb, 2004). Carey (2004) has called for the school counseling profession to move toward the use of rigorously evaluated “manualized” interventions versus individual counselor-generated interventions in order to develop a research base to support best practices.

Several components of implementation were monitored and required for inclusion in the SSS study. These included counselor attendance at training and peer coaching sessions, counselor use of prescribed materials, student attendance in the eight
weekly and four monthly booster sessions, and the counselor leading at least three SSS classroom guidance lessons at targeted grade levels.

**Student Success Skills Group Format**

The SSS strategies and skills were introduced to students in targeted grade levels in August and September 2000 in three 45-minute classroom guidance lessons. Students were randomly selected from those classrooms from a pool of students scoring between the 25th and 50th percentile on the reading section of the FCAT to participate in the SSS group intervention. Counselors began leading the SSS groups in October. The groups met for 45 minutes once each week for eight weeks. This was followed by four monthly “booster” sessions that met for 45 minutes in the spring prior to the scheduled achievement testing to reinforce the practice of skills learned in the fall.

A three-phase structured group format was used for each of the sessions to help ensure integrity of the intervention and consistent implementation across counselors and schools. Each session focused on skills aimed at improving academic, social, and self-management skills linked to student success and followed a beginning, middle, and end of session format. During the implementation of the SSS intervention, attending, listening, empathy, and encour-

**Table 1. Student Success Skills Group Format**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session Tasks</th>
<th>Embedded Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>(Beginning)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperature check of mood and energy</td>
<td>Nutrition, rest, exercise, and fun, related to mood and energy. Students share progress toward previously set wellness goals and are encouraged to look or even small improvements. Students share successful strategies (pairs/group) and identify areas for improvement for the coming week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life skills goal reporting, progress monitoring, and goal setting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of previous session</td>
<td>“What’s in it for me” rationale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preview of today’s session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Middle)</em></td>
<td>Social problem-solving model and student peer coaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main activity introduced using “tell, show, do, coach” approach</td>
<td>Note: Students learn to use encouragement, to provide feedback to peers, and to listen attentively and empathically as they brainstorm and try out solutions to typical issues for their age group. These skills are modeled and encouraged throughout each session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(End)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session review</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal and progress review</td>
<td>Cognitive skills: picking out important ideas to study, organizing important information into outlines/concept maps, chunking information on to note cards, reviewing note cards at least six times. Social skills: working cooperatively in groups, with study buddies. Self-management skills: anger management, managing anxiety. Goal-setting process: Students review progress toward goal and pick out one area to focus on for the coming week and what they are going to do to reach that goal. Students share their goal and plan with a partner. Volunteers share goals and plans with the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal setting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preview of next session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
agement were modeled and practiced as students shared ideas, tried out new behaviors, and reported progress toward goals. An emphasis was placed on helping students learn to recognize even small improvements toward goals and to replace negative self-talk with positive or motivating messages. One important component was to create a community of caring, encouragement, and support within the group. Strategies involved in the implementation of the SSS program include music, movement, storytelling, role playing, pair sharing, and student peer coaching.

The beginning of each group session focused on goal setting, goal reporting, and progress monitoring related to five life skill areas. Particular attention was given to nutrition, rest, exercise, fun, and social support as related to mood and energy.

The middle of each session focused on student-identified social, academic, or self-management issues. This provides practice opportunities for students to apply the Student Success Skills Peer Coaching (SSSPC) model. SSSPC is a social problem-solving model that uses dramatization and feedback as a practical way of teaching children prosocial skills in a systematic, interactive, and fun way. It was influenced by the work of Adler (1964), Bandura (1977), Benson, Galbraith, and Espeland (1995), and Dinkmeyer, McKay, Dinkmeyer, and McKay (1998). The SSSPC model allows students to develop positive interpersonal skills and to receive encouragement from peers while practicing the new skills within the safety of the group setting. A particular strength of this model is the relevance of the content to the students’ own lives and needs.

At the end of each group session, students reported progress toward specific cognitive, social, and self-management skills using an instrument called the “Seven Keys to Mastering Any Course.” Tasks and embedded skills for the beginning, middle, and end of each session can be found in Table 1.

**Student Success Skills Classroom Lessons**

Counselors used three 45-minute classroom guidance lessons in August and September to introduce many of the skills and tools that would be used during the SSS group sessions. A beginning, middle, and end format similar to the format used in group sessions was followed. The beginning and end were used for goal reporting, to practice goal setting and progress monitoring strategies, and to preview and review lessons. The middle of each classroom lesson focused on a prevention curriculum including the development of encouraging relationships, the introduction of goal setting and progress monitoring strategies, life skills, keys to academic success, and strategies for managing stress and test anxiety. Teachers were encouraged to reinforce these skills and strategies throughout the year. Students participating in the treatment group in the current SSS study received the classroom lessons followed by the group counseling intervention.

**RESULTS**

**Academic Achievement**

An analysis of covariance was conducted to compare the performance trends of treatment and comparison group students in reading and math FCAT achievement following the SSS intervention. The ANCOVA detected a significant difference \( p = .003 \) between treatment and comparison students in math scores (see Table 2). A significant difference was not detected \( p = .250 \) in reading scores between treatment and comparison students (see Table 3). Pre and post means, standard deviations, and gain scores are reported for both math and reading FCAT measures (see Tables 4 and 5 and Figure 1).

A moderate effect size for math change scores was found \( d = .45 \). This indicates that those in the treatment group had improved test scores of about a half of a standard deviation compared to students in the control group. The 95% confidence interval for the effect size was .23 to .67, indicating significance due to the range not containing zero. This is similar to other studies examining the effect size of SSS. Moderate effect sizes for math have been found in three similar studies using mean differences and fall in a range between .36 and .51 (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Campbell & Brigman, 2005; Webb et al., 2005). In regards to reading scores, the effect size indicated no significance between the two groups on reading change scores \( d = .03 \); CI –.17 to .10). Previously reported past studies have found small effect sizes for reading change scores ranging from .11 to .25 (Brigman & Campbell; Campbell & Brigman; Webb et al.).

**Behavior Ratings**

Students were chosen for participation in the SSS research project based on low to mid-range achievement in reading. Research supporting the development of the SSS curriculum suggested that if the SSS intervention was effective in helping students improve their behavior by developing academic, social, and self-management skills, the result would include improved academic achievement. The research design called for reading or math teachers to rate student behavior using the School Social Behavior Scale in September with the same teachers rating students again in April following the Student Success Skills group intervention. Results reflecting the combined ratings of elementary, middle, and high school students showed that 60% of students improved rated behaviors. The average amount of
improvement was 18 percentile points. While the primary interest in this study was to link the SSS intervention to improved academic outcomes, it was of interest to have a measure of what teachers were seeing in their classrooms.

**DISCUSSION**

The Student Success Skills approach is based upon research on skills associated with improved academic achievement. It is built around the academic, social, and self-management skills that students need to succeed in school. The SSS program has been linked to significantly improved achievement and behavioral student outcomes. The SSS program research has been termed “rigorous” by researchers in the counseling profession (Carey, 2004), and we believe it aligns closely with criteria set forth by the U.S. Department of Education (2003) as “strong evidence” of an effective intervention.

The results of the current study were consistent with three previously reported studies for math improvement (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Campbell & Brigman, 2005; Webb et al., 2005). In reading, the percentage of students improving in the current study was consistent with previously reported SSS studies that found statistically significant gains in reading (Brigman & Campbell; Campbell & Brigman). However, in the current study, the point gain was about half of that found in previous studies and a statistically significant difference was not detected between treatment and comparison group students in reading achievement.

**Directions for Future Research**

Several recommendations for future studies involving variations in the delivery of the SSS program and exploring outcomes with a wider range of students (grade level, ability, ethnicity) are offered to researchers and professional school counselors interested in interventions targeting the academic and social competence of students. In the current series

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**Table 2. ANCOVA Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for FCAT NRT Scale Scores Math 2001**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig. a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected model</td>
<td>107939.587 b</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>53969.794</td>
<td>123.544</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>8911.532</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8911.532</td>
<td>20.400</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCAT NRT M SS 00</td>
<td>105256.446</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>105256.446</td>
<td>240.947</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group (math)</td>
<td>3981.366</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3981.366</td>
<td>9.114</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Computed using $\alpha = .05$.

b $R^2 = .534$ (adjusted $R^2 = .529$).

**Table 3. ANCOVA Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for FCAT NRT Scale Scores Reading 2001**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig. a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected model</td>
<td>103389.022 b</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>51694.511</td>
<td>120.197</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>7064.489</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7064.489</td>
<td>16.426</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCAT NRT R SS 00</td>
<td>94944.617</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>94944.617</td>
<td>220.760</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group (reading)</td>
<td>573.143</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>573.143</td>
<td>1.333</td>
<td>.250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Computed using $\alpha = .05$.

b $R^2 = .526$ (adjusted $R^2 = .521$).
of studies, school counselors were trained to deliver the classroom lessons and to facilitate the small group intervention. Of interest would be counselors collaborating with teachers to implement the SSS program in their classrooms and measuring outcomes for the entire class. Based on observations and feedback from teachers who have been involved with implementing the SSS program, it appears that training teachers to implement the SSS program increases their investment in using SSS skills and strategies to enhance the curriculum and climate in their classroom. Preliminary reports from SSS-trained teachers indicate gains consistent with reported SSS study outcomes (Berman & Webb, 2005). Additional research is needed to support these preliminary reports.

Other related questions include exploring (a) differences in outcomes for students who receive both the classroom and group intervention compared to those who receive only the classroom or group intervention, (b) outcomes of teacher-counselor collaborative efforts with students receiving both teacher-led classroom and counselor-led group interventions, (c) length of intervention required to achieve desired outcomes, and (d) length of staff development and training required to achieve desired outcomes.

Researchers can continue to explore the efficacy of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Reading 00</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Mean Reading 01</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Gain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>643.69</td>
<td>27.906</td>
<td>653.75</td>
<td>30.401</td>
<td>+10.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>655.07</td>
<td>24.247</td>
<td>666.15</td>
<td>28.338</td>
<td>+11.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. FCAT NRT math mean scores 2000-2001.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Math 00</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Mean Math 01</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Gain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>632.54</td>
<td>26.488</td>
<td>659.06</td>
<td>29.676</td>
<td>+26.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>653.08</td>
<td>28.823</td>
<td>666.06</td>
<td>30.975</td>
<td>+12.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Treatment and Comparison Means and Standard Deviations for FCAT Math 2001

Table 5. Treatment and Comparison Means and Standard Deviations for FCAT Reading 2001
the SSS program with students at various levels of ability. Students participating in the current SSS study scored between the 25th and 50th percentile in reading on the state achievement test. Further research is needed to document whether similar results can be achieved with lower- and/or higher-achieving students.

It is also of interest to explore application of the SSS intervention beyond grades 5, 6, 8, and 9. The SSS program was developed following a series of similar research studies with positive outcomes involving the Ready to Learn (RTL) program designed for teachers. The RTL research has helped to answer questions about academic and social outcomes for students receiving the intervention in pre-K, kindergarten, and first grade. Existing SSS research has begun to address academic and social outcomes for students in grades 5, 6, 8, and 9. With students being required to show adequate yearly progress toward academic benchmarks much sooner than Grade 5, educators also have been interested in the use of the SSS program with younger students. Currently, no comparison group studies have been done using the SSS or RTL approach with students in grades 2, 3, and 4.

Longitudinal research including comparison groups will be needed if we are to generalize long-term effects of participation in the SSS program. However, a preliminary one-year follow-up to this current study shows promise. In the current study, FCAT achievement data were collected for students in grades 5, 6, 8, and 9 in 2000 and 2001. While there were no additional group or classroom lessons following the 2001 posttest, students who participated in the SSS program continued to show academic improvement in 2002. Seventy-five percent of students improved their 2002 FCAT math scale scores by an average of 23 points. Seventy-one percent improved their 2002 FCAT reading by an average of 30 points.

Research-based approaches such as the SSS program that have been linked to improved student outcomes have far-reaching practical significance for teachers and school counselors because they are no longer seen as effective based on what they do but rather for what students can do as a result of their teaching, coaching, facilitating, and/or counseling. Elias et al. (2003) posed questions for educators to consider as they advance from research to practice. A primary focus is examining which aspects of the implementation and training process are most important in maintaining the integrity of the intervention. Continued efforts to understand which components of training and implementation of the SSS program are most critical, if practitioners are to achieve desired student outcomes, provide additional lines of research.

The current demand for empirically driven programs targeting social and academic competence that have a positive effect on student achievement has created tremendous opportunities for researchers in the field of education and school counseling. Funding from state and national levels in school districts across the country is becoming more and more limited to programs that have strong evidence that they work. While there are no lack of programs available for use in schools, researchers play a key role in helping educators determine program effectiveness by providing rigorous examinations of current and developing programs.

Limitations
The current study offers no comparison group data for the behavior ratings. The lack of pre-post test data for the comparison students regarding behavior becomes a limitation in linking behavior outcomes to the SSS intervention. However, of the students receiving the SSS intervention in this study, 60% improved an average of 18 percentile points on the SSBS. Subsequent studies (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Campbell & Brigman, 2005; Webb et al., 2005) show 69%, 69%, and 72% of students improving on the social competence scale of the SSBS with average gains of 22, 18, and 19 percentile points. Students who participate in the intervention consistently show improved classroom behavior.

Conclusion
The focus of the current study was to evaluate the impact of the Student Success Skills program on the academic and social competence of students. It is the first of a series of four similar studies. The intervention involved eight weekly group sessions in the fall with four follow-up booster sessions spaced about a month apart in the spring. Grade levels targeted for the group intervention also received three counselor-led classroom lessons in the fall prior to the group intervention. Treatment outcomes for students in grades 5, 6, 8, and 9 from six schools were measured using state-mandated achievement tests and a measure of social competence. Comparison group achievement outcomes were measured for students in grades 5, 6, 8, and 9 in schools matched for key demographics. Treatment group students scored significantly higher in math versus comparison students. Treatment students also showed improvement in behavior. The results suggest that school counseling interventions that focus on the development of academic, social, and self-management skills lead to gains in students’ academic achievement and improved classroom behavior.
References


