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The Effects of a Success Skills Group on Adolescents' Self–Regulation, Self–Esteem, and Perceived Learning Competence

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THE EFFECTS OF A SUCCESS SKILLS GROUP ON ADOLESCENTS' SELF-REGULATION, SELF-ESTEEM, AND PERCEIVED LEARNING COMPETENCE

In this article, the authors discuss how school counselors at two middle schools identified and intervened with eighth-grade students who were at risk for academic failure using the Student Success Skills (SSS) small-group curriculum (Brigman, Campbell, & Webb, 2010). Participants reported significant increases in self-regulation and perceived competence for learning. The authors present results of the intervention, including (a) process, (b) perception, and (c) outcome data, and discuss implications for school counselors.

A cademic failure and dropout continue to be significant concerns in the United States, with a recent estimate that 22% of students fail to earn a high school diploma within four years (Stillwell & Sable, 2013). Academic failure is strongly linked to high-risk behaviors, such as alcohol and drug abuse, premature pregnancy, crime, violence, and physical inactivity (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011; Woods, 1994). Further, academic failure is predictive of school dropout; which can have serious long-term consequences such as lower earning potential (Aud & Hannes, 2010), higher probability of going to prison, and lower life expectancy (Dynarski et al., 2008). Multiple academic, psychosocial, and behavior factors contribute to students' academic success (Casillas, et al., 2012; Lucio, Hunt, & Bornovalova, 2012). Lucio et al. (2012) found that school misbehavior, school mobility, grade retention, homework completion, school safety, attendance, academic self-efficacy, academic engagement, and academic expectations were all uniquely related to grade point average (GPA), and experiencing two of the risk factors was predictive of academic failure. Casillas et al. (2012) found that, although previous grades and standardized achievement were the most predictive of high school performance among eighth-grade students, psychosocial (e.g., self-regulation, motivation, social control) and behavioral factors increased the strength of prediction. Therefore, Casillas and colleagues recommended that professionals (e.g., educators or counselors) address students' psychosocial concerns before they result in academic failure.

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School counselors are responsible for identifying and intervening with students who are at risk for not completing school (American School Counselor Association, [ASCA], 2011). Therefore, school counselors are in a unique position to promote success through interventions that address students' psychosocial development, social/emotional development, and academic readiness (ASCA, 2014). Specifically, school counselors utilize classroom lessons and/or individual or small group counseling to foster students' learning strategies, social skills, and self-management skills in order to promote college and career readiness (ASCA, 2014). Small group counseling is a common modality and is emphasized as a direct service component to address student success within the Delivery System of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012).

Campbell, & Webb, 2010). The SSS program includes a large group curriculum and an eight-session small group curriculum for students needing more targeted interventions and includes personal, social, and learning skills. Researchers have found the SSS program to be effective in increasing students' achievement in math and reading (Villares, Frain, Brigman, Webb, & Peluso, 2012), feelings of connectedness to school, executive functioning, and metacognitive skills (Lemberger & Clemens, 2012; Lemberger, Selig, Bowers, & Rogers, 2015).

Given the previous effectiveness of the SSS curriculum and its potential impact on psychosocial aspects that are predictive of student success, the authors' school counseling research team utilized the curriculum in an intervention with eighth-grade students

ACADEMIC FAILURE IS STRONGLY LINKED TO HIGH-RISK BEHAVIORS, SUCH AS ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE, PREMATURE PREGNANCY, CRIME, VIOLENCE, AND PHYSICAL INACTIVITY.

Previous researchers and school counselors have used group curriculums to promote students' psychosocial development and academic success. For instance, Steen, Henfield, and Booker (2014) described the Achieving Success Everyday (ASE) group counseling model that is designed to be flexible based on students' needs, yet addresses personal/social (e.g., social skills) and academic objectives (e.g., attending to tasks, completing homework). In one study, ESL high school students participated in the ASE group and reported increases in self-esteem (Shi & Steen, 2012). Rose and Steen (2013) also found moderate gains in GPA for middle school students who participated in the ASE group. Another curriculum with significant research support is the Student Success Skills (SSS) group curriculum (Brigman,

who were at risk for academic failure. Middle school students are at a critical developmental period that may influence future success at the high school and postsecondary levels (ACT, 2008). The research team targeted three psychosocial factors that are inversely related to academic failure: self-regulation, perceived competence for learning, and self-esteem. The purpose of this article is to (a) review self-regulation, perceived learning competence, and self-esteem; (b) discuss how school counselors at two middle schools identified students at risk for academic failure and not transitioning to high school; (c) describe practical application of the SSS small-group curriculum (Brigman, Campbell, & Webb, 2010); and (d) present the results of a study evaluating the curriculum's effectiveness, by reporting process, perception, and outcome data.

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation consists of an individual's ability to manage feelings, attitudes, and behaviors that influence one's openness to and application of learning activities (Robbins, Oh, & Button, 2009) and includes metacognitive components (i.e., thinking about one's thoughts) and executive function components (e.g., memory, attention shifting). Zimmerman and Schunk (1989) described it as one's ability to motivate, direct, and reflect on thoughts and behaviors. According to Zimmerman (2002), self-regulation involves personal responsibility and control over one's own learning, including academic skills such as goal setting, organization, rehearsal self-instruction, or advice seeking. Self-regulated adolescents tend to persist in times of doubt, engage in the monitoring of their own learning processes, and participate in metacognitive decision making (Zimmerman, 1990; Miller & Byrnes, 2001).

Researchers have found that self-regulation is a strong predictor of students' successful academic performance (Zimmerman, 1990; Dembo & Eaton, 2000; Miller & Byrnes, 2001; Reid et al., 2005). Combined with socioeconomic status, decision-making competencies indicative of self-regulation are often the most consistent predictors of GPA for adolescent students (Miller & Byrnes, 2001). Martel et al. (2007) found that executive functioning was predictive of academic competence among adolescents at high risk for substance abuse. Additional researchers (ACT, 2011) found that self-regulation is highly associated with standardized achievement and GPA among middle school students. Dembo and Eaton (2000) made several suggestions for educators who seek to foster self-regulated learning processes in their students, including: (a) encourage time management by modeling how to prioritize goals and values, (b) help boost performance with student-centered self-monitoring practices, and (c) assist students in identifying environments conducive to studying. In Reid, Trout, and Schartz's (2005) study of students

with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, self-regulated learning interventions helped with the consistency and maintenance of on-task behaviors, productivity, and accuracy of work. Lemberger and Clemens (2012) used the SSS small-group curriculum with inner-city elementary school students and found increases in metacognitive skills and executive functioning over a control group. Lemberger et al. (2015) also found increases in executive functioning for low-income middle-school students who participated in the SSS large-group curriculum.

Perceived Competence for Learning

Perceived competence for learning consists of personal judgments students make about their ability to learn or perform effectively (Guay, Marsh, & Boivin, 2003; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2005; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005). Students' perceived competence and beliefs about their academic success influence the amount of effort they put forth and their attitude toward task engagement (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). Furthermore, students who perceive themselves as competent have greater motivation to become involved in school activities by choice and for their own enjoyment. This motivation, as a result, increases academic performance (Guay et al., 2003). Conversely, students who doubt their competence are less likely to engage or put effort into academic tasks and are more likely to avoid work altogether (Seifert & O'Keefe, 2001; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006).

Previous researchers found that perceived competence is related to academic achievement. Wong, Wiest, and Cusick (2002) found that academic self-competence is a stronger predictor of academic achievement for middle school students than teacher autonomy support and parental involvement. Froiland and Eros (2014) found that students' perceived academic self-competence in fifth grade is predictive of reading achievement in eighth grade. In their study of 179 students' homework practices, Zimmerman and Kitsantas (2005) found self-efficacy for academic

achievement beliefs to be predictive of homework grades. Further, the authors discovered that perceived competence and perceived beliefs about responsibility were related and impact GPA. Students with lower perceived self-competence may be more likely to drop out of school (Caprara et al., 2008). Quiroga, Janosz, Bisset, and Morin (2013) also found that self-perceived academic competence mediated the role between depression and school dropout. Perceived teacher support (Masten, 2001) and support from classmates (Danielsen, Samdal, Hetland, & Wold, 2009) appear to contribute to students' perceived competence. Researchers on perceived competence for learning supported the following recommendations for educators: (a) foster confidence and autonomy in the classroom; (b) encourage metacognitive engagement by emphasizing that learning is a process; (c) provide opportunities for students to learn for themselves at their own pace; (d) take on the role of a nurturing and supportive facilitator; and (e) provide genuine opportunities for students to experience academic success.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem consists of one's "beliefs about his or her attributes and abilities as a person," which could be construed as positive or negative, depending on the individuals' valuing system (Valentine et al., 2004, p. 112). Middle school is fraught with personal and academic change and adolescents' self-esteem becomes particularly vulnerable to peer and teacher rejection as they begin to seek autonomy and rely more heavily on intrinsic motivation. Although some researchers contend that self-esteem and academic achievement are reciprocally related (Ross & Broh, 2000), others maintain self-esteem's significance in partially contributing to academic success (Urdan & Schoen-

felder, 2006; Ciarrochi, Heaven, & Davies, 2007; Whitesell, Mitchell, & Spicer, 2009). In their meta-analysis of self-esteem studies, Valentine et al. (2004), found that, among students of equal academic standing, having positive self-beliefs was positively correlated with having a slight advantage on subsequent academic achievement as compared to students who portray less positive self-beliefs. Aunola, Stattin, and Nurmi (2000) also determined self-esteem to be a necessary factor in the deployment of adaptive achievement strategies, such as task engagement and persistence. Students with high self-esteem may be more likely to participate in critical processes and take more initiative in academic situations (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). Adolescents who take pride in themselves and their academic performance are more likely to perform better when compared to peers without positive self-esteem characteristics. Furthermore, self-esteem has been identified as a contributing factor in increasing students' perceived learning competence (DiGiunta et al., 2013). Dalgas-Pelish (2006) found success in increasing self-esteem among fourth- and fifth-grade students through an interactive classroom program. Shi and Steen (2012) found support for the ASE 6-week group model in increasing self-esteem among sixth- and seventh-grade ESL students.

ACTION RESEARCH AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL

The idea for this research project emerged during discussions between a school counseling research team within a counselor education program

and a school counseling program advisory council. The school counseling research team consisted of a counselor education faculty member and a doctoral student (both former school counselors), and a current school counselor. The advisory council consisted of a current counseling graduate student, a practicing school counselor, and a district director of counseling services. The district is in a city with a population of approximately 115,000 people. The district director identified two middle schools (grades six through eight) that needed assistance in working with students who were experiencing poor academic performance and were in danger of not transitioning to high school. One school included a population of 877 students with a racial composition of 46% White, 41.6% Hispanic, 9 % African American, and 2.2% Asian. At that school, 58.7% of the students were classified as "economically disadvantaged." The second school served 951 students, consisting of 70% White, 16.4% Hispanic, 8% African American, and 4% Asian. At the second school, 13.4% of the students

were "economically disadvantaged." The counseling director received feedback from the school counselors that their struggling students tended to exhibit: (a) lack of motivation, (b) poor self-regulation, (c) low confidence, and (d) lack of engagement. After reviewing the literature, the school counseling research team proposed the SSS small-group program as an intervention for the identified students. The goal of the intervention was to foster improvement for students in three areas that are predictive of academic success: (a) self-regulation, (b) perceived competence for learning, and (c) self-esteem. An additional goal was to help students transition from eighth to ninth grade.

Student Success Skills

Brigman et al. (2010) designed the SSS curriculum based on findings from a series of large reviews in which researchers identified factors related to academically competent students, including resilient students living in distressed environments (e.g., Hattie, Biggs, & Purdie, 1996). The authors identified the following critical aspects of student success:

- cognitive and metacognitive skills such as goal setting, progress monitoring, memory skills;
- positive attitudes such as healthy optimism and self-efficacy;
- social skills such as interpersonal skills, social problem solving, listening, and teamwork skills;
- self-management skills such as managing attention, motivation, anxiety, and anger; and
- caring, supportive, and encouraging class environments.

Given the previous success of the SSS curriculum (e.g., Lemberger & Clemens, 2012) the research team used it to intervene with students who exhibited risk factors for academic failure. The specific research questions in the current study were as follows.

Research question 1: Do students who participate in the SSS group report significant increases in self-regulation at posttest and two-month follow-up as measured by the Adolescent Self-Regulatory Inventory (ASRI; Moilanen, 2007)?

Research question 2: Do students who participate in the SSS group report significant increases in perceived competence for learning at posttest and two-month follow-up as measured by the Perceived Competency Scale (PCS; Williams & Deci, 1996)?

Research question 3: Do students who participate in the SSS group report significant increases in self-esteem at posttest and two-month follow-up as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)?

An additional data measure included the number of student participants who were successfully promoted to ninth grade. Therefore, the research team collected (a) process data (number of students participating in the group); (b) perception data (students' pre to post beliefs about their self-regulatory ability, learning competence, and self-esteem); and (c) outcome data (number of students who successfully transitioned to ninth grade).

METHOD

Procedure

After obtaining university Institutional Review Board and school district approval, the counselors at each school collaborated with teachers to identify eighth-grade students exhibiting poor academic performance and potential difficulty transitioning to high school based on the Texas Education Agency (TEA, n.d.) at-risk indicators. The counselors and teachers identified participants based on the indicator that the student was in eighth grade and "did not maintain an average equivalent to 70 on a scale of 100 in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum during a semester in the preceding or current school year or is not maintaining such an average in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum in the current semester" (TEA, n.d.). Students who were not maintaining an adequate average in two or more subjects during the current semester were targeted for the intervention. The school counselors at each site coordinated group implementation. First, they recruited, invited, and screened potential participants for the groups. Then they obtained informed consent from the parents and collected demographic information from the students.

The first author invited three counselor education students, who had group counseling training, to implement the groups. One leader was a doctoral student and a former school counselor. The other two leaders were master's-level school counseling intern-

SELF-REGULATION IS A STRONG PREDICTOR OF STUDENTS' SUCCESSFUL ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE.

ship students. Two groups were co-led by a master's-level student and a school counselor and the other group was co-led by the doctoral student and a master's-level student. Prior to starting the groups, the first author provided a 2-hour training in the SSS small-group counseling curriculum with each of the group leaders. The training included discussion of group logistics, review of the SSS content, and discussion about strategies for addressing group development and dynamics. The first author also provided weekly supervision of group facilitation for approximately one hour each week to provide feedback and ensure consistency in implementation. Further, the school counselor supervisors at each site met with the group leaders each week to process the group and were also available during the groups for additional support or supervision as needed.

Design

Based on school need and the number of parents and students who consented to participate, the research team created three groups (two at one school and one at a second school), consisting of 6-8 members. Twenty-two total students were invited and agreed to participate in the groups. Each student completed three assessments prior to the start of the group intervention, after the conclusion of the group intervention, and at two-month follow-up. The assessments were (a) Adolescent Self-Regulatory Inventory (Moilanen, 2007), (b) Perceived Competency Scale (Williams & Deci, 1996), and (c) Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Three students relocated schools prior to the follow-up data collection point, resulting in 19 total participants who completed all assessments. One student transferred between the follow-up assessment and the end of the year; thus grade promotion information was available for 18 students.

Intervention

The SSS small-group intervention consisted of three separate groups (two at one school and one at a second

school), each with 6-8 members. The groups took place in the fall semester during regular school hours. The follow-up assessments were completed early in the spring semester. Each group session lasted approximately 40 minutes and the students were released from an elective course each week to attend the group. The groups were facilitated weekly for eight consecutive weeks, with the exception of one week during which the school was closed for a holiday. The group leaders followed the SSS as a manualized intervention in this study.

> ## STUDENTS WHO PERCEIVE THEMSELVES AS COMPETENT HAVE GREATER MOTIVATION TO BECOME INVOLVED IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES.

Within the SSS curriculum, students learned and practiced skills and strategies related to each of the five aforementioned categories. Students learned about practical skills to apply in their learning environment and set goals to work on throughout the group. The students also learned about life skills (e.g., nutrition, fun, exercise, social support, and rest) that are linked to success and to energy and mood. In the first session, students introduced themselves to one another, reviewed group expectations, discussed the essential success skills, and set a goal. Within each subsequent session, students reported on their identified goals (i.e., related to the learned skills), evaluated progress on their life skills, and shared their progress with an evaluation partner (i.e., student peer coach). In the eighth and final session, students also reflected on what the group did together and what the students liked. Finally, the students shared what they appreciated about each other throughout the group. Group implementation was consistent among all groups. Group leaders, while differing somewhat in style, followed the structured curriculum for each session. Although not used in this intervention, the SSS program

also includes an optional booster session. The booster session includes goal reporting, life skills, group problem solving, and additional goal setting. The booster session consists of three group meetings spaced one month apart (Brigman et al., 2010).

Participants

Participants in this study consisted of 22 eighth-grade students at two middle schools in a suburban school district in the Southwest. Three students dropped out of the study (i.e., relocated schools) between posttest and follow-up, resulting in a total of 19 participants who completed all three phases of assessment. Specifically, the final sample was 78.9% male (n = 15) and 21.1% female (n = 4). The racial composition included: White 26.3% (n = 5), Black/African American 15.8%, (n = 3), Hispanic/Latino 15.8%, (n = 3), and Multi-racial 42.1% (n = 8). The students' ages ranged from 13 to 14 years old (M = 13.47). Participants had the following diagnoses: ADHD (n = 6), dyslexia (n = 5), specific learning disability (n = 2), emotional disturbance (n = 1). Eight of the students were classified as English Language Learners (ELL).

Measures

Demographic questionnaire. The referring school counselors completed a demographic questionnaire on each student who participated. The questionnaire included information about the students' age, grade level, gender, race/ethnicity, referral reason, 504 status, Individualized Educational Plan status, and English Language Learner status.

Adolescent Self-Regulatory Inventory (ASRI). The ASRI (Moilanen, 2007) consists of two subscales: short-term and long-term self-regulation

ability. To measure self-regulation, the authors used the long-term regulation subscale of the ASRI. The long-term subscale includes 14 questions about adolescents' ability to activate, monitor, maintain, inhibit, and adapt their emotions, thoughts, attention, and behavior. Respondents rate how true an item is (e.g. "I can find a way to stick with my plans and goals, even when it's tough") on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *not at all true for me* to 5 = *really true for me*. Higher scores indicate higher levels of self-regulatory ability. Moilanen (2007) reported a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .80 for the long-term subscale. The Cronbach's alphas for this sample ranged from .84 to .91.

Perceived Competency Scale (PCS). The PCS (Williams & Deci, 1996) is a 4-item, Likert-scale questionnaire, designed to assess an individual's perceived competence for a specific behavior or domain. Respondents rated how true an item is for them ranging from 1 = *not at all true* to 7 = *very true*. The questions were adapted to the specific area being studied. Some example questions are: "I feel confident in my ability to learn course material in school" and "I am able to achieve my goals in school." The PCS authors reported internal consistency above .80. The Cronbach's alphas in this sample ranged from .95 to .96.

Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES). The RSES (Rosenberg, 1965) consists of 10 items measuring global self-esteem. The items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale through which respondents rate how much they agree with an item, ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. The instrument includes positively worded questions, such as "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself", and negatively worded questions, such as "At times, I think I am no good at all."

TABLE 1 — GROUP MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Measure	M (SD)		
	Pretest	Posttest	Follow-Up
Self-Regulation	53.26 (8.21)	56.58 (9.47)	54.42 (9.67)
Perceived Competence for Learning	19.47 (7.23)	21.58 (6.59)	21.16 (6.14)
Self-Esteem	29.42 (6.10)	32.00 (7.62)	31.63 (6.78)

Note. N = 19

The negatively worded questions are reverse scored and combined with the positively worded questions to derive a total score. Higher self-esteem is indicated by a higher score. Rosenberg (1965) reported internal consistency ranging from .77 to .82 and test-retest reliabilities ranging from .82 to .85. The Cronbach's alphas in this study ranged from .85 to .95.

Data Analysis
In order to analyze the data, the authors conducted repeated-measures ANOVAs (pretest, posttest, and two-month follow-up) on each of the dependent variables. They used mean scores to evaluate perception data (i.e., students' pre to post beliefs about their self-regulation, perceived learning competence, self-esteem). They used an alpha level of .05 to determine statistical significance and followed Sink and Stroh's (2006) recommendations for effect size interpretations to determine practical significance. The authors also evaluated outcome data (i.e., promotion to high school) by calculating total number of students who were promoted to ninth grade.

RESULTS

During the intervention, the authors collected process, perception, and outcome data. In terms of process

data, 22 total students participated in the groups. Perception data were available for 19 students after attrition. For perception data, students reported increases in their beliefs about learning competence and self-regulatory behavior. For outcome data, all students who participated were promoted to ninth grade. Specifically, for self-regulation, the data showed a significant main effect, $F (2,36) = 4.71$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .21$. Based on partial eta squared, the effect size was large. Students' scores increased significantly from pretest ($M = 53.26$; $SD = 8.21$) to posttest ($M = 56.58$; $SD = 9.47$), but decreased significantly from the posttest to two-month follow-up ($M = 54.42$; $SD = 9.67$). For perceived competence for learning, the authors interpreted Greenhouse-Geisser estimates and found a significant main effect, $F (1.2, 22.4) = 4.63$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .20$, with a large effect size based on partial eta squared. Students' scores increased significantly from pretest ($M = 19.47$; $SD = 7.23$) to posttest ($M = 21.58$; $SD = 6.59$). Students' mean scores decreased slightly but not significantly at two-month follow-up ($M = 21.16$; $SD = 6.14$), $p = .25$. For self-esteem, the authors interpreted Greenhouse-Geisser estimates and found that there was no significant effect, $F (2,36) = 3.21$, $p = .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$, despite the increases in mean self-esteem scores from pretest to posttest. The means and standard deviations at pretest, posttest, and follow-up are included in Table 1. There were no significant differences among the small groups after controlling for pretest scores.

Last, the research team also collected student grade promotion informa-

THE RESEARCH TEAM USED [THE SSS CURRICULUM] TO INTERVENE WITH STUDENTS WHO EXHIBITED RISK FACTORS FOR ACADEMIC FAILURE.

tion at the conclusion of the academic year. Among the students who completed the groups, one student moved and did not have promotion data available. Eighteen were successfully promoted to ninth grade.

DISCUSSION

In this study, students who participated in the SSS curriculum reported increases in their perceived learning competence, with sustained increases after two months. These findings are supportive of Masten's (2001) research on teacher support and the findings of Danielson et al. (2009) on peer support related to perceived learning competence. The SSS program strongly emphasizes building a caring and nurturing environment with support from the group leader and other group members. The supportive aspects of the group, in addition to the specific success skills learned, may have helped foster students' perceived learning competence. Further, it was encouraging that students maintained their gains in perceived learning competence at follow-up. It appears that students continued to practice healthy optimism and continued to believe in their ability to learn.

Students in this study reported increases in their long-term self-regulation skills after participating in the SSS group. These findings are consistent with Lemberger et al. (2015), who found that the SSS large-group curriculum was effective in increasing self-regulation skills for primarily Hispanic, low-income middle school students. Results of the present study also support those of Lemberger and Clemens (2012) who found significant increases in self-regulation skills (e.g., metacognitive skills and executive functioning) among inner-city fourth- and fifth-grade students. In the two previous studies, the researchers only measured gains at posttest. However, in the present study, students' gains did not sustain after two months. The SSS curriculum appears to have been effective in fostering self-regulation skills

over the course of the group. However, more time may be needed to develop consistency with self-regulatory behavior. Students in the present study might have benefited from continued support (e.g., SSS booster sessions) to help them sustain long-term gains.

> ## STUDENTS IN THIS STUDY REPORTED INCREASES IN THEIR LONG-TERM SELF-REGULATION SKILLS AFTER PARTICIPATING IN THE SSS GROUP.

This study's findings differed from those of Shi and Steen (2012) and Dalgash-Pelish (2006), who found increases in self-esteem after implementing a group intervention. Although the authors hypothesized that the positive leader and peer feedback on goals in conjunction with the caring and supportive environment would help improve students' self-esteem, the study results did not show support for the SSS curriculum in improving self-esteem scores. It is possible that the relationship between self-esteem and academic performance is, in fact, reciprocal (Ross & Broh, 2000) and students may need to experience more consistent academic success before reporting increases in self-esteem. Further, self-esteem may be influenced by multiple factors and may fluctuate frequently for middle school students. Although the authors hoped that aspects of the SSS curriculum would help improve students' self-esteem, more long-term, developmental interventions may be needed to help foster healthy self-esteem.

A final positive finding was that all of the students who participated in the groups were successfully promoted to ninth grade, which provides support that the groups may be effective in assisting student grade promotion and transition. However, it is not possible to discern whether or not the students were more likely to be promoted without the support of the group or whether counselors in other schools working with different populations would experience similar results. Nev-

ertheless, the present study demonstrated how school counselors identify students at risk for academic failure, utilize an evidence-based group curriculum, and track student results over time. The school counselors and group leaders reported that it took time for the students to "buy in" to the benefits of the group. However, over time, students became excited and invested in the group and in the success of the other members.

Limitations

Although the authors found several positive results in this study, readers must be aware of the limitations. The participants were diverse in regards to race/ethnicity; however, participants were primarily male students. The primary measures were all self-report and participants may have answered the questions in a socially desirable manner. Collecting data from more sources such as teachers and parents could be helpful. Last, due to the timing of the intervention, the authors did not collect students' overall GPA, which is an important outcome measure within the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012). Future researchers and school counselors may consider including more female students, and obtaining teacher or parent observations in addition to student self-reports.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Previous researchers recommended that school professionals attend to psychosocial factors during identification of and intervention with students at risk for academic failure (Casillas

et al., 2012; Lucio et al., 2011). In addition to academic interventions such as tutoring or intensive coursework, strategies that support students' psychosocial and social/emotional development are essential to academic success. The SSS group curriculum includes multiple success skills (e.g., goal setting, social skills, self-management, optimism) that are consistent with the Mindsets and Behaviors standards (ASCA, 2014). In this study, the authors utilized the SSS curriculum to address three psychosocial factors (self-esteem, perceived learning competence, and self-regulation) that are related to success. School counselors can use the SSS curriculum as part of a comprehensive program to address the Mindsets and Behaviors standards (ASCA, 2014) and intervene with students at risk for academic failure.

self-esteem, the curriculum may be helpful for students who struggle with self-regulation or perceived learning competence. Multiple factors are involved in students' ability to perform academically, so it is encouraging that all students for whom the study had data (one student transferred) were promoted to high school. The success skills the students learned, in addition to the support they received from the school counselors and peers, may have helped them obtain successful grade promotion. The authors encourage school counselors who use the SSS small-group curriculum to track progress of their particular student populations to ensure the program's effectiveness and to provide further support for the school counselor's role in effectively working with students at risk for academic failure.

to intervene with students at risk for academic failure. The school counselors, in collaboration with a counselor education program, identified students, organized groups, and tracked their effectiveness. Further, through their unique training and skills in group counseling, the school counselors were able to address psychosocial factors that are related to student success. As a result, students experienced an increase in their perceived learning competence, in addition to successfully transitioning to ninth grade. ■

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STUDENTS MAY NEED TO EXPERIENCE MORE CONSISTENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS BEFORE REPORTING INCREASES IN SELF-ESTEEM.

This article describes a process by which school counselors can demonstrate accountability for promoting success for students at risk for academic failure. For instance, school counselors can report student progress through the small-group results report, including process data (number of students participating in the groups), perception data (e.g., pre to post increases in self-regulation, perceived learning competence), and outcome data (i.e., grade promotion rates). The authors also recommend that school counselors utilize follow-up assessments to evaluate a group's effectiveness and identify students needing additional support. By including a follow-up assessment in addition to the posttest, the authors were able to recognize that self-regulation did not sustain after a period of time. Specific students who do not maintain improvement could be targeted for SSS booster sessions.

Although the authors did not find an effect of the SSS curriculum on

The group leaders also provided anecdotal feedback about the group. One of the skills students learn within the SSS curriculum is to listen with eyes, ears, and heart (as part of social skills and social problem solving). The group leaders believed it would be helpful to spend time modeling these behaviors with students at the beginning of the group. In relation to goals, the group leaders observed that students who created specific action plans were more likely to carry them out and students who focused on small improvements were more likely to accomplish their goals. Therefore, helping students create goals that are specific and attainable appeared to be most helpful.

CONCLUSION

In this practitioner-focused research article, the authors demonstrated how school counselors and interns used an evidenced-based group curriculum

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