

**THE EFFECTS OF THE READY FOR SUCCESS CLASSROOM GUIDANCE
PROGRAM ON THE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCE,
READING PROFICIENCY, AND PROMOTION RATE
OF THIRD-GRADE STUDENTS**

by

Ellen K. Chance

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of

The College of Education

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Florida Atlantic University

Boca Raton, FL

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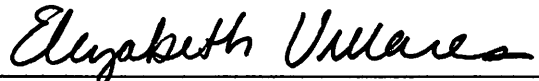
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This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Villares, Department of Counselor Education, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the College of Education and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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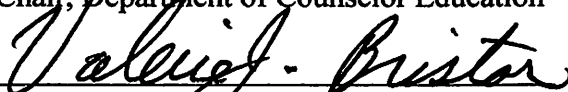


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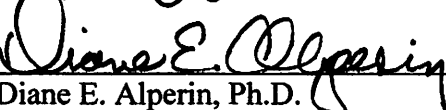
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ABSTRACT

Author: Ellen K. Chance

Title: The Effects of the Ready for Success Classroom Guidance Program on the Social-Emotional Skills and Competence, Reading Proficiency, and Promotion Rate of Third-Grade Students

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The purpose of the current outcome study was to determine the effects of the Ready for Success (RFS) classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) on the social-emotional skills and competence, reading proficiency, and promotion between third-grade students who received the RFS intervention (treatment group; $n = 104$), and third-grade students who did not receive the intervention (comparison group; $n=91$). Following training in the manualized RFS curriculum, certified school counselors in the treatment group implemented five, weekly, 30-minute lessons followed by three monthly booster lessons. This study followed a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent group design. The study employed a teacher report measure of social-emotional skills and competence (i.e., Devereux Student Strengths Assessment) and a standardized formative assessment of reading proficiency (i.e., Reading Running Record). Furthermore, retention data was provided by the participating school district's data source.

Statistical significance between the groups was measured by a series of MANCOVA analyses and a Pearson's chi-square analysis. A partial eta-squared η_p^2 effect size was reported for each dependent variable. The data supported the RFS classroom guidance program as an effective Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) intervention for promoting student social-emotional skill development (i.e. self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making) and overall social-emotional competence (SEC). This study provided support for the use of school counselor-led SEL classroom programs to promote the social-emotional development of students in the school setting. Furthermore, the study further supports the value of school counseling interventions for students in the domain of social-emotional development. Finally, the findings of this study provided empirical support for the RFS classroom guidance program as an effective SEL intervention.

DEDICATION

To my daughter, when this process began you were something we only dreamed of. When implementation of this research project started, we learned you were on your way. The day you were born, my purpose in life gained a whole new meaning, as did this project. It is my hope that you will one day read this manuscript and learn that all things can be accomplished with patience, perseverance, and determination. I love you, Harper Elizabeth, and I promise to serve as your greatest supporter in reaching all your dreams.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Third-grade is a critical year for students' academic and social-emotional development. For instance, it is fundamental for students in the third-grade to develop factors associated with third-grade promotion and later academic success, including social-emotional skills and competence (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Payton et al., 2008), and the ability to read independently and proficiently (Hernandez, 2012; Torgesen, Houston, Rissman, Kosanovich, 2007). The development of social-emotional skills and competence in elementary years is particularly important as researchers have not only found a positive association between social competence and reading proficiency (Miles & Stipek, 2006), but also with later academic success (Gabrieli, Ansel, & Krachman, 2015; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007; Zins, Weissberg, Wang & Walberg, 2004).

It is expected that by the end of third-grade students have learned to read independently, so that in later grades they are able to effectively and efficiently read to learn (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). Thus, third-grade reading proficiency is an essential prerequisite to acquiring knowledge and achieving academic success in later grades. Students who do not attain 3rd grade level proficiencies, particularly in reading, are far more likely to be retained, struggle academically, exhibit behavioral and social problems in later grades (Miles & Stipek, 2006) and are at higher risk for dropping out of high school (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010; Hernandez, 2012). Ultimately, three quarters of third-grade students who are unable to read proficiently by the end of year

will continue to struggle with reading throughout school and are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient third-grade readers (Hernandez, 2012).

Research in the areas of student literacy and academic achievement has shown a positive correlation between social-emotional competence and reading achievement (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Bernard, 2004). Researchers assert that social-emotional skills are of equal importance to school success as cognitive factors (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, 2011; Masten & Coastworth, 1998, Miles & Stipek, 2006; Nix, Bierman, Domitrovich, Sukhdeep, 2013; Parkinson, 2011; Zins et al., 2004). Social-emotional competence refers to the ability to effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and regulate emotions, set and achieve positive personal and academic goals, interact well and empathize with others, establish and maintain positive and cooperative relationships, and make responsible decisions in an age and contextually appropriate manner (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2012; LeBuffe, Shapiro, & Naglieri, 2009). Social-emotional competence provides students with a foundation for academic success, and the development of social-emotional skills promotes academic readiness, or a readiness to learn (Brigman & Webb, 2012, Durlak et al. 2011, Greenberg et al., 2003).

The CASEL (2012) organization has identified five foundational intrapersonal and interpersonal skills (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making) that contribute to social-emotional competence. Third-grade students are in the developmental period of middle childhood, which is characterized by increased self-awareness and opportunities for social

interactions (Erikson, 1968). Thus, students in third-grade must develop social-emotional skills to successfully navigate this period. It is expected that third-grade students are able to productively interact and cooperate with peers, actively listen and respond to others, empathize and value personal differences, and practice self-control and management (Elias et al., 1997). Alarming, students who lack social-emotional competence and skills are at greater risk for below grade level reading proficiency and grade retention (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013). Thus, promoting the development of social-emotional skills contributes to academic readiness, serves as a protective factor to grade retention, and optimizes students' likelihood of attaining reading proficiency and grade promotion (Brigman & Webb, 2012; Hennessey, 2007; White & Kelly, 2010).

Early intervention and prevention, in the form of explicit social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum, is vital to the development of social-emotional competence and skill development, and ultimately the educational outcomes of students (White & Kelly, 2010). In recent years the development of SEL programs has significantly increased, largely due to the connection between social-emotional competence and positive academic outcomes (Arbona, 2002; Daly, Duhon & Witt, 2002; Durlak et al. 2011, Zins et al., 2004). Researchers suggest that participation in SEL programs leads to school readiness and can predict the academic success and educational outcomes of students (Durlak et al. 2011; Zins et al., 2004). The National Association of State Boards of Education states, “Social-emotional learning (SEL) is every bit as critical to students’ success as their mastery of purely academic content and skills” (Heller, 2013, p.1). Fostering social-emotional skills has both immediate and long-term impacts that are linked to greater academic achievement, high school and college completion, and greater

likelihood of employment (Gabrieli et al., 2015). Furthermore, Payton et al. (2000), suggest that SEL curriculum contributes to reduced conduct and emotional problems among students and promotes academic readiness behaviors. For that reason, schools will see optimal student outcomes when both cognitive and social-emotional development is prioritized (Durlak et al., 2011).

Educators play an important role in cultivating the cognitive development and social-emotional development of all students (Durlak et al., 2011). Though the adoption of SEL programs within schools has increased in recent years, many barriers to effective implementation of evidence-based programs continue to exist, including competing demands, time constraints, and the lack of qualified personnel assigned to moving SEL initiatives forward in schools (Durlak et al., 2011; Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003; Riggs, Greenberg, Kusché & Pentz, 2006; Van Velsor, 2009a). Many school leaders view SEL interventions as secondary to academic learning (Riggs et al., 2006; Van Velsor, 2009a). Additionally, teachers are often unable and ill-equipped to address the social-emotional needs of students within the classroom environment and given the pressure for increased academic learning in elementary schools, there are simply not enough hours in the day to incorporate additional curricula (Van Velsor, 2009a). Furthermore, the majority of teachers and administrators lack formal training and education in social and emotional development (Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy [RCERP], 2015). This presents the need for leaders in education to identify qualified individuals within the school setting that are well-equipped to effectively implement SEL programming.

The American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) National Model (2012) identifies school counselors as key professionals, uniquely qualified to address the social-emotional needs of students in the school setting through large group (classroom), small group and individual counseling interventions. Van Velsor (2009a) identifies school counselors as SEL consultants influential in incorporating SEL interventions in the school setting. Additionally, the recent revision of the *ASCA Mindset and Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College-and Career-Readiness Standard for Every Student* (ASCA, 2014) specifically highlights the standards and competencies necessary for school counselors to incorporate into a comprehensive school counseling program in order to effectively address the social-emotional, academic and career development of all students. Thus, school counselors are not only qualified to address SEL, they are responsible for supporting the social-emotional development of all students. A comprehensive school counseling program that incorporates evidence-based SEL programs can foster the development of social-emotional skills, and in turn make significant contributions to student academic readiness, success, and educational outcomes (Van Valsor, 2009; White & Kelly, 2010).

The Ready for Success (RFS) classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) is a school counselor-led prevention/early intervention program developed specifically for second and third-grade students. RFS was designed as a bridge program between counselor-led prevention/intervention programs Student Success Skills (SSS) for grades 4-12 and Ready to Learn (RTL) for grades K-1 using the same theoretical and extensive research base (Brigman & Webb, 2016; Brigman, Lane & Lane, 2008). The positive outcomes of the SSS and RTL are evidenced in numerous studies that have

demonstrated significant student gains in academic achievement and social skills development (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Brigman, Webb, & Campbell, 2007; Brigman & Webb, 2003; Mariani, Webb, Villares, & Brigman, 2015; Villares, Brigman, & Peluso, 2008; Villares, Frain, Brigman, Webb, & Peluso, 2012; Webb, Brigman & Campbell, 2005). The RFS classroom guidance program was designed to promote skills predictive of long-term success and targets skills in all five areas of social-emotional competence (i.e. self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making). Additionally, two central goals of the RFS are to improve reading proficiency and school success behaviors, resulting in a reduction in third-grade retention rate (Brigman & Webb, 2012). The current study intended to establish a link between the school counselor-led RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) and an increase in social-emotional skills and competence, which is likely to improve grade level reading proficiency and promotion of third-grade students.

Significance of Problem

This study aimed to address three significant problems: (a) students who lack reading proficiency by the end of third-grade are at increased risk for an array of negative educational and life outcomes, including grade level retention and dropping out of high school (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010; Hernandez, 2012; Jacob & Lefgren, 2009; Lesnick, Goerge, Smithgall, & Gwynne, 2010), (b) the lack of research on SEL program effectiveness, which is needed to promote changes in educational policy and practice that prioritize social-emotional development of students (Gabrieli et al., 2015; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013), and (c) the need for school counselors to utilize impactful

interventions, such as explicit, evidence-based SEL programs that are proven to have positive student outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011).

First, research has established the connection between below grade level reading proficiency and grade retention to later academic and behavioral problems (Miles & Stipek, 2006) and a significantly higher risk of dropping out of high school (Hernandez, 2012; Jacob & Lefgren, 2009; Lesnick et al., 2010). Students unable to read proficiently by the end of third-grade have a higher risk of poor educational outcomes and dropout, which indicates that the process of high school dropout begins long before students enter high school (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010; Hupfield, 2007; Miles & Stipek, 2006). While discrepancy in the literature exists, grade retention has been found to be the strongest predictor of later dropout status, which has lasting negative socioeconomic impacts for the individual, families, communities, and society at large (Annie Casey Foundation, 2010; Hernandez, 2012; Jimerson, 2001; Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002; Ripple & Luthar, 2000). In the 2013-2014 school year, 43% of third-grade students in Florida (FLDOE, 2014a) were below grade level in reading, as measured the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) 2.0, the statewide standardized used to measure students' reading achievement at that time (FLDOE, 2011). Since 2002, the state of Florida has mandated the retention of third-grade students scoring below grade level proficiency in reading, unless the student meets criteria for a good cause exemption. In 2013-2014, 39,245 (18.4%) third-grade students were at risk of retention. Ultimately, 15,877 students (7.4%) were retained, while the remaining 23,368 were promoted with a Progress Monitoring Plan (PMP) due to a good cause exemption (FLDOE, 2014a). While this policy, which emphasizes early

identification and intervention of students not meeting grade level reading proficiency, has shown some promise in increasing standardized test scores of students in subsequent years, the achievement gains tend to decline over time, becoming statistically insignificant within five years (Hong & Yu, 2007; Jimerson, 2001; Jimerson et al., 2002; Powell, 2007; Schwerdt & West, 2012; Schwerdt, West, & Winters, 2015). Furthermore, researchers have not been able to establish the effect of these policies on academic trajectories and high school completion, and early grade retention is not proven to translate to any long-term positive outcomes for retained students (Schwerdt & West, 2012; Schwerdt et al., 2015; Squires, 2015; Winters & Greene, 2012). Consequently, researchers indicate that educational policies should shift focus to the prevention of academic difficulties and promotion of factors associated with academic and school success (Jimerson et al., 2002). Durlak et al. (2011) assert that educators would see improved outcomes by prioritizing evidence-based approaches that produce multiple benefits, including both cognitive and social-emotional development. Therefore, exploration of evidence-based early prevention and intervention programs that successfully promote factors associated with early grade level promotion (i.e. reading proficiency, social-emotional skills and competence) and positive student outcomes is necessary.

Next, although there is an overwhelming body of evidence on the numerous positive effects of social-emotional competence on children's school and life success, SEL at the K-12 level remains secondary to academic learning and is often overlooked by state policy makers, district-level leaders, and school officials (Durlak et al., 2011). Recently, researchers have explored the adoption of free-standing, comprehensive

standards for SEL that include developmental benchmarks across different grade levels at the state level, and have found that these standards establish SEL as a formal priority (Dusenbury et al., 2015; RCERP, 2015). However, currently only four states (i.e. Illinois, Kansas, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia) have mandated comprehensive free-standing SEL standards with developmental benchmarks at the K-12 level (Dusenbury et al., 2015). At this time, Florida does not have free-standing SEL standards with developmental benchmarks in place, nor any mandated integration of SEL into current standards or practices (CASEL, 2015). While state level prioritization of SEL is crucial to the adoption of formal standards and the support and funding for SEL initiatives, it is not the be-all and end-all of ensuring SEL implementation in schools. District level leader and administrator backing are particularly vital in ensuring the implementation and integration of evidence-based SEL practices within schools (RCERP, 2015). In 2015, RCERP declared that successful implementation of SEL will require the efforts and prioritization among multiple stakeholders at the state, district, and school level. The benefits of making SEL a core part of education is vast and the growing emphasis on evidence-based programming suggests that continued research on SEL program effectiveness is needed to establish SEL as a high priority in education (Gabrieli et al., 2015; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Addressing this issue with outcome research is necessary in gaining the attention and support of educational leaders, policy makers, and stakeholders in the incorporation of SEL standards and implementation of evidence-based SEL programming.

Finally, school counselors have been identified as consultants for SEL, who are influential in the implementation and long-term coordination of impactful and lasting

SEL interventions (Kress & Elias, 2006; Thompson, 2002, Van Velsor, 2009a). School counselors are professionals with specialized graduate training in both mental health and education, making them key individuals for addressing SEL in schools (Stanton & Gilligan, 2003). However, many programs have specified delivery through teacher-led classroom instruction. Additionally, much of the literature has been geared towards examining the outcomes of teacher-led or non-school personnel-led SEL initiatives on student outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). Therefore, there is a gap in the research on the impacts of school counselor-led SEL programs on students' SEL and academic outcomes. Furthermore, there is a need for school counselors to utilize explicit, evidence-based SEL classroom programs to improve the educational and life outcomes of all students (Brigman, 2006; Carey, Dimmitt, Hatch, Lapan, & Whiston, 2008; Dimmitt, Hatch, & Carey, 2007; Thompson, 2002). This study aimed to contribute to these needs in the field of school counseling outcome research.

Purpose

The purpose of the current outcome study was to determine the effects of the RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) on factors associated with third-grade promotion and later academic success: social-emotional skills and competence, and grade level reading proficiency. The rationale for the study was based upon critical findings in the literature: (a) promoting the development of social-emotional skills contributes to academic readiness, impacts academic achievement, and ultimately serves as a protective factor to negative student outcomes, and (b) students who do not meet reading proficiency standards by the end of third-grade are not only at greater risk for mandatory third-grade retention, but are also more likely to become high school dropouts.

It has become increasingly important to implement programs that provide significant and impactful outcomes. This study intended to contribute to further development and integration of evidence-based school counseling programs that promote social-emotional competence and the skills that promote educational attainment and life success. Various SEL programs have been integrated into comprehensive school counseling programs; however, there has been little research to support the efficacy of these programs on outcomes of third-grade students. Additionally, research that evaluates social-emotional skills and competence as an outcome of SEL programs is very limited (Durlak et al., 2011). Therefore, the present study aimed to address this gap in the literature by measuring the social-emotional outcomes of third-grade students as a result of a school counselor-led SEL program. This study serves as a stepping stone to further research on the effectiveness of evidence-based school counseling programs on factors associated with grade promotion and optimal educational outcomes.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of the Ready for Success classroom guidance program on third-grade student social-emotional skills (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making)?
2. What is the effect of the Ready for Success classroom guidance program on the social-emotional competence of third-grade students?
3. What is the effect of the Ready for Success classroom guidance program on third-grade student level of reading proficiency?
4. What is the effect of the Ready for Success classroom guidance program on third-grade promotion rate?

Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1

HO₁: There is no statistically significant difference in self-awareness, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) self-awareness subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Alternative Hypothesis 1

Alternative 1: There is a statistically significant difference in self-awareness, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) self-awareness subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Null Hypothesis 2

HO₂: There is no statistically significant difference in self-management, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) self-management subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Alternative Hypothesis 2

Alternative 2: There is a statistically significant difference in self-management, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) self-management subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Null Hypothesis 3

HO₃: There is no statistically significant difference in social awareness, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) social awareness subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Alternative Hypothesis 3

Alternative 3: There is a statistically significant difference in social awareness, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) social awareness subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Null Hypothesis 4

HO₄: There is no statistically significant difference in relationship skills, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) relationship skills subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Alternative Hypothesis 4

Alternative 4: There is a statistically significant difference in relationship skills, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) relationship skills subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Null Hypothesis 5

HO₅: There is no statistically significant difference in responsible decision making, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) decision

making subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Alternative Hypothesis 5

Alternative 5: There is a statistically significant difference in responsible decision making, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) decision making subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Null Hypothesis 6

HO₆: There is no statistically significant difference in social-emotional competence, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) composite scale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Alternative Hypothesis 6

Alternative 6: There is a statistically significant difference in social-emotional competence, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) composite scale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Null Hypothesis 7

HO₇: There is no statistically significant difference in reading proficiency, as measured by the district adapted Reading Running Record (RRR) portion of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2 (BAS-2), between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Alternative Hypothesis 7

Alternative 7: There is a statistically significant difference in reading proficiency, as measured by the district adapted Reading Running Record (RRR) portion of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2 (BAS-2), between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Null Hypothesis 8

HO₈: There is no statistically significant difference in third-grade promotion rate, as measured by school level data reported collected using the school district's Student Information System (SIS) system, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Alternative Hypothesis 8

Alternative 8: There is a statistically significant difference in third-grade promotion rate, as measured by school level data reported collected using the school district's Student Information System (SIS) system, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Definitions

1. **Promotion:** The movement of a student to a higher grade-level for the next academic year of school, based on the student's achievement of established proficiency criteria in the current grade.
2. **Retention:** A student remaining in the current grade level during the next academic year of school, often referred to as non-promotion.
3. **Good Cause Exemption:** Promotion of third-grade student to a higher grade without meeting levels of performance for progression based on limited

circumstances for exemptions or good cause (Florida Public School Student Progression, Fla. Stat. § 1008.25, 2015).

4. **Student Progression Plan:** School districts' plan for progression from one grade to another for students in grades K-12, based on student's mastery of state standards in accordance with Florida Statute § 1008.25(1)(2) (Florida Public School Student Progression, Fla. Stat. § 1008.25, 2015).
5. **Reading Proficiency:** Demonstrate skill/concept development that meets grade level standards in reading, as indicated by trimester benchmark independent reading levels established by the school district.
6. **Social-Emotional Competence:** The ability to effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and regulate emotions, set and achieve positive personal and academic goals, interact well and empathize with others, establish and maintain positive and cooperative relationships, and make responsible decisions in an age-and contextually appropriate manner (CASEL, 2012; LeBuffe et al., 2009).
7. **Social and Emotional Learning:** process of developing social-emotional skills that target behaviors, emotions, and cognitions necessary for school and life success (CASEL, 2012; LeBuffe et al., 2009).
8. **Social-emotional skills:** an interrelated set of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills that serve as protective factors; self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2012).
9. **Self-Awareness:** "The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing

one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism" (CASEL, 2012, p.9).

10. Self-management: "The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals" (CASEL, 2012, p.9).

11. Social Awareness: "The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports" (CASEL, 2012, p.9).

12. Relationship skills: "The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed" (CASEL, 2012. p.9).

13. Responsible decision making: "The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others" (CASEL, 2012, p. 9).

Limitations

This study recognizes the presence of the following limitations:

- Participants/schools limited to one school district in Southeast Florida;

- Random assignment of schools and classrooms was not possible;
- Instruments may be subject to teacher bias;
- Participants were limited to third-grade general education classrooms at select elementary schools;
- Participants were only exposed to one treatment modality (RFS classroom lessons); and;
- Timeline of study was limited to half of a school year.

Study Design

The current study was designed to explore the difference in social-emotional skills and competence, reading proficiency, and promotion rate between third-grade students in the treatment group who received RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) and third-grade students in the comparison group who did not receive the intervention. The present study utilized a quasi-experimental non-equivalent groups design with individual third-grade students serving as the unit of analysis (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Goodwin, 2010).

The participating schools came from a large school district in Southeast Florida with a diverse student population. District demographic data shows a grade K-5 population of 33% White, 28% Black, 33% Hispanic, and a free/reduced lunch rate of 61%. There is a total of approximately 86,166 students in grade K-5 across 107 elementary schools, with a third-grade student population of 15,683. To determine the appropriate study sample size, a priori G-power analysis was conducted with an $ES = 0.3$, $\alpha = 0.05$, power $p = 0.80$ (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009; Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). The results indicated a minimum 190 students were needed to

determine differences between the treatment and comparison groups. In anticipation of possible participant attrition, 280 third-grade students were sought. A minimum of four schools with approximately four third-grade classrooms, and 18 students per class, were needed to achieve the desired sample size in the present study.

Schools with similar student enrollment numbers, classroom size, socioeconomic, ethnic, gender, and academic performance demographics and that employed a certified school counselor were identified for school recruitment. Invitations for study participation was delivered to principals and school counselors in schools meeting this study criteria. Four elementary schools, four school counselors, and 16 third-grade classrooms were selected and consented for participation in the study. Schools were matched using a nonequivalent groups design. The first two schools to agree to study participation were assigned to treatment condition, and two additional schools were then assigned to the comparison condition. Individual classrooms were not independently assigned to a study condition. Rather, classrooms were considered treatment or comparison based on their school's assignment. Following the training, one classroom teacher from the comparison group withdrew consent for participation and was removed from the study. Therefore, ultimately 15 third-grade classrooms participated in the study.

In order for students to participate in the study, parent or guardian consent and student assent for participation were required. Students whose parents did not give permission or students who did not assent to study participation still received the RFS classroom program, however were not considered participants in the study. A total sample size of $n=195$ was achieved. Of the 195 students, there were a total of 104 students in the treatment group and 91 students in the comparison group.

A disaggregation of total demographic data found that males constituted 56.9% of the total sample, and 43.1% were female. In terms of ethnicity, 1.5% were Asian, 8.7% were African American/Black, 31.3% were Hispanic/Latino/Latina, 4.1% were Multiracial, and 54.4% were Caucasian/White. Of the total sample, 53.3% were eligible for free or reduced lunch which indicates socioeconomic need, 9.7% were eligible for exceptional student education services, 4.6% were eligible for 504 accommodations with an active 504 plan, and 3.5% were identified as limited English proficient.

There were 104 students in the treatment condition. A disaggregation of demographic data found that males constituted 52.9% of the total sample, and 47.1% were female. In terms of ethnicity, 2.9% were Asian, 8.7% were African American/Black, 32.7% were Hispanic/Latino/Latina, 3.8% were Multiracial, and 51.9% were Caucasian/White. Of the total sample, 55.8% were eligible for free or reduced lunch which indicates socioeconomic need, 7.7% were eligible for exceptional student education services, 3.8% were eligible for 504 accommodations with an active 504 plan, and 3.8% were identified as limited English proficient.

There were 91 students in the comparison condition. A disaggregation of demographic data found that males constituted 61.5% of the total sample, and 38.5% were female. In terms of ethnicity, 0% were Asian, 8.8% were African American/Black, 29.7% were Hispanic/Latino/Latina, 4.4% were Multiracial, and 57.1% were Caucasian/White. Of the total sample, 50.5% were eligible for free or reduced lunch which indicates socioeconomic need, 12.1% were eligible for exceptional student education services, 5.5% were eligible for 504 accommodations with an active 504 plan, and 3.3% were identified as limited English proficient.

Students in the treatment group received the RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) starting in January 2017. The RFS program consists of five, 30-minute lessons that are delivered to students by a trained, certified school counselor once a week for five consecutive weeks. Participating school counselors from the treatment and comparison group received training in the manualized RFS program in December 2016; however, only the school counselors in the treatment schools delivered the intervention during the second half of the 2016-2017 school year. The school counselors in the comparison group received their training and comparison group students were eligible to receive the program once the all the study data has been collected. School counselors at the treatment schools were responsible for delivering the program. The school counselors at the comparison schools continued business as usual.

The current study occurred throughout the 2016-2017 school year. Data collection was scheduled to begin in October 2016, following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, but due to delays with IRB approval and school recruitment, did not begin until December 2016. The study included three data collection intervals (pre-test, posttest1, posttest 2). Pretest data was collected in December 2016. The five-weekly RFS lessons were implemented in the treatment schools starting in January 2017 in the treatment. Posttest 1 data was collected directly following the intervention in February 2017. RFS booster sessions were delivered once a month in the treatment schools in March, April, and May of 2017. Following the final booster lesson, posttest 2 data was collected in May 2017. Finally, promotion or retention data was reported by schools at the end of the school year in June 2017.

Social-emotional skills and competence were measured using the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA; LeBuffe, Shapiro, & Naglieri, 2014) self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, and decision making subscales and social-emotional competence composite scale. Reading proficiency was measured using the district adapted Reading Running Record (RRR) portion of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2 (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010), which measures students' independent reading levels and aligns with school district's Student Progression Plan. Promotion rate was measured by school reported data collected for the school district's Student Information System (SIS) system at the end of the 2016-2017 school year. Two promotion groups will be analyzed: non-promotion group and promotion group.

Dependent Variables

The following dependent variables were included in the study:

- Student social-emotional skills:
 - Self-management as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (Teacher Report) self-management subscale.
 - Self-awareness as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (Teacher Report) self-awareness subscale.
 - Social awareness as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (Teacher Report) social awareness subscale.
 - Relationship skills as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (Teacher Report) relationship skills subscale.

- Responsible decision making as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (Teacher Report) decision making subscale.
- Student social-emotional competence as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment composite scale (Teacher Report).
- Student level of reading proficiency as measured by the district adapted Reading Running Record portion of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2 assessment.
- Third-grade promotion rate as measured by Student Information System (SIS) data reports (school level data).

Independent Variables

The RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) was the independent variable. The program was implemented in third-grade classrooms of participating treatment schools. Certified school counselors, who received training in the delivery of the manualized classroom guidance program, led the intervention.

Summary

The current chapter provided an overview of the present study including the significance of the problem, the purpose, study design, research questions and hypotheses, limitations, and definitions of key terms. In Chapter II, the researcher will provide a review of the literature related to: (a) Identifying key social-emotional skills that contribute to social-emotional competence and positive student outcomes; (b) Association between third-grade student reading proficiency and later educational outcomes; (c) Standards or policies for grade level promotion and the consequences of retention; (d) The importance of factors associated with third-grade promotion through

SEL programming; and (e) The role of certified school counselors in SEL. A review of the RFS program, development, research base, and school counselor effectiveness on improved student outcomes will be detailed. Chapter III presents the methodology and procedures used to gather the data, and provides a description of: (a) the setting and sample of participants, (b) study design, (c) dependent and independent variables, (d) instrumentation, (e) study procedures, (f) treatment fidelity and ethical considerations, and (e) data collection and analysis. Chapter IV shares descriptive data and a summary of the test of the hypotheses and research findings related to hypotheses. Finally, Chapter V presents the summary of findings and conclusions related to the current research questions, discussion of results, and implications for practice and future research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Third-grade is a pivotal school year for both students' development of social-emotional competence and their reading abilities. Though originally regarded as a time of latency (Freud, 1961; Piaget, 1932), other theories of development such as Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1968) have acknowledged middle childhood (6 to 11 years old) as a period of active development characterized by an expanded view of self, a need to develop a sense of mastery, and increased social interactions in a variety of contexts (Eccles, 1999). Additionally, Erikson (1968) explained that the development of self-confidence is vital in this stage, as children experience the developmental task of industry (i.e. competence) versus inferiority (i.e. incompetence, inadequacy). Students who develop the necessary social-emotional skills during this period in life are more likely to view themselves as competent individuals. Specific social-emotional skills have been identified as having significant impacts on students' academic achievement, well-being, and behavior (CASEL, 2012). These skills have been identified as contributing to social-emotional competence, allowing students to successfully navigate learning and life (Durlak et al., 2011). Conversely, students who lack social-emotional competence are at significant disadvantage and greater risk for multiple negative outcomes, including poorer academic performance and reading abilities (Benson, 2006; Kupersmidt & DeRosier, 2004). Third-grade students who do not meet grade level proficiency in reading are at risk for mandatory grade retention and are at a significantly higher risk for ultimately dropping out of high school (Hernandez, 2012).

In the following chapter, the researcher will: (a) identify the social-emotional skills necessary for student success and competence, (b) discuss the impact of social-emotional competence on student outcomes, (c) detail the importance of third-grade reading proficiency on later educational outcomes, (d) describe policies surrounding third-grade promotion and retention, (e) present the mixed findings on the effects of grade level retention, (f) describe how SEL addresses factors associated with third-grade promotion, (g) focus on the role of certified school counselors in social-emotional program implementation, and (h) propose the research-based, comprehensive school counseling intervention, the Ready for Success (RFS) classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012), as a SEL intervention to address factors associated with third-grade promotion.

Social-Emotional Skills and Competence

Social-emotional skills, when fostered, have significant impacts on students' well-being, behavior, and academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003; Payton et al., 2008). Social-emotional skill development has gained increased attention over the last 20 years, as an extensive number of empirical studies have shown a significant association between well-developed social-emotional skills and both short-term and long-term positive outcomes for students (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Bernard 2004, 2006; Durlak et al., 2015; Durlak et al., 2011; Elias et al., 1997; Farrington et al., 2012; Greenberg et al., 2003; Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill, & Abott, 2008; Payton et al., 2008; Sklad, Diekstra, Ritter, Ben, & Gravesteyn, 2012). Conversely, students who do not cultivate social-emotional skills are more likely to have difficulty functioning successfully across various settings (i.e. classroom, school, social, and

workplace settings), resulting in negative personal, social, and academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998). Before detailing outcomes related to the development of social-emotional skills, it is imperative for these specific competencies to be defined and understood in the context of middle childhood, a critical period for social-emotional development (Eccles, 1999).

Foundational researchers of social-emotional development, theorized that social-emotional skills are cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies that can be developed to promote optimal student functioning (Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence, 1994; Elias et al., 1997). In 1997, several specific social-emotional skills were identified by the newly formed CASEL including: (a) communicating effectively, (b) ability to work cooperatively with others, (c) emotional self-control and appropriate expression, (d) empathy and perspective taking, (e) optimism, humor, and self-awareness, (f) ability to plan and set goals, (g) solving problems and resolving conflicts thoughtfully and nonviolently, and (h) bringing a reflective, learning-to-learn approach to all domains of life (Elias et al., 1997). In subsequent years, research on social-emotional skill development increased, and a greater understanding of the association between social-emotional skills and educational outcomes emerged (CASEL, 2003). As a result of this significant link between social-emotional and academic learning, in 2001 CASEL changed names from the Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2003). Shortly after this shift, CASEL introduced five interrelated, core clusters of social-emotional skills coined as the “CASEL Five”. The

five competencies identified by the researchers as critical areas of social-emotional development included: (a) self-awareness, (b) social awareness, (c) self-management, (d) relationship skills, (e) responsible decision making (CASEL, 2003; Zins et al., 2004). Each skill set was presented as a fundamental competency for students' school and life effectiveness (CASEL, 2003). The CASEL social-emotional competencies continue to be widely agreed upon in present literature, and are regarded as foundational skills for optimal development (Durlak et al., 2011).

Self-Awareness

The first of the five competencies identified by CASEL (2012) is self-awareness, a social-emotional skill identified earlier on as a critical factor to emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Goleman's (1995) framework of emotional intelligence largely contributed to CASEL's identification of this core social-emotional skill (Elias et al., 1997). Goleman (1995) described self-awareness as being aware of feelings or emotions as they occur and one's thoughts towards those emotions. Self-awareness entails the desire for self-improvement and developing a realistic understanding of both one's strengths and limitations (Elias et al., 2003; LeBuffe et al., 2009). Pellitteri, Stern, Shelton and Ackerman (2006) described that self-awareness involves the realistic, or honest, evaluation of one's feelings, behaviors, strengths and challenges, which can ultimately lead to a stronger sense of self. A widely accepted and comprehensive definition of self-awareness is provided by CASEL (2012):

Self-awareness is the ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately

assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism. (p. 9)

Notably, third-grade students, considered to be in middle childhood (Erikson, 1968) are in a critical period for the development of this intrapersonal skill, as they develop an expanded view of self during this time. (Eccles, 1999; Weiss, 2005). Students in middle childhood become increasingly aware of their own abilities and can more accurately label their emotions than in earlier life stages (Voegler-Lee & Kupersmidt, 2011). With the development of self-awareness, students begin to identify strengths and positive qualities of self, which in turn contributes to improved self-confidence, self-efficacy, and healthy optimism (CASEL, 2003; Durlak et al., 2015). Self-aware students are more likely to become more confident about their capabilities, persist through challenges, and display more effort (Aronson, 2002). Moreover, developing self-awareness aids students in becoming independent learners, increases intrinsic motivation, and contributes toward success in school and life (Flavian, 2016). Finally, self-awareness enhances one's ability to manage behavior and interactions with others and is identified as an effective, and necessary leadership skill later in life (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Goleman, 1995; Frisina, 2014). In essence, when students are aware of self, they are better able to self-evaluate and manage both emotions and behavior. Consequently, self-awareness greatly contributes to a student's ability to develop other key social-emotional skills, particularly self-management.

Self-Management

The second social-emotional skill identified in the CASEL (2003) framework, self-management, is understood as the ability to manage emotions, monitor and regulate

feelings and impulses, and persevere through challenges. Students with well-developed self-management skills are better able to control impulses, possess greater self-discipline, and effectively manage stress (Dusenbury, Zadrazil, Mart, & Weissberg, 2011).

Additionally, this intrapersonal skill contributes to students' self-motivation, self-discipline, and organization, all of which are necessary to set goals towards self-improvement (Ee & Ong, 2014). CASEL (2012) captures all of these elements of self-management in one succinct definition:

Self-management is the ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals. (p. 9)

Importantly, students who possess competence in self-management exhibit greater academic readiness. Students with the skill of self-management more effectively use their time, as evidenced by on-task behavior and task completion (Reid, Trout & Schartz, 2005). Self-management practices control different aspects of individuals' behavior, including managing attention and feelings of anger, students' motivation, and beliefs about personal and academic abilities (Campbell & Brigman, 2005). Duckworth and Seligman (2005) concluded that self-control entails students' exercising self-discipline, which is a factor far more predictive of positive academic outcomes than measures of intellectual ability (i.e. IQ). Additionally, third-grade students are at a stage in development where it becomes increasingly essential to set, monitor, and evaluate personal and academic goals (Eccles, 1999; Elias et al., 1997). Thus, a major practice of self-management is the use of goal setting to promote students' attention and persistence

towards academic tasks (Zins et al., 2007). In summation, students who possess strong self-management skills are better able to exhibit self-control, conscientiousness, adaptability, and initiative (Carr, 2004). Self-management is imperative for productive interactions with others in social contexts. When students are able to effectively regulate and communicate their feelings and emotions, social relationships become easier to navigate. Thus, self-management greatly contributes towards development of social awareness.

Social Awareness

The third social-emotional skill identified by CASEL (2012) differs from self-awareness and self-management in that the focus shifts from self to others. Social awareness is an interpersonal skill associated with student's ability to empathize with others, interact successfully in a variety of social contexts, understand the perspectives of others, and respect individual and group differences and similarities (Denham, Brown, & Domitrovich, 2010). CASEL (2012) defines social awareness as, "the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports" (p.9). Students in middle childhood are more capable of developing social awareness than in previous developmental stages (Elias et al., 1997). Third-grade students experience increased social interactions and opportunities for choosing friendships. They also begin to appreciate the value of being part of a team or group (Eccles, 1999). Additionally, students begin to recognize the feelings, needs, and perspectives of others. Selman (2003) asserts that children at this age have an increased capacity for social understanding and empathy. To this point, it is

evident that students in middle childhood become more sensitive to the needs and feelings of others (Eccles, 1999). The skill of social awareness is imperative for the successful navigation of social interactions, especially during this period of broadened social worlds. Finally, as students become more socially aware they become better equipped to develop the relationship skills necessary to establish and maintain healthy relationships.

Relationship Skills

The fourth social-emotional competency, relationship skills, involves the ability to cooperate with others, build healthy relationships, resist negative social pressure, and resolve interpersonal conflicts effectively (Payton et al., 2008). Relationship skills are interpersonal skills used to create friendships, and also to disengage from negative, unhealthy relationships (Zaff et al., 2016). CASEL (2012) defines this competency as:

The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed. (p. 9)

Central to this interpersonal competency is the development of communication and cooperation skills. In order for healthy relationships to be formed and preserved, students must learn how to productively communicate and collaborate with others (CASEL, 2012). As students in middle childhood begin to place increased value on being part of a team, it becomes increasingly important for them to be able to work through naturally occurring conflicts (Elias et al., 1997). Notably, students who are successful in the development of relationship skills are more likely to possess positive social behaviors and

peer relationships (Durlak et al., 2011; Payton et al., 2008; Zins & Elias, 2007).

Additionally, feelings of connectedness and student engagement in school are increased when student successfully develop strong, lasting relationships with peers, teachers, and other adults (CASEL, 2012; Klem & Connell, 2004; Libbey, 2004; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013).

Responsible Decision Making

The final social-emotional skill responsible decision making is highly dependent on the successful development of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship skills (Elias et al., 1997). Worzby, O'Rourke, and Dandeneau (2003) assert that the aforementioned domains of social-emotional development are perquisites to responsible decision making. This skill requires students to regulate emotions, consider the short- and long-term consequences of decisions on self and others, and identify strategies to solve interpersonal conflicts as they occur within social contexts (Denham et al., 2010; Elias et al., 1997). As explained by CASEL (2012), responsible decision making is the ability to “make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others” (p.9). Often, prosocial behavioral choices are reliant on a student's ability to make responsible decisions (Denham et al., 2010). The responsible decision making process requires the identification of possible decisions, exploration of potential solutions and consequences, and the evaluation of decisions made in a range of life and school circumstances. Students in middle childhood become more autonomous as they broaden their social relationships outside of family (Eccles, 1999), which presents

more opportunities for independent decision making. If students are repeatedly successful in making responsible decisions that contribute towards school and life successes, they will begin to develop a strong sense of competence (Erikson, 1968; Worzbyt, O'Rourke & Dandeneau, 2003).

Ultimately, when students develop an awareness of self and identify personal strengths and abilities (self-awareness), they are better able to regulate emotions and behaviors (self-management). This leads to an improved understanding of the feelings and perspectives of others (social awareness) and an ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships (relationship skills). Subsequently, students are more qualified to make responsible decisions and solve interpersonal problems independently. The competencies described are five interrelated cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills essential for students' development of social-emotional competence, which significantly contributes to success in both school and life (CASEL, 2012; Durlak et al., 2011). Farrington et al. (2012) asserted that factors such as self-control, academic perseverance, self-regulation/self-management, goal setting, are among some of the non-cognitive factors pivotal for academic achievement. Social-emotional skills are influential in equipping students for the demands of the classroom and school (CASEL, 2012). When students are successful in developing social-emotional skills they reach a level of competence that is necessary for academic readiness and learning (Denham et al., 2010).

Social-Emotional Competence and Student Outcomes

Social-emotional competence is the ability to effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and regulate emotions, set and achieve positive personal and academic goals, interact well and empathize with others, establish

and maintain positive and cooperative relationships, and make responsible decisions in an age and contextually appropriate manner (CASEL, 2012, LeBuffe et al., 2009). In other words, the mastery of social-emotional skills contributes to social-emotional competence, which is associated with various positive cognitive, behavioral, and academic outcomes for students (Durlak et al. 2011). On the other hand, when students lack social-emotional competence there is the potential for challenges and negative student outcomes.

Goleman (2008) explains that emotions can either improve or hinder learning. In support of this view, Miles and Stipek (2006) affirm that social behavior has the potential to promote or undermine students' learning and academic performance. Thus, an understanding of both the positive effects of social-emotional competence and the negative implications of weak social-emotional skills, are necessary to effectively support student learning and development.

Social-emotional competence has been identified as the bridge to optimal student learning and development (Elias & Haynes, 2008). In fact, the National Association of State Boards of Education, proclaim the promotion of social-emotional development is "every bit as critical to student's success as their mastery of purely academic content and skills" (Heller, 2013, p.1). A growing body of evidence indicates students' social emotional competence is essential to academic success (Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003; Payton et al. 2008). For instance, students with higher levels of social-emotional competence are well-adjusted and demonstrate academic readiness, or a readiness to learn (Denham, 2006). Moreover, social-emotional competent students are not only more engaged in learning, but also have an increased capacity for learning (Durlak et al., 2011). The contribution of social-emotional competence to academic

learning is marked by improved test scores, grades, and reading ability (Bernard, 2004; Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003; Zins et al., 2004). Additionally, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura and Zimbardo (2000) found a predictive relationship between social-emotional skills and later academic achievement. These researchers discovered that students' eighth grade academic achievement was predicted by their ability to share, cooperate, and empathize with others in third-grade. Elias and Haynes (2008) examined the relationship between school outcomes and social-emotional competence of third-grade students using structural equation modeling. They found that social-emotional competence affects academic performance of at-risk students from disadvantage neighborhoods. Additional findings showed initial levels of social-emotional competence and improvements in social-emotional competence throughout school year predicts end-of-year outcomes for third-grade students (Elias & Haynes, 2008). Furthermore, social-emotional competence serves as a protective factor to conduct problems (i.e. disruptive behavior, aggression, bullying, and delinquency) and emotional distress (i.e. depression, stress, and social withdrawal) by promoting prosocial behavior and positive peer relationships (Greenberg et al., 2003; Mariani et al., 2015). To this end, students with social-emotional competence have more friendships and are less likely to be rejected or bullied by peers. The benefits of social-emotional competence are wide-spread and long-lasting including increased probability of high school graduation, improved college and career readiness, stronger interpersonal relationships, improved mental health, and decreased criminal behavior (Hawkins et al., 2008). With the understanding that social-emotional competence has far-reaching

impacts on a wide-range of positive student outcomes, it is comprehensible that deficiency in social-emotional skills creates the potential for negative consequences.

On the contrary, Elias and Wesissberg (2000) stated, “poor social-emotional skills affect the individual, the school, the family, and the community, leaving no one untouched” (p. 186). A lack of social-emotional competence is associated with internalizing (i.e. withdrawal, depression, distress) and externalizing behavior (aggression, noncompliance, delinquency), both of which disrupt learning (Eisenberg, Fabes & Spinrad, 2006; Ladd, Herarld, & Kochel, 2006). Student with gaps in social-emotional development often exhibit distress and disruptive behavior, which ultimately interfere with learning (Ladd et al., 2006). Additionally, lags in social-emotional development can lead to limited connectedness in the classroom and school environments and a general dislike of school (Denham et al., 2010; Durlak et al., 2011). Thus, poor social-emotional competence can interfere with students’ motivation and engagement in learning. Furthermore, students’ ability to perform well on academic tasks is negatively impacted, resulting in lower academic achievement and the potential for school failure (Kupersmidt & DeRosier, 2004). Benson (2006) found that when students have social-emotional deficits their academic performance is lower. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013) reported that social-emotional problems impair students’ cognitive function, development, and readiness to learn, which contributes towards lower literacy skills and struggles in reading. The association between social-emotional deficits and literacy skills has major implications for third-grade students who are at the pivotal point in attaining reading proficiency.

Reading Proficiency

Proficiency can be broadly defined as students' ability to demonstrate mastery of grade level standards in academic subject areas. The ability to read proficiently is considered fundamental to student learning, school performance, and educational attainment (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013). In fact, it has been stated that reading proficiency is the single most fundamental skill for academic learning and school success (Block & Israel, 2005). Furthermore, reading proficiency is not only foundational for school-based learning, but is also strongly associated with later educational, life, and career outcomes (Lesnick et al., 2010). Elementary school sets the groundwork for literacy development and acquiring the reading skills necessary for teach (Hernandez, 2012). More specifically, during elementary school a critical transition occurs from third-grade to fourth grade, wherein focus shifts from students learning to read to reading to learn (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). Therefore, third-grade reading proficiency is imperative for subsequent learning and meeting the increased academic demands across subject areas (Lesnick et al., 2010). To that end, if students are unable to read proficiently by the end of third-grade they are at significantly greater risk for negative educational and life outcomes (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013; Hernandez, 2012; Kutner et al., 2007).

Reading Proficiency at the National, State, and District Level

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2015) describes proficiency as an achievement level in which students demonstrate solid performance and competency of challenging grade level standards, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills appropriate

to the subject matter. NAEP (2015) is an assessment program that collects national student data in a variety of subject areas, including reading. The program is conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to provide insight on students' achievement in fourth, eighth, and twelfth grade at the national, state, and large urban school district level. The results of the NAEP are not intended to report reading proficiency at the individual student level, rather they are designed to show comparative trends in reading proficiency using representative samples of students and a probability sample design. The Nation's Report Card™, which reports results of the NAEP, is published on a bi-yearly basis. Startlingly, results from the 2015 assessment indicate that only 36% of fourth grade students are reading at or above a proficient level in the United States (NAEP, 2015). The report indicated a clear achievement gap between Black (18% proficient), and Hispanic (21% proficient) students, and their White (46% proficient) and Asian (57% proficient) counterparts. Furthermore, only 39% of fourth grade students in Florida are reading at or above a proficient level. Though students in Florida are scoring higher than the national average, this percentage was not significantly different from that in 2013 (NAEP, 2015). Thus, it appears that student progress towards grade level reading proficiency remained stagnant in recent years (NAEP, 2015). In result, consideration of state and district standards for reading proficiency and measures is necessary.

In 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2016). The bipartisan legislation reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1969) and increased state authority over student performance standards and assessed using multiple measures (Civic Impulse, 2016). In brief, states are responsible for setting

proficiency standards and deciding how they will assess student progress and achievement on such standards. According to the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE, 2014b), by the end of third-grade students are expected to be proficient, independent readers. Simply stated, third-grade students must be able to read independently and understand grade level words, sentences, and paragraphs without assistance to succeed in future grade levels (FLDOE, 2014b). The Florida Standards (2014) are a set of foundational expectations (i.e. standards) for all students at each individual grade level (i.e. kindergarten through twelfth grade). The Language Arts Florida Standards (FLDOE, 2014b) for third-grade emphasize phonemic awareness, phonics, and word recognition (i.e. word analysis skills and decoding), accuracy and fluency in reading, and comprehending on grade level text, and the ability to read and comprehend grades 2-3 complexity texts independently and proficiently. In order to measure third-grade students' mastery of standards achievement, all third-grade students in Florida are required to complete the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA), which measures students' achievement on the Florida Standards (Florida Student Assessment Program for Public Schools, Fla. Stat. § 1008.22, 2015). This measure offers an achievement level score ranging from level 1 to 5. A score of 3 indicates that a student is proficient, or on grade level. However, the pitfall of standardized achievement assessments, such as the FSA, is that it is administered as a summative measure of achievement towards the end of the school year. Consequently, this measure does not allow for early identification of students who are not making progress towards grade level standards. For that reason, school districts are responsible for establishing research

based reading plans that set measurable goals for monitoring and assessing student reading achievement.

The FLDOE requires that each elementary school regularly assess the reading ability of each student in kindergarten to third-grade according to Florida Statute § 1002.20(11) (Florida Student and Parental Rights and Educational Choices, Fla. Stat. § 1002.20, 2015). In the participating school district, third-grade reading proficiency is measured using the Fountas and Pinnell's Benchmark Assessment System 2 (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010), a part of the School District's K-5 Literacy Assessment System. This measure is mandatory in all K-5 schools within the district, and is administered a minimum of three times a year. The goals of this measure are to monitor students' progress towards trimester benchmark standards throughout the school year and to assess a student's independent reading level at the end of the school year. According to school district requirements students demonstrate reading proficiency through reading skill/concept development that meets the grade level standards (i.e. benchmark reading level). In 2015, nearly half of all third-grade students in the county were not meeting grade level proficiency standards in reading (Florida Standards). This high rate of deficiency prompts the exploration of the impacts of reading proficiency on later educational outcomes.

Third-Grade Student Reading Proficiency and Later Educational Outcomes

Existing literature has established the association between third-grade reading proficiency and future educational outcomes (Hernandez, 2012; Jacob & Lefgren, 2009; Lesnick et al., 2010). Students who achieve reading proficiency in third-grade are far more likely to perform stronger in later grades, graduate high school, and pursue

postsecondary education (Lesnick et al., 2010). Researchers have also linked below grade level reading proficiency at the end of third-grade with various negative outcome such as behavioral and social-emotional problems in later grades (Miles & Stipek, 2006), and an increased risk for poor academic performance, grade level retention, and dropping out of high school (Hernandez, 2012; Jacob & Lefgren, 2009).

Lesnick et al. (2010) conducted a longitudinal study to explore the impact of third-grade reading level on later educational outcomes. Specifically, the researchers examined relationship between third-grade reading and eighth-grade reading performance, ninth-grade course performance, high school graduation, and college attendance. In this study, they followed 26,000 first-time third-graders during the 1996-1997 school year. The correlation study used multilevel regression models to make estimations on the gap in eighth grade reading levels, ninth-grade course performance, high school graduation rates, and college enrollment rates for students below, at, or above grade level reading proficiency in third-grade. Another finding of the study was that third-grade reading proficiency predicted eighth-grade reading level and is a significant predictor ($r = .067$) of eighth grade reading scores even after controlling for demographics. Furthermore, it was found that both third-grade reading level and eighth grade reading performance are associated with ninth-grade course performance. Finally, third-grade reading level was also shown to be a predictor of high school graduation and college attendance. Students above grade level reading in third-grade attending college at significantly higher rates than those students who were below grade level. These findings suggest a strong positive correlation between third-grade reading proficiency and later educational outcomes.

Conversely, below grade level reading proficiency has been linked to negative school and life outcomes. First, an association has been made between behavior and social-emotional concerns and reading proficiency. Miles and Stipek (2006) conducted path analyses, which revealed that poor reading achievement in third-grade predicted later aggressive behavior and social problems. Next, poor reading abilities upon entering fourth grade were directly associated with poor academic performance, as students below grade level will be unable to comprehend approximately 85% of the grade level curriculum (Children's Reading Foundation, 2016). When students lack reading proficiency, they are at increased risk of grade retention. This association with school failure persists well into students' academic career, as 75% of students with low reading proficiency in third-grade will remain poor readers into high school (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). Hernandez (2012) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the relationship between third-grade reading proficiency and high school graduation rate. The researchers divided the sample of 3,975 students born between 1979 and 1989 into three separate groups (i.e. proficient, basic, below basic) based on reading proficiency levels on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The researcher found that one in six students who do not read on grade level in third-grade will drop out of high school, which is four times the rate of proficient third-grade readers (Hernandez, 2012). Additionally, when accounting for socioeconomic status, it was found that children exposed to poverty, even if only for a year, were three times more likely to drop out of high school than students who were never poor. Furthermore, 63% of all students who did not graduate from high school on time (i.e. 4-years) were not proficient readers.

in third-grade (Hernandez, 2012). These findings on the importance of early literacy skills have culminated in an intense focus on improving 3rd grade reading proficiency

The considerable implications of third-grade reading proficiency have incited state level policies surrounding third-grade reading and student progression. Namely, policies regarding promotion and retention decisions of third-grade students who do not meet grade level expectations in reading. Several states have responded by enacting mandatory retention laws, which require schools to retain students who are not meeting grade level proficiency standards, an intervention that has produced mixed results in the literature, and much debate amongst educational professional and policymakers.

Promotion Rate

Promotion is defined as a student's progression from one grade level to another. Students are promoted to the next grade level upon satisfactory performance on grade level standards in various subject areas (i.e. English Language Arts, mathematics, social studies, and science). Promotion decisions are made at the school level. However, decision making processes must follow the prevailing district school board criteria for student progression, which is formally created around state statutes and laws for promotion. According to the 2015 Florida state statute 1008.25, school districts are required to establish a comprehensive plan for student progression that emphasizes reading proficiency in kindergarten through third-grade (Florida Public School Student Progression, Fla. Stat. § 1008.25, 2015). As mentioned, many states have enacted policies specifically surrounding the promotion or retention of third-grade students, with reading proficiency being the driving factor.

Standards and Policies for Promotion

In response to dramatically low rates of reading proficiency across the United States, and the later negative impacts, many states have responded by passing third-grade reading laws. Workman (2014) identified various states that require a range of intervention practices such as, placement on an Academic Improvement Plan, online/computer-based instruction, extended day or extended year, transition classes, additional support and supplemental reading for reading specialist, summer reading programs, individual or group tutoring, and tailored instruction. Several states require the mandatory retention of third-grade students who are not meeting proficiency standards (Workman, 2014). Currently, 16 states (Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Washington) plus District of Columbia mandate retention with some exemptions permitted, and three additional states allow students to be retained based on parent, teacher, or superintendent recommendation (Workman, 2014). From this group, four states mandate retention, but do not require district schools or educators to implement any intervention strategies for struggling readers. Another 14 states (Alabama, Alaska, Hawaii, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota) do not have any third-grade reading laws currently in place (Workman, 2014).

Florida was one of the first states to enact a third-grade mandatory retention law through the passing of Florida Statute 1008.25(5)(6) in 2002, which resulted in the retention of nearly 23,348 third-graders in the 2003-2004 school year, according to state level data (Florida Public School Student Progression, Fla. Stat. § 1008.25, 2015;

FLDOE, 2004). This law is also known as the test-based promotion policy that ended social promotion (i.e. promoting students regardless of proficiency levels to keep them with their same age peers). The law requires students who score at a level one on the state-wide standardized reading assessment be retained in grade and receive multiple interventions to support growth in reading. The law requires that retained students attend a summer reading camp, be placed with a highly effective teacher (as determined by performance evaluations) during the retained year, be placed on an Academic Improvement Plan tailored to individual needs, and receive a minimum of 90 additional minutes of uninterrupted, evidence-based reading instruction daily. Additionally, this policy requires early intervention procedures for students who are not meeting grade level standards for reading proficiency. The early identification of students with substantial reading deficiency is required in grades K-3, and should be based upon district determined and/or statewide assessments. At the time a student is identified as deficient in reading they must receive intensive reading instruction until proficiency is demonstrated. Furthermore, the law requires parental notification of any student who has substantial deficiency in reading and is at risk for mandatory retention. Parents must be made aware of district specific retention decision making processes, alternate assessments, and the criteria and policies for good cause exemptions and student portfolios. Additionally, the law allows schools in Florida to offer students' exemptions to grade level retentions, but only if they meet one or more of the criteria for what is regarded to as a good cause exemption.

Good cause exemptions are defined as, "conditions that exist such that retention would be more adverse for the student than the promotion" (K-12 Student Progression

Plan, 2015, p. 114). Students not meeting grade level proficiency in third-grade can be promoted to fourth grade, if one or more of the following exemptions exist:

- (1) English Language Learner (ELL) with less than two years of instruction in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program;
- (2) Student with disability with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that indicates participation in the statewide assessment program is not appropriate;
- (3) Students who demonstrate acceptable level of performance on an alternative standardized reading or English Language Arts (ELA) assessment approved by the State Board of Education;
- (4) Students demonstrate through a student portfolio that he or she is performing at least at Level 2 on the statewide, standardized ELA assessment;
- (5) Students with disabilities who take the statewide, standardized ELA assessment and who have an IEP or a Section 504 plan that reflects that the student has received intensive instruction in reading or ELA for more than 2 years but still demonstrates a deficiency and was previously retained in kindergarten, first grade, second grade, or third-grade;
- (6) Students who have received intensive reading intervention for two or more years but still demonstrate a deficiency in reading and who were previously retained in kindergarten, first grade, second grade, or third-grade for a total of two years. A student may not be retained more than once in third-grade; and
- (7) Students who have received intensive remediation in reading or ELA for two or more years, but still demonstrate a deficiency and who were previously

retained in kindergarten, first grade, second grade, or third-grade for a total of two years.

Students promoted to fourth grade due to a good cause exemption are placed on an Academic Improvement Plan (i.e. Progress Monitoring Plan, PMP), which requires intensive reading instruction using evidence-based reading interventions. In all, there are three promotion trajectories for third-grade students in Florida (i.e. promoted, promoted with good cause exemption, or retained). As outlined by Florida Alternative Standardized Reading Assessment and Use of Student Portfolio for Good Cause Promotion Rule (2014), third-grade students who do not meet criteria for good cause exemption and score below a level two on the FSA-ELA are required to attend a Summer Reading Academy (SRA). At the end of SRA students are administered the Stanford Achievement Test, Tenth Edition (SAT10) as an alternate assessment. If students score at or above the 45th percentile on the SAT10 they will be promoted to fourth grade.

Policies regarding mandatory third-grade retention, such as Florida's, have sparked controversy due to the mixed conclusions on the consequences of grade level retention on student outcomes. There is an extensive string of research presenting the negative and harmful implications of grade level retention. However, more recently research surrounding third-grade retention policies, especially those with required intervention procedures in place, has challenged earlier findings (Greene & Winters, 2007, 2009; Lorence, 2014; Winters & Greene, 2012)

Consequences of Grade Level Retention

Research on the impacts of grade level retention is mixed, as many researchers have associated grade level retention with harmful academic and social-emotional

outcomes (Roderick, 1994; Crothers et al., 2010; Thomas et al., 1992), and greater potential for high school dropout (Hernandez, 2012). Moreover, some studies indicate the retention does not serve its purpose, as it does not increase academic performance on the majority of retained students (Cannon, Lipscomb & Public Policy Institute of California, 2011; Dawson, 1998; Jimerson, 2001; Moore, 2000; Silberglitt, Appleton, Burns, & Jimerson, 2006). Contrarily, other studies have shown that third-grade retention can increase performance on standardized reading assessments (Greene & Winters, 2007, 2009; Winters & Greene, 2012). Understandably, some researchers have adopted perplexed views over retention. Smith and Ronan (2014) state, “After decades of research, the only pervasive conclusion is that retention does not have a clear and consistent impact on student outcomes later in life” (p.58). Thus, a review of the literature surrounding grade level retention, particularly at the third-grade level is necessary.

An extensive body of quantitative research dating back to the early 20th century has suggested that grade level retention has significant negative effects on retained students’ later academic performance and social-emotional outcomes (Holmes, 1989; Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jimerson, 2001; Jimerson et al., 2006; Roderick & Nagaoka 2005; Shepard, Smith, & Marion, 1996). Holmes (1989) conducted a meta-analysis on the findings of 63 studies from 1925 to 1989 surrounding grade level retention and found that 54 studies demonstrated negative achievement effects for retained students when they moved on to the subsequent grade level. The study produced an overall effect of $d = -.15$, which indicated that retained students on average score .15 standard deviations lower on academic outcome measures. Jimerson (2001) conducted a systematic review

and meta-analysis of 20 retention studies published in the 1990s. Results showed a mean ES of $d = -.39$, which indicated that retained students had lower academic achievement than promoted students. This finding was consistent across all subject areas (i.e. Language Arts, Reading, and Mathematics). Social-emotional and behavior adjustment were also found to be lower for retained students with an ES of $d = -.22$. Furthermore, Jimerson (2001) found that 80% of studies included in the meta-analysis did not support grade retention as an efficacious intervention. Similarly, Martin (2011) found that grade retention was a significant negative predictor of academic self-concept and self-esteem. Crothers et al. (2010), found that students who are old-for-grade (i.e. older than peers in grade level due to retention) exhibit increased bullying behavior and victim behavior compared to age-appropriate-for-grade peers. In another study, Roderick and Nagaoaka (2005) studied the impact of the test-based promotion policies in Chicago using a regression discontinuity approach and found that students who were retained due to not achieving the proficiency score necessary on a state-mandated tests did not benefit from this policy. In fact, they found that retained third-graders experienced a relatively small increase in performance the year after retention, but retention displayed no positive effects on performance two years post-retention. Therefore, concluding that grade retention serves no benefit to students.

The impact on achievement and social-emotional factors led researchers to explore the long-term consequences of grade retention. On average, every student who does not complete high school costs \$260,000 to society in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity, making high school dropout a significant economical concern in the United States (Riley & Peterson, 2008). A longitudinal study followed retained students for 21

years and found that retained students exhibited lower levels of achievement, behavior and attendance concerns, were 20% to 25% more likely to drop out of high school at age 19, and were less likely to receive a diploma and enroll in post-secondary education (Jimserson, 1999). Many researchers support this same notion that grade level retention increases a students' risk of dropping out of high school and never earning a diploma (Alexander et al. 2001; Allensworth, 2005; Eide & Showalter, 2001; Jimerson et al., 2002; Roderick, 1994; Rumberger, 1995). Rumberger (1995) found that retained students are 11 times more likely to not complete high school than non-retained students. Jimerson et al. (2002) identify the experience of grade retention as one of the most dominant predictors of high school dropout. More recently, Ou and Reynolds (2010) assessed the long term impacts of elementary retention and found that retained students were significantly less likely to complete high school and pursue postsecondary education. Congruently, Andrew (2014) used propensity score matching and sibling fixed-effects models to discover that primary grade retention reduces students' odds of high school completion by approximately 60 percent.

Yet another significant finding in the literature is the disproportionate rate at which ethnic/racial minorities and low socioeconomic students are retained, compared to their white counterparts (McCombs, Kirby & Mariano, 2009). Reschly and Christenson (2013) indicated that low income Hispanic and Black males are much more likely to be retained. In Florida from 2013 to 2014, Black and Hispanic students represented 62.5% of the students retained that school year (FLDOE, 2014a). This disparity has researchers led researchers to conclude that grade retention unfairly punishes disadvantaged students.

On the other hand, the opposing view is that grade retention does in fact benefit the student and raises student achievement levels. This contrasting stake is built around the premise that previously mentioned reviews and meta-analyses lacked strong methodology and statistical methods (Reschly & Christenson, 2013). Furthermore, that some of the previous literature, particularly the large scale meta-analyses of Holmes (1989) and Jimerson (2001), were conducted prior to the accountability movement, which prompted the intensive, evidence-based interventions for students in retention year (Reschly & Christenson, 2013). Recent investigators have made contradictory inferences about the impact of grade retention on student outcomes.

Greene and Winters (2007) explored the effects of Florida's 2002 test-based promotion policy on student proficiency in reading one and two years after third-grade retention. Using an instrumental variable approach and two distinct IV comparisons (i.e. regression discontinuity design and an across-year approach) the researchers found retained third-grade students performed slightly better on standardized reading scores than socially promoted students the first year after retention, but the reading gains were not statistically significant. However, statistical significance was found in reading score differences in year two, with retained students outperforming socially promoted peers. The researchers suggested that it is necessary to explore the long-term association of third-grade retention and reading proficiency and the probability of graduating high school. They followed up in 2012 with a regression discontinuity study to explore the casual estimates of the effect of Florida's policy on reading and math achievement five years post retention (Winters & Green, 2012). Statistically significant gains in reading and math were evident the first year after retention, but that the gains decline over time,

becoming statistically insignificant after five years. Importantly, the researchers pointed out that the results of this study are strictly related to test-based promotion policies in Florida that mandate summer school attendance, placement with highly effective teacher in retention year, and intensive reading instruction (Winters & Green, 2012). The effects of retention could not be completely disaggregated from these additional interventions.

Allen, Chen, Wilson, and Hughes (2009) conducted a meta-analysis to address the concern with variability in effect sizes among earlier studies regarding retention. The researchers investigated 207 effect sizes stemming from 22 published studies from 1990 to 2007. Using multi-level modeling the examined between study variables (design quality) and individual level variables (median grade retained and median number of years post retention). They asserted that many previous studies of retention use minimally adequate control for pre-retention differences between students who are retained or promoted. Their findings suggest that studies that utilize methodological controls for non-equivalence found that grade retention does not significantly impact later achievement with a mean effect size of $g=.04$. This study produced results consistent with previous literature, that though an initial increase in improvement is evident in the retained year, this gain becomes statistically insignificant over time (Jacob & Lergren, 2004). Huddleston (2014) furthers this point by stating that short-term gains produced by test-based retention policies fade over time, students once again fall behind, and as a result of retention are more likely to drop out of high school. The researchers suggest that because results indicate that achievement significantly is not impacted, the cost-effectiveness and educational benefits of retention comes into question (Allen et al., 2009). Rose and Schimke (2012) reported in an Education Commission of the States

report that grade retention costs on average \$10,297 for each retained student per year. This would suggest that grade retention cost the state of Florida approximately \$163.5 million in 2013-2014. This is a sizeable consideration when determining if the use of grade retention as an intervention is the most beneficial approach to addressing reading deficiency.

Lorence (2014) explored the academic performance of over 38,000 third-grade students in Texas who did not reach proficiency scores on a state-mandated reading test. He controlled for initial differences between groups (i.e. retained and socially promoted students). Findings of this study suggest that third-grade retention does not lead to increased academic disadvantage, but rather higher reading scores in retained students than their socially promoted counterparts. Similar to Greene and Winters (2007), the researcher suggested that the results of this study may be partly due to the supplemental instructional practices Texas and the extra individual support students receive during the retention year (Lorence, 2014). To that end, students retained in states that do not require or implement intensive reading interventions may not exhibit the same reading growth. West (2012) argued that promoting students to the next grade while providing intensive individualized instructional support is equally as effective and avoids the high economic costs associated with grade retention.

In conclusion, researchers have long disagreed on whether grade retention is an efficacious approach or a harmful intervention for students and society. In a review of the research spanning the last 27 years, it becomes evident that there is little empirical support for grade retention as a significantly impactful intervention for addressing students' reading deficiencies. Furthermore, previous studies have only evaluated

students' academic growth on state standardized-test measures of achievement and have not explored whether grade retention is an effective approach for improving students' proficiency on grade level standards, particularly in reading (Greene & Winters, 2007, 2009; Lorence, 2014; Winters & Green, 2012). In short, it has not been reported whether the immediate gains in achievement were gains significant enough to bring students to proficiency levels. Thus, researchers have encouraged a shift in prevention and evidence-based interventions that support struggling students towards meeting or exceeding grade level proficiency standards on multiple measures of proficiency (Jimerson et al. 2006; Lynch, 2013).

Alternative Approaches

Many alternative approaches to retention have been supported in the research and place a strong emphasis on early and frequent intervention. Recommendations for early reading intervention such as intensive instruction, tutoring, after-school programs, and remediation have been underlined (Bowman, 2005; Burk, 1998; Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003; Jimerson et al., 2006; Lynch 2013). In addition, the hiring of highly effective teachers has become a priority of many state school boards and districts (Balkcom, 2014; Winters & Greene, 2012). Finally, in recognition of the strong association between social-emotional skills (i.e. the cognitive, behavioral, and affective abilities of students) and students' academic and behavioral outcomes, researchers have recommended comprehensive programs to promote both social and academic development (Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003; Jimerson et al., 2006; Lynch, 2013; Stearns, Moller, Balu, & Potochnick, 2007). White and Kelly (2010) highlighted the importance of providing explicit social skills instruction as a preventative approach to negative educational outcomes for

students, including student grade retention and potential high school dropout. Additionally, Stearns et al., (2007) explained that educators should focus on improving student engagement in both academic and social contexts. Jimerson and Kaufman (2003) emphasized the importance of promoting both academic and social success of students through comprehensive, evidence-based strategies. Comprehensive SEL programs can serve as both a proactive approach to prevent academic and behavior problems and an intervention that strengthens students' academic and social-emotional skills that are necessary for educational success (Zins et al., 2004).

Social-Emotional Learning

Advocates of comprehensive programs for the prevention and intervention of negative student outcomes, such as reading deficiencies and grade level retention, put emphasis on selecting programs that promote students' academic, social, and emotional learning (Zins et al. 2004). Durlak et al. (2011) contended that schools will see the greatest student outcomes when both academic and social-emotional are addressed through evidence-based programming. This contention has led many researchers to explore the impacts of SEL on student outcomes (Elias et al., 1997; Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003; Payton et al., 2008; Zins et al., 2004).

The evolution of SEL first began in the literature with Daniel Goleman's (1995) theory of Emotional Intelligence, which built upon the work of Salovey and Mayers (1990). The theory identified five essential characteristics that contribute to emotional intelligence: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-regulation, (c) motivation, (d) empathy, and (e) social skills. Consequently, researchers in education began to notice the concept of emotional intelligence and began to question how this concept could be taught in school.

The Fetzer Group, which consisted of educators, researchers, and child advocates, worked together to develop a conceptual framework for promoting social, emotional, and academic competence, which they coined “social-emotional learning” (Elias et. al, 1997). SEL has been defined by CASEL, 2015) as,

The process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand emotion, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (p. 1)

The development of the SEL construct prompted the creation of the CASEL, which targets the promotion and advancement of evidence-based SEL in education. According to CASEL (2015), the mission of their organization is to integrate SEL as a central part of education from preschool through high school. CASEL (2015) has developed a framework that underlines specific social-emotional competencies that are essential for children’s success in life and school. The interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills known as the “CASEL Five” were previously detailed in this review. CASEL’s framework of SEL is a comprehensive framework for systematically addressing these competencies within the school context through classroom and universal interventions. CASEL supports the notion that social-emotional skills can be taught through teaching, modeling, and facilitating the application of social-emotional competencies in a safe, caring, and engaging learning environment (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Therefore, SEL has both a person-centered focus (i.e. students’ skill development) and an environmental focus (i.e. caring, supportive, safe classroom/school climate). Durlak et al. (2011) asserted that SEL programs are most effective when they

follow the SAFE practices established by researchers through SAFE programs are: (a) sequenced (i.e. connected and coordinated sets of activities), (b) active (i.e. active forms of learning to help students master new skills), (c) focused (i.e., emphasis on developing personal and social skills), and (d) explicit (i.e. targeting specific social-emotional skills). According to Kaufman and Hulleman (2015), all SEL programs are designed around a theory of change, which focuses on developing core components necessary to produce intended changes and outcomes (i.e. social-emotional and academic skill development). Ultimately, SEL programs are designed using this theory of change to improve students' social-emotional and academic competence through explicit SEL programs, integration of SEL and academics, and SEL classroom teaching practices (Kauffman & Hulleman, 2015). A growing evidence-base for SEL suggests that social and emotional learning (SEL) is in fact fundamental to academic success, long-term achievement, and positive development of students (Durlak et. al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012). Furthermore, evidence-base suggests that SEL can have long-lasting positive impacts on students' well-being, educational attainment, and adulthood outcomes (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015).

SEL and Student Outcomes

Much of the earlier literature on SEL examined school-based prevention programs that were targeted to address specific issues (i.e. substance abuse, conduct problems, problem solving, bullying etc.) For example, Zins et al. (2004) reported that schools used a median of 14 interventions to prevent problem behaviors and concerns in the school environment. Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich and Gullotta (2015) explained that this “piecemeal” approach usually results in short-term interventions that are not adequately

integrated (p. 3). Greenberg et al. (2003) conducted a research synthesis to explore the impacts of school-based prevention and youth development programs. Certain studies examined programs that targeted specific problem behaviors, whereas others examine classroom-based SEL programs. The researchers reviewed the results of numerous meta-analyses and research syntheses on a number of student outcomes related to positive youth development, mental health, drug use, antisocial behavior, and academic performance. Findings of the syntheses suggested that when school-based SEL programs were well-designed and well-implemented, they created significant positive impacts across a broad range of student outcomes. Several conclusions related to SEL outcomes were drawn from the research synthesis including that enhanced social and emotional behaviors can significantly impact school and life success, including academic achievement. Notably, the researchers concluded that multi-year, multicomponent programs are more likely to produce lasting benefits. Zins et al. (2004) published the book *Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning: What Does the Research Say?*, which further emphasized the impact of SEL on school success. The authors (Zins et al., 2004) suggested that SEL outcomes can be divided into three primary areas: school attitudes (i.e. increased motivation, responsibility and attachment), school behavior (i.e. increased engagement, prosocial behavior, attendance, participation), and school performance (i.e. grades, proficiency, achievement scores). They mirrored the findings of Greenberg et al. (2003) by asserting that well-designed, well-coordinated SEL programming that addresses cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes will produce optimal results (Zins et. al, 2004).

Moving forward, a seminal meta-analytic study was conducted by Payton et al. (2008) to explore the effectiveness of SEL on positive outcomes for kindergarten to eighth-grade students. Their review differed in that it explored interventions specifically targeting one or more social-emotional competency (i.e. self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making). Three separate reviews were conducted: (a) a Universal Review for interventions that target all students, (b) an Indicated Review for interventions that target students exhibiting emotional and behavioral concerns, and (c) an After-School Review for after school program interventions. The quantitative meta-analytical study, collectively examined 317 studies involving a total of 324,303 children. These reviews calculated a single overall effect size for each study across various social-emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes. The Universal Review of 180 SEL programs found a mean effect size of $g = .60$ for increased social-emotional skills, $g = .23$ for reduction in conduct problems, and $g = .28$ for improvement in academic performance. The Indicative Review of 80 SEL studies found a mean effect size of $g = .77$ for increased social-emotional skills, $g = .47$ for reduction in conduct problems, and $g = .43$ for improvement in academic performance. In summation, results detail an 11 to 17 percentile point increase in academic performance.

The above-mentioned results mirror the findings of a more recent and extensive meta-analyses that explored the results of 213 experimental-control group studies on the effects of K-12 SEL programs on a variety of student factors. Durlak et al. (2011) conducted the large scale meta-analysis to examine the impacts of school-based SEL programming on students' social-emotional skills (i.e. CASEL five), academic

performance, attitudes towards self and others, positive social behaviors, conduct problems, and emotional distress. Collectively, the meta-analysis studied the outcomes of various SEL interventions on 270,034 kindergarten through high school aged students, of which over half (56%) were elementary students. The researchers found that students who received school-based SEL interventions had stronger social-emotional skills ($g = .57$), which is the proximal goal of SEL programs. In addition, improvement in academic performance was evident ($g = .27$), as indicated by an average of 11 percentile points higher on achievement scores for students who received an SEL intervention. Interestingly, Hill et al. (2007) reported that this effect size is comparable to the results of 76 meta-analyses that examined purely educational interventions (as cited in Durlak et al., 2011, p. 416). Another positive result found was that students in treatment group showed improved attitudes ($g = .23$) and prosocial behaviors ($g = .24$). Students who received SEL interventions exhibited greater motivation and time devoted to schoolwork, stronger commitment to school, and improved classroom behavior. Correspondingly, a reduction in negative conduct behaviors ($g = .22$) was evidenced through less disruptive behavior, aggression, delinquency, noncompliance, and as a result, fewer disciplinary referrals. The researchers also found that students who received SEL interventions experienced less emotional distress ($g = .24$) such as depression, anxiety, stress, and social withdrawal. These findings indicated gains across these domains and prove that there are positive academic, social, and emotional effects when implementing SEL programs (Durlak et al., 2011). The positive effects across all cognitive, social-emotional, behavioral and affective variables in this study demonstrated the multitude of benefits students can experience from receiving school-based SEL interventions. The researchers

placed emphasis on utilizing evidence-based programs that followed the SAFE practices, meaning they offer connected and coordinated sets of activities, have active forms of learning for skill mastery, are focused on developing personal and social skills, and target specific social-emotional skills (Durlak et al., 2011). Finally, another recommendation for future research was to examine SEL program effectiveness in promoting the five social-emotional competencies, the proximal goal of all SEL programs (Durlak et al., 2011). The researchers state that very little research has used these five skills as dependent variables in outcome studies.

Sklad et al. (2012) analyzed 75 experimental and quasi-experimental studies published which investigated the outcomes of universal school-based SEL program on a variety of social-emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes of students. This meta-analysis was the first to explore SEL programs in both the United States and international countries occurring between 1995 and 2008. The study found statistically significant outcomes across all student factors (i.e. academic achievement, anti-social behavior, mental disorders, positive self-image, prosocial behavior, social-emotional skills, and substance abuse), which indicates the significant impact and efficacy of SEL programs. The largest effect size was found for increases in social-emotional skills ($d = .70$). Additionally, moderate immediate effects were found on increasing academic achievement ($d = .46$), positive self-image ($d = .46$), prosocial behavior ($d = .39$) and reducing antisocial behavior ($d = -.43$). The largest follow-up effect size was found for academic achievement ($d = .26$). The researchers (Sklad et al., 2012) once again emphasized the importance of selecting evidence-based SEL programs that are comprehensive, and that follow the SAFE practices identified by Durlak et al. (2011).

Furthermore, the researchers recommended the use of SEL programs that offer manualized curriculums and training (Sklad et. al, 2012).

Throughout the literature the positive effects of SEL on students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional competence are evident and empirically supported (Elias et. al, 1997; Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003; Payton et al., 2008; Sklad et al., 2012; Zins et al. 2004). However, many obstacles to SEL program implementation continue to exist, including an emphasis on academic instruction, time constraints within classrooms and schools, and an unassigned point person for the implementation and long-term coordination of SEL programming within the school (Durlak et al., 2011; Riggs et al., 2006; Van Velsor, 2009a). Furthermore, the majority of teachers and administrators lack formal training and education in social and emotional development (RCERP, 2015). This presents the need for leaders in education to identify qualified individuals already within the school that are well-appointed to effectively implement SEL programming with fidelity. Researchers such as Baker and Gerler (2004) would likely tell educational leaders to look no farther than their school counselors, who are professionals who possess advanced education and professional training in social-emotional development of Prekindergarten -12 students (CACREP, 2014).

The Role of Certified School Counselors in SEL Program Implementation

School counselors have been acknowledged as the most highly qualified professionals in the school setting to address the SEL of students (Van Velsor, 2009a; Van Velsor, 2009b). Furthermore, the ASCA National Model (2012) identifies school counselors as key professionals, uniquely qualified to address the social-emotional needs and development of student through coordinated core curriculum and classroom

guidance. The recent revision of the ASCA Mindset and Behaviors for Student Success: Kindergarten (K)-12 College-and Career-Readiness Standard for Every Student (ASCA, 2014) highlights that school counselors are responsible for addressing the social-emotional development of all students. Furthermore, ASCA (2014) embeds key social-emotional skills into their school counseling standards such as self-management, responsible decision making, self-control, relationship skills, and self-awareness. Thompson (2002) explained that school counseling programs in elementary schools should target the improvement of students' academic and SEL in order to prevent negative student outcomes, such as academic failure and school dropout. DeVoss and Stillman (2012) asserted that school counselors can be the essential leaders of SEL implementation within schools by integrating SEL framework (e.g. CASEL) into their comprehensive school counseling programs. Furthermore, researchers have found that school counselors are influential in the implementation and long-term coordination of interventions that address the academic and social-emotional development of students (Kress & Elias, 2006; Thompson, 2002, Van Velsor, 2009b). Likewise, proactive prevention programming has been identified as one of the key roles of a school counselor (Baker & Gerler, 2004). With this in consideration, Whiston (2011) explained that during program planning school counselors should carefully select evidence-based programs that are empirically supported in promoting desired outcomes. Particularly, evidence-based programs that dually promote social-emotional and academic learning in students' elementary school are necessary in order to improve both the short-and-long term educational and life outcomes (Brigman, 2006; Carey et al., 2008; Thompson, 2002).

In response to the evidence-based practice movement, Whiston, Tai, Rhardja and Eder (2011) proclaimed the need for quantitative examination of school counseling interventions. The researchers addressed this gap in school counseling research by conducting a meta-analytic examination on the outcomes of school counseling interventions across K-12. The first meta-analysis utilized traditional treatment-control group comparisons, whereas the second meta-analysis used standardized gain scores based on pretest-posttest comparisons. The meta-analysis1 reviewed the results of 117 studies conducted between 1980 and 2004 (81 publishes and 36 theses/dissertations). The selected studied varied across different grade levels but the majority of interventions took place at elementary level (50.4%). In meta-analysis1, results of the Hedges and Olkin's (1985) weighting procedure showed the overall weighted effect size of school counseling interventions was $d = +.30$. This finding suggests that students who received school counseling interventions scored nearly a third of a standard deviation higher on a wide-range of student outcomes, then students who did not receive an intervention. The meta-analysis2, consisted of 33 studies using pretest-posttest methodologies did not find significant results, as corrected effect size was very small ($d = +.07$). The researchers summarized the findings by highlighting significant positive effects on cognitive, behavioral, and affective outcome measures, with large effect sizes in reduction of discipline problems ($d = +.83$), improvement in effective problem-solving ($d = +.96$). Additionally, medium effect sizes were found in promoting social skills ($d = +.33$) reducing depression ($d = +.37$) and anxiety ($d = +.40$), and small but significant effect sizes were found for promoting of personal/social development ($d = +.24$) and academic achievement ($d = +.16$). The findings of this study suggest that school counseling

interventions can impact an array of student outcomes. Thus, identifying specific evidence-based school counseling interventions that are associated with positive social-emotional and academic outcomes is not only recommended, but is necessary for continued movement toward evidence-based practice in the field of school counseling, and the effective implementation of SEL in schools.

Student Success Skills: A K-12 Classroom Guidance Curriculum Designed to Promote SEL

The Student Success Skills (SSS) a K-12 curriculum is a series of three evidenced-based, comprehensive, school counselor-led interventions aimed to promote the skills necessary for students' long-term success (Brigman & Webb, 2016). The SSS classroom (Brigman & Webb, 2016) and small group programs (Brigman, Campbell & Webb, 2010) were developed for students in 4th-12th grade, the Ready for Success Program (RFS, Brigman & Webb, 2012) for students grades 2nd and 3rd grade, and the Ready to Learn Program (Brigman, Lane, & Lane, 2008) for students in pre-kindergarten to 1st grade. In addition, there is a parent component, Parent Success Skills (PSS, Brigman & Peluso, 2009), which is intended to supplement the SSS program. Furthermore, a recently developed program, College Career Success Skills (Brigman & Villares, 2015), was designed for college students to promote successful college transition and achievement in postsecondary education. All programs were developed using the same extensive research base from five major reviews (Hattie et al., 1996; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Marzano et al., 2001; Wang et al., 1994; Zins et al., 2004). The programs were built around the most prominent skills and strategies found to be essential for students' success and learning including, (a) cognitive and meta-cognitive

skills such as goal setting, progress monitoring, memory skills and healthy optimism, (b) social skills such as interpersonal skills, social problem solving, listening, and teamwork skills; and (c) self-management skills such as managing attention, motivation, anxiety and anger (Brigman & Webb, 2012). Additionally, much like the SEL theory of change, the development of the three SSS programs is informed by a theory of change, which suggests that changes result when cognitive, social, and self-management skills are embedded into student learning and manifest as feelings of self-efficacy, confidence, and connectedness (Lemberger, Brigman, Webb, & Moore, 2013). Finally, Brigman and Webb (2012) detailed the various connections the three programs (RTL, RFS, and SSS) have with the principles. Many of the social-emotional competencies identified as essential for developing social-emotional competence (CASEL, 2012) are infused in the SSS curriculum. For example, teaching students the concepts of healthy optimism, self-confidence, and how to accurately recognize emotions and thoughts are promoted throughout the SSS curriculum. Additionally, incorporating goal setting and progress monitoring, stress and anger management strategies, and positive self-talk are provided in each of the SSS and RFS lessons and encourages self-management. Furthermore, the SSS curriculum fosters social awareness by teaching, modeling, and applying the concept of empathy, and also by encouraging students to identify and value social support. Moreover, relationship skills are developed through social problem solving, and teaching, modeling, and application of cooperation, teamwork attending, and active listening (i.e. listening with your eyes, ears, and heart) skills. Lastly, responsible decision making is encouraged through the Seven Keys to Success and Looking Good/Feeling Good weekly

progress monitoring activities, which encourage students to make healthy and responsible life and school decisions.

The SSS classroom guidance curriculum is one of the only empirically supported manualized programs that are explicitly designed for school counselor delivery. The authors describe the program as a school counselor and classroom teacher collaborative intervention developed to address the cognitive, social, and self-management development of students (Brigman & Webb, 2016). A noteworthy aspect of all three programs is the structured and sequenced delivery led by school counselors and important role of the teacher in reinforcing the skills and concepts while nurturing a caring, supportive, and encouraging classroom. The three programs meet the SAFE criteria for SEL programs (Durlak et al., 2011), meaning they are sequenced, provide active forms of learning, focus on the development of personal and social skills, and explicitly target specific social-emotional skills. The classroom guidance programs were designed to promote the fundamental prerequisite skills necessary for school and life success and to support the development of social-emotional and cognitive (academic) abilities (Brigman & Webb, 2012).

The positive effects of the SSS and RTL programs have been examined in many studies, which have reported significant student gains in academic achievement and social skills development (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Brigman et al., 2007; Brigman & Webb, 2003; Villares et al., 2008; Villares et al., 2012; Webb et al., 2005). Villares et al. (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of five outcome studies that explored the effectiveness of the SSS classroom and small group programs. The results of this study found an overall effect size of $d = .41$, which equivalent to a full year of math instruction, and an

effect size in reading of $d = .17$, which is equivalent to a half a year of additional reading instruction. Additionally, Mariani et al. (2015) found that participation in the SSS classroom guidance program significantly increased student prosocial behaviors, engagement in student success behaviors, and stronger perceptions of a positive classroom climate. Furthermore, results showed a decrease in bullying behaviors among students who received the intervention. A gap in the SSS line of research is evident, as the RFS program has not received the same empirical support as the partner programs. As the literature has indicated, third-grade is significant period for students' social-emotional development and a pivotal year for reading proficiency.

Ready for Success (RFS) Classroom Guidance Program

The Ready for Success (RFS) classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) is a school counselor-led prevention/early intervention program developed specifically for second and third-grade students. The RFS classroom guidance program was designed to promote skills predictive of long-term success such as reading proficiency and school success behaviors which targets skills in all five areas of social-emotional competence (i.e. self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making). The RFS program incorporates skills and strategies from both the RTL and SSS program. According to Brigman and Webb (2012) the RFS and RTL programs share the common goal of promoting reading proficiency and school success behaviors such as attending, listening, social skills, and cognitive skills (e.g. understanding story structure). RFS also has skill overlap with the SSS classroom guidance program such as goal setting and progress monitoring, creating a caring, supportive and encouraging classroom, cognitive and memory skills, performing

under pressure, and healthy optimism. The authors suggest that by building upon students cognitive, social, and self-management skills and strategies, reading proficiency and school success will be improved (Brigman & Webb, 2012). They further assert that this change can result in fewer third-grade retentions, and ultimately a higher graduation rate.

The RFS component of the SSS curriculum is essentially absent in outcome literature. However, two dissertations have studied the effects of the RFS program. The first dissertation written by Goldberg (2009) explored the effects of the RFS program on the reading achievement, as measured by the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), of both second and third-grade students from Title I elementary schools (i.e. 75% or more students on free and reduced lunch). The results of the study displayed no significant differences in standardized reading scores of students who participated in the RFS and those who did not. The researcher attributes the insignificant findings to a high proportion of English Language Learners (ELL) in the sample and issues with implementation fidelity. In particular, dosage as designed was not followed in this study. Treatment schools did not implement the full 30-minute of each lessons and booster sessions were not delivered in full. The second dissertation written by Brown (2014) used a quasi-experimental design with treatment and control group to examine the effects of RFS on the standardized reading scores of Hispanic and African American third-grade students. Two reading scores were attained using separate standardized measures of reading achievement, the Sunshine State Standard Diagnostic Reading Test (SSSDT) and the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). The researcher found no statistical difference in reading scores (on either measure) between third-grade students who

received the RFS intervention and those who did not. According to Brown (2014) the lack of significant findings was possibly attributed to concerns with implementation fidelity, poor attendance of target student groups (i.e. Hispanic and African American students). Similar to the previous dissertation study (Goldberg, 2009), the researcher found the RFS program dosage as designed was not followed. In fact, 37.5% of the lessons were shortened due to time constraints. Furthermore, one treatment school only delivered four out of eight lessons and the other only delivered six out of eight lessons. Thus, the lack of significant findings in both studies were largely attributed to fidelity issues in treatment schools.

In conclusion, the program's goals have not been evidenced through outcome research. The two studies described explored the impact of the RFS on one dependent variable, reading achievement. Research has yet to explore the impact of this program on social-emotional factors. Additionally, fidelity of implementation presented as a major flaw in both studies. The present study intends to address this issue in the RFS line of research by employing various strategies to promote fidelity of implementation including school counselor and teacher training, manualized curriculum delivery, and lesson fidelity logs. Moreover, both studies used summative, standardized measures of reading achievement, whereas the present study intends to examine progress towards reading proficiency benchmarks throughout the third-grade year at three separate data collection points.

Goals of the Current Study

There is a present need to increase the reading proficiency of third-grade students at risk for mandatory grade level retention. Students who are unable to read proficiently

by the end of third-grade are at significantly greater risk for negative educational outcomes such as high school dropout. While SEL has been identified as having significant impacts on students' well-being, behavior, and academic achievement (e.g. reading achievement) barriers to implementation persist. School counselors are well positioned to be leaders of SEL programming in schools. However, there is a lack of outcome research linking school counselor delivered SEL to positive student outcomes. Therefore, the current study intended to establish a link between the school counselor-led RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) and an increase in social-emotional skills and competence, thereby improving grade level reading proficiency and contributing to the promotion of third-grade students.

III. METHODS

The methodology section first provides a description of the sample including study location, schools, and participants. Following this description, the study's participants including treatment and comparison group will be described. Next the study design, instruments, research questions and hypotheses, and procedures will be discussed. Finally, data analysis and statistical procedures to test the study hypotheses will be presented.

Description of Sample

The present study was conducted in a diverse public-school district in southeast Florida. The school district is the 5th largest in the state of Florida and is comprised of 187 schools, serving 183,000 students. In the 2014-2015 school year there were a total of 15,623 third-grade students across 107 elementary schools. Of the 107 elementary schools, 26 were prohibited from being involved in research studies and cannot be considered for the study as outlined by the participating school district. District demographic data accounting for gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, students with exceptionalities (ESE), and ELL was collected. In addition, retention data of third-grade students within the participating district was considered.

The identified population for the current study was third-grade students in general education classrooms, both male and female, enrolled in the ethnically and socioeconomically diverse school district.

The unit of analysis was the individual third-grade students. In order to determine the appropriate study sample size, a priori G-power analysis was conducted with an $ES = 0.3$, $\alpha = 0.05$, power $p = 0.80$ (Faul et al., 2009; Faul et al., 2007). The results indicated a minimum total sample size of 190 students was needed to detect differences between groups. In anticipation of possible participant attrition, a total sample size of 280 was sought. A final sample size of $n=195$ was secured meeting the predetermined sample size from the power analysis.

A disaggregation of total demographic data found that males constituted 56.9% of the total sample, and 43.1% were female. In terms of ethnicity, 1.5% were Asian, 8.7% were African American/Black, 31.3% were Hispanic/Latino/Latina, 4.1% were Multiracial, and 54.4% were Caucasian/White. Of the total sample, 53.3% were eligible for free or reduced lunch which indicates socioeconomic need, 9.7% were eligible for exceptional student education services, 4.6% were eligible for 504 accommodations with an active 504 plan, and 3.5% were identified as limited English proficient.

There were 104 students in the treatment condition. A disaggregation of demographic data found that males constituted 52.9% of the total sample, and 47.1% were female. In terms of ethnicity, 2.9% were Asian, 8.7% were African American/Black, 32.7% were Hispanic/Latino/Latina, 3.8% were Multiracial, and 51.9% were Caucasian/White. Of the total sample, 55.8% were eligible for free or reduced lunch which indicates socioeconomic need, 7.7% were eligible for exceptional student education services, 3.8% were eligible for 504 accommodations with an active 504 plan, and 3.8% were identified as limited English proficient.

There were 91 students in the comparison condition. A disaggregation of demographic data found that males constituted 61.5% of the total sample, and 38.5% were female. In terms of ethnicity, 0% were Asian, 8.8% were African American/Black, 29.7% were Hispanic/Latino/Latina, 4.4% were Multiracial, and 57.1% were Caucasian/White. Of the total sample, 50.5% were eligible for free or reduced lunch which indicates socioeconomic need, 12.1% were eligible for exceptional student education services, 5.5% were eligible for 504 accommodations with an active 504 plan, and 3.3% were identified as limited English proficient.

The researcher obtained approval from Florida Atlantic University's IRB (Appendix A) and obtained the necessary participant parent or guardian consents form (Appendix B), teacher consent form (Appendix C), school counselor consent form (Appendix D), and student assent form (Appendix E). Following this approval, research approval request from the school district was obtained (Appendix F). Once approval was received, school counselors and principals from eligible schools were invited for participation in the study. To be eligible to participate, schools must have met the following requirements: (a) the school employs a certified school counselor, (b) school counselor commits to implementing the manualized RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) as outlined in the current study, which was provided to the school at no cost, and (c) the school had to agree to participate in all three data collection intervals (pretest, posttest1, posttest2).

Participants

A minimum of four elementary schools (two treatment schools and two comparison schools), four school counselors, and 16 third-grade classrooms

(approximately 18 students per class) were originally secured for study participation. However, following teacher training of study protocol and surveys, one teacher revoked consent for participation. Thus, teachers from the 15 participating classrooms were required to complete the study instruments (DESSA and RRR Assessment) over three data collection windows (pre-test, posttest1, posttest2). Using matching procedures, participating schools were assigned as either treatment or comparison group using demographic data with considerations of school performance level, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and gender representation. Teacher, school counselor and parent consent forms and student assent were required for data to be collected and included in the study analysis.

Treatment Group

Third-grade students from two elementary schools received the RFS (Brigman & Webb, 2012) classroom guidance program intervention during the 2016-2017 school year. All third-grade classrooms from participating treatment schools were encouraged to receive the intervention. Students who did not assent or whose parents did not consent to study participation still received the RFS classroom guidance program as a part of normal educational practice, however data was not collected for these students. School counselors at both of the treatment schools received training on how to deliver the RFS program and study protocols. In addition, all teachers received training on completion of the web-based DESSA survey instrument and study protocols. After receiving the training, the school counselor implemented one 30-minute RFS lesson per week for 5 weeks starting in January 2017. Three booster sessions will be delivered once a month from March 2017 to May 2017. Teachers in the treatment group completed the DESSA

and RRR measures for each participating student during each of the three data collection intervals. Pre-test data was collected in December 2016, prior to implementation of the RFS intervention. In February 2017, following the first five RFS lessons, posttest1 data was collected. At the end of May 2017, posttest2 data collection took place. Finally, in June 2017 promotion or retention school level data was reported and collected.

Comparison Group

Two comparison schools continued business as usual, and third-grade students at these schools did not receive the RFS classroom intervention. School counselors from the comparison schools received training on the study protocols and had the option to receive the same one-day training on program delivery following the completion of data collection. School counselors were able to deliver the RFS classroom guidance program, provided at no cost, at the completion of posttest2 data collection. In addition, all teachers received training on completion of the web-based DESSA survey instrument and study protocols. Teachers from comparison schools completed the DESSA and RRR assessment at the same data collection intervals as the treatment schools (i.e. December 2016, February 2017, and May 2017).

Study Design

The current study was designed to explore the difference in social-emotional skills and competence, reading proficiency, and promotion rate between third-grade students in the treatment group who received RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) and third-grade students in the comparison group who did not receive the intervention. The present study utilized a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent group

design with individual third-grade students as the unit of analysis (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Goodwin, 2010).

Schools with similar student enrollment numbers, classroom size, socioeconomic, ethnic, gender, and academic performance demographics and that employed a certified school counselor were identified for school recruitment. Invitations for study participation were delivered to principals and school counselors in schools meeting this study criteria. Four elementary schools, four school counselors, and sixteen third-grade classrooms were selected and consented for participation in the study. Schools were matched using a nonequivalent groups design, and two schools were assigned to the treatment condition and two schools were assigned to the comparison condition. Individual classrooms were not independently assigned to a study condition. Rather, classrooms were considered treatment or comparison based on their school's assignment. Following the training, one classroom teacher from the comparison group removed consent for participation in the study. Therefore, ultimately fifteen third-grade classrooms participated in the study.

In order for students to participate in the study, parent or guardian consent and student assent for participation was required. Students whose parents did not give permission or students who did not assent to study participation still received the RFS classroom program, however, they were not considered participants in the study. A total sample size of $n=195$ was achieved. Of the 195 students, there were a total of 104 students in the treatment group and 91 students in the comparison group.

There was one independent variable (i.e. participation in the RFS classroom guidance program) eight dependent variables examined in the present study. Social-

emotional skills and competence were measured using the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (LeBuffe et al., 2014) self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, and decision making subscales, and social-emotional competence composite scale. Reading proficiency was measured using the district adapted Reading Running Record (RRR) portion of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2 (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010), which measures students' independent reading levels and aligns with school district's Student Progression Plan. Promotion rate was measured by school reported data collected from the school district's data source, SIS, at the end of the 2016-2017 school year. Two promotion groups will be analyzed: non-promotion group and promotion group.

Dependent Variables

The following dependent variables were included in the study:

- Student social-emotional skills:
 - Self-management as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (Teacher Report) self-management subscale.
 - Self-awareness as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (Teacher Report) self-awareness subscale.
 - Social awareness as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (Teacher Report) social awareness subscale.
 - Relationship skills as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (Teacher Report) relationship skills subscale.
 - Responsible decision making as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (Teacher Report) decision making subscale.

- Student social-emotional competence as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment composite scale (Teacher Report).
- Student level of reading proficiency as measured by the district adapted Reading Running Record portion of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2 assessment.
- Third-grade promotion rate as measured by school district SIS data reports (school level data).

Independent Variables

The RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) was the independent variable. The program was implemented in third-grade classrooms of participating treatment schools. Certified school counselors, who received training in the delivery of the manualized classroom guidance program, led the intervention.

Instruments

Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA)

The DESSA is a standardized, norm-referenced behavior rating scale that measures the social-emotional competence of children in kindergarten through eighth grade (LeBuffe et al., 2014). The DESSA was created to be both screening and assessment tool that identifies social-emotional strengths and needs of children. The authors intended the measure to be utilized to support, and measure, children's growth and development of social-emotional skills and competence (LeBuffe et al., 2009). Results of this measure aid in the identification of students in need of interventions that promote SEL. The measure can be utilized for progress monitoring, and be administered multiple times to assess how individuals are responding to a particular intervention. In

addition, this measure can be utilized as a program evaluation measure, which evaluates outcomes of SEL interventions and program effectiveness (Flemming & LeBuffe, 2014).

For the purpose of the present study, the DESSA teacher report was used to evaluate the outcomes of the RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) on third-grade students' social-emotional skills and competence. The 72-item teacher measure that assesses social-emotional competencies that serve as protective factors and are related to resiliency. The positively worded, strength-based measure utilizes a 5-point Likert scale (Never 0, Rarely= 1, Occasionally= 2, Frequently= 3, Very Frequently= 4). The DESSA measures overall social-emotional competence using a composite score, in addition to eight conceptually derived subscales, which measure critical social-emotional skills (i.e. self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, goal-directed behavior, relationship skills, personal responsibility, decision making, and optimistic thinking). The subscales identified for use in this study directly align with the five identified social-emotional skills identified by CASEL (2012); the self-awareness subscale, self-management subscale, social awareness subscale, relationship skills subscale, and decision making subscale. In addition, social emotional competence of students was measured using the DESSA social-emotional competence composite score. The DESSA was completed by classroom teachers in both treatment and comparison conditions, who rated each student individually during three data collection events using the Apperson S.E.L. + Compass a web-based version of the DESSA (LeBuffe et al., 2014). The online tool was estimated to take 4.5 to 9 minutes to complete per student survey.

The DESSA has been found to be a psychometrically sound measure of social-emotional skills and competence. The measure was nationally normed measure with a

standardization sample comprised of 2,496 children, ages 5 to 14, who were representative of the United States population in respect to race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status (SES), and geographic region (Nickerson & Fishman, 2009). The coefficient alpha for the Social-Emotional Composite score is .99 for teacher report measures, which shows high internal consistency. The five subscales used to test the study hypotheses have reported alpha coefficients of .91 (social-awareness), .92 (decision making), .94 (relationship skills), .89 (self-awareness), and .92 (self-management). Additionally, test-retest reliabilities are high with correlation coefficients ranging from .86 to .94 for teacher report measures (Nickerson & Fishman, 2009). All DESSA scales evidence significant mean score differences between students identified with social, emotional, or behavioral disorders to non-identified students with a median effect size of .80, indicating a large effect size and criterion validity (Nickerson & Fishman, 2009).

The online version of the DESSA provided the researcher with automated scores. The measure offers two types of scores, percentile scores and T-scores for each scale. Percentile scores describe the child's relative position compared to other children who have been assessed on the DESSA. *T* scores are used to tell how far students are from the mean, with the score of 50 representing the mean and a standard deviation of 10 ($SD=10$). *T* scores of 60 represent strength within the scale, whereas *T* scores ranging from 41-59 are characterized as typical scores and scores of 40 or below indicates need for instruction (Fleming & LeBuffe, 2014).

Reading Running Records (District K-5 Literacy Assessment System)

The Reading Running Record (RRR) portion of the school district's K-5 Literacy Assessment System was adapted by the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment

System 2 (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010). The formative reading assessment is teacher administered to determine the independent and instructional reading levels of individual students. This one-on-one assessment takes approximately 15 minutes to complete per individual student. The system uses a set of 58 short, high-quality, and original non-fiction and fiction books to determine and document reading progress towards benchmark levels (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010). The RRR is a process-oriented measure, meaning students are evaluated on their performance during a reading activity, rather than a task completed after a reading activity (Ludlow, 2001). The RRR measures student's reading accuracy, fluency rate, decoding, vocabulary, reading comprehension. The BAS is a standardized assessment, in that administration, coding, scoring and interpretation procedures are standardized in order to obtain reliable results (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010). The BAS is divided into two sections; Benchmark System 1 (BAS-1) for use with grades K-2 students, which measures reading levels A-N, and the Benchmark System 2 (BAS-2) which is intended for grades 3-8 and measures reading levels L-Z.

Field testing of the BAS was conducted with an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse group of students ($n=498$) enrolled in 22 different schools from five geographic regions across the United States. Results found the BAS to be a reliable reading assessment with a reliability coefficient of .97 for all book (A-Z), and reliability coefficients of .93 for BAS-1 (A-N) and .94 for BAS-2 (L-Z). Convergent validity was found for the BAS-1, with correlations of .94 for fiction books and .93 for nonfiction books, and moderate association was found for BAS-2 with correlations of .69 for fiction books and .62 for nonfiction books (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

School districts often require teachers to complete the RRR on each of their students three times a year to assess students' progress towards grade level standards and reading proficiency (Ludlow, 2001). Additionally, in many school districts a RRR is also used as a summative measure of reading proficiency, and is utilized as a consideration for grade level retention.

In the present study, the participating school district already used the RRR measure as both a formative and summative measure of student reading proficiency, and was a critical factor in third-grade mandatory retention decision making. In accordance with the participating school district's Student Progression Plan (2015), benchmark reading levels are required to be collected and reported three times per school year prior to the end of each trimester (i.e. November, February, June). According to the participating school district's criteria for trimester benchmark reading levels, third-grade students should be reading independently at a minimum level N by the end of the first trimester (November) and finish third-grade at a minimum level P (June) in order to be considered on grade level (proficient) in reading. For the purpose of this study, teachers were given a two-week data collection window to collect RRR data on each individual student and report results on the school district's data source SIS for Teachers in December 2016, February 2017, and May 2017. Teachers documented the order in which students were assessed during the two-week period on the researcher created RRR data collection log (Appendix J). Students were assessed in the same order in subsequent data collection windows.

Data Source

Student Information System (SIS)

The Student Information System (SIS) was the participating school district's electronic system for sharing timely and relevant data reports. The online system aggregates data from various sources, including the Total Educational Resource Management System (TERMS), to produce reports and graphs on individual student, classroom, and grade level data. In addition, data on school performance and district summaries are reported. This information is stored and made available to school administrators, counselors, and teachers to view, print, or download into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. The researcher utilized this data source for four specific reasons: (1) to collect participant demographic information (i.e. race/ethnicity, age, gender, free/reduced lunch status, ESE status, and ELL status) in October 2016; (2) to collect individual student RRR results from the school district's K-5 Literacy Assessment in December 2016, February 2017, and May 2017; and (3) to collect information on student promotion to next grade level in June 2017, in order to examine the effect of the RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) on third-grade promotion rate.

The participating school district's Research and Evaluation Department provided the researcher with the SIS reports in the form of Microsoft Excel sheets and all identifying student information was removed and replaced with unique student code to ensure anonymity of participants.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of the Ready for Success classroom guidance program on third-grade student social-emotional skills (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making)?
2. What is the effect of the Ready for Success classroom guidance program on the social-emotional competence of third-grade students?
3. What is the effect of the Ready for Success classroom guidance program on third-grade student level of reading proficiency?
4. What is the effect of the Ready for Success classroom guidance program on third-grade promotion rate?

Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1

HO₁: There is no statistically significant difference in self-awareness, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) self-awareness subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Alternative Hypothesis 1

Alternative 1: There is a statistically significant difference in self-awareness, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) self-awareness subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Null Hypothesis 2

HO₂: There is no statistically significant difference in self-management, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) self-management subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Alternative Hypothesis 2

Alternative 2: There is a statistically significant difference in self-management, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) self-management subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Null Hypothesis 3

HO₃: There is no statistically significant difference in social awareness, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) social awareness subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Alternative Hypothesis 3

Alternative 3: There is a statistically significant difference in social awareness, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) social awareness subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Null Hypothesis 4

HO₄: There is no statistically significant difference in relationship skills, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) relationship skills

subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Alternative Hypothesis 4

Alternative 4: There is a statistically significant difference in relationship skills, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) relationship skills subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Null Hypothesis 5

HO₅: There is no statistically significant difference in responsible decision making, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) decision making subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Alternative Hypothesis 5

Alternative 5: There is a statistically significant difference in responsible decision making, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) decision making subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Null Hypothesis 6

HO₆: There is no statistically significant difference in social-emotional competence, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) composite scale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Alternative Hypothesis 6

Alternative 6: There is a statistically significant difference in social-emotional competence, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) composite scale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Null Hypothesis 7

HO₇: There is no statistically significant difference in reading proficiency, as measured by the district adapted Reading Running Record (RRR) portion of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2 (BAS-2), between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Alternative Hypothesis 7

Alternative 7: There is a statistically significant difference in reading proficiency, as measured by the district adapted Reading Running Record (RRR) portion of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2 (BAS-2), between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Null Hypothesis 8

HO₈: There is no statistically significant difference in third-grade promotion rate, as measured by school level data reported collected using the school district's Student Information System (SIS) system, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Alternative Hypothesis 8

Alternative 8: There is a statistically significant difference in third-grade promotion rate, as measured by school level data reported collected using the school

district's Student Information System (SIS) system, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program and those who did not.

Procedures

The current study was conducted during the second half of the 2016-2017 school year in four K-5 elementary schools. A quasi-experimental, non-equivalent groups pre-post-post design with treatment and untreated comparison was used in this study (Goodwin, 2010). This design is favorable in social sciences studies, especially in schools, where intact groups are present (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Goodwin, 2010). The unit of interest was the individual student.

School Selection

Following university IRB approval and obtaining school district research permission, select elementary schools were invited to participate in the research study. Principals and school counselors were contacted for invitation to participate. Schools interested in participating met with the researcher who provided a study overview and an implementation and data collection timeline. Thereafter, final school selection was made, and the four participating schools were matched based on student demographics (i.e. ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ESE status, English Language Learner status, gender, and school performance levels). Two schools were assigned to the treatment condition receiving the RFS (Brigman & Webb, 2012) classroom program. Two additional schools were assigned to the comparison condition and did not receive the classroom intervention. Consent for research was obtained from the participating school counselors, parents, teachers, and assent was obtained from students.

Implementation

In December 2016, four school counselors from participating schools received a one-hour training on delivery of the manualized RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012), as well as on study-related procedures including facilitation of survey completion and electronic fidelity reports. In addition, participating teachers from both the treatment and comparison schools received a one-hour training on completion of the web-based DESSA survey instrument and study protocols. Baseline data was collected from treatment and comparison classrooms during the pre-test window in December 2016. Teachers from both treatment and comparison schools completed the DESSA and RRR assessments on each participating third-grade student in his or her classroom. Administration time of the DESSA was estimated to be between 4.5 to 9 minutes per student survey. The RRR assessment, which must be administered three times per year, is estimated to take approximately 15 minutes per student. Participating teachers collected RRR data on each participating student during the two-week window in December 2016. Following the collection of pretest data, trained school counselors from the treatment schools delivered the weekly, 30-minute RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) to third-grade students (January 2017 – February 2017). Posttest1 data was collected upon completion of the five, weekly session in February 2017, and once again teachers from both treatment and comparison schools were required to complete the DESSA and RRR assessments on each participating student. Starting in March, three monthly booster lessons were delivered to third-grade students by the trained school counselors in the treatment schools. Posttest2 data collection took place in May 2017, and the same procedures were followed by teachers in

both treatment and comparison conditions. In June 2017, when end of the year data was shared, the EDW promotion/retention reports were collected to assess the promotion rate of third-grade students. Three promotion groups will be analyzed; non-promotion group and promotion group.

Treatment Fidelity

Steps were taken to increase fidelity of treatment and data collection procedures. First, participating school counselors received a formal training in the use of the RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) in December 2016. The manualized curriculum and a CD that explains intervention facilitation were provided to each counselor at no-cost. Counselors reviewed the CD with participating teachers upon training. In addition, school counselors from both treatment and comparison condition received training in study protocols and required reporting procedures. Next, an electronic report was created using Google Forms for school counselors to complete in regard to treatment fidelity (Appendix G). The report collected information on the date of each weekly lesson, the number of students present for the lesson, the start and end time of each session, and perceived effectiveness of the lesson. The counselors also reported any unanticipated problems or issues. These reports were required for each of the five weekly sessions, and then once a month for the three booster sessions. In addition, all school counselors were asked to complete a report via Google Forms (Appendix H) detailing any additional school counseling interventions (i.e. classroom guidance, small group, and school-wide initiatives) occurring during the study timeline.

Participating teachers from both treatment and comparison conditions received a one hour training on the completion of the DESSA and data collection procedures. In

addition, a survey was completed using Google Forms to collect information on years of teaching experience and year of last RRR training from each teacher (Appendix I).

Ethical Considerations

There was no more than minimal risk to participants, as the comparison group was eligible to receive the intervention after the study was conducted. School counselors from comparison schools received free manuals and training on the Ready for Success classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012), and were able to implement the program after study has concluded. Informed consent was provided to all participants. Participant identifying information was never provided to the researchers, as a coding system was utilized. Additionally, all data was stored on encrypted, password protected flash drives, that are in a locked cabinet.

Data Analysis

The current study followed a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent group design with data collected at pretest, posttest1, and posttest2. An alpha level of .05 and one-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) tests were used to analyze differences in social-emotional skills, social-emotional competence, and reading proficiency between students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program (treatment group) and students who did not (comparison group). A one-way MANCOVA is useful in research that consist of a single factor (independent variable) with a group of two participants (treatment and comparison) with two or more quantitative dependent variables (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). MANOVA's are useful when multiple dependent variables are present, as it reduces the probability of Type 1 errors, or mistakenly rejecting the null hypotheses (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). The MANCOVA evaluated posttest scores, and

differences between groups was compared using pretest scores as covariates. This analysis answered the research questions and determined the effect of the independent variable, the RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012), on the dependent variables. The results of the MANCOVA tests are reported using F statistics with a p value less than the $\alpha = .05$ indicating statistical significance (Heppner & Heppner, 2004).

Furthermore, a Pearson's chi-square test, or chi-square test of association, was used to discover if participation in the RFS classroom guidance program was significantly associated with promotion or non-promotion of third-grade students. A chi-square test of association is useful when trying to determine whether two variables are associated or whether they are independent of each other (Brace, Kemp & Sneglar, 2016). Therefore, the chi-square test of association was used to determine if receiving or not receiving the RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) was associated with promotion or non-promotion of third-grade students.

In addition to the MANCOVA, effect size (ES) were measured using the partial eta-squared (η_p^2). According to Vacha-Haase and Thompson (2004), ES informs researchers on the practical significance of results, or the strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Sink and Mvududu (2010) recommend the use of η_p^2 as a more precise measure of ES when using general linear model (GLM) factorial procedures such as MANCOVAs. According to Sink and Mvududu (2010), η_p^2 represents the proportion of variance attributable to the individual variable after removing for variance associated with other effects. The authors provide guidelines for determining what constitutes a small, medium, or large effect size, and set

benchmarks for using partial eta squared ES calculation. The determined benchmarks set forth are .14 (large effect size), .06 (medium effect size), and .01 (small effect size, Sink and Mvududu, 2010). Overall, ES calculations in conjunction with significance levels provides an understanding of the magnitude of an effect and are highly encouraged in quantitative research (Sink & Stroh, 2006).

Summary

This chapter encompassed the methodology of the study. The participants, study design, dependent variables, independent variables, instruments, research questions, hypotheses, definitions, procedures, and method of data analysis were explained. In the following chapter, the results of the study and analysis are provided.

IV. RESULTS

The purpose of the current outcome study was to evaluate the effect of the Ready for Success (RFS; Brigman & Webb, 2012) classroom guidance program on the factors significantly associated with third-grade promotion and later academic success: social-emotional skills and competence, and grade level reading proficiency. The study followed a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent groups design with the pretest, posttest1, and posttest2 data collection with the individual third-grade students serving as the unit of analysis. An alpha level of .05 and one-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) tests were used to analyze differences in social-emotional skills, social-emotional competence, and reading proficiency between students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program (treatment group) and students who did not (comparison group). Furthermore, a Pearson's chi-square test was used to discover if participation in the RFS classroom guidance program is significantly associated with promotion or non-promotion of third-grade students. Finally, ES calculations for each dependent measure are reported to determine the practical significance of results. The ESs are interpreted using the Sink and Mvududu (2010) benchmarks (i.e., large = .14, medium = .06, and small = .01). This chapter presents the findings of descriptive, MANCOVA, Pearson's chi-square, and ES analyses and the results of the tests of hypotheses.

Descriptive Data

Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA)

The DESSA is a standardized, norm-referenced behavior rating scale that measures the social-emotional competence of children in kindergarten through eighth grade (LeBuffe et al., 2014). For the present study, the DESSA teacher report was utilized to evaluate the outcomes of the RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) on third-grade students' social-emotional skills and competence. One hundred and ninety-five third-grade students participated in the study; however, if survey data was missing at either posttest 1 or posttest 2, the participants' data were not included in the analysis. Therefore, a total of 189 students were included in the DESSA analysis. Table 1 displays the treatment and comparison groups' means, standard deviations, and change scores across the five subscales of the DESSA (i.e., self-management subscale, self-awareness subscale, social awareness subscale, relationship skills subscale, and responsible decision-making subscale). Table 2 displays the treatment and comparison groups' means, standard deviations, and change scores for the Social-Emotional Composite Scale of the DESSA.

Table 1

Treatment and Comparison Group Means, Standard Deviations, and Change Scores for DESSA Subscales by Condition

Scale	Treatment (<i>n</i> = 102)					Comparison (<i>n</i> = 87)				
	Pretest <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Posttest1 <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> +/-	Posttest2 <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> +/-	Pretest <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Posttest1 <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> +/-	Posttest2 <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> +/-
SA	48.62 (9.126)	51.61 (9.096)	+2.99	53.74 (8.449)	+5.12	52.30 (13.768)	52.99 (12.726)	-.69	50.45 (13.504)	-1.85
SM	51.18 (9.190)	53.52 (9.443)	+2.34	54.25 (9.547)	+3.07	53.16 (13.519)	52.99 (13.289)	+.17	51.43 (13.630)	-1.73
SO	52.46 (10.707)	54.27 (9.193)	+1.81	54.49 (9.615)	+2.03	51.89 (14.272)	52.55 (12.959)	+.66	50.51 (13.716)	-1.38
RS	49.95 (8.509)	52.75 (9.267)	+2.80	53.39 (9.153)	+3.44	51.41 (13.986)	53.21 (12.988)	+1.80	50.91 (13.875)	-.50
DM	50.20 (9.010)	52.34 (9.842)	+2.14	53.59 (9.461)	+3.39	52.37 (13.804)	53.24 (12.663)	+.87	50.84 (13.492)	-1.53

Note. DESSA = Devereux Student Strengths Assessment; SA = Self-Awareness Scale; SM = Self-Management; SO = Social-Awareness; RS = Relationship Skills; DM = Responsible Decision Making; *n* = number; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; +/- = mean change score

Table 2

Treatment and Comparison Group Means, Standard Deviations, and Change Scores for DESSA SEC by Condition

Condition (n)	Pretest <i>M(SD)</i>	Posttest1 <i>M(SD)</i>	M +/-	Posttest2 <i>M(SD)</i>	M +/-
Treatment (102)	49.75 (9.182)	52.29 (9.252)	+2.54	53.45 (8.711)	+3.70
Comparison (87)	51.11 (14.435)	52.07 (13.210)	+.96	49.93 (13.616)	-1.18

Note. DESSA = Devereux Student Strengths Assessment; SEC Scale = Social-Emotional Composite scale; n = number; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; +/- = mean change score

Reading Running Records

The Reading Running Record (RRR) portion of the school district's K-5 Literacy Assessment System was adapted by the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS, Fountas & Pinnell, 2010). The RRR is a teacher administered reading assessment used to determine the independent and instructional reading levels of individual students. The RRR measures a student's reading accuracy, fluency rate, decoding, vocabulary, reading comprehension. For the present study, the RRR data were collected to evaluate the outcomes of the RFS classroom guidance program on third-grade students' level of reading proficiency. One hundred and ninety-five students participated in the study; however, if RRR data was missing at posttest 1 or posttest 2, the participants were not included in the analysis. Therefore, a total of 190 students were included in the RRR analysis. Table 3 displays the treatment and comparison group means, standard deviations, and change scores for the RRR.

Table 3

Treatment and Comparison Group Means, Standard Deviations, and Change Scores for RRR by Condition

Condition (<i>n</i>)	Pretest <i>M(SD)</i>	Posttest1 <i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M +/-</i>	Posttest2 <i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M +/-</i>
Treatment (101)	14.29 (2.476)	15.20 (2.445)	+.91	16.40 (2.462)	+2.11
Comparison (89)	13.83 (1.939)	14.97 (1.892)	+1.14	16.24 (1.732)	+2.41

Note. RRR = Reading Running Record; *n* = number; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; +/- = mean change score

Test of Hypotheses

The dependent measures examined in the present study included self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, social-emotional competence, grade level reading proficiency, and third-grade promotion rate. The results from the multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) analyses and a Pearson's Chi-square test the hypotheses are presented. An alpha level of .05 was used when testing all hypotheses. The ES calculations will also be presented for each dependent measure using the using the η_p^2 benchmarks set forth by Sink and Mvududu (2010); .14 (large effect size), .06 (medium effect size), and .01 (small effect size).

Social-Emotional Skills and Competence

Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) tests were used to analyze differences in social-emotional skills and social-emotional competence between students who participated in the RFS classroom guidance program (treatment group; *n* = 102) and students who did not receive the SSS program (comparison group, *n* = 87). The results from the MANCOVA tests revealed a significant main effect at posttest 1 and 2 by condition for each of the DESSA subscales, as detailed below.

Self-Awareness Subscale of the DESSA

To test the hypothesis that students receiving the RFS classroom guidance program (treatment group) would evidence an increase in self-awareness (SA) as compared to students who did not receive the RFS program (comparison group), a MANCOVA test was performed. To control for differences on the students' self-awareness prior to treatment, the students' SA pretest scores were used a covariate (50.64). Results from the MANCOVA revealed a statistically significant difference [$F(2,185) = 15.237, p = .000$; Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.859$, η_p^2 of .14, a large effect] between treatment and comparison groups. The test of between-subjects revealed a statistically significant difference [$F(1,186) = 4.173, p = .042$; η_p^2 of .02, a small effect] at posttest 1 between treatment ($M = 51.61, SD = 9.096$) and comparison groups ($M = 52.99, SD = 12.726$). The test of between-subject revealed a statistically significant difference [$F(1,186) = 30.285, p = .000$; η_p^2 of .14, a large effect] at posttest 2 between the treatment ($M = 53.74, SD = 8.449$) and comparison groups ($M = 50.45, SD = 13.504$). Table 4 and Table 5 presents the findings of the ANOVA tests at posttest 1 and posttest 2 respectively.

Table 4

Summary Table for One-Way Analysis of Variance for DESSA Self-Awareness Subscale at Posttest 1 by Condition

Source of Variance	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>
Between groups	1	154.463	154.463	4.173*
Within groups	186	6885.431	37.018	
Total	189	538224.000		

Note. *df* = degrees of freedom. *SS* = Sum of Squares. *F* = *F* distribution. * $p < .05$.

Table 5

Summary Table for One-Way Analysis of Variance for DESSA Self-Awareness Subscale at Posttest 2 by Condition

Source of Variance	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>
Between groups	1	1729.349	1729.349	30.285*
Within groups	186	10621.185	57.103	
Total	189	538224.000		

Note. *df* = degrees of freedom. *SS* = Sum of Squares. *F* = *F* distribution. * $p < .05$.

These results were used to test H_{O1} : There is no statistically significant difference in self-awareness, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) self-awareness subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not. Based on the above findings, the researcher rejects the null hypothesis because a statistically significant difference was found in self-awareness between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups.

Self-Management Subscale of the DESSA

To test the hypothesis that students receiving the RFS classroom guidance program (treatment group) would evidence an increase in self-management (SM) as compared to students who did not receive the RFS program (comparison group), a MANCOVA test was performed. To control for differences between the students prior to the intervention the students' SM pretest scores were used as a covariate (52.31). Results from the MANCOVA revealed a statistically significant difference [$F(2,185) = 9.631, p = .000$; Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.906, \eta_p^2$ of .09, a medium to large effect] between treatment and comparison groups. The test of between-subjects revealed a statistically significant difference [$F(1,186) = 7.783, p = .006$; η_p^2 of .04, a small effect] at posttest 1 between treatment ($M = 53.52, SD = 9.443$) and comparison groups ($M = 52.99, SD = 13.289$), and at posttest 2 [$F(1,186) = 18.935, p = .000$; η_p^2 of .09, a medium to large effect] between the treatment ($M = 54.25, SD = 9.547$) and comparison groups ($M = 51.43, SD = 13.630$). Table 6 and table 7 presents the findings of the ANOVA tests at posttest 1 and posttest 2 respectively.

Table 6

Summary Table for One-Way Analysis of Variance for DESSA Self-Management Subscale at Posttest 1 by Condition

Source of Variance	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>
Between groups	1	298.249	289.249	7.783*
Within groups	186	6912.683	37.165	
Total	189	560633.000		

Note. *df* = degrees of freedom. *SS* = Sum of Squares. *F* = *F* distribution. * $p < .05$.

Table 7

Summary Table for One-Way Analysis of Variance for DESSA Self-Management Subscale at Posttest 2 by Condition

Source of Variance	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>
Between groups	1	1011.096	1011.096	18.935*
Within groups	186	9931.872	53.397	
Total	189	555397.000		

Note. *df* = degrees of freedom. *SS* = Sum of Squares. *F* = *F* distribution. * $p < .05$.

These results were used to test the following hypothesis HO₂: There is no statistically significant difference in self-management, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) self-management subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not. Based on the above findings, the researcher rejects the null hypothesis because a statistically significant difference was found in self-management between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups.

Social Awareness Subscale of the DESSA

To test the hypothesis that students receiving the RFS classroom guidance program (treatment group) would evidence an increase in social awareness (SO) as compared to students who did not receive the RFS program (comparison group), a MANCOVA test was performed. To control for differences between the students prior to the intervention the students' SO pretest scores were used as a covariate (52.35). Results from the MANCOVA revealed a statistically significant difference [$F(2,185) = 5.728$, $p < .004$; Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.942$, η_p^2 of .05, a small to medium effect] between treatment and comparison groups. The test of between-subjects did not reveal a statistically significant

difference [$F(1,186) = 2.710, p = .101; \eta_p^2$ of .01, a small effect] at posttest 1 between treatment ($M = 54.27, SD = 9.193$) and comparison groups ($M = 52.55, SD = 12.959$). However, the test of between-subjects revealed a statistically significant difference [$F(1,186) = 11.393, p = .001; \eta_p^2$ of .05, a small to medium effect] at posttest 2 between the treatment ($M = 54.49, SD = 9.615$) and comparison groups ($M = 50.51, SD = 13.716$). Table 8 and table 9 presents the findings of the ANOVA tests at posttest 1 and posttest 2 respectively.

Table 8

Summary Table for One-Way Analysis of Variance for DESSA Social Awareness Subscale at Posttest 1 by Condition

Source of Variance	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>
Between groups	1	126.609	126.609	2.710*
Within groups	186	8689.960	46.720	
Total	189	563708.000		

Note. *df* = degrees of freedom. *SS* = Sum of Squares. *F* = *F* distribution. * $p < .05$.

Table 9

Summary Table for One-Way Analysis of Variance for DESSA Social Awareness Subscale at Posttest 2 by Condition

Source of Variance	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>
Between groups	1	716.002	716.002	11.393*
Within groups	186	11689.632	62.847	
Total	189	550296.000		

Note. *df* = degrees of freedom. *SS* = Sum of Squares. *F* = *F* distribution. * $p < .05$.

The results were used to test the following hypothesis HO₃: There is no statistically significant difference in social awareness, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) social awareness subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not. Based on the above findings, the researcher rejects the null hypothesis because a statistically significant difference was found in social awareness between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups.

Relationship Skills Subscale of the DESSA

To test the hypothesis that students receiving the RFS classroom guidance program (treatment group) would evidence an increase in relationship skills (RS) as compared to students who did not receive the RFS program (comparison group), a MANCOVA test was performed. To control for differences between the students prior to the intervention the students' RS pretest scores were used as a covariate (50.95). Results from the MANCOVA revealed a statistically significant difference [$F(2,185) = 5.892, p < .003$; Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.940, \eta_p^2$ of .06, a medium effect] between treatment and comparison groups. The test of between-subjects did not reveal a statistically significant difference [$F(1,186) = 1.096, p = .296$; η_p^2 of .006, no effect] at posttest 1 between treatment ($M = 52.75, SD = 9.267$) and comparison groups ($M = 53.21, SD = 12.988$). However, the test of between-subjects revealed a statistically significant difference [$F(1,186) = 11.131, p = .001$; η_p^2 of .05, a small to medium effect] at posttest 2 between the treatment ($M = 53.39, SD = 9.153$) and comparison groups ($M = 50.91, SD = 13.716$). Table 10 and table 11 presents the findings of the ANOVA tests at posttest 1 and posttest 2 respectively.

Table 10

Summary Table for One-Way Analysis of Variance for DESSA Relationship Skills Subscale at Posttest 1 by Condition

Source of Variance	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>
Between groups	1	47.302	47.302	1.096*
Within groups	186	8024.383	43.142	
Total	189	553350.000		

Note. *df* = degrees of freedom. *SS* = Sum of Squares. *F* = *F* distribution. * $p < .05$.

Table 11

Summary Table for One-Way Analysis of Variance for DESSA Relationship Skills Subscale at Posttest 2 by Condition

Source of Variance	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>
Between groups	1	693.971	716.002	11.131*
Within groups	186	11596.060	62.344	
Total	189	541265.000		

Note. *df* = degrees of freedom. *SS* = Sum of Squares. *F* = *F* distribution. * $p < .05$.

The results were used to test the following hypothesis HO₄: There is no statistically significant difference in relationship skills, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) relationship skills subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not. Based on the above findings, the researcher rejects the null hypothesis because a statistically significant difference was found in relationship skills between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups.

Decision Making Subscale of the DESSA

To test the hypothesis that students receiving the RFS classroom guidance program (treatment group) would evidence an increase in responsible decision making (DM) as compared to students who did not receive the RFS program (comparison group), a MANCOVA test was performed. To control for differences between the students prior to the intervention the students' DM pretest scores were used as a covariate (51.40). Results from the MANCOVA revealed a statistically significant difference [$F(2,185) = 8.941, p < .000$; Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.912, \eta_p^2$ of .08, a medium effect] between treatment and comparison groups. The test of between-subjects did not reveal a statistically significant difference [$F(1,186) = 1.190, p = .277$; η_p^2 of .006, a small effect] at posttest 1 between treatment ($M = 52.34, SD = 9.842$) and comparison groups ($M = 53.24, SD = 12.663$). However, the test of between-subjects revealed a statistically significant difference [$F(1,186) = 15.765, p = .000$; η_p^2 of .07, a medium effect] at posttest 2 between the treatment ($M = 53.59, SD = 9.461$) and comparison groups ($M = 50.84, SD = 13.492$). Table 12 and table 13 presents the findings of the ANOVA tests at posttest 1 and posttest 2 respectively.

Table 12

Summary Table for One-Way Analysis of Variance for DESSA Decision Making Subscale at Posttest 1 by Condition

Source of Variance	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>
Between groups	1	48.413	48.413	1.190*
Within groups	186	7567.233	40.684	
Total	189	549647.000		

Note. *df* = degrees of freedom. *SS* = Sum of Squares. *F* = *F* distribution. * $p < .05$.

Table 13

Summary Table for One-Way Analysis of Variance for DESSA Decision Making Subscale at Posttest 2 by Condition

Source of Variance	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>
Between groups	1	946.371	946.371	15.765*
Within groups	186	11165.256	60.028	
Total	189	542471.000		

Note. *df* = degrees of freedom. *SS* = Sum of Squares. *F* = *F* distribution. * $p < .05$.

These results were used to test the following hypothesis HO₅: There is no statistically significant difference in responsible decision making, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) decision making subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not. Based on the above findings, the researcher rejects the null hypothesis because a statistically significant difference was found in responsible decision making between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups.

Social-Emotional Composite Scale of the DESSA

To test the hypothesis that students receiving the RFS classroom guidance program (treatment group) would evidence an increase in overall social-emotional competence (SEC) as compared to students who did not receive the RFS program (comparison group), a MANCOVA test was performed. To control for differences between the students prior to the intervention the students' SEC pretest scores were used as a covariate (50.66). Results from the MANCOVA revealed a statistically significant difference [$F(2,185) = 12.493, p = .000$; Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.881, \eta_p^2$ of .12, a medium to large effect] between treatment and comparison groups. The test of between-subjects revealed

a statistically significant difference [$F(1,186) = 3.963, p = .048; \eta_p^2$ of .02, a small effect] at posttest 1 between treatment ($M = 52.29, SD = 9.252$) and comparison groups ($M = 52.07, SD = 13.210$). The test of between-subjects revealed a statistically significant difference [$F(1,186) = 24.362, p = .000; \eta_p^2$ of .12, a medium to large effect] at posttest 2 between the treatment ($M = 53.45, SD = 8.711$) and comparison groups ($M = 49.93, SD = 13.616$). Table 14 and table 15 presents the findings of the ANOVA tests at posttest 1 and posttest 2 respectively.

Table 14

Summary Table for One-Way Analysis of Variance for DESSA Social Emotional Composite Scale at Posttest 1 by Condition

Source of Variance	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>
Between groups	1	128.677	128.677	3.963*
Within groups	186	6039.174	32.469	
Total	189	538462.000		

Note. *df* = degrees of freedom. *SS* = Sum of Squares. *F* = *F* distribution. * $p < .05$.

Table 15

Summary Table for One-Way Analysis of Variance for DESSA Social Emotional Composite Scale at Posttest 2 by Condition

Source of Variance	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>
Between groups	1	1099.893	1099.893	24.362*
Within groups	186	8397.659	45.149	
Total	189	531922.000		

Note. *df* = degrees of freedom. *SS* = Sum of Squares. *F* = *F* distribution. * $p < .05$.

The results were used to test the following hypothesis HO6: There is no statistically significant difference in social-emotional competence, as measured by the

Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) composite scale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not. Based on the above findings, the researcher rejects the null hypothesis because a statistically significant difference was found in social-emotional competence between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups.

Reading Proficiency

To test the hypothesis that third-grade students receiving the RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) would evidence an increase in grade level reading proficiency, as measured by the district adapted Reading Running Record (RRR) portion of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2 (BAS-2), in comparison to student who did not receive the RFS program, a one-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was completed. To control for differences between the students prior to the intervention the students' RRR pretest scores were used as a covariate (14.04). Results from the MANCOVA revealed no statistically significant difference [$F(2,186) = .490, p < .613$; Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.995, \eta_p^2$ of .005, no effect] between treatment and comparison groups on RRR scores. The test of between-subjects did not reveal a statistically significant difference at posttest 1 [$F(1, 187) = .815, p = .368; \eta_p^2$ of .004, no effect], or posttest 2 [$F(1, 187) = .693, p = .406; \eta_p^2$ of .004, a small effect]. Table 16 and table 17 presents the findings of the ANOVA tests at posttest 1 and posttest 2 respectively.

Table 16

Summary Table for One-Way Analysis of Variance for RRR at Posttest 1 by Condition

Source of Variance	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>
Between groups	1	.540	.540	.368*
Within groups	187	123.868	.662	
Total	190	44177.000		

Note. *df* = degrees of freedom. *SS* = Sum of Squares. *F* = *F* distribution. * $p < .05$.

Table 17

Summary Table for One-Way Analysis of Variance for RRR at Posttest 2 by Condition

Source of Variance	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>
Between groups	1	.926	.926	.406*
Within groups	186	249.867	1.336	
Total	190	51483.000		

Note. *df* = degrees of freedom. *SS* = Sum of Squares. *F* = *F* distribution. * $p < .05$.

The results were used to test the following hypothesis HO7: There is no statistically significant difference in reading proficiency, as measured by the district adapted Reading Running Record (RRR) portion of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2 (BAS-2), between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not. Based on the above findings, the researcher fails to reject the null hypothesis because a statistically significant difference was not found in reading proficiency between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups.

Third-Grade Promotion Rate

To test the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference in third-grade promotion rate, as measured by school level data reported collected using the school district's Student Information System (SIS) system, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not, a multi-dimensional chi-square test was completed. A multi-dimensional chi-square test of independence determines whether there is an association between variables (Brace et al., 2016). In the present study, the chi-square was completed to determine whether receiving the RFS classroom guidance program was significantly associated with third-grade student promotion or non-promotion. An alpha level of .05 was used. Results from the chi-square concluded that there was not enough evidence to suggest an association between participation in the RFS classroom guidance program and student promotion next grade level ($X^2(1) = 1.349, p = .245$).

However, it is important to note that Expected Count values confirm that there were fewer students retained in the treatment group ($n = 4$) than expected ($n = 5.9$), and more students retained in the comparison group ($n = 7$) than expected ($n = 5.1$).

The results were used to test the following hypothesis HO₈: There is no statistically significant difference in third-grade promotion rate, as measured by school level data reported collected using the school district's Student Information System (SIS) system, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not. Based on the above findings, the researcher fails to reject the null hypothesis because a statistically significant association was not found between

participation in the RFS classroom guidance program and third-grade promotion ($X^2(1) = 1.349, p = .245$).

Summary of Hypotheses

A series of multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) tests were used to determine statistically significant differences between students who received the RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) and the students who did not receive the program. Furthermore, a Pearson's chi-square test, or chi-square test of association, was used to discover if participation in the RFS classroom guidance program is significantly associated with promotion or non-promotion of third-grade students. Decisions about the eight null and alternative hypotheses are presented in this section.

Null Hypothesis 1

HO1: There is no statistically significant difference in self-awareness, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) self-awareness subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not.

There was a statistically significant difference in self-awareness as measured by DESSA self-awareness subscale posttest scores between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups; therefore, the null Hypothesis 1 was rejected.

Alternative Hypothesis 1

Alternative 1: There is a statistically significant difference in self-awareness, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) self-awareness subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not.

There was a statistically significant difference in self-awareness as measured by DESSA self-awareness subscale posttest scores between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups; therefore, the alternative Hypothesis 1 was not rejected.

Null Hypothesis 2

HO2: There is no statistically significant difference in self-management, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) self-management subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not.

There was a statistically significant difference in self-management as measured by DESSA self-management subscale posttest scores between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups; therefore, the null Hypothesis 2 was rejected.

Alternative Hypothesis 2

Alternative 2: There is a statistically significant difference in self-management, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) self-management subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not.

There was a statistically significant difference in self-management as measured by DESSA self-management subscale posttest scores between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups; therefore, the null alternative Hypothesis 2 was not rejected.

Null Hypothesis 3

HO3: There is no statistically significant difference in social awareness, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) social awareness subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not.

There was a statistically significant difference in social awareness as measured by DESSA social awareness subscale posttest scores between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups; therefore, the null Hypothesis 3 was rejected.

Alternative Hypothesis 3

Alternative 3: There is a statistically significant difference in social awareness, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) social awareness subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not.

There was a statistically significant difference in social awareness as measured by DESSA social awareness subscale posttest scores between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups; therefore, the null alternative Hypothesis 3 was not rejected.

Null Hypothesis 4

HO4: There is no statistically significant difference in relationship skills, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) relationship skills subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not.

There was a statistically significant difference in relationship skills as measured

by DESSA relationship skills subscale posttest scores between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups; therefore, the null Hypothesis 4 was rejected.

Alternative Hypothesis 4

Alternative 4: There is a statistically significant difference in relationship skills, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) relationship skills subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not.

There was a statistically significant difference in relationship skills as measured by DESSA relationship skills subscale posttest scores between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups; therefore, the alternative Hypothesis 4 was not rejected.

Null Hypothesis 5

HO5: There is no statistically significant difference in responsible decision making, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) decision making subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not.

There was a statistically significant difference in responsible decision making as measured by DESSA decision making subscale posttest scores between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups; therefore, the null Hypothesis 5 was rejected.

Alternative Hypothesis 5

Alternative 5: There is a statistically significant difference in responsible decision making, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) decision

making subscale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not.

There was a statistically significant difference in responsible decision making as measured by DESSA decision making subscale posttest scores between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups; therefore, the alternative Hypothesis 5 was not rejected.

Null Hypothesis 6

HO6: There is no statistically significant difference in social-emotional competence, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) composite scale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not.

There was a statistically significant difference in social-emotional competence as measured by DESSA composite scale posttest scores between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups; therefore, the null Hypothesis 6 was rejected.

Alternative Hypothesis 6

Alternative 6: There is a statistically significant difference in social-emotional competence, as measured by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) composite scale, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not.

There was a statistically significant difference in social-emotional competence as measured by DESSA composite scale posttest scores between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups; therefore, the alternative Hypothesis 6 was not rejected.

Null Hypothesis 7

HO7: There is no statistically significant difference in reading proficiency, as measured by the district adapted Reading Running Record (RRR) portion of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2 (BAS-2), between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not.

There was not a statistically significant difference in reading proficiency, as measured by the district adapted Reading Running Record (RRR) portion of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2 (BAS-2), between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups; therefore, the null Hypothesis 7 was not rejected.

Alternative Hypothesis 7

Alternative 7: There is a statistically significant difference in reading proficiency, as measured by the district adapted Reading Running Record (RRR) portion of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2 (BAS-2), between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not.

There was not a statistically significant difference in reading proficiency, as measured by the district adapted Reading Running Record (RRR) portion of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2 (BAS-2), between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups; therefore, the alternative Hypothesis 7 was rejected.

Null Hypothesis 8

HO8: There is no statistically significant difference in third-grade promotion rate, as measured by school level data reported collected using the school district's Student Information System (SIS) system, between third-grade students who participated in the

RFS classroom program and those who did not.

There was not a statistically significant association between participation in the RFS classroom guidance program and third-grade promotion; therefore, the null Hypothesis 8 was not rejected.

Alternative Hypothesis 8

Alternative 8: There is a statistically significant difference in third-grade promotion rate, as measured by school level data reported collected using the school district's Student Information System (SIS) system, between third-grade students who participated in the RFS classroom program and those who did not.

There was not a statistically significant association between participation in the RFS classroom guidance program and third-grade promotion; therefore, the alternative Hypothesis 8 was rejected.

Summary

The present study used a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent groups pretest, posttest1, posttest2 design to determine the effect of the RFS Classroom Guidance Program on the social-emotional skills (i.e. self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making) and competence, grade level reading proficiency, and promotion rate of third-grade students. This chapter discussed the descriptive statistics of the DESSA and RRR instruments, presented the results from MANCOVA and Chi Square tests and the effect size calculations for each dependent measure to determine the practical significance of results. Chapter 5 will include the discussion of the results as they relate to existing literature, implications for future research, and limitations of the present study.

V. DISCUSSION

Chapter V discusses the significance and implications of the present study, based on the examination of results presented in the previous chapter. This chapter will provide a summary of the study, present explanations for the findings found in existing literature, and discuss the implications and limitations of the study, as well as the recommendations for future research in the areas of SEL and school counseling outcome research.

Discussion of the Results

The purpose of the current outcome study was to determine the effects of the RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) on factors associated with third-grade promotion and later academic success: social-emotional skills and competence, and grade level reading proficiency. This study contributed to the current outcome research on SEL and school counseling in various ways. This study (a) demonstrates the effectiveness of school counselor classroom guidance intervention (RFS) on students' SEL and development; (b) connects school counselors to the development of students' social-emotional skills and competence; (c) confirms the impact of SEL on students' social-emotional development; (d) identifies the RFS classroom guidance program as an effective SEL intervention; and (e) highlights the need for future research to determine the impact of school counselor led SEL interventions on student academic outcomes.

The present study followed a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent group design with individual third-grade students as the unit of analysis. The participants in this study were 195 third-grade students from four schools in a large school district in Southeast

Florida. The RFS classroom guidance program (independent variable) was implemented by school counselors in two treatment schools ($n=104$), while two schools served as comparison schools ($n=91$), in which the school counselors conducted business as usual. Results of the study were examined using pretest, posttest 1 and posttest 2 data for seven of dependent variables. The main findings of study included a statistically significant difference in social-emotional skills (i.e. self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making) and overall social-emotional competence between the treatment group and comparison group. No statistically significant difference, by treatment condition, was found regarding students' level of reading proficiency or third-grade promotion rate.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 stated a statistically significant difference in self-awareness would be found between students who received the RFS classroom guidance programs and those that did not, as measured by the DESSA self-awareness subscale. This hypothesis was supported by the results, as a statistically significant difference in self-awareness post-test scores was found between students in the treatment and comparison groups. Teachers in the treatment group reported an increase in students' self-awareness as reported on the DESSA self-awareness subscale. A η_p^2 ES of .14 indicated the RFS classroom guidance program had a large effect (Sink & Mvududu, 2010) on students' self-awareness skills. This main effect finding demonstrates the practical significance of using the RFS intervention to positively influence self-awareness among third-grade students, whom are in a critical period for the development of this particular social-emotional skill (Eccles, 1999; Weiss, 2005).

This finding indicates that a school counselor-led SEL classroom intervention can be instrumental in the development of students' self-awareness, and supports the claim that "SAFE" SEL interventions are effective in the promotion of social-emotional skill development (Durlak et al., 2011). Furthermore, these results suggest that classroom guidance programs, such as RFS, can be effective in supporting the development of social-emotional abilities (Brigman & Webb, 2012).

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 stated a statistically significant difference in self-management would be found between students who received the RFS classroom guidance programs and those that did not, as measured by the DESSA self-management subscale. This hypothesis was supported by the results, as a statistically significant difference in self-management post-test scores was found between students in the treatment and comparison groups. Teachers in the treatment group reported an increase in students' self-management as reported on the DESSA self-management subscale. An η_p^2 ES of .09 indicated the RFS classroom guidance program had a medium to large effect (Sink & Mvududu, 2010) on students' self-management skills.

This finding reveals that SEL classroom interventions, when led by school counselors, can be significantly impactful on students' self-management skills. This finding contributes to the growing body of evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of explicit SEL classroom interventions on skills essential for success in school and life (Flavian, 2016).

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 stated a statistically significant difference in social awareness would be found between students who received the RFS classroom guidance programs and those that did not, as measured by the DESSA social awareness subscale. This hypothesis was supported by the results, as a statistically significant difference in social awareness post-test scores was found between students in the treatment and comparison groups. Teachers in the treatment group reported an increase in students' social awareness as reported on the DESSA self-awareness subscale. An η_p^2 ES .05 indicated the RFS classroom guidance program had a small to medium effect (Sink & Mvududu, 2010) on students' social awareness skills.

This finding demonstrates the effectiveness of school counselor led, classroom SEL interventions, in promoting students' social awareness. Previous literature suggests that middle childhood students, such as those in third-grade, need to learn to navigate social interactions, develop social awareness, and understanding and empathize with others (Eccles, 1999; Elias et al., 1997). When students are provided the opportunity to learn and practice social-emotional skills in the classroom setting, social awareness is positively impacted.

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 stated a statistically significant difference in relationship skills would be found between students who received the RFS classroom guidance programs and those that did not, as measured by the DESSA relationship skills subscale. This hypothesis was supported by the results, as a statistically significant difference in relationship skills post-test scores was found between students in the treatment and comparison groups. Teachers

in the treatment group reported an increase in students' relationship skills as reported on the DESSA relationship skills subscale. An η_p^2 ES of .06 indicated the RFS classroom guidance program had a medium effect (Sink & Mvududu, 2010) on students' relationship skills.

This finding demonstrates the effectiveness of classroom-based school counseling interventions on students' relationship skills. Researchers have cited the need for SEL interventions that teach students how to effectively communicate and cooperate with others (CASEL, 2012). This result indicates that students who received the RFS classroom guidance program were more likely to display effective relationship skills. Thus, the present study addressed the need highlighted in previous research.

Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5 stated a statistically significant difference in responsible decision making would be found between students who received the RFS classroom guidance programs and those that did not, as measured by the DESSA decision making subscale. This hypothesis was supported by the results, as a statistically significant difference in decision making post-test scores was found between students in the treatment and comparison groups. Teachers in the treatment group reported an increase in students' responsible decision making as reported on the DESSA decision making subscale. A η_p^2 ES of .08 indicated the RFS classroom guidance program had a medium effect (Sink & Mvududu, 2010) on students' responsible decision making skills.

The results of the current hypothesis showed that students' responsible decision making skills are positively and significantly impacted by classroom SEL. Responsible decision making leads to students' competence, and success within social and academic

contexts (Worzbyt, O'Rourke, and Dandeneau, 2003). Thus, employing programs such as RFS as part of school counseling program interventions, is an effective approach to promoting students' social-emotional skill development.

Hypothesis 6

Hypothesis 6 stated a statistically significant difference in social-emotional competence would be found between students who received the RFS classroom guidance programs and those that did not, as measured by the DESSA social-emotional composite scale. This hypothesis was supported by the results, as a statistically significant difference in social-emotional competence post-test scores was found between students in the treatment and comparison groups. Teachers in the treatment group reported an increase in students' social-emotional competence as reported on the DESSA social-emotional composite scale. A η_p^2 ES of .12 indicated the RFS classroom guidance program had a medium to large effect (Sink & Mvududu, 2010) on students' SEC.

SEC has been identified as a significant indicator for successful student learning and development (Elias & Haynes, 2008). Current literature displays the need examine SEL program effectiveness in promoting of the five social-emotional competencies, the proximal goal of all SEL programs, and overall SEC (Durlak et al., 2011). This finding addresses this need by demonstrating the effectiveness of a school counselor-led, classroom-based SEL program in fostering students' social-emotional skill development, and overall competence. The proximal goal of all SEL programs, such as RFS, is to enhance students' social-emotional abilities by targeting specific skills (i.e. self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making). The finding that participation in the RFS classroom guidance program

increases students' overall SEC, confirms that the program's is in fact effective in promoting the intended proximal goals.

Hypothesis 7

Hypothesis 7 stated a statistically significant difference in reading proficiency would be found between students who received the RFS classroom guidance programs and those that did not, as measured by the district adapted Reading Running Record (RRR) portion of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2 (BAS-2). This hypothesis was not supported by the results, as a statistically significant difference in RRR post-test scores was found between students in the treatment and comparison groups, at posttest 1 or posttest 2.

The association between social-emotional competence and literacy skills (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013) has substantial implications for third-grade students who are at a critical period for achieving reading proficiency. Researchers have found that the successful development of social-emotional skills contributes to social-emotional competence, which is associated with positive academic outcomes for students (Durlak et al., 2011). Though gains in reading proficiency were evident, the gains were not statistically significant in comparison to students who did not receive the intervention. One factor that may have contributed to this finding, which is inconsistent with previous literature, is that the study though intended to occur over a full school-year, was only implemented over the second half of the school year. Additionally, it is unknown what additional literacy interventions were occurring in the participating schools.

Hypothesis 8

Hypothesis 8 stated a statistically significant association would be found between participation in RFS classroom guidance programs and students' promotion or non-promotion in third-grade, as measured by school level data reported collected using the school district's Student Information System (SIS) system. This hypothesis was not supported by the results, as results from a Pearson's chi-square test concluded that there was not enough evidence to suggest an association between participation in the RFS classroom guidance program and student promotion next grade level.

Researchers have determined that evidence-based SEL interventions can promote students' academic achievement and promotion to the next grade level (Jimerson et al., 2006; Lynch, 2013). The authors of the RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) assert that participation in the program can result in fewer third-grade retentions. While statistical significance in student promotion was not found, there were fewer students in the treatment group retained than expected, and conversely more student in the comparison group retained than expected, as indicated in the Pearson's chi-square test of independence.

Relationship Between Results and Existing Literature

The present study demonstrates the effectiveness of school counselor-led classroom guidance interventions on students' social-emotional development, and confirms the sentiment that school counselors are uniquely qualified to address the development of students' social-emotional skills and competence. Van Velsor (2009a) identifies school counselors as highly qualified professionals in the school setting to address the social-emotional development of students. However, much of the SEL

literature has only examined the outcomes of teacher-led or non-school personnel-led SEL initiatives on student outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011), who unlike school counselors often have little to no formal training or education in social-emotional development (Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy [RCERP], 2015). Thus, there has been a call for continued quantitative examination of the effectiveness of school counseling interventions, and the need to identifying specific evidence-based school counseling interventions that are associated with positive social-emotional outcomes (Whiston et al., 2011). The current quantitative, quasi-experimental study answered this call, and the results highlighted a significant difference in social-emotional skills and competence between third-grade students in the treatment and comparison groups. The results of the present study contribute to the growing body of school counseling outcome research, and indicates that evidenced-based school counseling interventions delivered in the classroom setting, can effectively address the social-emotional development of students.

Currently, SEL takes the back seat to academic learning, and although there is a growing momentum in the promotion of SEL, it is all too often overlooked by state policy makers, district-level leaders, and school officials (Durlak et al., 2011). There is a tremendous body of evidence on the numerous positive effects of social-emotional competence on students' educational and life success (Elias et. al, 1997; Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003; Payton et al., 2008; Sklad et al., 2012; Zins et al. 2004). However, previous literature demonstrated a need for continued research on SEL program effectiveness in order to endorse changes in educational policy and practice that prioritize social-emotional development of students (Gabrieli et al., 2015; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). The significant results of the present study across all five social-

emotional skills and overall social-emotional competence (CASEL, 2012) contribute to further development and integration of evidence-based school counseling programs. While the results could not translate to significant impacts on students' academic outcomes (i.e. reading proficiency and grade-level promotion), previous literature has soundly supported the connection between social-emotional skills and competence and academic achievement (i.e. grades, test scores, and reading ability; Bernard, 2004; Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003; Zins et al., 2004).

In addition, the results of this study identify the RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) as an effective SEL intervention that follows the SAFE criteria set forth by Durlak et al. (2011). More specifically, according the results of the present study, the RFS classroom guidance program is an effective intervention for promoting social-emotional skill development and competence. Whiston et al. (2011) emphasized the importance in selecting evidence-based school counseling programs that are empirically supported in promoting desired outcomes. This study was the first to examine the efficacy of the RFS intervention on both the proximal and distal intended outcomes of the program. First, the study investigated the impact of the program on the intended proximal outcome of the program, promoting student development in all five areas of social-emotional competence (i.e. self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making). The results demonstrated significant differences between treatment and comparison groups, which establishes the practical significance of using the RFS intervention to positively influence student social-emotional skills and competence. Thus, this study supports further development and

integration of evidence-based school counseling programs that promote social-emotional competence and the skills that promote educational attainment and life success.

In addition, the study explored the effect of the program on two intended distal outcomes, (a) improving students' reading proficiency and (b) reducing third-grade retention through targeting the cognitive and social-emotional skills of students. Similar to previous RFS research (Brown, 2014; Goldberg, 2009), a significant effect between participation in the program and reading proficiency/achievement was not established. Unlike the previous studies that utilized summative, standardized measures of reading achievement, the present study collected reading performance data at three separate data collection points using the RRR benchmark assessment. While gains in reading proficiency were evident among students within the treatment group, it was lower than that of the comparison group. Likewise, a significant association was not found between participation in the RFS program, and third-grade students' promotion or retention. These findings may be explained by additional academic and literacy interventions occurring within the school setting, particularly with students at-risk for third-grade retention. However, this information was not collected as part of the research study procedures. Another possible explanation is that the RFS program was not implemented in the beginning of the school year, as intended (Brigman & Webb, 2012). Thus, learning and application of newly developed social-emotional skills and competence in the academic setting was limited to second half of the school year. The treatment effect became increasingly more significant across pretest, posttest1 and posttest 2 for all dependent variables. With this in mind, and the understanding that social-emotional skills and competence effectively promote students' readiness to learn (Denham, 2006) and

increased capacity for learning (Durlak et al., 2011), it is possible that a year-long study would have produced significant results in the academic variables of the study.

This study highlights the continued need for future research to determine the impact of school counselor-led SEL interventions on student academic outcomes. As discussed, the present study was unable to establish a significant effect of the school counselor-led SEL intervention, RFS, on students' academic outcomes (i.e. reading proficiency and grade-level promotion). Whiston et al. (2011) explained that identification of evidenced-based school counseling interventions that promote both positive social-emotional and academic outcomes is necessary for continued movement towards evidence-based practice in school counseling. However, there is a current gap in the research on the impacts of school counselor led SEL programs on students' SEL and academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). The present study aimed to contribute to this need in the field of school counseling outcome research, and although significant academic outcomes were not found, factors associated with academic achievement such as social-emotional skills and competence were significantly impacted. It is well-evidenced in SEL outcome research that promoting the development of social-emotional skills contributes to academic readiness, student engagement in learning and ultimately impacts academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998). According to (CASEL, 2012), multi-year, integrated SEL efforts produce the most significant outcomes. With this understanding, students were not provided adequate time to practice and apply the social-emotional skills in the academic setting, and thus significant effects on academic outcomes (i.e. reading proficiency and grade-level promotion) were not found.

Methodological Implications

The methodological implications for this research demonstrate the effectiveness of the RFS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) as an evidence-based practice for school counselors in the area of SEL. This study was designed to (a) address the development of social-emotional skills and competence in third-grade, a critical period for developing self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making skills; (b) support the use of the RFS classroom guidance program as an effective classroom-based SEL intervention; and (c) provide a rigorous outcome research study protocol suitable for replication.

Implications and Recommendation for Future Research and Practice

The findings in this study support the conclusions of Durlak et al. (2011) that classroom-based SEL programs, that follow the SAFE practices, can effectively promote the development of students' social-emotional skills, and in turn contribute to overall social-emotional competence. Furthermore, the findings identify the RFS classroom guidance program as a SAFE and effective SEL intervention. CASEL (2012) asserts that the five SEL competencies (i.e. self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making) are essential skills for third-grade aged students to learn and develop. Data indicates improvements across all five social-emotional competencies for third-grade students who received the SEL intervention. In addition, the improvement of all five social-emotional skills contributed to the significant treatment effect on the social-emotional competence of students in the treatment group. Consequently, the research findings support the use of school counselor-led, evidence based classroom programs to address students' social-emotional needs and development.

The significant results of the school-counselor led intervention offers implications for the field of school counseling. First, the results indicate that a comprehensive school counseling program which incorporates evidence-based SEL programs can promote the development of social-emotional skills and competence. Second, this study identifies school counselors as key professionals in the movement towards evidence-based SEL programming in the school setting. Researchers have identified the lack of qualified personnel assigned to moving SEL programming within schools as a significant barrier to effective implementation of evidenced-based SEL (Elias et al., 2003; Durlak et al., 2011; Riggs et al., 2006; Van Velsor, 2009a). This barrier can be removed through school counselor implementation of empirically supported SEL programs in the classroom setting. Future research should explore the impacts of school counselor-led, classroom-based SEL interventions when delivered in conjunction with small-group counseling interventions for targeted students (i.e. students identified as needing further support). This multi-tiered approach to school counseling interventions may produce more significant results, especially among students identified as needing more support and practice with social-emotional skill development (Harrington, Griffith, Gray & Greenspan, 2016; Ziomek-Daigle, Goodman-Scott, Cavin, & Donohue, 2016). Additionally, school counseling outcome research should further explore the impact of school counselor-led SEL interventions on student outcomes over time. A multi-year approach to SEL has been determined as most effective in promoting desirable student outcomes (CASEL, 2012; Durlak et al., 2011). Therefore, future research should examine the effect of the RFS classroom guidance intervention when delivered in a multi-year format. The program is designed for second and third-grade students, hence a multi-year

approach is feasible. Additionally, as previously noted, treatment effects increased over time, therefore a longitudinal study should also be considered to determine the long-term treatment effects of the RFS program on social-emotional and academic outcomes.

These results have far reaching implications, not only for school counselors, but also for schools, school districts, and educational leaders and policymakers. The impacts of poor social-emotional development, below grade-level reading proficiency, and the negative outcomes associated with third-grade retention can have lasting negative impacts for the individual, families, communities, and society at large (Annie Casey Foundation, 2010; Hernandez, 2012; Jimerson, 2001, Jimerson et al., 2002; Ripple & Luthar, 2000). The benefits of social-emotional competence are wide-spread and long-lasting including increased probability of high school graduation, improved college and career readiness, stronger interpersonal relationships, improved mental health, and decreased criminal behavior (Hawkins et al., 2008). This study provides support for evidenced-based SEL intervention in schools. Durlak et al. (2011) assert that educators would see improved student outcomes by prioritizing evidence-based interventions that encourage social-emotional development. Future research should continue to explore the impact of school counselor led SEL programs on a variety of cognitive and academic outcomes for children. Additionally, continued practice should include implementation of SEL programs that directly and positively impact social-emotional skills and competence, such as the RDS classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012). Finally, researchers should provide findings of future research in the area of school-counselor led SEL to stakeholders at the school, district, state and national level to promote, as

continued empirical support is needed promote change in educational policies and practices.

Discussion of Limitations

This study was not without limitations. First, the study was limited to four schools in one large school district in Southeast Florida. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to other schools, particularly in other districts or outside of the state of Florida. Future studies should include more than one school district and other states. Thus, a threat to external validity, more specifically population validity, was present. Randomization was not possible; therefore, a nonequivalent comparison-group design was utilized.

As previously mentioned, the study was intended to occur over a full school year (September 2016 to June 2017), but was limited to half a school year (December 2016 to June 2017) due to delays in school district IRB approval and the recruitment of schools. Thus, the impact of the RFS classroom guidance program was not examined over time. A multi-year implementation of the RFS classroom guidance program that begins in second-grade and continues in third-grade is recommended. Moreover, longitudinal studies should be considered to determine the long-term impact of the RFS classroom guidance program on third-grade student social-emotional and academic outcomes.

According to a priori G-power analysis calculation the original sample size in the study ($n=195$) was above the adequate sample size of $n = 190$. In effort to proactively address barriers with recruitment and retention of participants, a sample size of $n = 280$ was sought. However, certain barriers with recruitment (i.e. recruiting schools to participate, receiving teacher consent for participation, and receiving parent consent for

student participation) and retention (i.e. attrition and missing survey data at posttest 1 and/or posttest 2) were present, resulting in total sample size of $n = 195$ and smaller sample sizes in the analysis of the DESSA ($n=189$) and RRR ($n=190$). This sample size for the DESSA analysis was smaller than necessary and therefore results should be considered with caution. Future studies should design a recruitment strategy that allows ample time for school recruitment and selection.

In this study, classroom teachers were not involved in RFS training and were not required to participate during the classroom intervention, or cue and coach the students on the skills taught. Lesson fidelity measures were employed to gather data on fidelity of implementation; however, not utilized in the study analysis. Finally, methodological limitations existed in this study. Pretest retention data was not utilized in the Pearson's chi-square analysis. Follow-up studies should account for the presented limitations, and replicate the current study with a larger population, over time.

Summary and Conclusions

Results of this dissertation study supported the prediction that students who received the Ready for Success (RFS) classroom guidance program (Brigman & Webb, 2012) would evidence significant differences in social-emotional skills (i.e. self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making) and social-emotional competence, as compared to students who did not receive the intervention. This study provided empirical support for the effectiveness of a school counselor-led, SEL classroom intervention on the proximal goal of all SEL interventions, social-emotional development. Additionally, the study highlights the significant effect school counselors can have on student success, particularly social-

emotional development, when utilizing an evidenced-based approach. School counselors are well positioned to serve as SEL interventionist within the school setting. Arming school counselors with an evidence-based, manualized SEL program can remove barriers to successful, long-term implementation of SEL in schools. It is recommended that future studies explore the impact of the RFS classroom guidance program over time, as this may provide a clearer picture of the impact of the SEL intervention on reading proficiency and grade-level promotion, among other academic outcomes.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Letter



Institutional Review Board
Division of Research
777 Glades Rd.
Boca Raton, FL 33431
Tel: 561.297.1383
fau.edu/research/researchint

Charles Dukes, Ed.D., Chair

DATE: September 7, 2016

TO: Elizabeth Villares, Ph.D.
FROM: Florida Atlantic University Social, Behavioral and Educational Research IRB

PROTOCOL #: 910377-2
PROTOCOL TITLE: [910377-2] THE EFFECTS OF THE READY FOR SUCCESS CLASSROOM GUIDANCE PROGRAM ON THE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCE, READING PROFICIENCY, AND PROMOTION RATE OF THIRD GRADE STUDENTS

SUBMISSION TYPE: Response/Follow-Up for New Project
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # A1

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
EFFECTIVE DATE: September 6, 2016

Thank you for your submission of Response/Follow-Up materials for this research study. The Florida Atlantic University Social, Behavioral and Educational Research IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM FEDERAL REGULATIONS. Therefore, you may initiate your research study.

We will keep a copy of this correspondence on file in our office. Please keep the IRB informed of any substantive change in your procedures, so that the exemption status may be re-evaluated if needed. Substantive changes are changes that are not minor and may result in increased risk or burden or decreased benefits to participants. Please also inform our office if you encounter any problem involving human subjects while conducting your research.

If you have any questions or comments about this correspondence, please contact Donna Simonovitch at:

Institutional Review Board
Research Integrity/Division of Research
Florida Atlantic University
Boca Raton, FL 33431
Phone: 561.297.1383
researchintegrity@fau.edu

* Please include your protocol number and title in all correspondence with this office.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations,
and a copy is retained within our records.

Appendix B

Parental Consent Form

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

The Effects of the Ready for Success Classroom Guidance Program on the Social-Emotional Skills and Competence, Reading Proficiency, and Promotion Rate of Third Grade Students
Elizabeth Villares, Ph.D. and Ellen Chance, Doctoral Candidate

Version 1.0 – July 14, 2016

1) Title of Research Study: The Effects of the Ready for Success Classroom Guidance Program on the Social-Emotional Skills and Competence, Reading Proficiency, and Promotion Rate of Third Grade Students

2) Investigator(s): My name is Ellen Chance and I am a doctoral candidate at Florida Atlantic University and a school counselor with the School District of Palm Beach County. I am working with Dr. Elizabeth Villares, Associate Professor at Florida Atlantic University, to study a school counselor-led classroom guidance program titled Ready for Success (Brigman & Webb, 2012).

3) Purpose: The purpose of the project is to determine the effects of the Ready for Success (RFS) classroom guidance program on grade 3 students' social-emotional skills (e.g., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making), overall social-emotional competence (i.e., students' ability to understand and regulate emotions, set and achieve positive personal and academic goals, interact well and empathize with others, establish and maintain positive and cooperative relationships, and make responsible decisions), grade level reading proficiency (i.e. ability meets grade level standards in reading) and grade 3 promotion rate (student promotion to next grade level).

4) Procedures: As part of this study your child will be randomly assigned to receive the counselor-led RFS classroom program (treatment group) or continue to receive the school counseling program curriculum already in place at their school (comparison group). All participating teachers will observe your child during regular classroom activities and complete the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), a measure of social-emotional skills and competence such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Researchers will collect demographic data (Age, Gender, Ethnicity, English Language Learning Status, Exceptional Student Education Status, and 504 Status) and your child's results on the Reading Running Record (the school district's required standardized measure of reading proficiency) three times throughout the 2016-2017 school year. If your child is a part of the study's treatment group, beginning in December 2016 they will receive five weekly school counselor-led classroom guidance lessons, followed by three monthly booster sessions. If your child is part of the study's comparison group, they will receive their standard school counseling curriculum/program and be eligible to receive the RFS once all the study data has been collected.

5) Risks: The risks involved with participation in this study are no more than any student would experience in regular school activities. It is unlikely that your students will experience any harm or discomfort. Please know that your student's name will not be shared or matched to any data provided to the researchers. Instead, your student will be provided a generic number that only your students' teacher and school counselor will know. You student may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

6) Benefits: We do not know if your child will receive any direct benefits by taking part in this study. However, the findings of this study may contribute to a greater understanding of the development of social-emotional skills (i.e., self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making), social-emotional competence, and reading proficiency.

Consent 5 Parental Consent Format. FAU/RI. Version 2 – 04/29/2016
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Initials _____


Institutional
Review Board

910377-2	
Approved On:	September 6, 2016
Expires On:	N/A

7) Data Collection & Storage: Any information collected about your child will be kept confidential and secure and only the people working with the study will see your child's data, unless required by law. Researchers will not have any information that will be used to identify your child. Your child will remain anonymous using a numeric/alphabetic coding system (e.g. school # 1 to X, teacher # 1 to X, and student # 1 to X). The data will be kept for 3 years on a password protect flash drive and will be stored in a locked cabinet in the Principal Investigator's office. After 3 years the electronic data will be deleted. We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, your child's name/identity will remain confidential.

8) Contact Information:

- ☐ For questions about the study, you should call the principal investigator(s), Dr. Elizabeth Villares at (772) 321-2220 or Mrs. Ellen Chance (561) 324-2808.
- ☐ **For questions or problems regarding your child's rights as a research participant, you can contact the Florida Atlantic University Division of Research at (561) 297-0777 or via email at researchintegrity@fau.edu.**

9) Consent Statement:

I have read, or had read to me, the information describing this study. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I allow my child _____ to take part in this study. First Name / Last name

I can refuse to participate or stop participating at any time without giving any reason and without penalty. I can ask to have the information related to my child returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Parent or Guardian: _____ Date: _____

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian*: First Name _____ Last Name _____

*Note: If you are not the biological or adoptive parent, please ensure you are the legal permanent guardian or have other court-appointed privileges to consent to research for your child.

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Teacher Consent Form

ADULT CONSENT FORM - TEACHERS

The Effects of the Ready for Success Classroom Guidance Program on the Social-Emotional Skills and Competence, Reading Proficiency, and Promotion Rate of Third Grade Students
Elizabeth Villares, Ph.D. and Ellen Chance, Doctoral Candidate

Version 1.0 – July 14, 2016

- 1) Title of Research Study:** The Effects of the Ready for Success Classroom Guidance Program on the Social-Emotional Skills and Competence, Reading Proficiency, and Promotion Rate of Third Grade Students
- 2) Investigator(s):** Principal Investigator (PI): Elizabeth Villares, Ph.D., Co-Investigator: Ellen Chance, Doctoral Candidate
- 3) Purpose:** The purpose of the project is to determine the effects of the Ready for Success (RFS) classroom guidance program on grade 3 students' social-emotional skills (e.g., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making), overall social-emotional competence (i.e., students' ability to understand and regulate emotions, set and achieve positive personal and academic goals, interact well and empathize with others, establish and maintain positive and cooperative relationships, and make responsible decisions), grade level reading proficiency (i.e. ability meets grade level standards in reading) and grade 3 promotion rate (student promotion to next grade level).
- 4) Procedures:** Schools whose principals have agreed to participate in the study will be randomly assigned to either a treatment or comparison group. If you agree to participate in this study and are assigned to the treatment group, we would ask you to do the following things: (1) Attend a one hour training in November 2016 to learn how to complete the web-based Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), a measure of social-emotional skills and competence; (2) Complete one Google Form to collect information on years of teaching experience and year of last Reading Running Record (RRR); (3) Grant your school counselor access to your classroom in order to deliver the weekly 45 minute RFS lessons for five consecutive weeks and the subsequent three monthly booster session to your participating students; (4) Complete the web-based DESSA survey related to the social-emotional skills of each participating student, three times throughout the 2016-2017 school year (Pre-Test in November, Posttest1 in January, and Posttest 2 in May). The web-based survey takes approximately 4.5 to 9 minutes per student to complete and will take place during the regularly scheduled school day. A substitute teacher will be provided to you, at each data collection interval, for two hours to complete the DESSA surveys; (5) Complete the district required Reading Running Record (RRR) assessment for each participating student, three times throughout the 2016-2017 school year (Pre-Test in Trimester 1, Posttest1 in January, and Posttest 2 in May). If you participate in this study, RRR data collection must occur over a specific two-week window and students must be tested in the same order for Pre-Test, Posttest1, and Posttest2. Data collection will take place during the regularly scheduled school day.

If you agree to participate in this study and are assigned to the comparison group, we would ask you to do the following things: (1) Attend a one-hour training in November 2016 to learn how to complete the web-based Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), a measure of social-emotional skills and competence; (2) Complete one Google Form to collect information on years of teaching experience and year of last Reading Running Record (RRR); (3) Complete the web-based DESSA survey related to the social-emotional skills of each participating student, three times throughout the 2016-2017 school year (Pre- Test in November, Posttest1 in January, and Posttest 2 in May). The web-based survey takes

Consent_1_Adult Consent Template FAU/RI. Version – 04/22/2016
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Participant Initials-

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Approved On:	September 6, 2016
Expires On:	

approximately 4.5 to 9 minutes per student to complete and will take place during the regularly scheduled school day. A substitute teacher will be provided to you, at each data collection interval, for two hours to complete the DESSA surveys; (4) Complete the district required Reading Running Record (RRR) assessment for each participating student, three times throughout the 2016-2017 school year (Pre-Test in Trimester 1, Posttest1 in January, and Posttest 2 in May). If you participate in this study, RRR data collection must occur over a specific two-week window and students must be tested in the same order for Pre-Test, Posttest1, and Posttest2. Data collection will take place during the regularly scheduled school day.

5) Risks: The risks involved with participation in this study are no more than any teacher/student would experience in regular school activities. It is unlikely you or your students will experience any harm or discomfort. Please know that no one else will know how you answered; no names will be used, only generic student numbers. Other than the researchers, no one will know your answers, including administrators, teachers, parents, friends or other students. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

6) Benefits: We do not know if your student will receive any direct benefits by taking part in this study. However, the findings of this study may contribute to a greater understanding of the development of social-emotional skills (self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making), social-emotional competence, and reading proficiency.

7) Data Collection & Storage: Any information collected about your students will be kept confidential and secure and only the people working with the study will see your child's data, unless required by law. Researchers will not have any information that will be used to identify you or your students. Your name will remain anonymous using a numeric/alphabetic coding system (e.g. school # 1 to X, teacher # 1 to X, and student # 1 to X). The data will be kept for 3 years on a password protect flash drive and will be stored in a locked cabinet in the PI's office. All electronic data will be deleted after three years. We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, your students' name/identity will remain confidential.

8) Contact Information:

- ☐ For questions about the study, you should call the principal investigator(s), Dr. Elizabeth Villares at (772) 321-2220 or Mrs. Ellen Chance (561) 324-2808.
- ☐ For questions or problems regarding your child's rights as a research participant, you can contact the Florida Atlantic University Division of Research at (561) 297-0777 or via email at researchintegrity@fau.edu.

9) Consent Statement:

*I have read or had read to me the information describing this study. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and freely consent to participate. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Printed Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

School Counselor Consent Form

ADULT CONSENT FORM – SCHOOL COUNSELORS

The Effects of the Ready for Success Classroom Guidance Program on the Social-Emotional Skills and Competence, Reading Proficiency, and Promotion Rate of Third Grade Students
Elizabeth Villares, Ph.D. and Ellen Chance, Doctoral Candidate

Version 1.0 – July 14, 2016

- 1) Title of Research Study:** The Effects of the Ready for Success Classroom Guidance Program on the Social-Emotional Skills and Competence, Reading Proficiency, and Promotion Rate of Third Grade Students
- 2) Investigator(s):** Principal Investigator (PI): Elizabeth Villares, Ph.D., Co-Investigator: Ellen Chance, Doctoral Candidate
- 3) Purpose:** The purpose of the project is to determine the effects of the Ready for Success (RFS) classroom guidance program on grade 3 students' social-emotional skills (e.g., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making), overall social-emotional competence (i.e., students' ability to understand and regulate emotions, set and achieve positive personal and academic goals, interact well and empathize with others, establish and maintain positive and cooperative relationships, and make responsible decisions), grade level reading proficiency (i.e. ability meets grade level standards in reading) and grade 3 promotion rate (student promotion to next grade level).
- 4) Procedures:** Schools whose principals have agreed to participate in the study will be randomly assigned to either a treatment or comparison group. If you agree to participate in this study and are assigned to the treatment group, we would ask you to do the following things: (1) Attend a half day training in November 2016 to learn how to deliver the RFS manualized classroom guidance curriculum; (2) Complete one Google Form to collect information on the previous and current school counseling program(s)/interventions(s) at your school; (3) Deliver the weekly 45 minute RFS lessons for five consecutive weeks and the subsequent three monthly booster session to participating students; (4) complete a weekly electronic report using Google Forms on the date of each weekly lesson, the number of students present for the lesson, the start and end time of each session, and perceived effectiveness of the lesson for each lesson delivered (a total of 8); (5) complete a weekly electronic report any unanticipated problems or issues following each lesson delivery (a total of 8). Data collection will take place during the regularly scheduled school day.
- If you agree to participate in this study and are assigned to the comparison group, we would ask you to do the following things: (1) Complete one Google Form to collect information on the previous and current school counseling program(s)/interventions(s) at your school. You will be eligible to receive a free half-day training on the delivery of the RFS manualized classroom guidance curriculum upon completion of the study.
- 5) Risks:** The risks involved with participation in this study are no more than any school counselor/ teacher/student would experience in regular school activities. It is unlikely you or your students will experience any harm or discomfort. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Participant Initials _____

- 6) Benefits:** We do not know if your students will receive any direct benefits by taking part in this study. However, the findings of this study may contribute to a greater understanding of the Consent_1_Adult Consent Template FAU/RI. Version – 04/22/2016

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FAU Institutional Review Board	910377-2	
	Approved On:	September 6, 2016
	Expires On:	

development of social-emotional skills (self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making), social-emotional competence, and reading proficiency.

7) Data Collection & Storage: Any information collected about your students will be kept confidential and secure and only the people working with the study will see your child's data, unless required by law. Researchers will not have any information that will be used to identify you or your students. Your name will remain anonymous using a numeric/alphabetic coding system (e.g. school # 1 to X, teacher # 1 to X, and student # 1 to X). The data will be kept for 3 years on a password protect flash drive and will be stored in a locked cabinet in the PI's office. All electronic data will be deleted after three years. We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, your child's name/identity will remain confidential.

8) Contact Information:

- ☐ For questions about the study, you should call the principal investigator(s), Dr. Elizabeth Villares at (772) 321-2220 or Mrs. Ellen Chance (561) 324-2808.
- ☐ For questions or problems regarding your child's rights as a research participant, you can contact the Florida Atlantic University Division of Research at (561) 297-0777 or via email at researchintegrity@fau.edu.

9) Consent Statement:

*I have read or had read to me the information describing this study. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and freely consent to participate. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Printed Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E

Student Assent Form

CHILD ASSENT

The Effects of the Ready for Success Classroom Guidance Program on the Social-Emotional Skills and Competence, Reading Proficiency, and Promotion Rate of Third

Researchers from Florida Atlantic University are trying to learn how best to teach 3rd grade students positive behaviors and social skills. Your school counselor will be teaching your class a program called Ready for Success (RFS). You will participate in five fun lessons that teach you helpful skills that you can use to become a better student and friend. You have been asked to participate because this program aims to improve the skills of students your age. If you decide to participate in this study, you will not be asked to do anything other than participate in the 45-minute lessons delivered by your school counselor in your regular classroom. Your school counselor will also come back once a month for three months to give you additional 45-minute lessons.

The researchers hope this study will help you learn positive social skills such as relationship skills, self-management skills, and responsible decision-making, and learning skills that will help you be a better student.

You do not have to be in this study if you don't want to and you can quit the study at any time. No one will get mad at you if you decide you don't want to participate. Your decision to participate or not to participate will have no impact on your grades. If you have any questions, just ask your school counselor.

This research study has been explained to me and I agree to be in this study.

First Name

Last Name

Subject's Signature for Assent

Date

Check which applies (to be completed by person conducting assent discussion):

- ☐ The subject is capable of reading and understanding the assent form and has signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.
- ☐ The subject is not capable of reading the assent form, however, the information was explained verbally to the subject who signed above to acknowledge the verbal explanation and his/her assent to take part in this study.

Name of Person Obtaining Assent (Print)

Signature of Person Obtaining Assent

Date

Consent 4 Child Assent Template. FAU/RI: Version 2 - 04/22/2016
Page 1 of 1


Institutional
Review Board

910377-2	
Approved On:	September 6, 2016
Expires On:	

Appendix F

School District Approval Letter



THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF
PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA

PAUL HOUGHENS
DIRECTOR

MARK HOWARD
CHIEF, PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY

DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH, EVALUATION, &
STATE ASSESSMENTS
3300 FOREST HILL BLVD., SUITE B-246
WEST PALM BEACH, FL 33406-5813
PHONE: 561-434-8469 FAX: 561-357-7608
WWW.PALMBEACHSCHOOLS.ORG/DRE/

October 24, 2016

Ms. Ellen Chance
110 Fairview, E
Jupiter, FL 33469

Dear Ms. Chance:

The Superintendent's Research Review Committee has approved your request to conduct research entitled, "The Effect of the Ready for Success Classroom Program on the Social-Emotional Skills and Competence, Reading Proficiency, and Promotion rate of Third Grade Students", in the School District of Palm Beach County (the District). According to documentation submitted, the intent of this study is to contribute to further development and integration of school counselor-led, evidence-based Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs that encourage social-emotional skills that promote educational attainment and life success. The study will utilize data gathered from Reading Running Records data gathered from four elementary schools, and result from Ready for Success curriculum utilized by school counselors at those four schools.

As this study is conducted, please be governed by the following guidelines and policies as outlined in District's Policy 2.142:

- Section 6 – Approval of Research, Item B – Limited Approval. The Department of Research and Evaluation's approval/acknowledgement of an external research study is conditional and subject to further approval by the school principal(s) and research subject(s) that form the basis for the proposed study. A principal may place restrictions on an External Researcher's access to students and staff to maintain a safe and secure school and to minimize disruption to instructional and other school activities.
 - Application indicated research would be conducted utilizing four schools. Provide list of the four schools. Also provide approval letter from each principal on school letterhead before research is started.
- Section 7 – Document, Character, and Other Requirements, Item G – *Confidentiality/ Data Security Agreement*: To receive access to district-held student level data or staff level data, the researcher must sign a Confidentiality/Data Security Agreement or other agreement, as approved by the Office of General Counsel, that identifies requirements for the storage, use, maintenance, protection, dissemination, and destruction of data provided hereunder. The Confidentiality/Data Security Agreement must be signed by the Researcher for each research proposal approved by the Department of Research and Evaluation.
- Contact **NO** school or department other than Department of Research and Evaluation. District policy provides that no one has the right to access students, staff or data, and prohibits researchers from requesting data directly from schools or other departments.

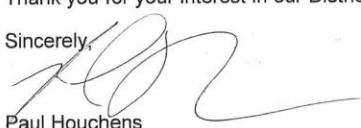
The School District of Palm Beach County
A Top-Rated District by the Florida Department of Education Since 2005
An Equal Education Opportunity Provider and Employer

- Researcher must provide parents with notice of and the opportunity to review the survey/assessment instrument prior to the survey/assessment being administered or distributed. A researcher's consent documents shall inform parents of their right to review surveys or materials created by an external researcher prior to the time it is administered.
 - In the case of student subjects, obtain written informed consent (active consent) from the parent or guardian for all students under 18 years of age before proceeding.
 - In the case of student subjects 18 years of age or older, obtain written consent from students (assent form) before proceeding.
 - Researcher will have signed parent permission forms in order to request personally identifiable student records for Reading Running Records assessment data. Provide original signed consent forms to Department of Research and Evaluation before research is started.
- Teacher participation is strictly voluntary. Obtain written Informed consent from teacher participants.
- Research activities at schools must not occur during the testing window of the Florida Standards Assessments and End-of-Course Assessments – February 16 – May 20, 2017.
- Summarize findings for reports prepared from this study and do not associate responses with a specific school or individual. Information that identifies the District, schools, or individual responses will not be provided to anyone except as required by law.
- This research study must be concluded by September 30, 2017, when the IRB expires.
- If the study requires the use of additional resources or change in participants in the future, a written request must be submitted to this office. Please wait for an approval before proceeding.

Please submit one copy of the study results to the Department of Research and Evaluation no later than one month after completion of the research.

Thank you for your interest in our District.

Sincerely,



Paul Houchens
Director

PH/RP:wl

Appendix G

Treatment Fidelity RFS Weekly Lesson Log

Ready for Success Lesson Log

School counselors, please complete the following log after delivery of each weekly lesson.

* Required

School Code (Provided by Researcher) *

Your answer

Today's Date: *

Date

mm/dd/yyyy

Lesson number: *

Choose

Start Time: *

Time

: AM

End Time:

Time

: AM

Classroom for which you are reporting: *

Choose ▼

Was the teacher present for the entire lesson? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Please rate your delivery effectiveness for this lesson: *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not Effective	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very Effective

Please list any unexpected events, obstacles, or disruptions that occurred during this lesson: *

Your answer _____

Select which students were absent for this lesson (if any):

- ☐ Student 1
- ☐ Student 2
- ☐ Student 3
- ☐ Student 4
- ☐ Student 5
- ☐ Student 6

- ☐ Student 7
- ☐ Student 8
- ☐ Student 9
- ☐ Student 10
- ☐ Student 11
- ☐ Student 12
- ☐ Student 13
- ☐ Student 14
- ☐ Student 15
- ☐ Student 16
- ☐ Student 17
- ☐ Student 18
- ☐ Student 19
- ☐ Student 20
- ☐ Student 21
- ☐ Student 22

SUBMIT

Appendix H

School Counselor Profile and Program Survey

How many years of experience do you have working as a school

☐ School-wide Initiatives

☐ Other:

Please list any School Counseling programs and/or school wide initiatives currently in use at your school. *

Your answer

Please list any School Counseling programs and/or school wide initiatives currently in use at your school specifically intended for third grade students. *

Your answer

SUBMIT

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

Which counseling services does your school counseling program provide? (Select all that apply) *

☐ Individual Counseling

☐ Small Group Counseling

☐ Classroom Guidance

☐ Consultation

☐ Parent Education (i.e. workshops)

School Counselor Profile

Please complete the following survey to provide the researcher information on your professional experience and school counseling activities and programs.

* Required

School Code (Provided by Researcher) *

Your answer

Please indicate whether your school has been assigned to treatment or comparison group *

- ☐ Treatment
- ☐ Comparison

How many years of experience do you have working as a school counselor? *

Your answer

Were you a certified teacher prior to becoming a school counselor? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, how many years of experience as a certified teacher?

Your answer

Appendix I

Teacher Profile and RRR Training Survey

Teacher Profile Survey

Please complete the following survey regarding your years of teaching experience and Running Reading Record training.

*** Required**

School Code (Provided by School Counselor) *

Your answer _____

Classroom Code (Provided by School Counselor) *

Your answer _____

How many years of experience do you have working as a teacher? *

Your answer _____

How many years have you been teaching third grade students? *

Your answer _____

What was the year of your last mandatory Level 1 Reading Record Running training? *

Your answer _____

Have you received Level 2 Reading Running Record Training? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Have you received Level 3 Reading Running Record Training? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Option 1

SUBMIT

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

Appendix J

RRR Data Collection Log

READY FOR SUCCESS STUDY RRR LOG

Teachers,



Thank you for participating in the study, *The Effects of the Ready for Success Classroom Program on the Social-Emotional Skills and Competence, Reading Proficiency, and Promotion Rate of Third Grade Students*. The attached document is used to track the collection of RRR data throughout the duration of the study. Please refer to Student Coding Roster provided to you by the school counselor to complete this form in order to ensure you are completing this form for the correct student (e.g. John Doe is coded as Condition 1, School 1, Classroom 1, Student 1).



- ☐ Complete the attached form during each data collection window.
 - o For **baseline data** in November/December, you will share the date of RRR collections and the order (i.e. 1st, 2nd, 3rd, ...) in which students were tested in 1st trimester.
 - o For **posttest 1** in January and **posttest 2** in May, you will test students in the **same order** as they were tested in 1st trimester (e.g. Student 3 was tested 3rd in 1st trimester, so will be tested 3rd for posttest 1 in January and posttest 2 in May). Students must be tested in same order and within the two-week data collection window provided for posttest.



- ☐ Maintain one electronic copy and one hard copy of this form throughout the duration of the study. Download the electronic copy by visiting: [\[link\]](#)



- ☐ Provide a copy of the electronic RRR log to your **School Counselor** at the completion of **each posttest data collection** window.



- ☐ **School Counselor** will provide an electronic word document of the RRR log to lebutten@fau.edu. Please ensure student identifiers are included.

Please note:



- ☐ Once the **Student Coding Rosters** have been formed, students must stay in this order for the entire project even if students are added to the class or students withdraw from the class/school. For example, John Doe was first on the roster in classroom 1, therefore for the entire duration of the study John Doe will be listed as Condition 1, School 1, Classroom 1, Student 1, even if he moves to another school. Students who leave or join the classroom after the start of the study will not be included in the data collection.

READY FOR SUCCESS STUDY 1-RRR LOG

SCHOOL NAME:

TEACHER NAME:

TEACHER CODE:

Condition	School Code	Classroom Code	Student Code	RRR ORDER TRIMESTER (i.e. 1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd)	RRR DATE TRIMESTER (Baseline)	RRR ORDER POSTTEST (i.e. 1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd)	RRR DATE POSTTEST	RRR ORDER POSTTEST (i.e. 1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd)	RRR DATE POSTTEST
1	1	1	1						
1	1	1	2						
1	1	1	3						
1	1	1	4						
1	1	1	5						
1	1	1	6						
1	1	1	7						
1	1	1	8						
1	1	1	9						
1	1	1	10						
1	1	1	11						
1	1	1	12						
1	1	1	13						
1	1	1	14						
1	1	1	15						
1	1	1	16						
1	1	1	17						
1	1	1	18						
1	1	1	19						
1	1	1	20						
1	1	1	21						
1	1	1	22						

Appendix K

Study Timeline

Summary of Procedures and Study Timeline

The Effects of the Ready for Success Classroom Guidance Program on the Social-Emotional Skills and Competence, Reading Proficiency and Promotion Rate of Third Grade Students.

Month/Activity	Researcher	School Counselor	Teacher	Student
August 2016	Submit School District Research Request	-	-	-
December 2016 <i>School Assignment & Participant Consent</i> <i>Pretest data collection</i>	Gain school level commitments, assign participants to groups & conduct training workshops. Collects baseline data.	Attend training workshop on RFS delivery and data collection facilitation. Send home study participation and consent forms to parents.	Receives training on data collection process and measures, completes informational survey & collects informed consent forms from students. Completes <i>pretest</i> measures DESSA and RRR.	Receives permission and informed consent forms
January 2017 – February 2017 <i>RFS delivery and Posttest1 data collection</i>	Collects fidelity logs electronically from school counselors (<i>Treatment only – after weekly RFS lesson implementation</i>).	Implements 5 weekly sessions of RFS classroom guidance program to 3 rd grade students & completes weekly electronic fidelity logs (<i>Treatment only</i>).	Completes <i>posttest 1</i> measures DESSA and RRR in January.	Receives RFS weekly lessons (<i>Treatment only</i>)
March– May 2017 <i>RFS booster sessions</i>	Collects fidelity logs electronically from school counselors (<i>Treatment only – after monthly RFS lesson implementation</i>).	Implements 3 monthly RFS booster sessions of RFS classroom guidance program to 3 rd grade students & completes weekly electronic fidelity logs.		Receives RFS booster lessons (<i>Treatment only</i>)
May 2017 <i>Posttest 2 data collection</i>	Collects posttest2 data. Begins preliminary analysis (<i>excluding promotion rate</i>)	.	Completes <i>posttest2</i> measures DESSA and RRR.	-
June 2017 <i>Promotion data collection</i>	Collects third grade promotion data	-	-	-

Note. DESSA = Devereux Student Strengths Assessment; RFS= Ready for Success; RRR = Reading Running Record.

Appendix L

Crosswalk: Ready for Success and Dependent Variables

Ready For Success	SELF-AWARENESS	SELF-MANAGEMENT	SOCIAL AWARENESS	RELATIONSHIP SKILLS	RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING	SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE	READING PROFICIENCY
Cognitive/Meta-cognitive Skills							
Goal Setting		✓			✓	✓	
Progress Monitoring	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Story Structure							✓
Memory Skills							✓
Healthy Optimism	✓					✓	
Social Skills						✓	
Social Problem Solving				✓	✓	✓	
Listening/Attending				✓		✓	
Encouragement	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Empathy			✓	✓		✓	
Teamwork/Cooperation				✓		✓	
Self-Management Skills							
Calming Strategies		✓				✓	
Positive Self-Talk/Cognitive Reframing	✓	✓				✓	
Stress/Anger Management Strategies		✓				✓	
Coping Skills		✓				✓	
Attention/Motivation/Focusing		✓				✓	
Life Skills		✓			✓	✓	
Healthy Optimism	✓	✓				✓	

Appendix M

Crosswalk: Study Measures and Dependent Variables

Crosswalk: Study Measures and Dependent Variables

Study Measure	SELF-AWARENESS	SELF-MANAGEMENT	SOCIAL AWARENESS	RELATIONSHIP SKILLS	RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING	SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE	READING PROFICIENCY
DESSA – Self-Awareness Subscale	√						
DESSA – Self-Management Subscale		√					
DESSA – Social Awareness Subscale			√				
DESSA – Relationship Skills Subscale				√			
DESSA – Responsible Decision-Making Subscale					√		
DESSA – Social-Emotional Composite						√	
District K-5 Literacy Assessment System: RRR (Adapted from BAS)							√

Note. BAS= Benchmark Assessment System; DESSA = Devereux Student Strengths Assessment; RRR = Reading Running Record.

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