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Graduate Studies

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL COMPETENCE AND STUDENT
DROPOUT

A Chapter Style Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Education Specialist

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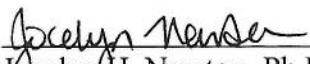
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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL COMPETENCE AND STUDENT DROPOUT

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We recommend acceptance of this thesis in partial fulfillment of the candidate's requirements for the degree of Education Specialist in School Psychology.


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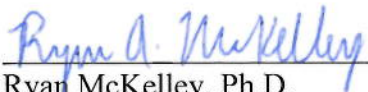
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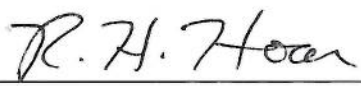


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ABSTRACT

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School administrators across the country continue to search for new, effective interventions meant to alleviate the issue of student dropout. Researchers agree that such intervention practices should target unstable factors (i.e., changeable) related to risk for dropout versus stable factors (i.e., unchangeable) related to dropout. While past research has focused on examining the relationship between the unstable factors of GPA, attendance, retention, and school engagement, and risk for dropping out, specifically in high school students, the aim of the current study was to examine the general relationship between the protective factor of social competence and its relationship to previously identified risk factors for dropout: low academic achievement and low school engagement. Results of this study indicated that social competence has a predictive relationship with dropout (as measured by school engagement) above and beyond the well-known predictive factor of academic achievement.

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CHAPTER 1

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM

Review of Literature

Current Issue of Student Dropout

The United States' public school system has been fighting for decades to reduce the number of students that dropout each year. Despite the Department of Education's efforts to combat risk factors and promote a connection to academics, peers, and educators, the nation as a whole continues to struggle keeping students in school. As reported in the U.S. Department of Education graduate and dropout data, of the 14,954,795 students enrolled in the public education system from 2008-2009, 607,789 students dropped out nationally, resulting in a dropout rate of 4.1% (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Data collected over the past decade indicate that efforts to lower dropout rates have had little effect; the percentage of student dropout has remained stable across the years (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). These stagnant dropout rates have a negative impact on communities, as well as on the students who dropout. With the large population of young adults entering the workforce without a high school diploma, the United States is projected to lose \$319 billion in potential earnings each year (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

In addition to the financial impact of student dropout, the public school system is failing to prepare students for postsecondary schooling or careers, which can be connected to a number of negative outcomes throughout adulthood. According to the

U.S. Department of Labor, adults without a high school diploma earn substantially less than those who do graduate, averaging an annual income of roughly \$24,000 compared to over \$40,000 in 2007. Furthermore, among adults in the workforce, a higher percentage of dropouts are unemployed and are in worse health than those with a diploma. Drop out students also make up a disproportionately higher percentage of the nation's prison and death row inmates (National Association of School Psychology, 2011). The negative outcomes projected for students who drop out of school make it imperative that researchers and educators implement programs and interventions that target students at risk.

Dropout: What Are the Risk Factors?

Research has shown that certain factors increase a student's likelihood of dropping out of high school. Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, and Lehr (2004) suggested categorizing these factors as stable or unstable; stable factors are those that researchers believe to be unchangeable by school intervention, and unstable factors are those that researchers believe can be altered by school intervention. Stable factors include race, economic structure and resources, disability status, school type, region, and home language. These researchers noted race to be a significant stable predictive factor of dropout. Specifically, students who are African American, Hispanic, or Native American are at greater risk for dropping out than students who are Caucasian or Asian (Anderson et al). This was evident in the 2008-2009 school year; 613,379 students dropped out, the majority of which were African American, Hispanic, and Native American students (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Coinciding with ethnicity, socio-economic status has also been examined as a stable risk factor for dropout. Students who are considered low-income, or living in single parent homes, have lower high school completion rates than students from an average or high-income family (Anderson et al, 2004). In addition, students with disabilities, specifically emotional or behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, or mild mental retardation, are at a greater risk for dropping out. Overall, urban schools typically have lower high school completion rates. Lastly, students who do not speak English as their first language are also at greater risk (Anderson et al., 2004).

Though these demographic stable risk factors cannot be changed, there are other elements of a student's education that can be altered to promote success. Anderson et al. (2004) labeled certain factors as "unstable," and stated that interventions should be focused on factors within the school, family, and student. Factors within the schools include school climate, teacher temperament, and discipline policy as predictors of dropout rates (Anderson et al.). For instance, schools with perceived positive and safe atmospheres, caring teachers, and discipline policies that are consistent and perceived as fair have lower dropout rates than schools with high student-teacher ratios, teachers with low expectations, or discipline practices that are unstable. In connection to family, students with unsupportive, uninvolved, and mobile families are at a greater risk for dropping out of school than students who have involved, positive, and educated parents (Anderson et al.).

Research has indicated that those students who are struggling academically, are frequently absent, have been retained, or have behavior problems at school are more likely to drop out, compared to students who succeed academically, come to school

prepared, and have high expectations and motivation for school success (Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007). In a study by Suh, et al. (2007), low grade point average and frequent absence in the 8th grade were positively correlated with risk for dropping out of high school. In addition, the study also found that students who were suspended at least once based on a behavioral infraction were at an increased risk for dropout. However, in light of this finding, researchers also determined that if the suspended student had support of family, peers, and school staff, the risk of dropping out greatly decreased (Suh et al.). Educators should be focusing on improving such unstable factors within intervention practices in order to prevent risk for dropping out.

School Engagement and Risk for Dropout

One of the risk factors proposed in the research is low levels of school engagement. Research has shown that there is a predictive relationship between student engagement and risk for dropout; low engagement positively correlates with high risk for dropping out (Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006 as cited in Finn & Rock, 1997; Janosz, Archambault, Morizot, & Pagani, 2008). Some of the research on school engagement and risk for dropout is based on a model of engagement purposed by Finn in 1989 (as cited in Finn & Rock, 1997). Finn describes school engagement in terms of behaviors related to academics, extra-curricular, and social life. In terms of academics, school engagement is defined as compliance to school and class rules, attendance, time on task, and responding to teacher questions and direction. School engagement also includes a student's tendency to initiate help-seeking behaviors and going above and beyond what is expected, such as participating in extra credit opportunities. Students who consistently act in a noncompliant manner are more likely to experience academic

difficulties as well as increasingly severe behavior problems compared to compliant students (as cited in Finn & Rock, 1997).

A study conducted by Finn and Rock (1997) examined the difference between resilient students at risk for dropping out and non-resilient students at risk in terms of engagement. Results indicated a significant difference in school engagement behaviors between the two groups of students; resilient students displayed more engagement behaviors- coming to class, being prepared for and participating in class work, and avoiding disruption- compared to students who were struggling academically (Finn & Rock).

In addition, in a study examining school engagement behaviors in adolescents ages 12 to 16, researchers found that students who showed a rapid decrease of engagement or who reported low levels of engagement early in adolescence were more likely to drop out (Janosz, Archambault, Morizot, & Pagani, 2008). Dropout risk was linked with unstable patterns of school engagement; these students reported more psychosocial and academic difficulties compared to students who were on a stable path of engagement throughout adolescence. Within the group of students with unstable patterns of engagement, most enacted low levels of engagement prior to entering high school (Janosz et al., 2008). The results of this study indicate a need for prevention prior to high school, as well as a need for increasing engagement to improve resilience to dropout. As an unstable factor, it appears feasible that educators focus on school engagement as a means to intervene on dropout risk.

Low Academic Achievement and Risk for Dropout

As previously discussed, there are many risk factors (both stable and unstable) associated with dropping out of school. It is evident that educators should be targeting unstable factors; however, it is up to the educator to choose which factors to target. Research has shown a connection between school engagement and dropout, though other factors, such as academic achievement and its effects on retention, should also be considered. Some of the most well researched and strongly predictive risk factors of student dropout are retention and low academic achievement (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002).

Within a review of literature, researchers examined the relationship between retention and high school dropout, and proposed prior school experiences shape future success (Jimerson et al., 2002). In terms of grade retention, a student's perception and experience of being retained early in education may trigger or influence other factors associated with an increased risk for dropping out. Some of the factors discussed were a student's self-esteem, socioemotional adjustment, peer relations, and school engagement. In order to evaluate past findings, researchers analyzed 17 articles, all of which included grade retention as a potential predictive factor for dropout. As researchers expected, most studies found retention to be the strongest predictor for dropping out of high school. For example, a study by Rumberger and Larson (1998) (as cited in Jimerson et al., 2002) found that retained students were four times more likely to dropout than non-retained students. Similarly, Jimerson (1999) (as cited in Jimerson et al., 2002) found that retained students were 20-25% more likely to have dropped out of high school by age 19 than the comparison group of low-achieving, promoted students.

Despite the fact that data-driven research contradicts the rationale behind retention, educators continue to use this process as a means to improve academic performance (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002). The majority of students retained are low achieving; however, studies have found that gains in achievement decline within two to three years of retention, potentially resulting in lower achievement than similar groups of students who were not retained (Jimerson, Woehr, & Kaufman, 2004). In addition to having little impact on academic achievement, retention can also negatively affect a student's connection with peers, perception and motivation towards schoolwork, and can potentially lead to an increase in behavior problems (Jimerson et al., 2004).

Alongside retention, low academic achievement has been repeatedly connected to high dropout rates, specifically in urban settings. According to Roderick and Camburn (1996), the average Chicago 9th grader enters high school with reading and mathematics skills that place him or her over a year below grade level with respect to national norms. In their study, the researchers analyzed the performance of students in the first semester of 9th grade, comparing those that were failing a course versus those that were achieving at an average rate. The researchers then used the grades students received their first semester to attempt to predict future performance. It was determined that those students who failed a course within the first semester, in addition to presenting other risk factors such as ethnicity and low socioeconomic status (SES), were projected to continue to spiral into the second semester. Following this pattern, it was assumed that these students had little hope of recovering, and therefore, were at high risk for dropping out (Roderick & Camburn, 1996).

Similarly, in a study by Suh, Suh, and Houston (2007), researchers examined the predictive relationship between 20 commonly referenced predictors of student dropout, including grade point average (GPA), and a student's risk for dropping out. Results confirmed a predictive relationship between GPA and dropout risk; low GPA had one of the largest coefficient correlations with risk for dropout, along with low SES (Suh et al., 2007). It is not surprising that researchers have repeatedly found a link between low academic achievement and dropout rates.

Clearly, educators and community members should be concerned about how high the student dropout rate is currently in the U.S. As discussed, there has been much research done to demonstrate that there are certain risk factors which increase a student's likelihood of dropping out. Unfortunately, race/ethnicity, SES, and disability status are risk factors upon which educators cannot alter and/or intervene. However, other research has shown that school factors, such as social skills, levels of school engagement, as well as academic achievement, are also important predictive risk factors for student drop out. These elements of a student's education would be considered unstable or alterable, and therefore things that upon which educators can intervene.

When Are Students Most At Risk?

Aside from the stable and unstable risk factors, research has also revealed that the transition between middle and high school can present another risk for students. Students who display risk factors for dropping out in middle school tend to have trouble transitioning into high school, which can then further threaten their academic and social resilience. During this transition, the majority of students find themselves in an unfamiliar setting, often having to leave teacher and peer relationships behind

(Langenkamp, 2010). In addition, student expectations, as well as academic curriculum, can become more demanding, independent, and, at times, overwhelming for students entering high school. As a result, the transition into high school can cause additional anxiety and stress in students already stigmatized academically and socially in middle school (Langenkamp, 2010).

Easing this transition is essential in promoting later school success. Research continues to show that those students who fail courses freshman year are less likely to receive a high school diploma (Neild, 2009). Supporting this data, the *Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: 2008-2009* report for the state of Wisconsin reported that the dropout rate among freshmen was 1.3%, which was higher than sophomores at 0.9% and comparable to juniors at 2.0% (senior dropout rate was 4.8%) (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). In Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Arkansas, the dropout rate for freshman was highest amongst the four years of high school.

In addition, research findings also indicate that 9th graders enrolled in urban schools who struggle their first year are at an additional elevated risk for dropping out compared to students attending rural schools (Neild, 2009). Researchers reported that students in the Chicago Public Schools who fell behind during 9th grade had a 22% on-time graduation rate, compared with an 81% graduation rate for students who stayed on course after their first year in high school (Neild, 2009).

Due to the severity of dropout that can occur within the first year of high school, it is essential that educators develop interventions that target students early in middle school. Given the evidence and implications provided by the research, attention should be

directed towards these unstable or alterable risk factors displayed by the student before the transition into high school. By doing so, educators would enhance protective factors, and counteract the risk associated with stable and unstable factors during this period. The research also indicates that targeting low academic achievement may be the best way to combat high dropout rates. The question then becomes how can educators improve low academic achievement, and, therefore, reduce the number of students dropping out of high school without the use of retention? Educators have implemented such things as afterschool programming, tutoring services for students of low income households, family support groups, teacher training on positive teacher-student interactions, and curriculum attempting to connect students to the schools. Though some schools have seen progress using various interventions, current research has focused more on improving social competence as a way of promoting academic achievement. The current study aims to expand on past findings that suggest developing skills in social competence can be beneficial for reducing national dropout rates.

Protective Factor: Social Competence

Social competence is defined as a broad construct that consists of a variety of behavioral and cognitive characteristics and various aspects of emotional adjustment useful and necessary in the development of adequate social relations and gaining desirable social outcomes. The term includes such things as adaptive behavior, social skills, and peer acceptance (Merrell, 2006). Social competence can be considered in terms of a student's ability to meet standards of personal independence and social responsibility, as well as a student's ability to cooperate with peers, assert themselves,

engage in socially appropriate conversation, regulate emotions, and enact practices of self-control (Elias & Haynes, 2008; Merrell, 2006).

In an attempt to bring knowledge, depth, and awareness to the construct, Caldarella and Merrell (1997) performed an extensive literature review of 21 studies that used multivariate approaches to classifying social skills. As a result of the examination, researchers were able to group social skill behaviors under five dimensions: (1) peer relations (e.g., social interaction, socialability-leadership, empathy); (2) self-management (e.g., self-control, social independence, frustration tolerance); (3) academic (e.g., school adjustment, respect for social rules at school, academic responsibility); (4) compliance (e.g., social cooperation, sharing, appropriately use free time); and (5) assertion (e.g., assertive social skills, social initiation) (Caldarella & Merrell, 1997). Researchers chose these specific behaviors based on a 30% occurrence rate across their review of 20 years of literature indicating that these dimensions are essential components for developing a strong social competence and are perceived as necessary for success within the schools. Caldarella and Merrell (1997) go on to suggest using these dimensions as a focus for assessment and intervention practices.

As an extension of Caldarella and Merrell's research on the five components of social competence, researchers examined teacher perspectives on which components are most essential for classroom success. In a study by Lane, Pierson, and Givner (2004), researchers asked 240 secondary school teachers to rate the extent to which each skill related to social competence was necessary for students to succeed in their classrooms. Skills that were listed included the dimensions of assertion, self-control, and cooperation within social competence. After gathering the data, researchers concluded that neither

middle school nor high school teachers viewed assertion as a vital tool for success. However, each group of teachers rated four skills (responds appropriately to aggression from peers, attends to instruction, controls temper with adults, and complies with directions) as being critical for success in schools, placing higher emphasis on self-control and cooperation skills rather than assertion (Lane et al., 2004).

Stang, Carter, Lane, and Pierson (2009) examined the same components of social competence in another sample of teachers; however, researchers also included data on certain school characteristics in order to determine whether elements of poverty, mobility, enrollment, and school level would affect teacher expectations. Researchers found that all teachers, grades K-12 and despite school characteristics, placed more importance on behaviors of cooperation and self-control, selecting the four same items selected by teachers in the 2004 study as critical. Again, assertion was not perceived as critical for school success by any group of teachers (Stang et al., 2009).

Such findings between the two experiments suggest that interventions should focus on promoting cooperation and self-control skills, which would then increase achievement in the classrooms, thus preventing dropout. It should be noted, however, that due to the limited amount of research examining these specific components of social competence and the connection to school success, assertion skills, along with peer relations and academics (in terms of social competence), should not be eliminated from consideration as protective factors. Likewise, cooperation and self-control skills may only be seen as essential to these two groups of teachers; perhaps the expectations cannot be generalized across schools, districts, or states. More research is needed to address these issues.

Social Competence and Academic Achievement

Additional research supports the inclusion of social competence teaching within schools. In a study of social competence and academic achievement in urban elementary school students, researchers collected data from 282 3rd grade students on three components of social competence: cooperation, assertion, and self-control (Elias & Haynes, 2008). Using a social skills rating measure, researchers correlated scores on the three components to academic performance. Results indicated that social competence is important in determining school success among an at risk population, as social competence was significantly related to academic performance. Specifically, African American students were found to have significantly lower levels of social competence (Elias & Haynes, 2008). Researchers stated that developing social competence in the schools is essential because it gives students an opportunity to practice those skills that they might not to get to develop at home, and to further achieve greater academic success at school (Elias & Haynes, 2008).

In addition to this study, Masten and Coatsworth (1998) wrote an article outlining the development of competence in aversive and non-aversive environments. In their extensive review of the literature, they reported that social competence has been associated with better achievement, higher IQ, future job competence, and improvements in self-worth and mental health (Masten & Coatsworth). In addition, the review outlines the need for prevention projects and intervention practices to focus on both competence enhancement and problem reduction in order to be effective. Programs targeting self-regulation of attention, emotion, and behavior were successful in developing competence,

therefore promoting resilience among students at risk for dropping out (Masten & Coatsworth).

In a related article, researchers examined a program called Unique Minds School Program, which was developed to help teachers meet the social and emotional needs of urban, elementary school students (Linares et al., 2005). The program consists of a multi-year (i.e. Kindergarten through 5th grade) prevention intervention format that targets students' competence in the areas of cognition, socialization, and emotion, as well as academic achievement. The logic behind the program is that student-level changes in cognitive, social, and emotional competences will lead to classroom-level changes (e.g. school climate, teacher-student relations), which will then lead to both student-and classroom-level changes in academic achievement. Positive school climate, as well as a student's ability to manage stress and solve interpersonal problems in a pro-social manner, has been linked to improved learning and positive self-concept (Linares et al., 2005).

After two years of student exposure to the Unique Minds School Program, researchers used multi-methods of assessment, including student self-reports, ratings of student problem solving skills, and teacher reports on student behavior and grades, in order to determine the effect of the program on competencies and academics. Results showed consistent gains in a range of student cognitive, social, and emotional competencies, such as higher self- efficacy beliefs about learning and pro-social problem-solving skills, compared to competence levels before program implementation. Furthermore, their teachers described them as more attentive, socially and emotionally competent, compliant, and non-disruptive compared to their behavior prior to the

program. Those students within the program also received high report card math grades during the second year of the program compared to the first, supporting the theory that increases in competence can lead to increases in academics (Linares et al., 2005).

In 2006, Bernard proposed the inclusion of social competence curriculum in the schools. After a review of the literature, Bernard (2006) stated that students who display learning disabilities and achievement problems also present delays in the development of academic confidence, work persistence, and organizational skills. In addition, students with learning disabilities and achievement issues also seem to experience delays in emotional resilience and social skills necessary for collaboration and cooperation with other people (Bernard, 2006). In order to evaluate the effect of social competence curriculum on academic achievement, researchers examined five studies that highlighted the effects of a program called “You Can Do It!” which teaches 5th and 6th grade students skills in confidence, persistence, organization, cooperation, and emotional resilience. Research results indicated that low achieving students in the program showed an increase in academic effort, overall GPA, and attendance (Bernard, 2006).

However, just as high social competence predicts positive outcomes, students lacking in social competence are typically aggressive, rejected by peers, and unable to regulate emotions (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Specifically, secondary students with deficits in academic, behavioral, and social skills or whose abilities differ from the norm are at risk for short and long term negative outcomes, including school dropout (Lane, Pierson, & Givner, 2004).

Overview of the Concern

Though researchers have found a relationship between social competence and academic achievement, few examine the specific components of social competence in secondary students, specifically regarding a student's level of risk for dropping out. As outlined in Cappella and Weinstein (2001), few studies address the difficulty of altering a negative academic trajectory later in the student's schooling. Results from the two studies previously discussed on teacher expectation indicate that teachers across grade levels believe developing competence in cooperation and self-control is essential for academic success. Teachers expect students to be able to control anger and aggression towards peers and adults, as well as show compliance and attention during instruction. Based on these expectations, educators should strive to create interventions, not only focused on promoting social competence overall, but that promote skill development in the specific areas of cooperation and self-control. Few researchers have examined the direct predictive relationship between these components and student dropout in secondary schooling. The aim of the current study is to examine the general relationship between the protective factor of social competence and its relationship to previously identified risk factors for dropout: low academic achievement and low school engagement. Specifically, this study seeks to understand if sub factors of social competence predict risk for dropout (as measured by school engagement) above and beyond the well-known predictive factor of academic achievement.

Based on the relationship between social competence and academic achievement, as well as other risk factors associated with dropping out, increasing a student's social competence at the middle school level has the potential to: (a) combat unstable dropout

risk factors among both urban and rural students; (b) build resilience within the transition to high school; (c) increase overall academic achievement, therefore reducing the risk of retention and associated negative outcomes; and (d) develop skills associated with cooperation, assertion, and self-control as perceived important by secondary teachers. Overall, the positive outcomes of social competence interventions have the potential to serve as a protective factor for students at risk for dropping out. By examining cooperation and self-control in students at risk for dropping out versus those not at risk, educators can gain a better understanding of the relationship, and, therefore, can develop effective interventions for middle and high school students. The current study will examine how well certain facets of social competence (cooperation, and self-control) predict a student's level of risk for school dropout. This study will also examine the potential predictive relationship between social competence as a whole and a student's risk for dropping out. Results of this study will contribute insight on whether a low level of social competence is predictive of high risk of dropout.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

This study examined the relationship between five areas of social competence and student engagement when controlling for academic achievement. Academic achievement has been a well-established predictor of dropout within the research literature and this study sought to determine additional factors that may be predictive of student dropout, such as sub-factors of student social competence.

Instruments

Demographic Questionnaire

Students completed a demographic questionnaire in order to gather information about age, gender, mother's level of education, primary language, and grade. Qualitative questions also were included regarding special education services and retention. For instance, students were asked if they have received or are currently receiving special education services. In addition, students were also asked if they had ever been retained during their educational career.

Student Engagement

As previously discussed, research has shown that school engagement is predictive of risk for dropping out. Therefore, in order to effectively assess risk for dropout, students completed the Student Engagement Instrument (SEI). -The self-report measure was comprised of two subtypes of school engagement: cognitive and psychological engagement. Students completed the survey by rating the items based on a 4 point Likert

scale (0=Strongly Agree to 3= Strongly Disagree). Authors of the measure reported validity and reliability coefficients as high as 0.59 when correlated with things such as GPA and reading and math scores; negative relationships were found between scores on the SEI and school suspension (Appleton et al, 2006).

The Cognitive Engagement Subscale of the SEI is designed to measure the less observable, more internal indicators of engagement, such as self-regulation, relevance of schoolwork to future endeavors, value of learning, and personal goals and autonomy. The Psychological Engagement Subscale of the SEI is designed to measure feelings of identification or belonging, and relationships with teachers and peers (for psychological engagement) for school engagement (Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006).

Some sample items from the SEI include: “Overall, adults in my school treat students fairly;” “Most teachers at my school are interested in me as a person, not just as a student;” and “School is important for achieving my future goals.”

Social Competence

In order to measure a student’s level of social competence in terms of Merrell’s five factors, the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) scale was administered. The scale is considered the revision of the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS), which examines a student’s competence in: cooperation (e.g. “I do what the teachers ask me to do”); assertion (e.g. “I meet and greet new people on my own”); responsibility (e.g. “I do my homework on time”); empathy (e.g. “I try to make others feel better”); and self-control (e.g. “I stay calm when other people point out my mistakes”). These components are reflective of Merrell’s five components (compliance, self-management, assertion, peer relations, and academics) (Merrell, p. 380). In 2008, Gresham and Elliot released the

SSIS, which included the addition of communication and engagement behavior sub scales (Gresham, Elliott, Vance, & Cook, 2011). For the purpose of the current study, academic competence and social skills domains were used.

The scale can be administered in order to assess a student's risk for social deficits as well as poor academic performance. Students completed the SSIS, on which they rated items using a 4-point Likert scale (0=Never to 3= Almost Always) based on their perception of the frequency of each behavior. The scale also included a 3-point Importance rating (0= Not Important, 1= Important, 2= Critical). Students were asked not to complete the Importance rating, as level of importance was not imperative to the current study. The authors of the scale reported reliability coefficients ranging from mid to upper .90s, and validity coefficients from .67 to .78 when compared to other measures of social skill competence (Gresham, Elliott, Vance, and Cook, 2011).

Academic Competence

Academic competence was determined by using a pseudo grade technique. On the demographic questionnaire, students were asked to estimate what their current grade was in four core classes: English/Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies/History. The options provided were grades A through F, with assigned percentages that were reflective of the school's established grading system. Each letter grade was assigned a numerical value; the values for each subject were then added together and divided by four, resulting in the student's pseudo grade point average. Students were also asked to provide their overall GPA from last year. There was an option on the questionnaire to report "not applicable" if the student was not currently taking one of the four core courses.

Procedure

The SSIS and SEI were administered to students in regular education classrooms, grades 7 to 12, during study hall or homeroom periods. Researchers provided the Middle and High Schools with packets for each classroom, which included the three surveys, passive forms of consent, and student consent forms. Passive informed consent was obtained prior to the surveys being administered; students were then given the informed choice to participate. Students who returned consent forms requesting that they be excluded from the study did not receive surveys. For administration, teachers were provided a standardized script to read to the group of participants, explaining the task to the students. Each survey took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete; all surveys were completed during one study hall or homeroom period. Once the surveys were completed, researchers collected the materials from the school offices and analyzed the data.

Data Analyses

For the purposes of this study, a hierarchical linear regression was conducted in order to examine the relationship between the five areas of social competence, achievement, and school engagement. The independent variables were academic achievement and the five areas of social competence as outlined in the SSIS measure and related to Merrell's five components (cooperation, self-control, assertion, empathy, and responsibility). Academic achievement (as indicated by student GPA) was entered in the model first, followed by all five areas of social competence. The dependent variable was the student's scores on the school engagement measure, indicating his or her risk for dropout.

Hypotheses

H1: Academics will have a predictive relationship to school engagement. A high level of academic competence (as measured by student reported GPA) will predict higher scores on school engagement.

H2: Social competence will have a predictive relationship to school engagement. High scores on the social competence scales will predict higher scores on school engagement scale.

H3: Within Merrell's five factors of social competence, cooperation and self-control will have the strongest predictive relationship to school engagement, as teachers perceive cooperation and self-control to be indicative of academic success. High scores on the cooperation and/or self-control scales will predict higher scores on the school engagement scale.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

The current study was conducted to examine the general relationship between the protective factor of social competence and its relationship to previously identified risk factors for dropout: low academic achievement and low school engagement. Specifically, this study sought to understand if sub factors of social competence predict risk for dropout (as measured by school engagement) above and beyond the well-known predictive factor of academic achievement.

Demographics

A total of 209 students, grades 7 through 12, from regular education study hall classrooms were asked to participate in the study; 149 students completed the surveys and were included in the analyses (71.3% completion rate). The students were from a small, rural Mid-Western school district. Approximately 89 percent of students participating in the study were Caucasian, and 97 percent reported English as their primary language. Table 1 provides a summary of grade composition. In terms of retention, two students reported being retained once during their academic career. Five students within the sample were receiving special education services.

Table 1. Number of Student Participants Within Each Grade and Percentage of Whole Sample of Participants

Grade	Number of Students	Percentage of Sample (N=149)
7	42	28%
8	32	21%
9	29	19%
10	23	15%
11	13	9%
12	10	7%

Data Analysis

Preliminary Analysis

Before addressing the hypotheses of the current study, a reliability analysis was conducted for the Student Engagement Instrument (SEI) used in the study. In previous research, reliability analyses have been conducted for the Social Skills Improvement System (see measure section in Chapter 2), therefore, a reliability analysis was only conducted on the SEI measure. The Cronbach's Alpha value for the 35 item survey was .93. This value exceeds the recommendation of .60 for measures intended for group research purposes (Ysseldyke, 2007), providing good evidence for the internal consistency reliability of the SEI.

Two other preliminary analyses were also conducted prior to the main analyses of this study. First, correlations were computed to determine the relationships among the study variables. All of these correlations are reported in table 2. According to the data analysis, significant positive correlations were found between the variables Mother's education, communication, cooperation, assertion, responsibility, and empathy with

engagement, self-control, and total GPA. Negative correlations were found between all variables and SEI total score.

Table 2. Significant Correlations at the 0.05 Level (2-tailed) Between Study Variables.

		Engagement	Self-Control	SEITotalScore	TotalGPA
Grade	Pearson	-0.01	.01	.06	-.02
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.91	.94	.47	.79
	N	165	165	153	175
Education	Pearson	.11	.07	-.16	.27**
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.15	.36	.06	.00
	N	165	165	153	175
Communication	Pearson	.47**	.43**	-.44**	.26**
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.00	.00
	N	165	165	150	165
Cooperation	Pearson	.40**	.39**	-.54**	.26**
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.00	.00
	N	164	164	149	164
Assertion	Pearson	.36**	.50**	-.38**	.15*
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.00	.05
	N	165	165	150	165
Responsibility	Pearson	.40**	.50**	-.50**	.28**
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.00	.00
	N	165	165	150	165
Empathy	Pearson	.48**	.44**	-.40**	.13
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.00	.10
	N	164	164	150	164
Engagement	Pearson	1	.36**	-.37**	.03
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	--	.00	.00	.67
	N	165	165	150	165
Self-Control	Pearson	.36**	1	-.40**	.26**
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	--	.00	.00
	N	165	165	150	165
SEITotalScore	Pearson	-.37**	-.40**	1	-.24**
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	--	.00
	N	150	150	153	153
TotalGPA	Pearson	.03	.26**	-.24**	1
	Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.67	.00	.00	--
	N	165	165	153	175

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Second, independent sample t-tests were conducted in order to determine if males and females in the study differed on the variables of interest within this study (GPA, Student Engagement Scores, and the seven Components of Social Competence). In terms of gender, this analysis revealed a significant difference between male and female scores on the following scales: communication, cooperation, responsibility, empathy, and student engagement. Within these scales, females self-reported significantly higher levels on each scale compared to male participants. In addition, males and females differed significantly in their reported GPAs within this study; females self-reported significantly higher GPAs than male participants. However, significant differences between female and male participants were not found within the assertion and self-control scales.

Main Analyses

The primary purpose of this study was to determine if social competence predicted student engagement in 7 to 12th grade students. In addition, this study also aimed to examine the relationship of each component of social competence (responsibility, cooperation, assertion, empathy, and self-control), as outlined by Merrell (2006), with student engagement.

H1: Academics will have a predictive relationship to school engagement. A high level of academic competence (as measured by student reported GPA) will predict higher scores on school engagement.

A hierarchical linear regression was conducted to investigate how well social competence, and the five areas of social competence, predicted student engagement when controlling for grade point average (GPA). First, the independent variable of GPA was entered in the model first, followed second by all five independent variable sub-areas of

social competence. The dependent variable was the student's scores on the school engagement measure, indicating his or her risk for dropout. Means and standard deviations are presented in table 2. When total GPA was entered alone, it significantly predicted a student's level of engagement, $F(1,147) = 8.97$, $p = .003$, adjusted $R^2 = .06$. This indicates that only 6% of the variance in SEI scores can be explained solely by knowing the student's GPA. As was hypothesized, higher GPAs predicted higher levels of school engagement.

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for Student Engagement and Predictor Variables (N=149)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Student Engagement	66.95	13.73	--	-.24**	-.54**	-.38**	-.40**	-.40**	-.49**
Predictor Variable									
2. GPA	4.15	.81	-.24**	--	.25**	.15*	.27**	--	.29**
3. SSIS: Cooperation	2.90	.48	-.54**	.25**	--	.40**	.38**	.51**	.51**
4. SSIS: Assertion	2.87	.57	-.38**	.15*	.40**	--	.51**	.37**	.37**
5. SSIS: Self-Control	2.99	.56	-.40**	.27**	.38**	.51**	--	.44**	.51**
6. SSIS: Empathy	2.99	.56	-.40**		.51**	.37**	.44**	--	.51**
7. SSIS: Responsibility	3.07	.53	-.50**	.29**	.51**	.37**	.51**	.50**	--

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

H2: Social competence will have a predictive relationship to school engagement.

High scores on the social competence scales will predict higher scores on school engagement scale.

When the SSIS variables were added to the hierarchical linear regression, the scores significantly improved the predictive relationship, R^2 change = .33, $F(5,142) = 15.00$, $p < .001$. When entered together, the factors of social competence significantly predicted student engagement, $F(6,142) = 14.71$, $p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .36$. Consistent with hypothesis 2, social competence predicted high school engagement above and beyond GPA.

H3: Within Merrell's five factors of social competence, cooperation and self-control will have the strongest predictive relationship to school engagement, as teachers perceive cooperation and self-control to be indicative of academic success. High scores on the cooperation and/or self-control scales will predict higher scores on the school engagement scale.

The beta weights, presented in table Y, suggest that, when all variables were entered into the model, cooperation and responsibility were the two variables that emerged as contributing significantly to the model. Contrary to prior research, the sub factors of cooperation and responsibility presented the strongest predictive relationship to school engagement.

Table 4. Hierarchical Linear Regression Analysis Summary for GPA and the Five Subfactors of Social Competence: Cooperation, Self-Control, Assertion, Empathy, and Responsibility (N=149)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
Step 1				.06	.06**
GPA	-4.06	1.35	-.240**		
Constant	83.78	5.72			
Step 2				.38	.33**
GPA	-.92	1.20	-.05		
Cooperation	-9.55	2.43	-.33**		
Self-Control	-2.17	2.11	-.09		
Assertion	-2.50	1.94	-.10		
Empathy	-.93	1.89	-.04		
Responsibility	-5.28	2.26	-.20*		
Constant	131.05	7.28			

p* < .05, *p* < .01

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Summary of Study

School administrators across the country continue to search for new, effective interventions meant to address student dropout. Researchers have proposed that such intervention practices should target unstable factors (i.e. changeable) related to risk for dropout versus stable factors (i.e. unchangeable) related to dropout. While past research has focused on examining the relationship between the unstable factors of GPA, attendance, retention, and school engagement, and risk for dropping out, specifically in high school students, the current study aimed to examine the relationship between the unstable factors of social competence and GPA and the risk for dropout in middle and high school students. More specifically, how well does a student's self-reported social competence predict their risk for dropout when controlling for GPA?

Engagement as an Indicator of Dropout

Research examining the relationship between a student's level of engagement and risk for dropout has displayed a consistent pattern in that high school engagement leads to low risk for dropout (Appleton et al., 2006 as cited in Finn & Rock, 1997; Janosz et al., 2008). In light of the connection between student engagement and risk for dropout, the current study used student levels of engagement as an indicator (or measure) of a student's risk for dropping out of school.

Unstable Factors for Examination: GPA and Social Competence

Past research has indicated academic performance as a robust predictor variable for dropout. Specifically, those students who excel academically are more likely to stay in school. In studies conducted by Roderick and Camburn (1996), and Suh, Suh, and Houston (2007), results indicated a predictive relationship between GPA and risk for dropout.

Another unstable variable that is emerging within the risk for dropout literature is social competence, which is defined as a broad construct that consists of a variety of behavioral and cognitive characteristics and various aspects of emotional adjustment useful and necessary in the development of adequate social relations and gaining desirable social outcomes (Merrell, 2006). Recent studies have highlighted the positive relationship between social competence, and school success. Results from prior research have indicated that high social competence is predictive of positive outcomes in students, including academics and school engagement (Bernard, 2006; Elias & Haynes, 2008; Linares et al., 2005; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). However, despite the current trend of examining social competence and its relationship to a student's risk for dropout, little research has examined social competence at the middle school level, a time period that presents a particular risk as many students find the transition from middle to high school inherently difficult.

In addition, beyond the general concept of social competence, teachers have expressed in prior research that certain elements of social competence, particularly cooperation and self-control, as essential skills for success in the classroom (Lane et al., 2004; Stang et al., 2009).

In an attempt to expand the research regarding social competence and risk for dropout, the current study examined the predictive relationship between the five subfactors of social competence and risk for dropout in students grades 7 to 12.

Summary of Results

A hierarchical linear regression was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the independent variables of the five sub-areas of social competence and GPA and the dependent variable school engagement. GPA was entered in the regression model first, followed by all five areas of social competence.

The results of this study supported previous research indicating a significant predictive relationship between student academic achievement and school engagement; six percent of the variance in the scores on the Student Engagement Instrument was explained by a student's GPA. This implies that students with strong academic achievement (high GPA) also reported high levels of student engagement, and therefore, are at lower risk for dropout. Concurrently, students with low academic achievement report lower levels of student engagement, and, therefore, are at greater risk for dropout than their peers. These results were anticipated, replicating the positive relationship between academic success and risk for dropout found in past research.

When analyzing the relationship between social competence and student engagement, above and beyond academics, students who reported strengths in social competence also reported high levels of school engagement. When entered into the regression, the combination of all variables (scores on the SSIS and GPA) explained 38 percent of the variance in the Student Engagement Instrument scores. The addition of the SSIS variables in the second step of the regression resulted in a significant improvement

in prediction (R^2 change = .33, $p < .001$), indicating a significantly more predictive relationship than academics alone. Based on these results, it can be concluded that above and beyond academic success, a student's ability to socially function with teachers and peers within a classroom is crucial in keeping a student engaged and likely enrolled in school, as students with both academic and social success are at very low risk of dropping out. Conversely, students with low social competence, in addition to low academic achievement, are at great risk for dropping out.

Further, the current study analyzed the predictive relationship between each sub-component of social competence and school engagement. In prior research, teachers reported that cooperation and self-control were the most important aspects of social competence to have to be successful in the classroom. However, results of this study indicated that, along with cooperation, responsibility had the most predictive relationship to a student's score on the Student Engagement Survey. This indicates that a student's ability to cooperate with teachers or peers in a group setting and meet standards of personal independence and social responsibility would then also have a high level of engagement to the school, and would, therefore, be at lower risk for dropping out as compared to peers. In contrast then, students who struggle getting along with peers within a group setting, or cooperating with teacher direction within the classroom, would be at greater risk for dropout compared to peers. Additionally, students who struggle taking responsibility for their behavior socially as well as academically, would also be at greater risk.

Implications for Schools

The results demonstrate a need for educational professionals to focus intervention practices on areas within social competence in order to prevent students from dropping out. If students are not academically successful, the results indicate that schools can attempt to prevent dropout by implementing programs targeting competence in areas of cooperation, self-control, assertion, responsibility, and empathy. If a student has low social competence, in addition to low academic achievement, there is high probability that the student will have significantly lower engagement to the school as compared to peers with low academics but high social competence. Therefore, the combination of low GPA and social competence places a student at even greater risk for dropping out of school, which supports research conducted by Lane, Pierson, and Givner, 2004; secondary students with deficits in academic, behavioral, and social skills are at risk for short and long term negative outcomes.

The current study provides support for programs targeting social skills to promote resilience in students at risk for dropping out, consistent with previous research (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Linares et al., 2005). With the current shift to Response to Intervention and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support practices within the Wisconsin school settings, this is ideal time to increase social skill training within universal curriculum, as well as throughout tiers of specific intervention. At the universal level, when working with all students in the school, teachers can work to enhance social competence by building opportunities to practice such skills within the regular education curriculum. Promoting group work and a sense of community within the classroom are

just some ways teachers can build social competence without dipping into district budgets.

More intensive interventions, such as empathy training, social skills groups, and individualized interventions targeting a specific skill can be enacted across tiers within Response to Intervention and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports programming. Specific curriculum that teaches elements of social competence includes *Social Thinking for Tweens and Teens* by Michelle Garcia Winner (2011) and *Empowering Discipline: An Approach that Works with At-Risk Students* by Vicki Phillips (1999).

Within this study, results indicated that social competence is related to a projected risk for dropping out of high school, both within middle and high school students. In light of these results, intervention practices should begin early within a student's middle school career. Students displaying risk factors for dropping out during middle school tend to struggle transitioning to high school, which can then threaten their academic and social resilience (Langenkamp, 2010; Neild, 2009). Targeting students with low adaptive behaviors, social skills, or peer acceptance at the middle school and early high school years will greatly benefit school districts when working to prevent high school dropout.

In light of the results, the current study presents support for preserving, as well as increasing, the number of social skills interventions and opportunities for student engagement outside of academics within middle and high schools. In past research, students involved in such programming have developed competence, positive self-esteem and pro-social problem solving skills, and displayed an increase in academic effort and achievement (Bernard, 2006; Linares et al., 2005; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Establishing positive behavior practices universally, specific social skills groups targeting responsibility and cooperation, as well as implementing individual functional behavior assessments to improve social competence are just some of the ways schools can increase competence within the school setting. Additionally, programs related to extra-curricular activities can also provide opportunity for students to enhance their abilities to work in groups, internalize responsibility and belonging to a common cause, increase cooperation in order to meet standards, and invoke a sense of belonging and engagement to the school. As results of the current study indicate, teaching beyond academics is increasingly important within the school setting in reducing dropout rates.

Future Directions and Limitations

Despite controlling for GPA, methods of data analysis did not control for other potentially confounding factors, such as gender, age, retention, special education services and socioeconomic status. Though the information was collected on the demographic questionnaire, these factors were not included in the data analysis. As a result, the variance found in the study may be a result of other factors within the student population rather than a direct result of GPA and scores on the SSIS. However, despite the number of factors that were not controlled for within the data analysis, the amount of variability within the participants regarding gender, age, retention, special education services, and socioeconomic status was minimal. Therefore, it is assumed that significance regarding the predictive relationship between social competence and school engagement would still be obtained if those factors were controlled for.

The lack of variance within the participants can be considered a result of the population that was sampled for the current study. Such uniformity in terms of race, SES,

English speaking status is an inherent limitation of the population sampled. Students were from a small, rural district; 89% were Caucasian, 97% were English speaking, only 2 had been retained throughout their school career, and only 8 students were receiving special education services. In addition, the high school principal reported that few, if any, students dropout each year. As noted by Anderson et al. (2004) students who are African American, Hispanic, or Native American are at greater risk for dropping out than students who are Caucasian or Asian. In addition, students who are considered low-income, or living in single parent homes, have higher dropout rates than students from an average income family home (Anderson et al., 2004). However, despite the considerable homogeneity in race and ethnicity within the current population, a significant predictive relationship was found between social competence and risk for dropout (as measured by student engagement in this study). In order to increase the generality of the results, as well as the support for social competence programming, it is suggested that the current study be replicated in a diverse district with a substantial dropout rate.

In addition to expanding generalization and support, comparing the current results to those obtained from an urban, diverse district has other benefits. Within the current population, students filter from one middle school to one high school; therefore, the opportunity to maintain peer and teacher relationships from one school to the other are much greater compared to a district with multiple middle and high schools to attend. As a result, the transition from middle to high school may be inherently less difficult in a small, rural area compared to a larger, urban setting. Comparing the results of the current study to the same study conducted in an urban district would potentially shed light on the

significance of transition within a student's risk of dropping out; therefore, further supporting the need for targeting social competence in middle school.

Lastly, a limitation of the current study was the exclusion of special education students. In a review of literature, Bernard (2006) found that students who displayed learning disabilities and achievement problems also displayed delays in emotional resilience and social skills necessary for collaboration and cooperation with other people. In addition, Masten and Coatsworth (1998) found that students lacking in social competence are also typically aggressive, rejected by peers, and are unable to regulate emotions, which are behaviors typically seen among students with emotional behavioral disorders. The population sampled in the current study did not examine the relationship between social competence and risk for dropout within students in special education classrooms. When replicating the study, it is suggested that researchers compare results obtained from regular education students and special education students in order to target the need for social competence programming. In finding a significant predictive relationship between social competence and risk for dropout in a regular education population, it can be assumed that a predictive relationship would also be found among special education students, as they typically struggle developing social skills (Langenkamp, 2010).

Conclusion

It is imperative that administrators, teachers, parents, and students understand the importance of developing social competence within the school setting as a means to prevent dropout. The current study examined the predictive relationship of social competence to student engagement (as an indicator of risk for student dropout) in 7th to

12th grade students. The findings of the current study indicate that, above and beyond academic achievement, social competence has a positive predictive relationship to risk for dropping out, specifically in the areas of cooperation and responsibility. Therefore, the results of this study support the implementation of social competence programming in middle and high schools, as high social competence is predictive of low risk for dropout.

It is essential for school staff to facilitate such things as group work, cooperation among peers and authority, empathy training, academic responsibility, and assertion within curriculum and extra-curricular activities. By increasing level of engagement and social competence, students who struggle academically will have greater opportunity to succeed, therefore decreasing the dropout rate. Future research should continue to examine the relationship between social competence and risk for dropout in urban, diverse settings and within special education populations in order to expand the implications of the present study.

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APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER FOR PARENT NOTIFICATION

Cover Letter for Parent Notification

Dear Parent(s) or Guardian(s):

I would like to inform you of a project that 7th through 12th graders will participate in during the months of _____. This letter is to inform you of the project and give you the opportunity to decide if you do or do not want your student to take part. **If you DO NOT wish to have your son or daughter take part in the project, please sign and return the enclosed form to the middle or high school office indicating your child's name and that you do not want him or her to participate in this study.**

The project involves students in the 7th through 12th grades and provides these students with an opportunity to be a part of a study that is being conducted by Andrea Tirabassi, school psychology graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. The goal of this study is to obtain information about student social competence and how these might relate to a student's overall academic achievement and risk of later drop out. The results will assist parents, educators, health professionals, and other key decision-makers in the development of more effective curricula and services for our students. The data will also help us explore and strengthen ways to assist young people in developing social competence.

Students will be invited to complete three surveys that are completely anonymous and confidential. The content of the survey deals with student engagement, social competence, and risk of drop out. The question of whether or not this factor differs by grade and gender will also be taken into consideration. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide to have your child not participate. In addition, your child will have the opportunity to decide if he or she wants to participate on the day the study is conducted. Moreover, even if a student participates, he or she may choose not to response to particular questions.

If you would like to review or discuss the study, Andrea will be available to answer your questions and address your concerns. A translator and translated letter will also be available for parents/guardians if needed. We believe this study will assist us in continuing to provide quality education in a supportive environment for all of our students. Questions regarding study procedures may be directed to the researchers or their university supervisor:

UW-L Graduate Student
Andrea Tirabassi (262-945-5070)
Graff Main Hall
School Psychology Program
1725 State Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

University Supervisor
Dr. Jocelyn Newton (608-785-6889)
341P Graff Main Hall
School Psychology Program
1725 State Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

Questions regarding the protection of human subjects may be addressed to irb@uwlax.edu.

APPENDIX B
PARENT NOTIFICATION

Hello, my name is Andrea Tirabassi and I am a graduate student from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. As part of my graduate program, I am doing a research study to learn more about social skills in middle and high school students. The purpose of this study is to examine how the factors of social competence affect academic performance and risk of dropping out. The question of whether or not this factor differs by grade and gender will also be taken into consideration. I am contacting you to ask you to allow your child to participate in the study by filling out brief surveys.

This study is **ANONYMOUS** and will include no identifying information. The study will not ask for the name of your child, nor will it ask for any other information that could be used to identify your child. Your child's participation will involve completing brief surveys that will be administered to the entire class during his/her study hall. The results of this study may be published in scientific literature or presented at professional meetings using grouped data only and will not include any identifying information of the individuals that completed the surveys.

Your child can withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without penalty. There are no rewards for participation and no negative consequences associated with nonparticipation. Students and school professionals may benefit by understanding how a student's persistence might relate to their overall academic achievement. Questions regarding study procedures may be directed to the researcher or their university supervisor:

UW-L Graduate Student

Andrea Tirabassi (262-945-5070)
353 Graff Main Hall
School Psychology Program
1725 State Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

University Supervisor:

Dr. Jocelyn Newton (608-785-6889)
341P Graff Main Hall
School Psychology Program
1725 State Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

Questions regarding the protection of human subjects may be addressed to irb@uwlax.edu.

*Please fill out this form and return it to Rushford-Peterson Middle or High School office before _____, 2012 if you do **NOT WANT** your child to participate.

Student's Name

Grade

Study Hall Teacher

I have read the above, have been informed of the nature of this study, and **DO NOT** want my child to participate.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

STUDENT CONSENT FOR RESEARCH

Student Consent for Research

Protocol Title: The relationship between social competence and risk for student dropout

Investigator: Andrea Tirabassi, M.S. in Education, School Psychology, UW-La Crosse

- Purpose and Procedure
 - The purpose of this study is to examine how persistence and social competence affects academic performance and risk of dropping out.
 - It is being conducted for a research project, for degree completion at the UW- La Crosse.
 - Participation will involve completing brief surveys in which you rate yourself on levels of persistence and social competence and provide information of your academics.
 - The questionnaires administered will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes.
 - You will be instructed not to write your name on the questionnaires to ensure confidentiality.
- Potential Risks
 - You may experience minimal discomfort answering some of the questions.
 - You will miss approximately 10-15 minutes of class time for each survey.
- Rights and Confidentiality
 - Your participation is voluntary.
 - You can chose to stop answering the questions at any point, or chose not to participate at all, without penalty.
 - All responses from you will be confidential.
 - The results of this study will be used as a part of a research project and may be published in scientific literature or presented at professional meetings using grouped data only (meaning your name will never be used).
- Possible Benefits
 - Results from this study could show classroom targets for prevention and intervention by building skills in social competence persistence, in an attempt to increase student's academic achievement.

You do not have to participate in this study. Participation is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate and later decide that you do not want to participate, you may withdraw. Questions may be directed to the researcher or her university supervisor:

UW-L Graduate Student
Andrea Tirabassi (262-945-5070)
Graff Main Hall
School Psychology Program
1725 State Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

University Supervisor:
Dr. Jocelyn Newton (608-785-6889)
341P Graff Main Hall
School Psychology Program
1725 State Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

Questions regarding the protection of human subjects may be addressed to the UW-L Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, irb@uwlax.edu.

Student Name _____

Please check one:

I GIVE my consent to participate. ____ I DO NOT give my consent to participate. ____

Student Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Grade: _____ 2. Age: _____

3. Gender (Check one that applies): Male: _____ Female: _____ Other: _____

4. Primary Ethnicity (Check one that applies):

_____ Caucasian _____ Hispanic _____ African-American

_____ Asian-American _____ Native American

_____ Other: _____

5. What is the highest level of education your mother has completed (Check one that applies)?

_____ Less than High School

_____ High School/GED

_____ Some College

_____ 2-Year College Degree (Associates)

_____ 4-Year College Degree (BA, BS)

_____ Master's Degree

_____ Doctoral Degree

_____ Professional Degree (MD, JD)

6. What is your primary language?: _____

7. Have you ever been held back a grade? Yes _____ No _____ If yes, what grade? _____

8. Do you currently receive any sort of special education services? (i.e. Do you have an IEP?)

Yes _____ No _____

9. What grade did you receive in the following subjects last quarter? If you do not know the exact grade, please give your best estimate.

- Math: _____
- English/Language Arts: _____
- Social Studies/History: _____
- Science: _____

APPENDIX E

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INSTRUMENT

This survey has sentences that teens and young adults may use to describe how they think or feel or act. Read each sentence carefully. For the sentences, you will have four answer choices:

1= Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3= Disagree, and 4= Strongly Disagree.

Circle **1** if you agree strongly with the sentence.

Circle **2** if you agree with the sentence.

Circle **3** if you disagree with the sentence.

Circle **4** if you disagree strongly with the sentence.

If you wish to change the answer, mark an X through it, and circle your new choice.

Give the best response for you for each sentence, even if it is hard to make up your mind.

There are no right or wrong answers. Please do your best, be honest, and respond to every sentence.

1. Overall, adults in my school treat students fairly.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

2. I enjoy talking to the teachers here.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

3. Most of what is important to know you learn in school.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

4. At my school, teachers care about students.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

5. When I do schoolwork, I check to see whether I understand what I'm doing.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

6. My family/guardian(s) want me to keep trying when things are tough at school.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly Disagree

7. The school rules are fair.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

8. What I'm learning in my classes will be important in my future.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

9. Adults at my school listen to the students.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

10. I feel safe at school.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

11. Most teachers at my school are interested in me as a person, not just as a student.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

12. The tests in my classes do a good job of measuring what I'm able to do.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

13. Overall, my teachers are open and honest with me.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

14. I am hopeful about my future.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

15. After finishing my schoolwork, I check it over to see if its correct.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

16. Learning is fun because I get better at something.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

17. My teachers are there for me when I need them.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

18. When I do well in school, it's because I work hard.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

19. I feel like I have a sat about what happens to me at school.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

20. I'll learn, but only if the teacher gives me a reward.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly

Disagree

21. The grades in my classes do a good job of measuring what I'm able to do.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly

Disagree

22. Other students at school care about me.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly

Disagree

23. Students at my school are there for me when I need them.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly

Disagree

24. My family/guardian(s) are there for me when I need them.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly

Disagree

25. I enjoy talking to the students here.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly

Disagree

26. I have some friends at school.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly

Disagree

27. I plan to continue my education following high school.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

28. When something good happens at school, my family/guardian(s) want to know about it.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

29. School is important for achieving my future goals.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

30. My education will create many future opportunities for me.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

31. Students here respect what I have to say.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

32. When I have problems at school, my family/guardian(s) are willing to help me.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

33. Going to school after high school is important.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

34. I'll learn, but only if my family/guardian(s) give me a reward.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree

35. Other students here like me the way I am.

1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree 4= Strongly
Disagree