

# Exceptional Student Success Skills



Helping Students Develop  
the Academic, Social and  
Self-Management Skills  
They Need to Succeed





## Exceptional Student Success Skills:

Helping Students Develop the Academic Social and  
Self-Management Skills They Need to Succeed

### Classroom Manual

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## SECTION 1

### Summary of SSS Research and Overview

## Exceptional Student Success Skills: An Evidence-Based, School Counselor-Led Program

The Exceptional Student Success Skills (ESSS) program is a school counselor delivered planned core curriculum and small group program designed with consideration to learning capacities of exceptional student populations and aims to amplify a student's internal cognitive capacities. The ESSS program is based on one of the most researched counselor-led programs to date, the Student Success Skills. The philosophical underpinning of the ESSS and SSS programs are consistent with the Advocating for Student within Environment theory. That is, both curriculums were created from the philosophic conviction that all students have the potential to achieve; however, such ability is marred by environmental factors (Villares, Lemberger, Brigman, & Webb, 2011).

When the SSS program was administered to exceptional student learners, students experienced gains in executive functioning abilities and social-emotional learning constructs, however, they had decreased attention to various program tasks (Bowers, Whitford, & Maines, 2018). A revision of the SSS program was called to action to better meet the needs of exceptional student learners, leading to the creation of the ESSS comprehensive core curriculum and small group program.

### **ALIGNMENT TO SPECIAL EDUCATION**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) provides an acknowledgement by Congress that students with disabilities can have a higher quality of education when they are provided with high expectations and access to the general education curriculum, as much as appropriate. IDEA (2004) prioritizes the use of technologies with universal design to maximize student access to the general education curriculum. ESSS utilizes the key components of universal design for learning (UDL) throughout all aspects of the program; focusing on guiding students using techniques for multiple means of engagement, providing multiple means of representation, and allowing students to engage in the program using multiple means of action and expression (CAST, 2019).

ESSS utilizes best practices in work with all student, particularly with students who have disabilities and receive services through special education programming:

- The use of UDL approaches to teach ESSS concepts and facilitate student learning through discussions throughout the program are essential to student learning and engagement; they are backed by studies within one recent meta-analysis and one systematic review regarding the effectiveness of UDL with students who receive special education services (Capp, 2017; Ok, Rao, Bryant, & McDougall, 2016).

- ESSS includes several high leverage practices for work in special education settings, as identified by the CEEDAR Center. These high leverage practices primarily fall within the social/emotional/behavioral practices category and the instruction category. For example, (a) establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment, (b) provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior, (c) teach social behaviors, (d) teach cognitive and metacognitive strategies to support learning and independence, and (e) use strategies to promote active student engagement, to name a few (CEC, 2017).

## RESEARCH SUMMARY

As mentioned, ESSS is a derivative of SSS, a school counselor led program based on the principle that students can improve academically when surrounded by a supportive environment that involves skill-building activities in self-management, prosocial behaviors, and cognition. It is a humanistic approach to school counseling that focuses on the following areas: (1) cognitive factors, including memory and learning processes, (2) attitudinal skills, (3) self-regulation and metacognitive abilities, (4) behavioral strategies and goals, and (5) social skills training.

The SSS pre-K to 12 curriculum programs can be implemented across grade levels. There are 11 different programs to target a range of ages and developmental stages. Nine of the 11 programs are classroom based, one is group counseling based and one is workshop based for parents.

- ◆ Ready to Learn (RTL), Classroom is for pre-K, kindergarten, and grade 1.
- ◆ Ready is for Success (RFS), Classroom is for grades 2 – 3.
- ◆ The SSS Classroom, grade 4 and Student Success Skills Classroom, grade 5 programs are for upper elementary students.
- ◆ Exceptional Student Success Skills, Classroom is for Grades 3 – 8.
- ◆ The SSS for SEL Success, Classroom is for grade 6 – 8.
- ◆ The SSS, Classroom is for grades 7 – 9, SSS 2.0, Classroom is for grades 8 – 10.
- ◆ SSS Group Counseling, is for grades 4-10.
- ◆ College/Career Success Skills, Classroom is for grades 10 – 12).
- ◆ Parent Success Skills (PSS) is for parents and caregivers of children in grades 6 – 9.

The SSS curricula implemented in grades pre-K through 5 includes 30-minute lessons that range from 5 to 8 weekly lessons. Programs for grade 6 to 12 are designed for classroom delivery and are presented once per week for five weeks, with booster lessons provided. The PSS is delivered in a workshop format. We also have an eight-session small group version that reinforces SSS skills and attitudes and includes a social problem solving model for grades 4-10.

Each study below examined components of the SSS program on different aspects of student skillsets, including academics, classroom behaviors, and student interpersonal skills. This report contains 22 published studies and 9 doctoral dissertations exploring the effectiveness of the intervention. Of the 31 studies, 3 included an evaluation of RTL Classroom program, 2 evaluated the RFS Classroom program, 17 examined the SSS classroom intervention, 4 examined the SSS Group program, 1 evaluated the Exceptional Student Success Skills Classroom program, 1 evaluated the CCSS Classroom program, 2 included a Spanish-cultural translation of SSS, and 1 included a Haitian Hybrid SSS intervention. The students in the study ranged in age from pre-K through 12th grade, coming from urban, rural, and suburban areas. Over 150 schools were included in this study, covering three regions of the United States. The studies utilized a variety of measures to gather the data, and 24 out of the 28 included a control group for comparison. Overall, several significant findings were shown among the studies, demonstrating the efficacy of the intervention on several aspects of student functioning and academics.

### SIGNIFICANT POSITIVE FINDINGS

Cognitive/Academic Skills	Social Skills	Self-Regulation Skills
Standardized reading scores	Interpersonal/pro-social skills	Reduced anxiety
Standardized math scores	Reduced problem behaviors	Planning and organizing
Task completion rates	Listening skills	Self-regulation of arousal
Learning competence	Increased cooperation	Coping skills
Executive functioning	Reduced bullying	Improved impulse control
Engagement	Appropriate assertion	Improved motivation

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Exceptional Student Success Skills  
 Social and Emotional Learning: Strategies and Skills

Self-Awareness

- Calm Place, Breathe, Picture, Focus
- Keep Kool Tunes
- Identifying and managing stress
- Fixed vs. Growth Mindset

Self-Management

- Goal setting, progress monitoring, success sharing
- Brain Gym
- Looking Good Feeling Good: Five Keys to High Energy and Positive Mood

Responsible Decision-Making

- Kaizen: Look for even very small improvements. Take small steps.
- Don't doubt ability, doubt strategy & try something different.

Relationship Skills

- Creating a caring, supportive, and encouraging classroom community
- Looks Like, Sounds Like, and Feels Like
- Listening with Eyes, Ears, and Heart

Social Awareness

- Sharing improvements and recognizing others for improvement
- Peer interviews
- Friendship building



Exceptional Student Success Skills  
Classroom Guidance Curriculum

Eight strategies and tools that reoccur in each lesson:

1. Goal setting, progress monitoring, and success strategy sharing tied to Check In/Check Out, weekly classroom session goals, and Looking Good Feeling Good
2. Kaizen (noticing even small improvements)
3. Pair sharing practice of attending, listening, empathy, and encouragement
4. Social skill building through Interviews and Forming Friendships
5. Optimism cheer and Imagine Poster
6. Class sharing of “one thing you have noticed someone doing in class this past week that helps build a caring and encouraging community”
7. Brain gym
8. Performing under pressure: Calm Place, Keep Kool Tunes, Stress Busters, Growth Mindset