Paper 2: Evaluating SECURe: Results from a small-scale pilot study

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Prior research has demonstrated that comprehensive, evidence-based literacy interventions can improve the academic skills of disadvantaged elementary school children (Borman, Slavin, Cheung, Chamberlain, Madden & Chambers, 2005). Yet the gains for these children, while important, are modest and most often do not erase the achievement gap that emerges early in development. Likewise, accumulating evidence has revealed that social, emotional and cognitive understanding and regulation skills uniquely contribute directly and indirectly to academic success in the early grades (Raver, Garner, & Smith-Donald, 2007). To date, few efforts have attempted to unite these two perspectives into an integrated program of intervention that would simultaneously and directly target both literacy and self-regulation, in the hope of boosting children's academic gains beyond those normally achieved. This study will share results from a pilot study of Social Emotional Cognitive Regulation and Understanding in education (SECURe); a school-based intervention for pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade that is designed to build skills in social-emotional learning (focusing on EF and Regulation as core processes) and literacy.

In the spring of 2011, 6 SFA schools one district were identified and randomly assigned to the SECURe intervention or to a control condition (3 schools to each). The SECURe program was implemented in grades K-3 in the three intervention schools during the 2011-2012 school year, and students in all six study schools were tracked and assessed in Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 with measures of academic achievement and social, emotional, and cognitive understanding and regulation skills using multiple measures and reports (e.g., both direct assessment and teacher reports). Early programmatic feedback from schools and teachers was very positive; many educators commented that they observed improvements in the classroom setting, as well as in other micro-climates within the school building (e.g., in the cafeteria, playground, hallways). The program was also implemented with relatively high fidelity. Furthermore, despite limited power (e.g., with only 6 schools in total randomized to condition) we found a positive (effect size equal to 0.33) and marginally statistically significant effect (p < .09) of the program on a measure of attention/impulsivity assessed using the PSRA Assessor Report (Smith-Donald et al., 2007). We did not find statistically significant effects on our other measures of cognitive regulation, emotion processes, or interpersonal skills. We also found positive and statistically significant effects of the program on growth in both reading and math achievement measured with the 4Sight Benchmark Assessments given by the participating district five times over the course of the school year.