

The School Success Profile

A Results-Focused Approach to Assessment and Intervention Planning

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A goal of social work practice in schools is to help students overcome barriers to school success. Intervention success is promoted in situations where social workers have access to information about students, and a careful assessment is the first step in the evidence-based practice sequence. Social workers employ many tools in their efforts to understand students and their presenting situations, including observations of students, information from significant others in the lives of students, and administrative data. Social workers also employ quantitative assessment tools in the form of surveys to assess the perceptions of students about themselves, their performance at school, and the larger environment in which they live. The resulting information may be used directly by school social workers to inform interventions or to guide more informal assessments.

This chapter reviews one such survey, the School Success Profile (SSP), as a tool for informing, monitoring, and evaluating social work interventions with middle and high school students. The SSP assesses students within the context of their broader social environment and produces student profiles from the data informing both micro- and macro-level practice interventions. Results-focused planning, a decision management and resource allocation strategy, is reviewed as a framework in using information from the SSP for intervention planning.

The SSP resulted from a partnership between the School of Social Work (SSW) at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Communities In Schools (CIS), which is the largest private, nonprofit network in the United States devoted to promoting high school graduation and success among students at risk of school failure. The SSP was designed to help CIS (1) inform the process by which students are provided with a comprehensive program of support services and life skills training; (2) monitor changes in program participants over time; and (3) increase accountability to stakeholders. The SSP is administered in cooperation with Flying Bridge Technologies, Inc., which is an internet and interactive media service company in Charlotte, North Carolina.

CONTENT

The SSP, available in both English and Spanish, is an online survey questionnaire with 195 multiple-choice items. These items address students' beliefs about their social environment—neighborhoods, schools, friends, and families—and about their own physical and psychological health and school performance (individual adaptation). The survey is divided into six modules: About You (6 items), Neighborhood (26 items), School (54 items), Friends (25 items), Family (45 items), and Health and Well-Being (39 items).

The SSP was developed after a comprehensive review of the school success literature and of risk and protective factors for children. An eco-interactional developmental perspective framed and informed the literature review (Richman & Bowen, 1997; Richman, Bowen, & Woolley, 2004). Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological theory of human development, attention is directed to *proximal processes* in the social environment that may either constrain or support students' ability to achieve desired results. These proximal processes may include people, in the form of interpersonal relationships and social support, or places, in the form of safety, satisfaction, and opportunity. These proximal processes are assumed to operate on a continuum from risk to asset, which is consistent with Sameroff and Guttman's (2004) concept of "promotive factors" or those which exert positive effects on outcomes independent of risk status.

The SSP currently assesses 22 core dimensions that are related to the student's social environment and individual adaptation (see Appendix). Each profile dimension is a summary scale that includes multiple items. The 15 social environment dimensions are all labeled and defined as assets that students need for healthy development and school success. The 7 dimensions of individual adaptation are positively worded and are defined as attitudinal and behavioral outcomes that evidence healthy development and success at school. School success is defined as graduation from high school prepared to pursue postsecondary education or training, military service, or employment capable of moving the student toward economic self-sufficiency. The SSP includes no questions about illegal behavior, substance abuse, sexual activities, or issues of child abuse and neglect that may place students or families in self-incriminating situations.

RESULTS-FOCUSED PLANNING

Results-focused planning (RFP), which is a program management strategy, provides an approach for using information from the SSP as a tool for intervention and prevention planning. A key principle of RFP is planning with the intended results in mind (Hatry, 1999). RFP focuses on helping practitioners manage results rather than manage activities (Orthner & Bowen, 2004). The specification of program activities receives attention only after intended results are defined, and intended results are organized in the form of a logic model based on theory, empirical research, practice wisdom, and discussion with stakeholders at multiple levels.

Three levels of results were differentiated in organizing the 22 core dimensions from the SSP into a logic model: distal results (academic performance), intermediate results (personal beliefs and well-being/school attitudes and behavioral indicators), and proximal results (neighborhood, school, friends, and family indicators). Distal and intermediate results were labeled student results because they are viewed as the consequence of addressing the physical, psychological, and support needs of students. As longer term results, no single agency, organization, or group can either take full credit for these results when they meet expectations or assume total responsibility when they fall short of expectations—they are the product of multiple contextual influences in the lives of students. Proximal results were labeled program results because they are the targets of intervention and prevention activities. Unlike student results, results related to the neighborhood, school, peer, and family environment can be directly linked to the efforts of individuals and agencies working to help youth.

In the past, we have used the hands on a clock to distinguish among these three levels of results, as well as to represent the chain of influence among them. From this perspective, distal results are on the hour hand, intermediate results are on the minute hand, and proximal results are on the second hand. Results on the hour hand turn slowest of all and depend on the movement of the second and minute hands.

DEVELOPMENT

Since 1991, the SSW has worked at the national, state, and local levels with CIS representatives to design, field-test, and implement the SSP across multiple CIS sites. This work has been supported by a series of grants from the BellSouth Foundation (1992–1997), from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation (1995–2006), from the William T. Grant Foundation (2003–2006), and from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (since 2005). Although the SSP was designed in partnership with CIS, the survey is currently used in a variety of educational and social service settings, including juvenile detention facilities. Researchers in both the United States and abroad have also included items and scales from the SSP in their own research tools.

A key challenge in developing the SSP was to keep the survey to a manageable length within the context of the broad number of constructs requiring eco-interactional developmental assessment. The process that evolved in developing the instrument included partnerships with stakeholders at many levels. SSP staff consulted with national experts in education, adolescent development, and psychometrics to identify existing items and scales for inclusion, as well as for information regarding questionnaire design. Subject matter experts provided consultation on the content validity of SSP measures—the degree to which items on the SSP adequately represent and assess underlying conceptual dimensions. Lay experts, including CIS staff and student participants, provided critical feedback on the face validity of the measures. The SSP staff also elicited the help of school superintendents, teachers, guidance counselors, and school social workers in obtaining feedback on the instrument from diverse groups of middle and high school students, through the use of student interviews and focus groups. Special attention was given to ensuring that survey items were applicable to students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This collaborative process continues through ongoing feedback solicited from individuals involved in all aspects of the SSP administrative process.

Since its initial development as a prototype in 1993, the SSP has undergone four revisions (in 1993, in 1997, in 2001, and in 2005) to increase its responsiveness as a source of information for informing student-, school-, and community-based interventions. New items were added on each occasion to strengthen the survey's coverage of the four social environment domains, and some items were deleted to keep the survey to a manageable length for administration. The current version of the survey is available only in online form.

The 2001 version of the SSP was subjected to a rigorous test for reliability and validity, including tests of measurement invariance over gender, school level, and race/ethnicity (Bowen, Rose, & Bowen, 2005). Based on a nonprobability sample of more than 16,000 middle and high school students across 351 school sites and six states who took the SSP between July 2001 and March 2003, the findings provided support for the internal consistency reliability and the construct validity of the SSP core profile dimensions. The

results from this extensive psychometric analysis were used in developing the current version of the SSP, including shortening the survey by 25 items. Recent reliability analysis confirms the internal consistency of the survey items comprising each dimension—18 of the 22 dimensions have reliability coefficients that exceed .80, which are considerably higher than the cutoffs of .60 or .70 that are commonly specified as minimally acceptable in aggregate analysis with large samples (Rosenthal, 1994).

ADMINISTRATION

Training materials for clients who register to use the SSP are available for downloading from the SSP administration website (www.schoolsuccessonline.com). Administration and intervention training are available to SSP clients via 90-minute online webinars. Training requires the use of an online tool for real time communication at remote sites. Our partner company, Flying Bridge Technologies, Inc., subscribes to Live Meeting from Microsoft®—an effective and easy to use online tool.

Sites are encouraged to secure active parent consent before students take the SSP. The SSW works with sites to address their own guidelines for institutional review. Sites are strongly encouraged to use passive consent procedures at a minimum before survey administration.

The SSP is typically administered to students in the computer lab at their school. An onsite survey monitor enters a unique serial number and password that has been assigned to each student. Students then sit at the computer in which the serial number and password have been entered and choose if they want to take the SSP in English or Spanish by clicking on the relevant box on the computer screen. After clicking on a next button, they watch a short video that introduces them to the SSP and provides instructions for completing the survey. Students need audio to hear the introduction, although a written script is also available. They complete the SSP by clicking on the box with the best answer for each question on the screen and then clicking on the next button to continue. They may use the back button to go back to a previous answer or the skip button to move past a question. On the last screen, they click next to close the survey. If they cannot finish the survey in one sitting, they can come back to the survey and continue where they left off. On average, students take 30 to 40 minutes to complete the survey.

School sites download summary profiles from the Web. Access to these profiles is password-protected, and sites have access only to their own data.

SUMMARY PROFILES

The SSP provides data in the form of individual student profiles and site-level aggregate profiles. An integrated query system allows practitioners to examine group-level results within student subgroups. Practitioners are encouraged to meet with students individually and as a group to establish the validity of the findings from the students' perspective. The SSP is designed to supplement and enhance practitioners' ongoing observations of and dialogue with students, not to substitute for this process. Other information, such as that from school records or observations, may either support or counter students' reports. Practitioners work with students, both individually and as a group, from an RFP

perspective to design appropriate intervention goals and strategies. Repeated administrations of the SSP provide a means to monitor the effectiveness of interventions.

Individual Profile

The individual profile includes information about 22 dimensions related to the student's social environment and individual adaptation (see Appendix). Each profile dimension is a summary scale that includes multiple items. The 15 social environment dimensions are all labeled and are defined as assets that students need for healthy development and school success. The seven indicators of individual adaptation are positively worded and are defined as attitudinal and behavioral indicators that evidence healthy development and success at school.

Student scores on each dimension are coded into three colors: red, yellow, and green. The colors correspond to cutoffs that have been determined based on comparison to national norms, criterion analysis, and expert review. Each dimension reflects a continuum of protection from red (potential risk), yellow (some caution may be warranted), and green (potential asset). Reference information about the school and child is included on the left side of the profile form.

From an RFP perspective, the 15 social environment dimensions are program results that can be targeted for intervention and prevention planning as a means to influence student results associated with individual adaptation. Individual profiles provide a starting point for intervention planning and a baseline for tracking individual progress over time. Practitioners and students use the data in the context of other available information to design the most appropriate interventions and to modify interventions as needed to ensure student success.

Summary Group Profile

A composite summary of the individual profiles at a particular site, the summary group profile helps school social workers identify areas that may represent particular strengths or concerns among students. A site may include a classroom (at least 10 students), school, district, county, or state. The summary group profile looks similar to the individual profile with the exception that information includes summary statistics for the student group. Reference information about the student group is included on the left side of the summary profile. Summary data on the 22 SSP profile dimensions are included on the right side of the page. The percentages associated with each dimension indicate the proportion of students who received one of three scores: red (potential risk), yellow (some caution may be warranted), and green (potential asset). These data reflect how students are doing as a group on the dimensions included in the social environment profile and the individual adaptation profile.

The most positive summary group profile would include results with a high percentage of students with green (asset) codes. In reviewing the findings, school practitioners are encouraged to consider the desired performance standard for each dimension—the minimally acceptable proportion of students with asset codes. Information from the summary group profile is helpful in prioritizing interventions that address the difficulties faced by groups of students. In this way, profile data are one means by which social

workers determine how to allocate their limited resources to maximize program effectiveness.

Located under the community link on the School Success Profile Web site (www.schoolsuccessonline.com), summaries of evidence-based practice strategies/programs are provided for each of the dimensions included on the summary group profile, including a description of the program, the objectives of the intervention, implementation requirements, the cost, evaluation research references, and contact information for further details on the program. Gordon's (1983) public health typology of prevention programs informs the classification of programs and strategies as universal (programs that target all students in the school), selected/indicated (programs that target specific students who might benefit from program components), or multi-component (programs that include universal and selective/indicated components). Promising practices (intervention ideas and strategies that have shown promise) and resources (books, articles, and websites that provide information about effective practices in schools) are also displayed for each dimension. This feature of the website is reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis.

Detailed Group Report

The SSP data are also aggregated into a detailed group report informing practitioners about students' risks and assets, and helping them demonstrate program needs to stakeholders and potential funders. The detailed group report includes 90 indicators across six summary profiles: demographic; school performance; contextual risks; social capital assets; internal assets; and health, adjustment, and social support. Each indicator is assessed by a single SSP survey item, and results are expressed in percentages (0 to 100%).

Two-thirds of the 90 indicators address contextual risks (N = 20), social capital assets (N = 20), and internal assets (N = 20). These indicators have demonstrated good discriminative validity in prior studies of personal adjustment, school attitudes and behavior, and/or academic performance (e.g., Woolley & Bowen, 2007).

Contextual risks are situations and conditions in the social environment of youth that decrease their chances for school success and positive developmental outcomes. The detailed group report provides information about risk factors found in the neighborhoods, schools, peer relationships, and families of youth, including risks related to the safety and social needs of students.

Social capital assets exist for youth within and outside of the family. In the family, social capital refers to the quality of family relationships and the time and attention parents give to youth. Social capital outside the family includes three aspects. First, it includes the opportunities and support that youth receive from institutions and adults in their community. Second, it consists of the relationships that parents have with adults and institutions in the community that have linkages to their developing child. These linkages provide youth with greater consistency of expectations and experiences across settings. Last, it includes the supportive relationships that youth experience with their friends. Social capital assets may operate as either promotive or protective factors in helping youth manage life demands and achieve their goals and ambitions. Because of the important role that parents/guardians play in the life and development of children, adult

family members and their links to other sources of social capital were a central focus in the development of the social capital assets index.

Internal assets are those resources that reside within the individual. Resulting from the dual influences of nature and nurture, these assets reflect the value and belief systems of youth about themselves and about the level of control they exert over events in their lives. Such value and belief systems inform the way in which youth approach and react to events and situations in their environment. Internal assets are captured in the areas of school engagement, health, self-regard, and social competency.

Consistent with an RFP perspective, practitioners are encouraged to develop performance standards for the indicators associated with school performance; contextual risks; social capital assets; internal assets; and health, adjustment, and social support. As a basis for interpretation of students' results, performance standards are defined as the minimum desired result. Interventions are targeted at closing the gap between desired expectations and current realities as reflected in the detailed group report.

EVALUATION

The SSP has received many affirmative evaluations from practitioners in the field using its results as a basis for designing and monitoring the effects of interventions with students (see www.schoolsuccessprofile.org), as well as positive reviews from behavioral and social scientists about its utility as an evidence-based assessment method (e.g., Early, 2001; Franklin, 2004). Assessment is the first step in an evidence-based practice strategy sequence (Thyer, 2002), and social work practitioners need access to information about the degree to which instruments produce reliable and valid data. Only then can they successfully choose among competing assessment tools and place enough confidence in the tools' findings to inform intervention strategies.

Although the results from prior investigations to examine the psychometric properties of the SSP have been promising (Bowen, Rose, & Bowen, 2005), including studies using the Spanish version of the SSP (Garcia-Reid, 2003), continued efforts are required to examine the integrity of the SSP using diverse samples across different social and cultural contexts. The SSP is a dynamic assessment tool and it will continue to be revised periodically to reflect changing norms and to address evolving conditions in the assessment of the needs of middle and high school students.

As our development and evaluation of the SSP continue through what Gambrill (1999) calls the "tradition of criticism" (p. 343), we, the developers of the SSP, take some refuge in the instructions that are given for its use—the SSP's caveat emptor: "The SSP is designed to augment other ways of knowing about students and their presenting situations." Practitioners are strongly encouraged to discuss SSP results with student respondents, allowing students to give meaning and interpretation to the quantitative results. Decisions should not be based on SSP results alone. When used in this context, the future of the SSP as an assessment tool for use by social work practitioners appears promising.

COSTS

The actual costs for sites to use the SSP vary by the specific nature of the request. Currently, the charge for students to take the online SSP is \$2 with a \$350 registration fee per contract (a single contract can involve multiple schools or locations). For this investment, sites are provided with usernames and passwords for downloading resource materials; administering the SSP; downloading the resulting individuals and group reports; and accessing evidence-based practice strategies. Sites also receive telephone and email access to SSP project staff at both Flying Bridge Technologies, Inc. and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Sites incur additional costs for administration and intervention training using online webinars, for on-site technical assistance, and for special data analysis requests.

NEXT STEPS

More than 50,000 students have completed the SSP since 1993, and the SSP or parts of the SSP have been translated into Spanish, Hebrew, Lithuanian, Romanian, and Portuguese. In response to requests from practitioners using the middle and high school version of the SSP, an elementary version of the survey has been developed with funding from the National Institute on Drug Abuse—the Elementary School Success Profile (ESSP). The ESSP assesses the same major domains as the current SSP, but includes items and language appropriate for third through fifth graders. To enhance its ability to sustain children's interest, the online survey includes state-of-the-art graphics and audio features. Because of concerns about the reliability and validity of self-report data from young children, some elementary SSP data are collected from parents and teachers. Like the SSP, the ESSP has involved rigorous testing throughout its development, which is ongoing (N. Bowen, 2006; Woolley, Bowen, & Bowen, 2004). The elementary survey allows school-based practitioners to address risk and protective factors known to be associated with adolescent behavioral problems before the problems fully develop.

Websites

<http://www.schoolsuccessprofile.org/>

The main website, which is maintained by the developers of the SSP at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, provides summary information about both the SSP and the ESSP, including an extensive list of publications and research that make use of the instruments.

<http://schoolsuccessonline.com/>

Sponsored by Flying Bridge Technologies, Inc., this website is designed for clients administering the SSP and the ESSP, accessing summary results, or accessing evidence-based practice programs. Some features on this website are available only to registered users. This website is also used for marketing the SSP and the ESSP.

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School Success Profile Dimensions

Social Environment Profile

Neighborhood

Neighbor Support (7 items)

Youth perceive their neighbors as trustworthy and supportive of young people, interested in their welfare, and willing to help them if they have a problem.

Neighborhood Youth Behavior (8 items)

Youth live in a neighborhood where young people engage in constructive behavior, graduate from high school, and are unlikely to break the law and get in trouble with the police.

Neighborhood Safety (8 items)

Youth live in a neighborhood with a low incidence of crime and violence.

School

Learning Climate (7 items)

Youth attend a school where students get a good education, where student needs come first, where the adults at school affirm and care about students, and where every student is valued.

School Satisfaction (4 items)

Youth enjoy going to their school, get along well with teachers and other students, and report that they are getting a good education.

Teacher Support (8 items)

Youth perceive teachers at their school as supportive, as caring about them and their academic success, and as expecting them to do their best.

School Safety (11 items)

Youth attend a school with a low level of crime, problem behavior, and bullying behavior.

Friends

Friend Support (5 items)

Youth perceive their friends as trustworthy and supportive and as responsive to their needs and feelings.

Peer Group Acceptance (7 items)

Youth feel accepted by their peers, able to be themselves, and able to resist peer pressure.

Friend Behavior (9 items)

Youth have friends who are unlikely to break the law or get in trouble with the police, who stay out of trouble and perform well at school, and who are likely to graduate from high school.

Family

Family Togetherness (7 items)

Youth report that the people in their home feel a sense of emotional closeness and bonding with one another, do things together, and work together to solve problems.

Parent Support (5 items)

Youth report that the adults in their home provide them with loving support and encouragement and spend free time with them.

Home Academic Environment (8 items)

Youth report that they discuss their courses or programs at school, their school-related activities, current events and politics, and their plans for the future with the adults who live in their home.

Parent Education Support (6 items)

Youth report that the adults in their home encourage and support them in their school work and activities, help them get needed books or supplies, and offer help with homework or special assignments.

School Behavior Expectations (12 items)

Youth perceive the adults in their home as expecting them to do their school work, to attend classes, and to follow school rules.

Individual Adaptation Profile

Personal Beliefs and Well-Being

Social Support Use (8 items)

Youth indicate that there are people they can turn to for various types of social support and assistance.

Physical Health (8 items)

Youth evidence good health, as indicated by an absence of symptoms or physical illness over the past seven days.

Self Confidence (5 items)

Youth report a sense of confidence in themselves and positive self-regard.

Adjustment (6 items)

Youth do not feel a sense of sadness, confusion, aloneness, or general despair about the future.

School Attitudes & Behavior

School Engagement (3 items)

Youth report that they find school fun and exciting, look forward to learning new things at school, and look forward to going to school.

Trouble Avoidance (11 items)

Youth report that they have avoided problem behaviors in the past 30 days that reflect getting into trouble at school.

Academic Performance

Grades (3 items)

Youth report at least B's or C's or better on their most recent report card, no D's or F's on their most recent report card, and they describe their grades as better or much better than the grades received by other students in their classes.