

# Secondary Teachers' Views on Social Competence: *Skills Essential for Success*

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The purpose of this study was to examine secondary teachers' expectations of student behavior, to identify differences and similarities between middle and high school teachers, as well as between general and special education teachers. Teachers ( $N = 240$ ) identified which of 30 social skills were essential for classroom success. Results indicated that while middle and high school teachers are relatively similar in their expectations regarding cooperation and self-control skills, they have different opinions about the importance of assertion skills. However, none of the assertion items was rated by the majority of respondents as critical for success by any of the subgroups (program type, secondary level). Findings also indicated that secondary level and program type were associated with the importance placed on assertion skills. These variables, as well as credential status, were also associated with teachers' ratings about cooperation skills. Implications for prereferral interventions, inclusive programming, and transitioning from middle school to high school are discussed.

At the secondary level, social and behavioral expectations at school become more rigorous for all students, including those receiving special education services. From middle school on, students are expected to assume increased responsibility for regulating their behavioral and academic performances (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). For example, students are expected to manage the instructional styles and work demands of multiple teachers, spend increased time beyond the instructional day completing long-term assignments (e.g., research papers), and use a range of interpersonal skills to negotiate social demands and respond to peer pressure.

Secondary students with deficient academic, social, and behavioral skills or whose skill levels differ markedly from normative levels are at risk for short- and long-term negative outcomes. Examples of such outcomes include substandard academic performance, school dropout, impaired social relationships, unemployment or underemployment, substance abuse, unstable and unfulfilling personal lives, and a lack of postsecondary education and training (Edgar, 1992; Thornton & Zigmond, 1986; Wagner, D'Amico, Marder, Newman, & Blackorby, 1992; Walker & Severson, 2002).

Given an ever-diversifying student population, the federal mandate for inclusive education, and the state and federally legislated accountability for ensuring high standards for student achievement (e.g., No Child Left Behind Act of 2001; Fournier, 2002), educators are currently under tremendous pressure to create highly effective instructional environments. Special and general educators must understand and implement

the systems and structures necessary to provide effective instruction of meaningful core curricula, which is differentiated to meet the unique strengths, interests, and needs of a diverse student population in inclusive educational environments (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; MacMillan, Gresham, & Forness, 1996). To maximize their opportunities to succeed in various general education environments, educators and teacher educators must have a comprehensive understanding of the sociobehavioral expectations required of secondary students, including those with disabilities (Kerr & Zigmond, 1986).

Information on teacher expectations of student behavior has the potential to enhance educational experiences for secondary students in a number of ways. First, secondary students, unlike elementary students, are expected to negotiate the expectations of a variety of teachers over the course of the school day (Seidman, Allen, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994). To accomplish this formidable task, students must identify teachers' expectations and adjust their academic, social, and behavioral performances to meet those expectations. If teachers do not explicitly state their expectations to students, or if teachers vary substantially in their expectations, it becomes increasingly more challenging for students to meet teachers' expectations.

When there is a vast discrepancy between current and desired levels of performance, students may be referred to the prereferral intervention team for additional supports (Bergan & Kratochwill, 1990; Lane, Mahdavi, & Borthwick-Duffy, 2003). If the goals and procedures of the interventions gener-

ated by the preferral intervention team are aligned with teacher expectations (e.g., completing assignments in the allotted time frame) and the interventions produce the desired outcomes, it is possible to develop a better fit between teacher expectations and student performance (Sulzer-Azaroff & Mayer, 1991). In doing so, it is possible that fewer students will need additional supports beyond the general education setting. Because general education teachers are the primary source of referrals (Lloyd, Kauffman, Landrum, & Roe, 1991), it is essential that research and teaching communities identify those student behaviors that teachers view as important for school success. Once identified, these behaviors and skills can be taught to general education students to promote successful school experiences (Lane, Mahdavi, & Borthwick-Duffy, 2003). Thus, it may be possible to improve the design, implementation, and outcomes of interventions generated by the prereferral intervention teams by aligning intervention goals and procedures with teachers' expectations (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bahr, 1990; Fuchs et al., 1990; Lane, Givner, & Pierson, in press; Sulzer-Azaroff & Mayer, 1991). By creating a better fit between student performance and teacher expectations, it also may be possible to decrease the teacher's need to refer students for even more focused supports, such as special education services.

Second, for those students who ultimately do require special education services, knowledge about teacher expectations is also important. With the movement toward inclusive programming for students with disabilities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; MacMillan et al., 1996), it is likely that students receiving special education services will be required to meet the behavioral expectations of both general and special education teachers. If these youngsters could be made aware of their teachers' expectations and then taught the skills necessary to meet the academic, social, and behavioral demands, these students may experience more successful inclusive experiences than those students who were not privy to this knowledge (Lane et al., in press).

Further, in understanding how middle and high school teachers converge and diverge in their expectations of student behavior, teachers and administrators might improve the transition from middle to high school, a difficult time for many students (Alspaugh, 1998; Morrison, Robertson, Laurie, & Kelly, 2002). Information about the transition between middle and high school levels is sparse at best (Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983; Healy & Steward, 1984; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Seidman et al., 1994). Research by Isakson and Jarvis has suggested that the high school environment is unique with a range of academic and social challenges characterized by increased teacher expectations and demands. The degree of difficulty associated with this transition appears to be associated with a variety of factors including the extent to which students experienced earlier transitions (e.g., moving from an elementary to a middle school; Blyth et al., 1983), the student's perception of the degree to which the transition is salient and unique (Healy & Steward, 1984), the student's sense of connectedness with the school (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999), the so-

cial support available from teachers and peers (Isakson & Jarvis), the gender of the student transitioning into the high school setting, with girls initially demonstrating increased vulnerability in the area of self-concept (Blyth et al., 1983), and the presence of adaptive coping strategies, such as problem-solving skills (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). It is interesting to note that students with adaptive coping strategies and those with lower levels of autonomy responded more favorably to the transition into high school, as evidenced by a greater sense of school membership and higher grade point averages (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Seidman et al., 1994). Isakson and Jarvis suggested that adolescents who are less autonomous may actually "turn to school as a way to help define themselves, resulting in higher grades and a greater sense of belonging to one's school" (p. 22). Understanding differences and similarities among teachers at the secondary levels and then providing this information to students may give students additional information to even further improve their adaptive coping skills, giving them new tools to further facilitate the transition into high school in the form of improved educational outcomes (Seidman et al., 1994), a sense of school membership (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999), and adaptive relationships with adults (O'Shaughnessy, Lane, Gresham, & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2002; Walker & Severson, 2002).

At the elementary level, studies of teacher expectations illustrate the potential value of understanding teacher expectations. For example, Walker and colleagues (Hersh & Walker, 1983; Walker, Irvin, Noell, & Singer, 1992) constructed a model of interpersonal social-behavioral competence within school settings that delineates behaviors preferred and nonpreferred by elementary teachers. The model suggests that when students display certain adaptive, teacher-preferred behaviors (e.g., cooperates with peers, follows directions), they are more likely to experience positive relationships with teachers and peers than if they display maladaptive behaviors (e.g., aggresses toward others, disrupts the group). The empirically derived correlates have met with demonstrated success in distinguishing students with behavior disorders from those without behavior disorders (Walker & McConnell, 1988) and between rejected and nonrejected peers (Coie, Dodge, & Copotelli, 1982). Thus, this model suggests that the skills that constitute a student's behavioral repertoire lead to important academic and social outcomes (Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995; Walker et al., 1992). If the student's behavioral repertoire is characterized by an absence of adaptive, teacher-preferred behaviors, it is likely that a referral for support services will follow.

Gresham, Dolstra, Lambros, McLaughlin, and Lane (2000) sought to extend this work by exploring the specific social skills that upper elementary educators deem essential for school success. Further, they examined differences in expectations across the grade span. Results indicated that upper elementary educators place significantly less emphasis on assertion skills than on cooperation and self-control skills. Further, the number of social skills rated as critical for success

increased between fourth and sixth grade. However, only limited information on the responding teachers was collected. Variables such as teaching experience, teaching assignment, and gender were not included, making it difficult to identify the teacher characteristics associated with various perceptions about cooperation, assertion, and self-control.

Lane and colleagues (in press) extended work on elementary teachers' expectations in a study of 126 educators. Kindergarten through sixth-grade teachers were asked to identify which social skills they perceived as essential for success. Findings indicated that primary and intermediate teachers view assertion skills to be significantly less important than self-control and cooperation skills, which were rated as equally important for success. General educators viewed cooperation skills as more essential for success than did special educators. However, general and special educators had similar views on the importance of self-control and assertion skills. Implications of using teacher expectation data for improving interventions designed by the prereferral intervention team and enhancing service delivery for students receiving special education services were discussed.

Unfortunately, although the information gleaned about teachers' expectations at the elementary level has produced some potentially useful information, less work has been conducted at the high school level. Kerr and Zigmond (1986) surveyed 220 general education and 24 special education high school teachers in a large urban area using the *Social Behavioral Survival Inventory of Teacher Social Behavior Standards and Expectations, Secondary Version* (Walker & Rankin, 1980). Results indicated that general and special educators, for the most part, held similar expectations and agreed on classroom target behavior for secondary students with disabilities that were "critical for success" as well as "intolerable." There were, however, some exceptions. General educators were more rigorous in their expectations and standards for classroom behavior, especially related to deportment. Kerr and Zigmond also found "a straightforward emphasis on self-control, good study habits, and teacher compliance" (p. 247) for both general and special educators. Both groups minimized the importance of peer-to-peer social skills and interactions. Although this study provides much-needed insight into general and special educators' expectations at the high school level, middle school educators' expectations remain unexplored. Further, high school teachers' expectations may have changed in the last 15 years.

The purpose of this study was to extend research conducted at the elementary level into the secondary level, extend the work of Kerr and Zigmond (1986) to determine if middle and high school teachers' expectations are parallel, and acquire current knowledge about high school teachers' behavioral expectations. The following objectives were addressed

1. to examine the effect of teacher type (general vs. special education) on teachers' perceptions of skills critical for success;

2. to explore the effects of secondary level (middle vs. high school) and type of program (general vs. special education) on teachers' perspectives about the importance of self control, cooperation, and assertion skills; and
3. to examine the extent to which teacher characteristics predict the importance teachers place on cooperation, assertion, and self-control.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 240 secondary school teachers from four schools (two middle schools and two high schools) located in Southern California. All four schools were large, culturally and ethnically diverse, and served predominantly Hispanic populations (45%–89%;  $M = 76.55$ ,  $SD = 21.15$ ). Percentages of student populations ranged as follows: White students, 2% to 28% ( $M = 8.85$ ,  $SD = 12.97$ ); African American students, 4% to 17% ( $M = 8.93$ ,  $SD = 5.53$ ); and Asian/Pacific Islanders, 1% to 8% ( $M = 4.90$ ,  $SD = 3.37$ ). The middle schools enrolled 1,100 and 1,300 students, and the high schools enrolled 1,600 and 2,300 students.

Teachers were asked to complete a brief anonymous questionnaire on the social skills necessary for success in general education classrooms at the secondary level (see Table 1 for participant characteristics). In terms of teacher characteristics, 39.15% ( $n = 92$ ) were men. (Five teachers did not report their gender.) Thirty-seven percent ( $n = 89$ ) of teachers taught middle school. Eighty-three percent ( $n = 199$ ) of participants classified themselves as general educators, 12.55% ( $n = 30$ ) as special educators (e.g., resource and special day class teachers), and 4.18% ( $n = 10$ ) as "other" (e.g., reading specialists). Sixty-six percent ( $n = 158$ ) of the teachers were certificated, and 33.89% ( $n = 81$ ) held either substitute or emergency credentials. (In California, it is possible for a person to be assigned a temporary, or emergency, credential for a short period of time while obtaining official credentials.) There was tremendous variability in terms of teaching experience: Participants had 1 to 40 years of experience ( $M = 8.69$ ,  $SD = 8.04$ ), with 42.50% ( $n = 102$ ) of the teachers have fewer than 5 years of teaching experience. Chi-square analyses contrasting Credential Status  $\times$  Type of Program,  $\chi^2(2, N = 238) = 4.84$ ,  $p = 0.09$ ; Credential Status  $\times$  Gender,  $\chi^2(1, N = 234) = 0.07$ ,  $p = 0.07$ ; Gender  $\times$  Type of Program,  $\chi^2(2, N = 234) = 2.55$ ,  $p = 0.28$ ; and Gender  $\times$  Teaching Experience,  $\chi^2(1, N = 235) = 0.002$ ,  $p = 0.97$ , were not significant.

### Procedures

After obtaining permission to conduct the study at the university level, three Southern California school districts were invited to participate in this study. One district opted not to

TABLE 1. Participant Characteristics

Variable	Middle <sup>a</sup>		High <sup>b</sup>		Total <sup>c</sup>	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Gender						
Male	35.96	32	41.10	60	39.15	92
Female	64.04	57	58.90	86	60.85	143
Type of program						
General	76.40	68	87.33	131	83.26	199
Special	15.73	14	16.67	16	12.55	30
Other	7.87	7	2.00	3	4.18	10
Credential status						
Certificated	73.86	65	61.59	93	66.11	158
Substitute/emergency	26.14	23	38.41	58	33.59	81
Teaching experience						
Novice (< 5 yrs)	39.33	35	44.37	67	42.50	102
Experienced (5+ yrs)	60.07	54	55.63	84	57.50	138

Note. Percentages are based on the number of participants who completed the given item.

<sup>a</sup>*n* = 89. <sup>b</sup>*n* = 151. <sup>c</sup>*n* = 240.

participate because of concerns about time constraints. Four secondary schools were randomly selected from the two participating districts, using a random numbers table, and then invited to participate in the study. Principals of two middle schools and two high schools consented to participate by asking their site-level teachers to complete an anonymous questionnaire exploring teacher expectations of student behaviors.

The second author attended a faculty meeting at each school to explain the study, distribute an introductory letter, and request teacher participation. Teachers who consented devoted 10 to 15 minutes of the regularly scheduled staff meeting to completing the questionnaire. In order to maintain anonymity, completed questionnaires were collected using a sealed box.

A research associate with a master's degree in special education entered the data. Fidelity of data entry was assessed for 25% of the surveys by a master's-level research assistant. Four data entry errors were detected. When errors were detected, the first author was consulted. These procedures were also used to examine elementary teachers' expectations of students' behaviors as described in Lane et al. (in press).

### Instrumentation

The questionnaire contained two sections: one focused on specific social skills and another on teacher characteristics. The first section presented teachers with a list of 30 social skills items from the *Social Skills Rating System* (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990). Teachers rated the extent to which each skill was necessary for students to succeed in their classrooms on a 3-point Likert-type scale, where 1 = *not important*, 2 = *important*, and 3 = *critical*. These 30 items are typically rated by teachers for a specific student on two Likert-type scales: one

that assesses how often a student demonstrates specific social skills (frequency) and another that assesses how important those skills are for the student to be successful in a given teacher's classroom (importance). The frequency items constitute three subdomains derived through factor analytic procedures: assertion (e.g., invites others to join in activities, appropriately questions rules that may be unfair, initiates conversations with peers), self-control (e.g., politely refuses unreasonable requests from others, receives criticism well, responds appropriately to peer pressure), and cooperation (e.g., ignores peers distractions when doing class work, puts work materials or school property away, finishes class assignments within time limits). This measure has strong psychometric properties with alpha coefficients: cooperation, 0.91 for males and 0.91 for females; assertion, 0.85 for males and 0.87 for females; and self-control, 0.92 for males and 0.89 for females.

Next, teachers completed a second section focusing on teacher characteristics: gender, grade-level assignment, program type (e.g., general or special education) currently taught, years of teaching experience, and credential information. Limited demographic information was requested in order to ensure teacher anonymity and increase the likelihood of teachers' completing the survey in its entirety.

Data were analyzed using descriptive and multivariate procedures. A repeated-measures ANOVA with simple contrasts was employed to identify potential differences between secondary teachers' perceptions of the importance of assertion, self-control and cooperation skills.

Three two-way fixed-effects ANOVAs were computed using the general linear model to compare differences between general and special education and middle and high school teachers' expectations of social competence. School level (middle vs. high school) and type of program (general vs. special

education) were treated as a fixed-effects factor. Composite scores for assertion, self-control, and cooperation served as dependent variables. Mean scores were compared for significant ANOVAs. Multiple comparisons were not necessary, given that each comparison involved only two groups (Huck & McLean, 1975; Kleinbaum, Kupper, Muller, & Nizam, 1998). A MANOVA was not conducted, given that the three dependent variables were not moderately correlated (Klienbaum et al., 1998).

Three step-wise regressions were conducted to determine the extent to which teacher characteristics (i.e., teaching experience, program type, gender, secondary level, and credential status) predicted the value teachers place on the three social skill domains explored. A jackknife procedure was used to detect outliers. The residual sums of squares, multiple-correlation coefficient, and Cp criterion values were examined to identify the most parsimonious set of predictors to retain in the model (Borthwick-Duffy, Lane, & Widaman, 1996).

## Results

### *Skills Critical for Success*

Examination of frequency tables indicated that the majority (> 50%) of middle school teachers viewed six skills as essential for success, whereas high school teachers identified eight social skills as critical for school success (see Table 2). Five skills (responds appropriately to aggression from peers, attends to instructions, controls temper with peers, controls temper with adults, and complies appropriately to peer pressure) were rated as critical by middle and high school teachers. However, the percentage of high school teachers rating these five skills as important was less than the percentage of middle school teachers who rated the skills as important.

These results suggest that high school teachers may view more social skills as necessary for school success than do middle school teachers. Although middle school teachers view fewer skills as mandatory for classroom success, they may be more uniform in their expectations. Particularly noteworthy was that neither middle school nor high school teachers viewed assertion as vital to school success.

Results also indicate that general and special education teachers have parallel expectations of student behaviors. The majority of general education teachers rated seven skills as critical for success in their classroom, and the majority of special education teachers rated six skills as essential, with five skills rated as critical by both types of teachers. Further, the skills identified by both sets of educators constituted both the self-control and the cooperation domains; none of the skills in the assertion domain were rated as critical for success by general or special education teachers. Four skills (responds appropriately to aggression from peers, attends to instruction, controls temper with adults, and complies with directions) were rated by each group (program taught and secondary level) as being critical for success in school.

Frequency tables were again examined to identify the skills that the majority of respondents viewed as not important for success in schools, as evidenced by an importance score of 0 (see Table 3). Middle school teachers and the sample as a whole rated one skill (gives compliments to members of the opposite sex), as not important for school success. The majority of high school special education teachers, however, rated a total of five skills as not important to success. In addition to the previous item, they also indicated that the following skills were not important: initiates conversations with peers, introduces self to new people without being told to do so, appears confident in social interactions with opposite-sex peers, and invites others to join in activities. It is interesting to note that all items rated by the majority of teachers as not important represented the assertion domain.

In terms of composite scores, a one-way repeated-measures ANOVA yielded significant differences among assertion, self-control, and cooperation scores,  $F(2, 238) = 1224.52, p = .0001$  (Greenhouse-Geisser epsilon value = 0.94; Kleinbaum et al., 1998). Simple contrast revealed that assertion scores were significantly lower than self-control,  $F(1, 239) = 379.46, p < .0001$  ( $ES = 1.55$ ), and cooperation,  $F(1, 239) = 369.01, p < .0001$  ( $ES = 1.56$ ) scores. Secondary teachers viewed self-control and cooperation skills as equally important for success ( $ES = .10$ ). Effect sizes were calculated using the pooled variances as the error term (Busk & Serlin, 1992; see Table 4 for group means).

### *Comparison of Middle and High School Teachers' Perspectives*

**Assertion.** Results of a two-way ANOVA with two between-groups factors revealed that the interaction between secondary level and type of program was not significant,  $F(1, 225) = 0.01, p = .92$ . The main effect of secondary level was significant,  $F(1, 225) = 6.14, p = .01$ , indicating that middle school teachers rated assertion skills as more important for success than did high school teachers. The main effect of type of program was also significant,  $F(1, 225) = 6.26, p = .01$ , suggesting that general education teachers rated assertion skills as more important for success than did special education teachers (see Table 4 for group means).

**Self-control.** Results of a two-way ANOVA with two between-groups factors revealed that the interaction between secondary level and type of program was significant,  $F(1, 225) = 8.34, p = .004$ . A simple effect for type of program for middle school teachers was not significant,  $F(1, 80) = 1.80, p = .18$ . General and special education middle school teachers shared similar views regarding the importance of self-control skills. A simple effect for type of program for high school teachers was significant,  $F(1, 145) = 7.99, p = .0054$ , with high school general education teachers rating self-control as significantly more important than did high school special education teachers.

TABLE 2. Specific Skills Rated as Essential for Success by the Majority of Secondary Teachers

Item	Domain	Middle school <sup>a</sup>						High school <sup>b</sup>						Total <sup>c</sup>								
		General educators			Special educators			General educators			Special educators			General educators			Special educators			Total		
		%	<i>n</i>		%	<i>n</i>	Total	%	<i>n</i>		%	<i>n</i>	Total	%	<i>n</i>		%	<i>n</i>	Total	%	<i>n</i>	Total
3. Responds appropriately to aggression from peers	Self-control	61.67	42	78.57	11	62.50	55	59.23	77	56.25	9	58.67	88	60.10	119	66.67	20	60.08	143			
6. Politely refuses unreasonable requests	Self-control							51.15	67													
8. Responds appropriately to teasing by peers	Self-control			71.43	10			51.91	68			50.33	76			56.67	17					
9. Accepts peers' ideas for group activities	Self-control						8															
11. Receives criticism well	Self-control							57.25	75					52.02	03							
12. Attends to instructions	Cooperation	82.35	56	78.57	11	80.90	72	64.89	85	62.50	10	65.56	99	70.85	141	70.00	21	71.25	171			
18. Controls temper with peers	Self-control	77.97	53	85.71	12	78.65	70	67.18	88			64.24	97	70.85	141	63.33	19	69.58	167			
20. Listens to classmates when they present work	Cooperation	60.29	41				46															
23. Controls temper with adults	Self-control	70.15	47	92.86	13	73.86	65	67.18	88	56.25	9	65.56	99	68.18	135	73.33	22	68.82	164			
29. Complies with directions	Cooperation	79.41	54	78.57	11	80.9	72	65.56	86	56.25	9	64.90	98	70.35	140	66.67	20	70.83	170			
30. Responds appropriately to peer pressure	Self-control	51.47	35					55.73	73			51.66	78	54.27	108			50.83	122			

Note. Percentages are only reported for those cells with values greater than 50%; numbers in Item column refer to item numbers on the *Social Skills Rating System* (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).  $a_n = 89$ ,  $b_n = 151$ ,  $c_n = 240$ .

TABLE 3. Specific Skills Rated as Not Important for Success by the Majority of Secondary Teachers

Item	Domain	Middle school <sup>a</sup>						High school <sup>b</sup>						Total <sup>c</sup>					
		General educators		Special educators		Total		General educators		Special educators		Total		General educators		Special educators		Total	
		%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
4. Initiates conversations with peers	Assertion							56.25	9										
14. Introduces self to new people without being told to do so	Assertion			57.14	8			62.50	10					60.00	18				
21. Appears confident in social interactions with opposite-sex peers	Assertion							62.50	10										
22. Invites others to join in activities	Assertion							56.25	9										
28. Gives compliments to members of the opposite sex	Assertion	55.82	40			58.43	52	62.50	10	50.75	101	56.67	17	52.08	125				

Note. Percentages are only reported for those cells with values greater than 50%; numbers in Item column refer to item numbers on the *Social Skills Rating System* (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).  
<sup>a</sup>*n* = 89. <sup>b</sup>*n* = 151. <sup>c</sup>*N* = 240.

TABLE 4. Mean Scores: Type of Program Versus Secondary Level

Program	Skill area					
	Assertion		Self-control		Cooperation	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Overall	8.18	3.90	14.26	3.94	13.89	3.41
General education (secondary level)						
Middle school (Grades 6–8)	9.38	3.72	13.90	3.54	14.68	2.81
High school (Grades 9–12)	7.97	3.82	14.89	4.07	13.88	3.76
Overall	8.45	3.83	14.55	3.91	14.15	3.48
Special education (secondary level)						
Middle school (Grades 6–8)	7.57	4.67	15.29	3.50	13.14	2.57
High school (Grades 9–12)	6.00	4.04	11.94	2.74	11.44	2.85
Overall	6.73	4.35	13.50	3.50	12.23	2.81

**Cooperation.** Results of a two-way ANOVA with two between-groups factors revealed that the interaction between secondary level and type of program was not significant,  $F(1, 225) = 0.46, p = .50$ . The main effect of secondary level approached significance,  $F(1, 225) = 2.96, p = .09$ , indicating that middle and high school teachers had relatively similar views on the importance of cooperation skills. The main effect of type of program was significant,  $F(2, 225) = 9.35, p = .003$ , suggesting that general education teachers rated cooperation skills as more important for success than did special education teachers.

### *Teacher Characteristics Predictive of Teachers' Perspectives*

**Assertion.** Secondary level and program type were significant predictors of the importance of assertion skills. School type accounted for 2% of the variance in assertion,  $F(2, 216) = 5.15, p = 0.02$ , and program type accounted for an additional 3% of the variance in assertion,  $F(2, 216) = 6.13, p = 0.01$ . The negative regression weights  $\beta = -1.36$  and  $\beta = -1.91$ , indicate that middle school teachers rated assertion skills as more essential skill for school success than did high school teachers. Similarly, general education teachers, in comparison to special education teachers, rated assertion as more important for school success (see Tables 5 and 6).

**Self-Control.** No variable met the 0.05 significance level for entry into this model. Therefore, none of the teacher characteristics (years of teaching experience, credentialing status, program taught, grade level taught, and gender) was significantly associated with the value teachers place on the importance of students exhibiting self-control.

**Cooperation.** Program type, credential status, and secondary level were significant predictors of the importance of

cooperation skills. Program type accounted for 4% of the variance,  $F(3, 215) = 8.00, p = 0.005$ ; credential status accounted for 2% of the variance,  $F(3, 215) = 4.11, p = 0.04$ ; and secondary level accounted for an additional 2% of the variance in assertion,  $F(3, 215) = 5.51, p = 0.01$ . The total model explained 8% of the total variance. Examination of the regression rates indicated that general education teachers rated cooperation as a skill more essential for school success than did special educators. Teachers without credentials also rated cooperation skills as more important than did certificated teachers. Further, middle school teachers placed a higher value on cooperation skills than did high school teachers (see Table 7).

## Discussion

At the elementary level, research on teacher expectations of student behavior has suggested that the presence or absence of teacher-preferred behaviors may influence educational outcomes for students. Moreover, students who exhibit adaptive behaviors appear to be more likely to experience positive relationships with teachers and peers than did those students who exhibit maladaptive behaviors (Hersh & Walker, 1983; Walker et al., 1992). These correlates have been effective in differentiating between students who do and do not have behavior disorders (Walker & McConnell, 1988) and between socially rejected and nonrejected peers (Coie et al., 1982).

Information on teacher expectations of student behavior at the high school level may also have the potential to improve educational outcomes for students by improving the quality of interventions generated by the prereferral intervention teams, inclusive experiences for students receiving special education services, and transitions from middle to high school. Yet, to date, the majority of relevant studies have centered on elementary students (Gresham et al., 2000; Hersh & Walker, 1983; Lane et al., in press; Walker et al., 1992). Only one study



TABLE 5. Mean Scores by Comparison Groups

Group	Skill area					
	Assertion		Self-control		Cooperation	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Secondary level						
Middle school (Grades 6–8)	8.87	3.90	13.80	3.76	14.37	2.75
High school (Grades 9–12)	7.78	3.86	14.53	4.03	13.61	3.73
Type of program						
General	8.43	3.83	14.55	3.91	14.15	3.48
Special	6.73	4.35	13.50	3.50	12.23	2.81
Credential status						
Certificated	6.73	4.35	13.50	3.50	12.23	2.81
Substitute/emergency	8.43	4.43	14.98	3.91	14.26	3.66
Experience						
Novice (< 5 yrs)	8.65	4.01	14.52	3.93	14.11	3.48
Experienced (> 5 yrs)	7.84	3.79	14.07	3.95	13.73	3.67

has been conducted at the high school level. Kerr and Zigmond's (1986) study revealed that both special and general education high school teachers were similar in terms of their behavioral expectations. Behaviors pertaining to academic performance, study habits, and behavioral performance were viewed to be most critical, whereas assertion skills in the areas of interpersonal skills and problems were rated less important. The intent of the current investigation was to bring current methods used in elementary investigations (Gresham et al., 2000; Lane et al., in press) into the study of secondary teacher expectations and to explore expectations of high school and middle school general and special education teachers.

The findings from this study confirmed Kerr and Zigmond's (1986) findings that high school teachers emphasized skills in the areas of rule-following, listening to teachers, and compliance and de-emphasized assertion skills (e.g., "Student volunteers for classroom activities," "Student initiates conversations with peers in informal situations"). Furthermore, the present study extends Kerr and Zigmond's work by exploring teacher expectations at the middle school level. More specifically, current findings revealed that although middle and high school teachers as a whole are relatively similar in their expectations regarding cooperation and self-control skills, they have different opinions about the importance of assertion skills. Middle school teachers appear to view assertion skills as significantly more important than high school teachers. However, none of the items pertaining to assertion were rated by any group of teachers as critical for success. As students transition into middle school from elementary school, they move from having one primary teacher to having a multitude of teachers over the course of the school day. During the elementary years, in which students have sustained contact with

one teacher, teachers may be more able to anticipate and meet students' educational and personal needs. It may be that middle school teachers promote self-advocacy and assertion skills in an effort to encourage students to make their assistance needs known and to manage their own interpersonal relationships with peers, because it is difficult for middle school teachers to anticipate and meet so many students' needs. Yet, assertions skills are still not perceived as critical for success.

In examining the specific skills essential for classroom success, our results, which also parallel Kerr and Zigmond's (1986) findings, suggest that secondary general and special education teachers view self-control and cooperation skills as important for success. In the present study, high school teachers, as a group, identified eight social skills as critical for success, whereas middle school teachers identified six such social skills. Although middle school teachers identified fewer skills as critical for classroom success, they were more unified in their perceptions, as evidenced by higher percentages of teachers rating a given item as critical for success. Five skills—responds appropriately to aggression from peers, attends to instructions, controls temper with peers, controls temper with adults, and complies appropriately to peer pressure—were rated as critical for success by the majority of middle and high school teachers. Three of these skills (attends to instructions, controls temper with peers, and controls temper with adults) are similar to behaviors identified by Kerr and Zigmond (1986), Lane et al. (in press), and Walker et al. (1992) as important to school success.

In addition to the similarities between middle and high school teachers, there were also similar expectations between general and special educators. Again, assertion skills were not rated by teachers as critical for classroom success. All items

rated by the majority of respondents as *not* important for success were assertion items. This outcome was also evident in Kerr and Zigmond's (1986) study of high school teachers and Walker and Rankin's (1983) study of elementary teachers.

Results further indicate that secondary level and program type were predictive of the importance placed on assertion. As previously mentioned, middle school teachers placed a higher value on assertion skills than did high school teachers. Further, general education teachers placed a higher value on assertion and cooperation skills than did special education teachers. It may be that general education teachers view assertion skills as necessary skills for accessing teacher attention and negotiating peer relationships. Perhaps special education teachers are more focused on maintaining control and minimizing assertion because the potential consequences of aggression are more damaging as students increase in size. This explanation may also account, in part, for why high school teachers place less value on assertion skills than do middle school teachers.

The lack of importance placed on assertion skills by teachers in this study suggests that there is a disconnect between the current emphasis on self-advocacy skills of students with disabilities supported in the self-determination literature. Many of the self-determination curricula contain self-advocacy and assertion components (Algozzine, Browder, Karvonen, Test, & Wood, 2001; Malian & Nevin, 2002). Algozzine and colleagues' recent meta-analysis suggested that self-determination skills, which include a range of skills such as choice-making, goal-setting, problem-solving, person-centered planning, self-advocacy, and assertion skills, can be "taught and learned, and can make a difference in the lives of individuals with disabilities" (p. 219). Yet, our findings suggest that not all teachers place assertion skills at a premium, with high school teachers and special education teachers actually placing less emphasis on assertion skills relative to their middle school and general education counterparts. Moreover, assertion skills are actually de-emphasized. Thus, although self-determination skills can be successfully taught and learned, it is important that researchers and teachers consider the extent to which emphasizing assertion skills in the curriculum will actually improve the educational experiences of students acquiring these skills. As with all interventions, including those developed by pre-referral intervention and special education teams, it is important that intervention goals align with the expectations and goals of the parties involved (Sulzer-Azaroff & Mayer, 1991). Perhaps future investigations pertaining to self-determination skills could include an assessment of teacher expectations of student behavior prior to selecting intervention components, to ensure that students are being taught the specific types of self-determination skills that are valued by the teachers and other individuals with whom they interact.

Secondary level and program type, along with credential status, were also predictive of the importance placed on cooperation skills. In this case, general education teachers, middle school teachers, and teachers without credentials placed a

**TABLE 6.** Summary of Step-Wise Regression Analysis Predicting Assertion

Variable	Beta weight	Partial $R^2$	F	p
1. Secondary level	-1.36	0.02	5.15	< .05
2. Type of program	-1.91	0.03	6.13	< .05
Total model		0.05 ( $R^2$ )	5.70	< .01
		F (2, 116)		

**TABLE 7.** Summary of Step-Wise Regression Analysis Predicting Cooperation

Variable	Beta weight	Partial $R^2$	F	p
1. Type of program	-2.16	0.04	10.77	< .01
2. Credential status	-1.13	0.02	8.56	< .05
3. Secondary level	-1.11	0.02	5.03	< .05
Total model		0.10 ( $R^2$ )	5.99	< .0001
		F(3, 215)		

higher value on cooperation. These findings, in part, parallel teacher expectations at the elementary level, as program type was also predictive of cooperation skills of elementary teachers (Lane et al., in press). Perhaps general education teachers place an increased emphasis on cooperation because they must teach a large number of students on a daily basis. For example, if a secondary teacher has approximately 30 students per period and teaches six periods per day, he or she will come in contact with 180 students every day. The number of students and the responsibility of different course preparation demands may increase expectations regarding cooperation skills. It is also possible that special education teachers are more accustomed to working with students who demonstrate fewer cooperation skills (Lane et al., in press). Perhaps middle school teachers place a higher premium on cooperation in light of less mature behavior characteristic of middle school students. Finally, perhaps teachers without credentials place a higher value on cooperation skills than credentialed teachers because the former lack the knowledge to prevent and manage misbehaviors when delivering instruction (Walker et al., 1995).

None of the teacher characteristics was predictive of the value placed on self-control skills; however, an interesting interaction was noted. Whereas general and special education middle school teachers shared similar views about the importance of self-control skills, high school general education teachers rated self-control as significantly more important than did high school special education teachers. These findings, as

previously discussed, may prove useful in facilitating inclusive experiences at the high school level.

Collectively, these findings may assist in improving service delivery to all students. Our results extend the work of Kerr and Zigmond (1986), to reveal differences in behavioral expectations of middle and high school teachers. Teaching middle school students the similarities and differences in behavioral expectations of high school and middle school teachers could improve students' transitions into the high school setting. Further, findings also confirm previously identified differences between general and special education teachers, with general education teachers placing a higher value on cooperation (Lane et al., in press). If special education students in inclusive environments could be made aware of the differences between general and special education teachers' expectations and then taught the requisite skills to meet general education teachers' expectations, it might be possible to improve the quality of inclusive experiences (Kerr & Zigmond, 1986; Lane et al., in press).

In this article, we suggest that information on teacher expectations of student behavior has the potential to inform and, ultimately, improve interventions aimed at sociobehavioral concerns. Over the last 5 years, social skills interventions have been criticized as being ineffective for a number of reasons (Gresham, 1998; Grehsam, Sugai, & Horner, 2001; Mathur, Kavale, Quinn, Forness, & Rutherford, 1998). Some of the criticisms pertain to issues of alignment and generalization and maintenance. Moreover, too often interventions aimed at improving the social competence of students have focused on addressing a general set of social skills contained in a given program, rather than specific skills absent from the student's behavioral repertoire that are regarded as important from the teachers' perspectives (Gresham, 1998, 2002; Gresham et al., 2001). Successful social skills interventions typically involve both the systematic assessment of students' skill strengths, acquisition deficits, and performance deficits, as well as an assessment to determine which skills are viewed as most vital to the students' education. The later assessment is conducted to identify specific skill areas that are socially significant to the involved parties (e.g., teachers, parents, students). By using the information provided in this study, interventions can be designed to address acquisition deficits that are rated as highly important by relevant judges of social competence—classroom teachers. This method of aligning skills taught with both students' acquisition deficits and teachers' ratings of importance has met with demonstrated success with general education elementary students who were identified as nonresponsive to a schoolwide intervention program (Lane, Mahdavi, & Borthwick-Duffy, 2003), as well with elementary students with high-incidence disabilities in a self-contained class (Lane, Wehby, & Miller, 2003). Recently, teacher expectation information has been used to inform the design of multilevel positive behavior support (PBS) plans at three inclusive high schools in middle Tennessee. PBS teams surveyed faculty members to identify those student behaviors they deem essential for school suc-

cess. This information was used to guide the focus, content, and instructional procedures of the respective PBS plans. These intervention plans will be implemented during the coming academic year, with the one of the goals focusing on the efficacy of school-wide interventions based on teacher expectations.

In addition to concerns of alignment, social skills interventions have also been criticized for lack of attention to generalization and maintenance issues. One of the goals of all intervention work, including social skills interventions, is to produce lasting change that generalizes and maintains (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968; Lane & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004; Lane, Beebe-Frankenberger, Lambros, & Pierson, 2001). To accomplish this charge, interventions must target goal areas that are likely to meet with reinforcement beyond the initial training setting. In other words, the goals targeted must be perceived as socially valid from the perspective of relevant parties (e.g., the general education teacher who will be working with the student with special needs in an inclusive setting; the ninth-grade English teacher who works with students new to the school; the general education teacher who is seeking new strategies for better supporting a student who is not meeting his or her expectations in the classroom). Designing interventions whose goals target acquisition deficits on the part of the student and skills that the teacher views to be critical for success increases the probability that (a) the intervention will be implemented as designed—with treatment integrity—thereby increasing the likelihood that the student will acquire the necessary skills and (b) the newly acquired behavior will be reinforced in the naturally occurring environment. If the newly acquired skills, namely those targeted for social skills training, are reinforced beyond the training setting, it is likely that these skills will generalize across circumstances (e.g., persons, environments) and maintain over time.

However, these hypotheses have yet to be tested. To date, however, there is no empirical evidence to validate the hypothesis that information on teacher expectations may assist in preparing secondary students to more successfully negotiate the demands of inclusive classrooms and facilitate transition from middle to high school. Yet, the possibility exists. The next step is to conduct investigations at the high school level to see if the above hypotheses hold true. Namely, do interventions designed in line with teacher expectations actually improve intervention outcomes?

## Limitations

As with all studies, this investigation is not without limitations. First, in Lane et al. (in press), we relied on self-report data. It is possible that there is a discrepancy between the behaviors teachers state are important for classroom success and the behaviors actually associated with classroom success. It is possible that the behaviors rated as critical are not reinforced when demonstrated in the classroom. Future studies verifying the

accuracy of self-report data with direct observation data are warranted.

Second, it is possible that teacher expectations are student-specific. In other words, it is possible that teachers hold different expectations for various students. Future studies exploring teacher expectations at the secondary level could be enhanced by asking teachers to rate the importance of social skills for individual students rather than for students in general (Gresham et al., 2000; Lane et al., in press). For example, it may be that assertion skills would be rated as more important for students with disabilities such as mental retardation and less so for typically developing students.

Although future research exploring teacher expectations at the secondary level is warranted, findings from this work confirm and extend earlier work by examining possible differences in behavioral expectations held by general and special education teachers working with middle and high school teachers. Although teachers of different secondary levels and different program areas place great importance on cooperation and self-control skills, there are some noteworthy differences. Middle school teachers rated assertion skills as significantly more important than did high school teachers; however, none of the assertion items were rated as critical by the majority of any group subtype (e.g., program, secondary level). Whereas the majority of high school teachers identified more skills as critical for success, middle school teachers were more focused in their expectations. Further, certain teacher characteristics (e.g., program, secondary level, credential status) were predictive of the value placed on assertion and cooperation scores. Collectively, these findings extend previous investigations (Kerr & Zigmond, 1986), and the outcomes closely parallel teacher expectations at the elementary level (Gresham et al., 2000; Lane et al., in press). This information may have the potential to improve the prereferral intervention process at the secondary level, facilitate the transition from middle to high school, and improve inclusive experiences at the secondary level. Specifically, information on teacher expectations may be used to inform target behavior selection so that the views of general and special education teachers can be used to inform intervention design and thereby teach behaviors that will likely be reinforced in other settings and in other circumstances (Kerr & Zigmond, 1986; Lane & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004). Although not the intent of this study, it would be interesting for future investigations into teacher expectations of behavior to explore how teacher expectations influence academic, social, and behavioral competence of secondary students with and without disabilities.

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