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## Impacts of a Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum on the Prereading Skills of Prekindergarten Students

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FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

IMPACTS OF A SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING CURRICULUM  
ON THE PREREADING SKILLS OF PREKINDERGARTEN STUDENTS

By

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 1943, my grandmother graduated from what was formerly known as The Florida State College for Women with a degree in teaching. Not only did she pave the way for a family of Florida State University Graduates, but she also demonstrated the beauty of how teaching can inspire students to achieve greatness. I enjoyed hearing her own classroom stories and was fortunate to begin my teaching career near where she lived. Over the span of my teaching career, I was able to teach students whose parents were in my grandmother's class. For the first ten years of my teaching career, I utilized my maiden name, "Learn", when teaching as a way to show my gratitude towards her. Although she is no longer with us, I believe she remains one of my greatest supporters.

After teaching for 14 years, I desired to pursue a career in administration and was fortunate to open the school featured in this study. Although I had a Master's Degree in Education, I longed to further my education and pursue a doctoral degree where my expertise could not only further my career, but also serve as mechanism to better support the staff and students I led. I am thankful Florida State University accepted me into its Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership and Administration.

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## ABSTRACT

Self-regulation, an increasingly focus of social-emotional learning curriculums for over twenty years according to Zimmerman (2008), provides students with the ability of “setting goals, selecting strategies, and self-monitoring their effectiveness” as opposed to waiting for others to redirect their behavior (p. 166). Prekindergarten students who have documented strengths in social-emotional learning, and particularly self-regulation, have a greater chance at demonstrating academic readiness at the kindergarten level (Ashdown & Bernard, 2015). On the contrary if students do not strengthen these social-emotional learning skills by the age of 8, a potential of long-term academic weaknesses exists (Aksoy, 2019).

Prekindergarten options such as the State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Program, strive to provide enriching methodologies for students at four years of age with aspirations of strong social-emotional skills and academic success in kindergarten. The most recent readiness results, from the 2018 school year, from the State of Florida indicate 58% of students demonstrated proficiency, meaning 42% of students were not ready for kindergarten during the 2019 school year (Nickerson, 2019). This result is an increase from 36% not being proficient in the 2018 school year (Postal, 2019).

The purpose of this study was to better understand if an increased focus on social-emotional development at the prekindergarten level would increase a prekindergarten student’s academic readiness in the form of print knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language. In addition, the study researched the relationship between this social-emotional learning program and the number of verbal and physical aggressions for prekindergarten students.

The leadership team for the school featured in this study researched several commercial programs dedicated to social-emotional learning and selected the *Incredible Years Dinosaur*

*School* as the primary means for teaching social-emotional skills during the school years of 2020-2021. I conducted a descriptive study using ANOVA to compare academic reading scores of prekindergarten students at the school between the years of 2019-2020 (control group) and 2020-2021 (treatment group) using the results of the State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Assessment for Assessment Period 1 administered within the first 30-days of each school year and Assessment Period 3 which occurred 30-days prior to the ending of both school years. I calculated the number of incidents of verbal and physical aggression using student behavioral incident forms to provide further data regarding the outcome. An additional analysis examined the role gender and age play in the success of students in both groups for the areas of literacy.

This study finds that the students who participated in the *Incredible Years Dinosaur School* demonstrated growth in oral language skills with a decrease in both verbal and physical aggression occurrences. In addition, further analysis of age data between the control and treatment group indicated students from the younger cohort group (those who turned five years of age from February 1<sup>st</sup> 2021-August 31<sup>st</sup> 2021) demonstrated more success with pre-reading skills than those from the older group (those who turned five years of age from September 2, 2020-January 31, 2021). On the contrary, however, the results showed that the addition of the *Incredible Years Dinosaur School* at the school, had no effect on the students' print knowledge or phonological awareness levels.

While the school found the implementation of *Incredible Years Dinosaur School* strengthened students' social-emotional skills as measured by student behavioral data, the prekindergarten program at Country Wide School should research and employ supplemental reading curriculums for students to develop levels of print knowledge and phonological awareness. Oral Language, however, can be increased from such social-emotional learning

programs as these programs typically provide modeling and an enhanced exposure to vocabulary. Prekindergarten programs should review the information presented in this study as well as examine the data from their own facilities to gauge whether additional time allotted to social-emotional learning possibly would be of benefit.

## CHAPTER 1

### PROBLEM OF STUDY, PURPOSE, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, DESIGN, SITE OVERVIEW

#### Problem of Study

Dissatisfaction exists among State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Providers based on the way the Florida Department of Education evaluates the scores of Voluntary Prekindergarten Providers in conjunction with the Florida Readiness Kindergarten Skills Assessment. Goldstein and colleagues from The University of South Florida, University of Kansas, Ohio State University, and University of Missouri (2017) ask the question about whether the Voluntary Prekindergarten Program is preparing students for kindergarten readiness and what additional methodologies can prekindergarten programs employ to ensure prekindergarten students have the knowledge they need for reading success at the kindergarten level.

As the prekindergarten education system in the State of Florida seeks to place more emphasis on improving the pre-reading skills of students enrolled in the Voluntary Prekindergarten Program, explicit efforts to improve students' social-emotional learning skills have simultaneously become more prevalent in the culture of preschools and elementary schools. Social-emotional development encompasses the ability of students from infant to age five to foster relationships with peers, promote positive interactions with caregivers, as well as navigate novel academic tasks (Ashdown & Bernard, 2011). Social-emotional learning at the prekindergarten level, according to Ashdown and Bernard (2015), provides prekindergarten students with "self-confidence, concentration, and the ability to communicate feelings" (p. 397).

Students who demonstrate social-emotional development in prekindergarten also have a higher success rate academically in kindergarten (Ashdown & Bernard, 2015). Students who

exhibit weaknesses in social-emotional skills that if not addressed by eight years of age, face long-term effects on their academic development (Aksoy, 2019). Prekindergarten programs provide students with the ability to increase their social-emotional learning through the utilization of peer interactions, direct teaching, and exposure to oral language. Prekindergarten students who develop their social-emotional skills are more likely to have the school readiness skills needed to achieve academic success in the elementary setting (Sezgin and Demiriz, 2019).

Focusing on pre-reading skills at the prekindergarten level, according to Goldstein et al. (2017) serves as a critical component of prekindergarten as "we must develop prevention and early intervention strategies that ensure children are entering school with the skills needed to become successful readers" and avoid reading delays (p.89). Phonological Awareness and Phonics in the form of letter-sound knowledge, provide meaningful reading instruction for prekindergarten students. Students who receive a solid level of Phonological Awareness and Phonics training, observe improvement in the area of reading (Peterson et al., 2017).

While prekindergarten programs incorporate programs to foster pre-reading skills, social-emotional learning does not appear to be explicitly addressed in all prekindergarten programs as many teachers lack the understanding and tools as to how to teach social-emotional learning skills (Humphries, Williams, & May 2018). Programs such as *Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS)*, *Positive Action (PA)*, *Promoting Alternative Thinking Curriculum*, *Tools of the Mind*, *Conscious Discipline*, and *Incredible Years* exist to provide social-emotional learning activities for teachers to facilitate with students. Without adequate training and instructional fidelity for teachers, the question remains as to whether social-emotional learning programs such as these can positively correlate to growth in social-emotional development for students. More specifically, how would additional teacher training in social-emotional learning paired with

continuous modeling from trained facilitators who teach the program effectively, increase the pre-reading skills of prekindergarten students?

Skills such as “self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making” serve as domains of social-emotional learning according to Ashdown and Bernard (2010, p. 1). “The ability to encode, interpret, and organize (social and emotional) information” are pre-requisites for students to master learning objectives according Humphries, Williams, and May (2018, p.159). Self-Management, sometimes referred to as self-regulation refers to one’s ability to adapt to the circumstances in an environment which includes social interactions and academic tasks (Montroy et al., 2015). Early childhood students with poor self-regulation skills are more likely to experience difficulties in reading development and prosocial skills in the school setting (Loomis & Mogro-Wilson, 2019). Students with higher self-regulation levels demonstrate stronger literacy development skills (Skibbe, Montroy, Bowles & Morrison, 2019).

Hunter, Bierman, and Hall (2018) suggested while social-emotional learning programs work to increase a student's level of prosocial skills such as working collaboratively with others, communicating feelings and self-regulation, additional skills are simultaneously improved such as "attention, perseverance, and approach towards a task" as students expose themselves to different means and ways to problem-solve social situations (p.3).

Many states such as Florida, have created programs to encourage students to attend prekindergarten. Florida's program, Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK), provides 540 hours of instruction for four-year-old students in pre-academic areas such as reading and math to prepare them for the academic rigor provided in kindergarten. The State of Florida measures the reading success of prekindergarten students using the Voluntary Prekindergarten Assessment which is

administered to students in September (baseline) and May as well as the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Skills Assessment completed during the students' kindergarten school year (Florida Early Learning Coalition, 2019). Reading assessments evaluate a student's ability to demonstrate alphabetic knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language (Bright Beginnings, n.d.). Students who participate in the VPK Assessment earn one point for each correct answer within each domain including print knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language. The number of points students earn for each correct answer determine whether they are meeting the criteria, below, or exceeding expectations. Learning gains based on the VPK assessment occurs when students move up a level (from below expectations to meeting expectations or meeting expectations to exceeding expectations) or maintain a level of exceeding expectations throughout the school year.

Country Wide School, a private school located in Florida, provides instruction for infants through fifth grade students. Country Wide School is currently in its fifth year of operation and considered a VPK Provider in the State of Florida. The school utilizes classroom observations, classroom assessments, and report cards distributed in January and May to note a student's academic and behavioral progression throughout the school year. Students in the lowest quartile of prekindergarten receive an academic improvement plan. When compared to other prekindergarten schools in the area, Country Wide School Prekindergarten Students scored lower on state-wide assessments and therefore needed to increase the pre-reading skills of students in order to maintain enrollment. Based on the data from students during the time period of August 2017 through May 2019, Country Wide School began searching for additional reading and social-emotional learning programs to increase the students' levels of print knowledge, phonological awareness, oral language, self-regulation, persistence, perseverance, and problem-

solving. The school researched various commercial reading and social-emotional learning programs and identified *The Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* as a program to further explore. *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* utilizes reading and writing approaches to potentially increase the social-emotional learning skills of four-year-old students (Franklin, personal communication, June 6, 2020). Country Wide School decided the *Incredible Years Dinosaur School* could provide students with the instruction to enhance their reading progression through embedded literacy activities while also strengthening students' social-emotional learning skills. The leadership team also felt the program facilitation should come from trained in house staff therefore the school would enroll teachers in training offered by *The Incredible Years Team* to ensure the program was presented to students in a manner that was consistent with the curriculum's framework. The trained facilitators would provide the program weekly in the classroom while also simultaneously modeling how to teach these skills for teachers to continue the program language when the program facilitators were not present.

### **Study Purpose**

The purpose of this proposed study is to examine the relationship between implementing a social-emotional learning program and student outcomes (specifically reading progression) of prekindergarten students. Social-emotional development, according to Ashdown and Bernard (2011), is "a significant predictor of a five-year-old children's level of reading achievement" (p. 398). Ashdown and Bernard (2011) go on to state that "children considered to be at-risk" for academic difficulties displayed significantly lower levels of competence in the areas of confidence, persistence, and organization" (p.398). It is theorized that incorporating a social-emotional learning program could potentially increase a student's ability to demonstrate prereading skills at Country Wide School. The purpose of this study is not to evaluate the



effectiveness of the *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* compared to other social-emotional program, but rather to understand how prekindergarten student outcomes are impacted with the incorporation of the program.

The main research question driving the study is “How does implementing a social-emotional learning skills curriculum relate to the pre-reading and behavioral outcomes of prekindergarten students in the classroom setting?”

Focus Questions Include:

1. What is the relationship between the implementation of a social-emotional learning program in a prekindergarten classroom and the reading academic progression for students over the span of one school year compared to the previous years without the program?
2. How does the implementation of a social-emotional learning program relate to number of negative behavioral occurrences in a prekindergarten program as measured by the student’s behavioral data?

### **Study Design Overview**

I conducted a descriptive study featuring an ANOVA Analysis for this problem of practice. A comparison of the data between the Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Assessment and student behavior as documented from the student’s behavioral incident forms data occurred between the years of 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. Data from the Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Assessment in the areas of print knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language submitted in August and May of each school year in addition to student behavioral incident forms completed upon occurrence, serve as the main forms of data.

Lead prekindergarten teachers provided literacy instruction daily for students based on lessons prescribed by a specific curriculum approved by the State of Florida Voluntary

Prekindergarten Program. In addition, trained instructors in the *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* Program served as the main facilitators of the social-emotional learning intervention between the years of 2020-2021. These facilitators also provided weekly social-emotional learning training for teachers through the utilization of modeling techniques and interactions with students.

### **Study Site Overview and Feasibility**

Country Wide School, a pseudonym for a private school in North Florida is not associated with the public-school district, Saint John's County, in which it resides. This district boasts the state's top-rated elementary and high schools. The staff at Country Wide School strive to provide a whole-child approach catered to the specific needs of each student. The school opened with 92 students in 2017. Now during its fifth year, enrollment currently sits at 343 students with openings solely remaining in the elementary program.

The schools' enrollment has steadily increased since the onset of opening the school with the exception of spring 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 Health Crisis. During this time period, the school observed a decrease in enrollment as families practiced social distancing and were impacted by the loss of income. Enrollment returned back to pre-pandemic levels in January 2021.

The mission of Country Wide School is to encourage a multi-sensory experience paired with resources such as art, yoga, music, Spanish, gardening, and Physical Education. The Florida Association of Childcare Management (FCCM) serves as the accreditation bureau for the infants through prekindergarten programming. The Department of Children and Families provides licensing. Prekindergarten students at the location of study, classified as four years of age, are primarily Caucasian (95%), while the remaining 5% are Hispanic, Asian, African American, and

Indian. Upon completion of this program, these students matriculate into a kindergarten program of choice. Over 98% of the students in this control group participate in the State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Program. The remaining 2% participated in the same instruction but families chose not to participate the Voluntary Prekindergarten Program. Instead, parents enrolled students in the classes and paid full tuition for the program in lieu of accepting the VPK Voucher.

Fourteen teachers served as instructional leaders for infants through age four and provided preparation for the core academic subjects. For this study, the term "highly qualified" indicated that teachers had a bachelor's or a master's degree in education or a related field. Highly qualified did not constitute teachers who had an associate's degree or Child Development Associate (CDA). Seven of the teachers within the Early Childhood Community had a bachelor's or master's degree in the field of education. Six teachers had a Childhood Development Associate or associate's degree in Education. Two of the remaining teachers were working towards the Childhood Development Associate. The school had a requirement in place for all teachers in the Early Childhood Community (infants-age two) to obtain a Childhood Development Associate Certification or higher prior to the first day of school to teach these age groups during the 2021-2022 school year. Teachers who taught preschool (three-year-old level), had an associate or bachelor's degree in Education, and four-year-old teachers had a bachelor's degree.

Differentiation is a vital aspect of the campus at Country Wide School. When prekindergarten students apply for acceptance, students undergo an admissions process to gauge their level of academic ability. This process is not to prevent a student from enrolling, but more to ensure the school is providing the means necessary to provide an acceptable and calculated

form of instruction. In the event students exhibit deficiencies, the school can provide additional academic and behavior support. The same provisions are in place for students who show strong academic proficiencies. Academic Improvement Plans dictate the additional guidance these students require. Parents receive progress reports every six weeks towards these goals.

### **Feasibility**

Individualized instruction tailored to the unique needs of students correlates to the mission of Country Wide School. Prekindergarten students and prekindergarten teachers served as the participants in this study. As an administrator of this school since the school opened in 2017, I met with the teachers daily, had access to all of the behavior plans, report cards, academic improvement plans, as well as reading scores from the school's administration of the VPK Assessment for the duration of this study. Prior to serving as the Head of School for this facility, I had a career as a Special Education Teacher, also known as an Exceptional Student Education Teacher in the public school system. Through my nine years serving in this field, I grew accustomed to observing students, collecting data, accommodating and modifying instruction, as well as formulating Individual Education Plans. At times, I tended to gravitate towards students who are classified in the lowest quartile and seek ways to remediate instruction to meet their needs.

This experience as an observer and one who could amend instruction to meet the needs of students served as a benefit when reviewing data obtained from intervention programs at the setting for this study. Observations for the facilitation of the *Incredible Years-Dinosaur Program* and in-person and meetings with teachers were conducted opposed to relying on an outside agency for data collection. The observations examined the lesson content and the student response to instruction rather than observing and providing feedback to the program facilitators.

Daily onsite interactions with the facilitators solidified the relationship between the program and the teachers.

### **Local Significance**

The administration at County Wide School sought to understand how it could improve the academic readiness skills of its prekindergarten students. The first step of the process included reviewing the school's academic and social-emotional learning data. The VPK Data during the years from 2017-2019 indicated students demonstrate progression with print knowledge. Students, however, presented weaknesses in the domain of phonemic awareness. Four students received behavior plans in 2017-2018 and thirteen in 2018-2019. Thirteen prekindergarten students were placed on an Academic Improvement Plan during the 2017-2018 school year and fifteen in 2018-2019 school year due to weaknesses with phonemic awareness, print knowledge, and oral language. The pervasive issues revealed by the data caused a concern as the number of behavior deficiencies and academic weaknesses continually increased. Based on the increases of negative behavior in the areas of self-control, attention to task, and peer interactions, along with the deficits in phonemic awareness, the administration at Country Wide School felt a social-emotional learning program that provided students with literary components such as writing, and reflection may benefit the students.

School administrators monitored student performance through a data system to provide meaningful instruction for students while also ensuring students met their developmental milestones. Students participated in assessments to evaluate their development using curriculum analyzing their cognitive, language, physical motor, fine motor, and social-emotional learning. These forms of data assisted with providing additional information as to whether alterations in social-emotional learning increased or decreased a prekindergarten student's pre-readiness skills.

## **Significance**

The question as to whether the State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Program provides students with sufficient instruction for successful completion of kindergarten remains a concern for VPK Providers. In the lens of the local context, it is important to review the Assessment Period 3 VPK Data from 2019-2020 at Country Wide School in conjunction with the number of verbal and aggression occurrences to identify the school's strengths and weaknesses. Country Wide School's Reading Data indicates the mean score for print knowledge was 11.03 (exceeding expectations), for phonological awareness it was 10.62 (meeting expectations), and finally 19.83 for oral language (meeting expectations). The goal for the school is to produce scores that all fall within the "exceeding expectations" domain.

## **Conclusion**

Prekindergarten provides a plethora of learning opportunities for students including immersion in pre-readiness and social-emotional learning skills. Articles researching the reading development of prekindergarten students are apparent in many journals. Examples include previous research on Phonemic Awareness with Kindergartners who have reading difficulties and oral language in preschool (Ukrainetz, Ross, & Harm, 2009) and (Luna, 2017). A lack of research, however, exists regarding the impacts of providing explicit instruction in social-emotional learning in the prekindergarten class setting and how these skills affect a student's ability to generalize the skills into the natural and academic setting.

The school followed in this study, sought to examine the outcome data for print knowledge, phonological awareness, oral language, as well as levels of both verbal and physical aggression when a social-emotional learning program such as *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* was incorporated to teach prekindergarten students self-regulation, communication, and

relationship skills with the aspirations of providing students with the skills needed to understand novel academic information. The implementation of *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School*, was facilitated weekly by trained facilitators to provide engaging lessons for students as well as to train teachers. The results of this study which will be shared with school administrators and potentially state legislatures to advocate for the potential of allocating more resources to the State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Program.

## CHAPTER 2

### INTRODUCTION, ORIENTATION, PREVIOUS STUDIES, LOCAL CONTEXT, SUMMARY

#### Introduction

The prekindergarten period in a student's life provides opportunities for growth in academics and social-emotional learning. Gunter, Caldarella, Korth, and Young (2012) assert that children at this stage of development are learning to develop "language skills in addition to regulating thoughts, feelings and behaviors" (p. 151). These skills tie into what Ashdown and Bernard (2011) refer to as "social-emotional development" (p. 397). According to Ashdown and Bernard (2011) "social-emotional development" is a phrase associated with the ability of infants through age 5 to understand their levels of "self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and decision-making" which if not addressed may impact their ability to demonstrate long-term academic success in reading (p. 397).

Social-emotional development encompasses a prekindergarten student's ability to demonstrate "adaptive learning behaviors, cooperation, managing emotion, emotion with difficult tasks, and self-regulation" according to Wenz-Gross, Yoo, Upshur, and Gambino (2018, p. 2). The development of these skills is increased during a student's exposure to schooling at the prekindergarten level and correlates to a student's ability to demonstrate academic reading skills needed for kindergarten (Wenz-Gross et al., 2018). In turn, students who exhibit difficulties with academic readiness and, specifically, literacy in kindergarten "struggled with text comprehension later in third grade" (Goldstein et al., (2016) p. 89). Ukrainetz, Ross, and Harm (2009) suggested that prekindergarten students who exhibit deficiencies with phonemic awareness manifest difficulties with "word decoding which impairs reading comprehension and reading fluency, resulting in long-lasting pervasive reading difficulties" (p.90). The academic pre-readiness skills



needed for a prekindergarten student to be successful include phonemic awareness, print knowledge, and oral language (vocabulary). The purpose of this study is to analyze the academic differences when embedding a social-emotional learning program, *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School*, into the weekly curriculum of four-year-old prekindergarten students.

### **Orientation within the Larger Educational Landscape**

A social-emotional learning program that is geared towards equally incorporating students, teacher, and parents could potentially show positive effects on the reading levels of prekindergarten students (Skibbe et al., (2019). Learning pre-requisite skills to "regulate emotions" catapults students to have "better academic and achievement outcomes" based on the research provided by Humphries, Williams, and May (2018, p. 157). Gunter, Caldarella, Korth, and Young (2012) studied Strong Start PreK to examine the benefits of incorporating social-emotional learning into the prekindergarten setting. The study found that teachers who utilized this social-emotional learning program saw a significant increase in a student's ability to monitor personal behaviors. Behaviors, such as "the ability to encode, interpret, and organize emotional and social information," are skills needed to demonstrate academic success based on the research from Humphries et al., (2018) (p. 158). A social-emotional learning program geared towards incorporating students, teachers, and parents could potentially show positive effects on the reading levels of prekindergarten students (Skibbe et al., 2019).

Teachers who incorporate social and emotional learning, coupled with the ability to facilitate open-ended questions and opportunities for vocabulary development, have also been found to increase the reading levels of students (Hans & Pritchett, 2019). Print knowledge is an academic skill that, if taught beginning in the preschool setting, can have a positive correlation on the long-term reading performance on students (McConnell & Wackerle-Hollman, 2015).

Vocabulary development begins at an early age for children. Children initially learn to express their social needs through physical movements such as pointing and nodding. Physical movements provide the primary form of communication. Gradually the verbal replaces the gestures when exposed to an environment with rich language (Goh, Yamauchi, & Ratliffe, 2012). Incorporating vocabulary and demonstrating how to speak is a crucial component for increasing a student's oral language ability. Increased verbal language abilities assist a student in the long-term with reading comprehension (Luna, 2017).

To facilitate the early development of these academic and social emotional skills, states such as Florida provide students with the option of attending prekindergarten at no cost to parents. The VPK program began in August 2005 in the State of Florida. The program's goal serves to provide 540 hours of instruction per school year for students who turn four years of age by September 1<sup>st</sup>. Five-year-old students can also attend should they not be enrolled in a VPK Program when they are four-years of age. The program aims to provide a quality level of instruction focused on pre-reading, math, social-emotional learning, and communication skills. The benefit to parents in the State of Florida is that the 540-hour program is free. Parents can then decide to pay for additional instruction throughout the school year.

Teachers who teach VPK in the State of Florida have a requirement to hold a Bachelor's Degree in Education or a related field, Associates Degree, or a Child Development Associate Credential. Throughout the school year, the Early Learning Coalition, the office that oversees VPK Providers and instruction, monitor providers for quality assurance and student attendance. Students must maintain a consistent attendance rate in order to remain eligible for the VPK Program.

Florida has over 70% of four-year-old students enrolled in state-funded prekindergarten known as Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK), but when compared to the instruction from other states, the quality of the education students receive at the prekindergarten level in the State of Florida is lacking (Sanchez & Nadworny, 2017). The Florida Kindergarten Readiness Assessment is a state-created evaluation that examines the progression of Kindergarten Students in prekindergarten programs based on the State of Florida Prekindergarten Standards. This assessment, completed within the first 30-days of kindergarten, is a computer-based assessment (Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener, (n.d.)). Leigh (2019) indicated that kindergarten assessments administered in Florida public schools during the fall of 2017 school year show almost half of the prekindergarten students did not exhibit the necessary skills to be successful in kindergarten" (Gov. DeSantis, May 16, 2019).

### **Previous Studies**

A number of previous studies identify the importance of different social emotional competencies and skills on the outcomes of students and the effectiveness of teachers. Here, I review studies regarding the role of teachers in teaching social-emotional learning for prekindergarten students, the relationships between teachers and social-emotional learning,

Self-regulation, an important skill taught through social-emotional learning, includes a student's ability to monitor and regulate emotions (Caldarella et al., 2012). Self-regulation can impact the academic performance of students. Students who demonstrate a higher level of self-regulation exhibit a more robust quality of classroom interactions and academic ability (Hunter, Bierman, & Hall, 2018). Korinek and DeFur (2016) outline students who exhibit poor self-regulation skills potentially demonstrate deficits with "multi-step processes, planning, impulsivity, organization, and time management" (p.233). The Collaborative for Academic

Social and Emotional Learning (2013) suggests teachers need to provide instruction in the areas of "self-awareness, self-management, relationship building, and decision making" to increase a student's ability to learn self-regulation skills.

Previous studies on social-emotional learning and prekindergarten students show a limited amount of research is available regarding the effects of implementing a social-emotional learning curriculum explicitly and the impacts on the reading development of prekindergarten students. Considering teachers in the present study were participants in the *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School*, they had the opportunity to increase their connection with students and ability to foster social-emotional learning in their classes.

### **Social-Emotional Learning and Teachers**

Previous studies utilizing The Foundation of Learning (FOL) Project provided training and support to teach social-emotional learning to students (Morris et al., 2013). Morris et al., (2013) found teachers who incorporated FOL into their learning environment, improved their capacities to enhance the social-emotional learning levels of students. Morris et al., (2013) also found teachers who understood FOL were able to maintain classroom management better in their classrooms. This research was taken into consideration when deciding to embark on providing a social-emotional learning skills program such as *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* programming into the school referenced in this study. While information regarding other programs is available, significant research is not available regarding the impacts of *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* and prekindergarten social-emotional learning skills due to the program being relatively new.

Building rapport with students is a critical feature of the classroom setting when teaching students social-emotional learning skills. Caldarella, Page, and Gunter (2012) studied the

opinions of teachers regarding social-emotional learning by implementing Conscious Discipline. Conscious Discipline is a program created to serve as a social-emotional learning mechanism for schools using developmentally appropriate and researched-based strategies. Opposed to initially providing lessons for students, Conscious Discipline focuses on encouraging teachers to balance their social-emotional levels as adults in order to strengthen the social-emotional learning levels of students. Building relationships serves as a primary function on Conscious Discipline (Darling et al., 2019). The Caldarella study found that teachers who were fonder of the approach were more likely to utilize the components in the classroom setting and thus created a stronger relationship with students (Caldarella et al., 2012). The lessons behind the *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* work towards building a relationship with teachers and students to promote social-emotional development in students. Teachers can participate in the lessons facilitated by trained professionals to learn more and engage with students. This form of instruction can create a connection between the student and the teacher.

### **Relationship Between Social-Emotional Learning and Classroom Teacher**

Although previous research provides information on the impacts of social-emotional learning programs in the prekindergarten setting, the teacher plays an integral role in the process. Teachers have a desire to implement social-emotional learning but lack the understanding as to how to provide this instruction to meet the needs of students (Zinsser et al., 2014). This study, using *Incredible Years Dinosaur School*, differs from other studies in that it not only provided a specific program, but the intervention utilized the assistance of trained facilitators who worked directly with students every week.

After receiving training on how to implement *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* Curriculum, the facilitators provided weekly lessons for students in a whole group setting.

Teaching the students as a class offered the same level of instruction for all students simultaneously. As a class, students had the ability to hear what their peers were feeling and expressing and could use the same terminology to resolve conflict as what was instructed by the facilitators throughout the school setting even when the facilitators were not present.

Teachers played an active role in the weekly lessons as they assisted with the modeling and learned to use the same language as the facilitators when behavior situations arose throughout the school day. When students began showing frustrations or difficulty with peer relations, teachers could remind students of what they learned in their whole group sessions to assist with resolving conflict. Also, the facilitators were onsite regularly to provide support to teachers in-between sessions should it be requested by teachers.

The classroom teacher serves as the building block between the curriculum and the student. The teacher should be well aware of how to incorporate these techniques into the day-to-day activities of students. Prior research has targeted the impact of incorporating a social-emotional learning curriculum into the classroom setting. Limited research, however, is available to discuss the relationship between what Poulou (2016) described as "the emotional intelligence" of a teacher and the student (p.427). In the Poulou study, teachers participated in training sessions to enhance their understanding of social-emotional learning and emotional intelligence. The results indicated that teachers who receive social-emotional learning strategies are more likely to prevent harmful situations in the classroom setting. The study, conducted using kindergarten teachers, suggests the need to duplicate these findings in the preschool setting. Poulou (2016) states, "teachers with high levels of emotional intelligence are more likely to handle negative behaviors from students" (p. 428). Teachers who exemplified higher levels of

social-emotional intelligence created a more welcoming environment for students (Poulou, 2016).

Generalizing social-emotional learning skills from the classroom setting into the natural learning session such as lunch, recess, and at home is a critical component of increasing these capacities of prekindergarten students. Zinsler et al. (2014) researched the effects of teachers' opinions on social-emotional learning and how it was reflected in their classrooms. They also evaluated teachers' classrooms using the CLASS observation protocol (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) (Zinsler et al., 2014). Zinsler et al., (2014) found the results of the "Emotional Support Domain" were more aligned to their study as it measures "Positive Climate, Negative Climate, Teacher Sensitivity, and Regard for Student Perspectives" (p. 477). Zinsler also found that teachers who were more positive about teaching social-emotional learning tended to incorporate more opportunities to explore these skills in the classroom setting. In the prekindergarten setting, teachers who provided warm interactions with students demonstrated more of an awareness of social-emotional methodology than that of teachers who did not display warm and inviting tendencies.

Li and Lau (2019) have outlined the importance of the teacher to student relationship by conducting various surveys. The results of these interviews indicate that students who do not feel connected are more likely to exhibit negative behaviors in the classroom and school setting. Teacher surveys, similar to the ones referenced in this article, are utilized for this study to reflect the teacher interpretations regarding their student's ability to demonstrate self-regulation.

## **Teacher Training in Social-Emotional Learning**

Teachers who receive training in social-emotional learning are more likely to provide welcoming, inclusive classrooms (Zinnser et al., 2019). Predesigned social-emotional learning curriculums can assist teachers with allocating instruction towards objectives. Teachers play an integral role in the facilitation of social, emotional learning skills in the preschool program (Silkenbeumer, Schiller, & Kartner, 2018). Teachers who have access to support are less likely to request the removal of a student than those who do not have support readily available (Zinnser et al., 2019). Teachers understand the significance of employing more prosocial skills in the classroom but feel they unequipped with implementing these skills in the school without additional assistance (Humphries, Williams, & May, 2018). Humphries et al. (2018) indicate that teachers are unable to consistently devote time due to "time constraints, lack of support, and limited resources" (p. 2). Providing a curriculum designed to teach prosocial skills in the natural setting increases the likelihood that teachers will implement the program (Humphries, Williams, & May, 2018).

Medford and McGeown (2015) find that students with positive prosocial skills benefit from more teacher remediation in the area of reading as teachers naturally gravitate towards students who demonstrate positive self-regulation skills. A study of kindergarten teachers indicates teachers incorporate strategies such as "setting a positive tone, suggestion of solutions, task allocations, and extension" into their classrooms to promote social-emotional learning according to NG and Bull (2018, p. 347). The authors suggest that small group instruction provides the framework needed to teach these skills in a more individualized manner.



## **Social-Emotional Learning Classroom Environment**

The classroom environment plays a role in the social-emotional learning level of students. Teachers who receive social-emotional learning training are more inclined to increase their ability to welcome students in an inclusive setting (Cologon, 2011). Cologon (2011) studied teachers who participated in a reflective approach as they documented their feelings towards inclusive education and the needs of a student who had deficiencies in social-emotional learning. Throughout the year, teachers completed over 20 hours of coursework and learned techniques to assist students. She found that teachers believed their ability to differentiate instruction improved as teachers appeared to be more favorable of an inclusive education environment. Through the course, the teachers felt they received more instruction on how to redirect students with disabilities including those who demonstrated physical aggression. Other teachers, however, felt they needed more instruction and modeling in order to be successful with teaching students who had difficulty with classroom behaviors.

Social-emotional learning levels of prekindergarten students can be increased through specific strategies in the classroom environment to strengthen conversation skills. Teachers envision a classroom setting that fosters language using both verbal and nonverbal communication tools (Goh, Yamauchi, & Ratliffe, 2012). Goh et al. examined this idea through the usage of a program called *Instructional Conversations*. By using this program, researchers aspired to view the effects of providing direct language instruction on the conversational skills of preschool students. Researchers found teachers see the importance of employing such a program but felt a program focused solely on language skills did not improve the student's social-emotional learning skills and potentially did not assist with building the classroom environment.

Studies also find that the classroom environment is shaped by students' social-emotional competencies. Students who demonstrate self-regulation levels are more likely to have a positive impact on their peers and their ability to assist their peers with self-regulation (Montroy, Bowles, and Skibbe, 2016). The Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (2013) suggests teachers need to provide instruction in the areas of "self-awareness, self-management, relationship building, and decision making" (para. 1) to increase a student's ability to learn self-regulation skills and foster strong peer relation skills.

### **Student Social-Emotional Learning Deficiencies**

Students with social-emotional learning deficiencies are less likely to experience social and academic success. Gunning, Holloway, and Healy (2019) combined the usage of teacher training and class observations in their study where social-emotional learning was taught in a whole-group format while targeting specific skills. Observations from the Gunning et al., study (2019) indicate that prekindergarten students can acquire "emotional, social, and academic skills" (p.48) during the preschool years. Research from this study shows that these skills assist prekindergarten students with transitioning into elementary successfully (p.48). More persuasive self-regulation skills in students provide a learning environment that fosters learning in their peers (Montroy et al. 2016). A class that consists of students who are demonstrating positive social-emotional skills is more inclined to have students who monitor their emotions and comply with classroom rules. According to Viglas and Perlman (2018), school-based programs geared towards fostering self-regulation can increase a student's ability to demonstrate "executive functioning, self-control, and attention" (p.2).

Strategies utilized to decrease inattentive behaviors while increasing attentive habits can positively impact the reading performance of students. These strategies assist prekindergarten

students in improving their levels of self-regulation and concentration (Medford & McGeown, 2016). Self-regulation gains are evident in the studies from Safe and Healthy Schools (n.d.) and Columbia University (2015). Columbia University reports "for every dollar invested; there is a return of more than 11 dollars" (para. 3) (Shriver & Bridgeland, 2015). Hunter, Bierman, and Hall (2018) have suggested that social-emotional learning programs address the student's level of prosocial skills. Additional skills are simultaneously improved, such as "attention, perseverance, and approach towards a task." Student exposure to different means and ways to problem-solve social situations (p.3). The research from these studies provided the rationale for incorporating a social-emotional learning curriculum in the classroom setting.

### **Summary**

Teacher training serves a need in order for teachers to adequately increase the social-emotional development of students in the classroom environment. Teachers feel more confident and comfortable addressing problematic behaviors in the classroom when they receive extensive modeling and techniques. In return, teachers tend to feel more accepting of students who demonstrate social-emotional development deficiencies as they feel confident on how to incorporate these students more in the classroom setting to remediate these weaknesses. As a result, students who demonstrate more pro-social emotional learning development levels are more likely to succeed later in the elementary setting.

### **Description of the Local Context**

Schools are searching for ways to improve their Provider Readiness Rate to maintain their ability to serve as a Voluntary Prekindergarten Provider in the state of Florida. Country Wide School, the location of this specific study, scored a 71% proficiency level in 2018. Preliminary scores indicate Country Wide School scored an 80% proficiency score for the

2019 program. After an internal audit, the administration of Country Wide School decided to implement a new curriculum with the goal of increasing student outcomes. However, Country Wide School strived to increase the proficiency even higher to compete with neighboring schools that have scored in the high 90% range.

Country Wide School is a privately-owned establishment providing instruction for infants through fifth grade. An Executive Board, consisting of leadership members, monitors the progression of the school. These members include the Chief Executive Officer, the Head of School, and the Director of Elementary Education. The owner, who is the Chief Executive Officer, is considered highly qualified with a clinical psychology degree. The other two members of the executive team both have obtained a Master's Degree in Education and serve as experienced administrators. As the Head of School, I have access to and review all of the data from the VPK Data at Country Wide School. I review the data with the teachers at the conclusion of each assessment period and formulate goals for both teachers and students dependent on the results of the assessment. In addition, I assist the school to ensure the data is uploaded into the VPK Portal as part of the requirements of VPK. As the Head of School, I served as the researcher in this study.

Administrators at the school have made a commitment to continuing education and professional development for teachers at Country Wide School. The school employed a Curriculum Coordinator as opposed to an instructional coach to meet with teachers and provide guidance in matching instruction to the needs of students. Country Wide School financially allocated for trained *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* facilitators to provide weekly social-emotional learning classes for prekindergarten students. The *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* program provides techniques for teachers to enhance language skills, through the usage of

prompts and role-playing while also providing means for teachers to strengthen their classroom environment. Resources for skills such as "school rules, doing your best in school, expressing feelings, problem-solving, anger management, and building friendships" are included in the Dinosaur Curriculum Lessons (n.d.) (Dinosaur Curriculum, n.d.). *Incredible Years* fosters instruction in a whole group setting (circle time) with additional activities taught through the usage of "small group activities" (Incredible Year, n.d.). *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* facilitators, who are not teachers, were trained by the Incredible Years to provide meaningful social-emotional learning programming to students. The goal of utilizing facilitators as opposed to teachers ensures program fidelity. Sessions were pre-scheduled weekly and rotated on a set schedule where students and parents were aware of the day and time of the meetings. Teachers were encouraged to participate in the sessions. The social-emotional lessons contained highly engaging content through the usage of two puppets. Students role-played and obtained feedback from the facilitators. Literacy components were embedded. Students completed journals and created books to express their progression with the concepts.

### **Summary and Contributions**

Previous studies have examined the relationship between other social-emotional learning programs such as Conscious Discipline and FOL. However, limited research existed regarding the effects of *The Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* on the social-emotional learning levels of prekindergarten students. *The Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* shares some of the same approaches as the others from previous studies such as S.A.F.E, "Sequenced Activities, Active Forms of Learning, Focused Time, and Explicitly defined targets, and "Everyday Arts for Special Education (EASE)" (n.d.). Previous studies, however, focused on the impact of social-emotional learning through the eyes of the teachers and the students.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW, INTRODUCTION, SAMPLE SELECTION, DATA SOURCE, DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE, LIMITATIONS, SUMMARY

#### Methodological Overview

Social-emotional development is a domain of a prekindergarten program for students who are four years of age. Social-emotional development at the prekindergarten level provides a solid foundation for students to have the social-emotional understanding to acquire academic understanding at the kindergarten level as previously mentioned. Although students' social-emotional learning is a critical component for prekindergarten programs, strengthening a student's level of pre-reading skills in print knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language simultaneously plays a role in the future success of prekindergarten students when they matriculate to elementary school.

As a response to *No Child Left Behind*, prekindergarten programs have witnessed a transition from focusing on students' social-emotional development to providing more academic programming options to ensure prekindergarten students demonstrate success in kindergarten (Akaba et al., 2020). In addition, kindergarten programs ensure students have academic readiness and incorporate social-emotional development through "play-based exploration and social interactions with peers and teachers" according to Akaba et al. (2020) and have created a mindset where kindergarten has become the new "first grade" (p. 2). This idea poses the question of whether prekindergarten now serves as the new kindergarten and how we as educators and administrators measure whether students acquire the social-emotional learning and pre-reading skills needed for successful entry into kindergarten.

The purpose of this ANOVA analysis served to determine whether a relationship existed between the addition of a social-emotional learning program (independent variable) taught by

experienced program facilitators on the pre-reading levels, verbal aggression, and physical aggression levels (dependent variables) of prekindergarten students at a private school in Florida by measuring the reading progressions and student behavior of prekindergarten students over two school years. The first school year, 2019-2020 was classified as the control group while those enrolled from 2020-2021 participated in the social-emotional learning program and comprised the treatment group.

Data in the form of student reading scores from the Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Program for the areas of print knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language served as the main source of reading data, along with student behavioral incident forms written when an incident of verbal or physical aggression occurred. Data analysis was performed by calculating the mean (average) score for both the control and treatment groups for the areas of print knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language independently using a pretest and post-test comparison. Further analysis involved analyzing the percent change of the control group, a group of prekindergarten students who did not receive a social-emotional learning curriculum for the school year, and a treatment group consisting of prekindergarten students who received a social-emotional learning curriculum for a school year to understand the students' pre-reading developmental outcome. The study desired to discover whether the social-emotional learning program correlated to an increase or decrease in prekindergarten students' reading development and social-emotional learning by comparing the control and treatment groups' reading assessment results and incidences of verbal and physical aggression over the span of two school years. A description of the research design, limitations, and summary are provided in this chapter to answer the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between implementing a social-emotional learning program in a prekindergarten classroom and the reading academic progression of prekindergarten students based on student gender and chronological age?
2. Does this relationship differ based on gender and chronological age?
3. How does student behavioral data vary with the incorporation of a social-emotional learning program?

### **Research Design**

As outlined in this study, prior research examines social-emotional learning to explain why this form of instruction is essential for students. After reviewing the data from the student behavioral incident forms and State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Reading Data, the school featured in this design felt a need existed to increase the self-regulation, peer interactions, and student communication, and reading capacities of students. Country Wide School researched various reading and social-emotional learning programs as a way to improve student performance. The *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* was selected to focus on social-emotional development while providing literacy activities to foster both of these skills in students.

Students enrolled at the school during August 2019-May 2020 serve as the control group, whereas students from August 2020-May 2021 formulated the treatment group. All student data between both groups were utilized and not selected randomly. Each of the three research questions focused on different forms of data. While the information from this design may provide a framework for other prekindergarten programs, the research also altered how the local setting in this study continues to implement social-emotional learning programming in the future.



## **One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)**

An ANOVA (RQ 1) design evaluated the reading development of prekindergarten students prior to and after the implementation of a social-emotional learning program known as the *Incredible Years Dinosaur School*. ANOVA was selected as the study had one independent categorical variable (social-emotional learning program) and one dependent scale variable (print knowledge, phonological awareness, or oral language). The ANOVA analysis further analyzed the students' Voluntary Prekindergarten Score for print knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language independently as influenced by student age and gender. An increase or decrease between variables demonstrated a relationship, whether positive or negative, between the reading scores of students. age, and gender.

The ANOVA analysis (RQ 2) allowed the school to understand how social-emotional development correlated to the number of verbal and physical aggression occurrences of students who either participated or did not participate in a social-emotional learning program. For RQ2, again, the social-emotional learning program served as the independent categorical with the dependent scale documenting the incidences of verbal and physical aggression. ANOVA compared the dependent variables, verbal and physical aggression and one independent variable: social-emotional learning program. Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), the results of ANOVA test compared pre-and post-data from 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. Independently analyzing the data using the ANOVA analysis for each variable permitted me with interpreting whether the social-emotional learning program had a positive or negative correlation on students' verbal and physical aggression levels.

## **Sample Selection Procedures**

### **Characteristics of Teachers**

Prekindergarten Students (age four) in an affluent area of Florida and their teachers participated in the study. Two of the control group teachers held a Bachelor's Degree in Education, one a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, and one a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership. The treatment group teachers earned a bachelor's degree in Education or a related field such as Psychology. One teacher held a Florida Teaching Certification and a Gifted Endorsement through Florida. Two of the teachers in the treatment were employed by the school since 2017. The other two teachers started working for the school during the 2020-2021 school year. As part of the *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School Program*, teachers actively participated in the program's facilitation weekly through in-class interaction with facilitators, modeling behavioral expectations, reinforcing positive behaviors, and positively redirecting students at the occurrence of negative student behavior.

### **Characteristics of Students**

According to the State of Florida, the cohorts of prekindergarten students all turned four years of age before September 1st, which satisfied the Voluntary Prekindergarten Program's age qualification. A sampling of seventy students from 2019-2020 serves as the control group. From August 2019 through May 2020, students received social-emotional learning through *Morning Meeting* and other "circle time" activities. Meetings with facilitators held during the summer of 2020 identified weaknesses with social-emotional development and reading scores from the Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Assessment.

During the years of August 2020-May 2021, the treatment group consisted of four prekindergarten classrooms consisting of 18 students, one teacher, and one assistant teacher in

each class. Students in the treatment group attend weekly social-emotional learning lessons facilitated by trained *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* Counselors. Teachers actively engage in the weekly social-emotional learning lessons while also receiving periodic training from the facilitators.

Through the *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School's* utilization, students completed the process of collaboration and reflection to communicate their understandings of concepts. Collaboration permitted students to verbally express their feelings, while reflection encouraged students to communicate their feelings via written expression. In addition, role-playing with peers exposed students to more opportunities for acquiring new vocabulary. The *Incredible Years Dinosaur School* program, addressed both social-emotional development and vocabulary skills.

### **Data Source**

All student documentation from the years 2019-2021 in the form of Voluntary Prekindergarten Reading Scores from the school and student behavioral incident forms served as the focus for this study. Teachers administered the reading assessment individually as part of the Florida VPK provider requirements followed by uploading the scores to the state portal. Student behavioral incident forms were submitted upon occurrence to track the number of verbal and physical aggressions. To be considered a sample in this study, students needed to be enrolled in the program from August of each year and have finished the school year in May.

### **Reading Assessments**

Teachers evaluated pre-reading prekindergarten students' pre-reading skills (RQ 1) using the State of Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Assessment. Programs that accept the VPK Voucher must complete the assessment within the first 30-days of the prekindergarten year

(Assessment Period 1-Pretest) and at the end of the school year (Assessment Period 3-Posttest).

The assessment evaluated the prekindergarten students' print knowledge levels, phonemic awareness, oral language, and mathematics. Mathematics was not included in this study. The Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Assessment is copyrighted; however, The Florida Early Learning Correlation Florida VPK Assessment Measures Technical Manual (2011) states the test contains "22-23 items for Oral Language, 14 items for Phonological Awareness, and 12 items for Print Knowledge" (p.8).

### **Behavioral Incident Forms**

Behavioral Incident Forms (RQ 2) completed by the classroom teacher, assistant teacher, or other school staff note negative behavior occurrences, including verbal aggression, physical aggression, and property destruction. The staff witnessing the occurrence notifies the guardian of the occurrence, including the antecedent, behavior, and consequence, and discusses a plan to decrease the likelihood it will occur again. After two to three incidences of aggression or property destruction, a recommendation is made for the school psychologist to observe the student and provide the instructional team and guardian feedback on how to proceed with the student. During the 2019-2020 school year, 45 incident forms were completed by teachers.. Based on the documentation, school staff observed 37 physical aggression occurrences towards students and staff and eight occurrences of verbal aggression. Two students who received behavioral incident forms have a diagnosed disability such as Oppositional Defiance Disorder.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Prekindergarten teachers received training during from August 2019-May 2020 during preplanning (August) on how to provide universal techniques for classroom management, administer the State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Assessment, and complete behavioral

incident forms. The training detailed procedures for evaluating and documenting each criterion. Teachers from August 2020-May 2021 received the same training. In addition, the teachers who worked at the school during this time participated in additional training from trained facilitators of *The Incredible Years-Dinosaur School*.

Teachers received information obtained from the study would be kept confidential, and students would be associated with numbers instead of names to maintain their confidentiality. To increase and maintain the sampling size, all teacher and student data from both the control and treatment groups were utilized in this study. Serving as an educational administrator at this school, the researcher could obtain student files access from the previous years.

Teachers administered the Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Assessment two times a year (August and May). Scores are entered into the State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten immediately following the assessment period's conclusion to determine how the students are progressing with their reading development. Finally, behavioral incident forms, written daily, outline when a student displays behavior that endangers themselves and others' safety. The same scales obtained during the school years of 2020-2021 outlined the treatment group, the group receiving the social-emotional learning program.

Results from the reading assessments and student behavioral incident forms provide distinctive data that can further understand whether the independent variables altered independent variables. Strategies to analyze teacher rating scales, reading assessment data, and behavioral incident forms followed a detailed process. Teachers received an explanation of all data sources to ensure the evaluation followed the same parameters. Teachers also learned how to write behavioral incident forms and which behaviors justify a report.

## **Reading Assessments**

Other forms of categorical data regarding the print knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language levels of students follow classifications, including below, meeting, or exceeding expectations outlined in the Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Program Assessment parameters. The State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Providers adheres to strict guidelines to determine whether the students have progressed in this school year with baseline data gathered during the first 30-days and the spring assessment in April. The Florida VPK Program requires providers to enter the data into the state portal.

## **Student Behavioral Data**

Teachers and school staff complete student behavioral incident forms to document negative behaviors on campus. These reports identify students who have demonstrated weaknesses with social-emotional learning. Currently, student behavioral incident forms are available from the years 2019 to the present. This process permits the researcher to access the data from the time before the weekly social-emotional learning program and the data since it initiated the program. Quantifiable data from student incidents and behavior forms allow the researcher to calculate the number of student behavior incidences in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021.

## **Analytic Approaches**

### **Reading Assessments**

The Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Assessment provided teachers with knowledge pertaining to the student's phonological awareness levels, print knowledge, and oral language. Scores from these assessments were obtained two times a year, immediately after the assessment period's conclusion for review. While quantitative data systems provide information regarding how students perform in reading, a thorough analysis permits the opportunity to disaggregate the

data to understand the specific strengths and weaknesses for each student in the three reading domains.

The assessment results yielded a student's pre-reading skills in terms of exceeding expectations, meeting expectations, and below expectations based on the number of questions the student responded to correctly. The image below presents the scoring criteria for assessment periods 1 (AP1) and assessment period 3 (AP3). Learning gains occur when students increase from one result category to another (i.e., increasing from below expectations in AP1 to meeting expectations in AP 3) or exceeding expectations in print knowledge, phonemic awareness, and oral language. A script provided by the Florida Early Learning Correlation of Florida VPK ensures teachers administer the assessment and adhere to the same parameters. Teachers provide feedback; however, the feedback also follows a script. All providers receive the same test and enter scores into a state portal.

For the purposes of this study, each student was assigned a number (i.e., student 1, student 2) to protect their identity. The score for each student was inputted into an Excel document along with the student's gender (0 for female and 1 for male) and the age of the student based on whether the student turned 5 from September 2<sup>nd</sup> through January 31<sup>st</sup> (notated as 1) and February 1<sup>st</sup> through September 1<sup>st</sup> (notated as 2).

The data was then uploaded into the SPSS software followed by the ANOVA Analysis for print knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language. Each of these three reading domains were entered separately as the dependent scale variables with the *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* program as the independent categorical factor for individual results. Descriptive Statistics yielded the Descriptive Table to include the mean and standard deviation with the ANOVA Table providing the significance of the mean.

AP 1	Print Knowledge	Phonological Awareness	Oral Language
Exceeding Expectations	10 and Above	15 and Above	19 and above
Meeting Expectations	8-9	12-14	16-18
Below Expectations	0-7	0-11	0-15

AP 3	Print Knowledge	Phonological Awareness	Oral Language
Exceeding Expectations	10 and Above	12 and Above	20 and above
Meeting Expectations	7-9	8-11	16-19
Below Expectations	0-6	0-7	0-15

Figure 1  
*VPK Assessment Domains*

**Behavioral Incident Forms**

The collection of daily student behavioral incident forms upon occurrence permitted the increased communication between the teacher and administration as well as the teacher and parent when a behavior occurred. In some cases, the behavioral incident forms provided additional information about teaching practices that need strengthening or presented a need for the classroom environment to be adapted to prevent behaviors from occurring through the



description of the antecedent, behavior, and consequence. Through the usage of behavior incident forms, teachers communicated data with the program's trained facilitators to immediately remediate behavior deficiencies instead of waiting until January or May to address them like in the case of the reading assessments.

At the end of each school year, the number of both verbal and physical aggressions were tabulated with each incident correlating to one point. The data of each occurrence for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 was entered into an Excel document followed by the data being uploaded into SPSS. An ANOVA Analysis was selected to determine if the one independent variable (social-emotional learning program) affected the dependent variable (verbal aggression) followed by a separate analysis of the second independent variable; physical aggression. Descriptive Statistics was selected as an option to formulate the Descriptive Table and the ANOVA Table.

The number of occurrences in 2020-2021 for both verbal and physical aggression was subtracted from the number in 2019-2020 to provide the actual difference. The result of this difference was then divided by the number of verbal or physical aggressions that occurred during 2019-2020 (control group) to provide the percent change.

### **Limitations**

Limited research exists to demonstrate a correlation between a prescriptive, social-emotional learning program and the social-emotional development of prekindergarten students in conjunction with students' pre-reading levels. While prekindergarten programs in the State of Florida incorporate programs such as *Conscious Discipline*, these programs focus on students' social-emotional learning and do not supplement literacy activities, as evidenced in *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School*. *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* is a newer product with a limited understanding of the long-term trajectory for prekindergarten students. Although the program

lacks research, the prekindergarten setting for this study selected the program based on the short-term benefits and the ability to capture the student's engagement. However, the sample size of this setting and the prekindergarten program also serves as a limitation for the study. While the study can research the association between the social-emotional learning program and the pre-reading levels of students, additional research on whether race and socioeconomic status play a role in students' social-emotional development was not available and therefore not included in this study.

### **Summary**

Research regarding social-emotional development is available to discuss the importance of implementing programming into prekindergarten students' instructional day. Previous studies outline the importance and benefits of adding social-emotional learning programs and ensuring prekindergarten students have a solid foundation of pre-reading skills before entering kindergarten. Limited research, however, is available to compare the correlation of social-emotional development and the reading performance of students. The research design outlined in this study analyzes students' social-emotional development through the lens of teachers and student behavioral incident data. In addition, the study captures the reading progression rates of students to justify whether allocating resources focusing on social-emotional learning provides benefits to the reading development of prekindergarten students.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, DISSEMINATION PLAN

#### Study Summary

In this study, I investigated the relationship between a prekindergarten student's (age 4) social-emotional development and reading progression with the implementation of a social-emotional learning program known as *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* at Country Wide School. I sought to explore how increasing a prekindergarten student's repertoire of social-emotional learning skills by providing more strategies to enhance self-regulation and communication would impact the pre-reading skills, including print knowledge, phonological awareness, and vocabulary. During this study, both groups of participants experienced impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic. I infused information on how instruction was addressed at Country Wide School due to COVID-19 throughout this chapter including a greater conversation in the implications section.

According to Ashdown and Bernard (2015), social-emotional development is crucial for students at this age level as these students need to develop their levels of "self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and decision-making" (p.397). These skills, strengthened at the prekindergarten level through repeated exposure, can increase the pre-reading skills needed for kindergarten (Wenz-Gross et al., 2018). With this idea in mind, my study focused on whether a social-emotional learning program at the prekindergarten level improved their social-emotional development while simultaneously increasing their pre-reading skills.

For this study, I centered the research around two groups of prekindergarten students who both attended school at Country Wide School. Students who attended the school during the

2019-2020 comprised the control group (n = 65). Those who enrolled the subsequent year, 2020-2021, served as the treatment group (n = 51). To understand students' outcomes before and after the implementation of *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School curriculum*, I analyzed the results from the State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Assessment to include levels of print knowledge, phonological awareness, vocabulary. I calculated social-emotional learning data by tabulating the number of verbal and physical aggressions that occurred during both school years.

Country Wide School, the location of the study, is situated on 8-acres of land in Northeast Florida. The school provides an experiential form of instruction for infants through fifth grade in Florida. The school averages 330 students per year with 60-70 prekindergarten students. The enrollment temporarily decreased to 51 students in August 2020 following the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic. During the initial phase of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Country Wide School remained open for prekindergarten instruction; however, parents could select either onsite learning or virtual instruction. The school averages four prekindergarten classrooms during a traditional year, consisting of a lead teacher, assistant teacher, and 18-students. As part of the school's accreditation requirements, all lead teachers must have a Bachelor's Degree in Education or a related field to teach prekindergarten. Two of the four teachers have been with the school since its opening in 2017.

Prekindergarten students at County Wide School have the option of participating in the State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Program, also known as VPK. The State of Florida pays for 540 hours of prekindergarten instruction for one year with this program. Students who attend 540 hours of prekindergarten per year at Country Wide School earn the classification of "Voucher Only Students" as they leave campus after the day's instruction, typically around noon. Parents at Country Wide Schools can pay for extended hours should they choose to equate to

three-additional hours of school per day or 1080 instructional hours per year. Only students who completed 1080 hours of instruction participated in this study for the control and treatment groups.

The Country Wide Leadership Team meets yearly to review all students' academic progression, including prekindergarten. The leadership team consists of the executive team, me as an administrator, and support staff such as psychologists and developmental-behavioral specialists. When we meet, these data review meetings serve to formulate both academic and social-emotional learning goals to foster development in students.

After reviewing data from the school's prekindergarten program during the 2019-2020 school year, the school's leadership identified areas of alarm, including an increase in verbal and physical aggression and a lack of improvement in reading progression in the areas of print knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language. Based on this analysis, the school administrators decided to focus on increasing students' reading skills in print knowledge, phonemic awareness, and oral language while decreasing verbal and physical aggression. Reviews of commercial-based programs led the school to *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* program as it lent itself to providing social-emotional learning strategies while also embedding language building activities through shared writing, verbalizing feelings (vocabulary) and journaling. This program was selected for implementation during the 2020-2021 school year.

During the 2020-2021 school year, *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* program was added and did not replace any existing literacy programs already in place. Prekindergarten teachers embedded *Explode the Code* into the classroom from 2019-2021 to teach phonological awareness, phonics, and oral language skills for students. Although handwriting was not evaluated in this study, teachers continued to incorporate *Handwriting Without Tears* during both

school years to assist students with fine motor skills and additional exposure to the formation of letters.

Zinsser (2014) emphasizes teachers want to implement a social-emotional learning program but do not have the understanding as to how to teach these skills. Country Wide School, therefore, obtained the services of outside providers trained in *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School program*. The facilitators who have a background in mental health, received both training from *The Incredible Years Company* as well as the curriculum components. These experts in the field taught the social-emotional learning piece to students on a weekly based with teachers participating in the lessons so teachers could continue this methodology when facilitators were not present. I used the data gathered from this program in conjunction with analyzing the reading scores and student behavioral incident forms as the basis for this study.

In this chapter, I present the results for my comparative study paired with a growth model to compare the 2019-20 control group with the 2020-21 group of students that experienced *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School program*. Performing a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* was used as the independent variable to determine the effects on print knowledge, phonological awareness, oral language, verbal aggression, and physical aggression. As mentioned above, I obtained reading progression data from the State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Assessment and calculated the growth from Assessment Period 1 (AP-1) to Assessment Period 3 (AP-3) for each student in 2019-2020 (control group) and 2020-2021 (treatment group). I then compared the data between the control and treatment groups to understand whether the curriculum and its focus on fostering friendships, the communication of feelings, identification of anger, and peer interactions increased the student's end of the year assessment scores based on letter identification (print knowledge),

blending and segmenting sounds (phonological awareness), and vocalizing thoughts and feelings (oral language). I also calculated the number of student verbal aggressions and physical aggressions from the same two years. Finally, I also divided both the control and treatment by gender and student's age (using the date of birth) to review the outcomes of the print knowledge, phonemic awareness, and oral language data for these two subgroups.

The ANOVA findings I present in this study benefit the leadership team at Country Wide School to determine if there is a link between *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* program and print knowledge, phonological awareness, oral language, verbal aggression, and physical aggression and the degree of change that link has on student performance and behavior. It may also be helpful for other prekindergarten programs that seek to understand whether to allocate additional funds for a social-emotional learning program. In addition, differentiating between the specific reading domains of print knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language provides information about whether a focus on social-emotional learning increases these specific areas while also targeting students' number of verbal and physical aggression occurrences. Finally, this study assists the developers of *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* with potentially developing more lessons that target students' communication skills in the hopes of increasing their social-emotional development, specifically, their self-regulation.

### **Findings**

Country Wide School administered reading assessments within the first 30-days of the student's prekindergarten school year and these results served as the baseline (Assessment Period 1). Teachers utilized the same assessment at the end of the school year (Assessment Period 3) to measure the progression of students. To determine whether a difference occurred between these two assessments, I subtracted Assessment Period One from Assessment Period Three then

divided by Assessment Period Three to calculate the percent change for print knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Further quantitative analysis occurred when I separated the data into two groups to include girls and boys. This permitted me with utilizing the same methodology to determine the percent change for both genders. Finally, I used chronological age to divide the participants into two groups to include those who were born September 2<sup>nd</sup>-January 31<sup>st</sup> (Cohort 1) and February 1<sup>st</sup> to September 1<sup>st</sup> (Cohort 2) with the second group serving as the younger group to examine whether a student's age related to the academic progression or lack thereof for the areas of pre-reading.

Verbal and physical aggressions differences were tabulated using a similar process in which I subtracted the number of occurrences from 2020-2021 with 2019-2020 to determine the point change and then divided by 2020-2021 to calculate the percent change. The results can be found in the tables and graphs that follow. Unlike the areas of pre-reading skills, I did not look at gender or chronological age.

The research questions are:

**RQ 1:** What is the relationship between implementing a social-emotional learning program in a prekindergarten classroom and the academic reading progression for students over one school year compared to the previous years without the program?

**RQ 2:** How does the implementation of a social-emotional learning program relate to the number of negative behaviors in a prekindergarten program as measured by the students' behavioral data?

To conceptualize the findings of this study, it was imperative I provided an additional review of how pre-reading and social-emotional learning were implemented at County Wide



School for both the control and treatment groups. I organized the subsequent sections of this study to provide the reader with more context as to how instruction looked during both 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 while outlined by each research question in chronological order. The treatment group size was slightly less during 2020-2021 when compared to the 2019-2020 school year due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, as some families decided not to have their students participate in onsite instruction due to safety concerns. In addition, Country Wide School did not offer distance learning in 2020-2021.

### **Control Participants**

The alphabetic principle serves as one of the important skillsets prekindergarten students learn and this is tied directly to the State of Florida Prekindergarten Standards. Prekindergarten teachers seek to provide ways to incorporate these standards into the classroom to increase a student's level of letter identification. During the 2019-20 school year, teachers taught reading by formulating lessons based on the State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Standards and worked with 65 students to address weaknesses as identified by the Voluntary Prekindergarten Assessments.

Teachers facilitated social-emotional learning at Country Wide School during 2019-2020 primarily occurred using a daily Morning Meeting format, where teachers reviewed the day's schedule, class expectations, and present a question of the day for students to discuss. Onsite guidance counselors, in addition to teachers, provided opportunities for students to learn strategies to improve self-regulation, peer interactions, and social awareness. At times, however, social-emotional learning instruction such as the focus on self-regulation and communication of feelings did not occur and were removed when other events on campus occurred as literacy and math served as the focus.

Teachers in the control group incorporated a positive reinforcement system where students received an item (jewel, bucket filler) when positive behavior occurred. In addition, whenever a student demonstrated behaviors that impeded the learning and behavior of themselves or others in the form of verbal aggression or physical aggression, teachers attempted to discuss the situation with the student and allowed the student to sit in a “calm corner.” While in the calm corner, students read books and had access to comfort objects in accordance with accreditation standards. Incorporating these items attempted to allow students to view this process as a way to increase self-regulation as opposed to a punitive time-out procedure. Teachers also completed written documentation in the form of school behavioral incident forms for families to communicate these behaviors. These forms provided the social-emotional learning data for this study for the control group.

During the 2019-2020 school year, teachers recorded eight occurrences of verbal aggression and 37 occurrences of physical aggressions. Verbal aggression included vocal outbursts in the form of threats or inappropriate language. Physical aggression occurred when students struck another student, staff member or threw an object.

### ***COVID-19 Impact on Control Group***

Students in the control group received onsite instruction from August 2019 through mid-March 2020. On March 13, 2020, students transitioned to spring break and at that time it was recommended private schools in the State of Florida permit students to either participate in onsite or offsite instruction until the positivity rate of COVID-19 subsided. Country Wide School adhered to this provision and formulated a program that consisted of both synchronous instruction with the form of brick-and-mortar learning as well as asynchronous learning in the form of daily videos and communication with families. Although offsite, students continued to

sign-in daily for Morning Meeting with their teachers and classmates to review social-emotional learning and literacy skills. Class sizes onsite decreased to 10 students with an average of 8-students in every classroom participating in distance learning. Assessment Period 3 continued with me administering the assessment either online with students or in-person.

### **Treatment Participants**

The fifty-one students, enrolled in four classrooms during the 2020-2021 prekindergarten program, served as participants of the treatment group. Three of the four prekindergarten teachers were the same as during 2019-20, while one teacher transitioned to the school's elementary program and a newly hired teacher filled the vacancy. All students who participated in the study during the 2020-2021 school year received onsite instruction that began in August. Similar to the 2019-2020 school year, literacy activities focused on the letter of the week. In addition, students continued to receive individual learning goals in literacy to increase their performance with the progress tracked by the school-based data team. Throughout the instructional day, teachers were encouraged to provide more phonological awareness activities than offered in the 2019-2020 school year to increase a student's ability to blend and segment sounds.

*The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* program began in August of 2020 during the first week of the 2020-21 school year. Several social-emotional learning programs were reviewed as indicated in Chapter 2 by the school-based leadership team, and although they focused on increasing the relationships and interactions of students, staff, they failed to include opportunities for students to increase their levels of oral language. *The Incredible Years-Dinosaur School*, however, served as a program that utilized researched-based strategies to promote “adherence to school rules, performing well in school, expressing feelings, problem-solving, peer interactions,

and self-regulation” (Incredible Years, n.d.) while also incorporating oral language and written expression opportunities. Based on the challenges students exemplified during the 2019-2020 school year, *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* was selected as the school’s social-emotional learning program during the 2020-2021 school year. Teachers continued facilitating literacy with *Explode the Code* and *Handwriting Without Tears*.

*Incredible Years Dinosaur School* facilitators provided an overview of the program for teachers and parents prior to the onset of the school year. Each week, prekindergarten students received an hour of instruction that incorporated role playing, shared writing activities, and modeling of positive behaviors to promote self-regulation, communication of feelings, problem solving skills, friendships, and adherence to school rules. This program continued throughout the 2020-2021 school year.

As the school year progressed, the school witnessed an increase in enrollment in the prekindergarten program. These students, however, did not participate in AP-1 as their enrollment date occurred after the first assessment, and therefore their data could not be utilized. When comparing Assessment Period 1 and Assessment Period 3, a 3.17-point gain occurred in print knowledge, 4.14 in phonological awareness, and 3.17 in oral language. No instances of verbal aggression were noted during the 2020-2021 school year whereas teachers reported six occurrences of physical aggression.

### ***COVID-19 Impact on Treatment Group***

Although students returned to synchronous onsite instruction, the school introduced additional health regulations to maintain the safety of students. Like the last quarter of the 2019-2020 school year, these provisions included temperature screenings, students grouped in pods, and the requirement of staff to wear masks. The grouping of pods allowed for the organization of

students in small groups within a larger classroom. Both the teacher and the assistant teacher were assigned to a pod. Students traveled in centers, ate, and also rested with their pods. Teachers had the ability to change these pods on Mondays following a 48-hour separation of students to prevent a COVID-19 Spread.

The usage of masks was optional for students. Staff remained 6-feet from students as much as possible to prevent both a student to staff and staff to student exposure. When a COVID-19 exposure occurred, an isolation period prevented both students and staff from being onsite for 10-days. Virtual instruction occurred when a COVID-19 Case was reported until students and staff were permitted to return onsite. Two of the classes experienced one isolation where students remained at home for the full ten days. The other two classes remained onsite throughout the school year as the classes did not experience any isolations.

### **Pre-Reading Skills and Social-Emotional Development for both Control and Treatment Groups**

*RQ 1: What is the relationship between implementing a social-emotional learning program in a prekindergarten classroom and the academic reading progression for students over one school year compared to the previous years without the program?*

#### ***Print Knowledge***

The State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Assessment evaluates a student's level of print knowledge by having students identify the names of letters. Students were administered the assessment individually in paper form based on the test specifications and directions. Figures 1, 2, and 3 represent the student scores for this assessment from AP-1 and AP-3 during 2019-2020 (control group) and 2020-2021 (treatment group).

For both the control and treatment groups, I identified the mean scores for each set of students. Next, I analyzed the percent change from Assessment Period 1 to Assessment Period 3 between both the control and treatment groups. During the 2019-2020 school year, the students experienced a 49% change for print knowledge when comparing AP-1 to AP-3. Students enrolled during the 2020-2021 school year witnessed a 38.6% change. As indicated in Figure 2 below, these results indicate the control group students experienced a higher increase in performance for print knowledge than the treatment group by 10.39%. Based on this data, I found adding *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* program to foster the student’s level of self-regulation, did not improve the prekindergarten students’ print knowledge. Although there is a statistically significant relationship with a score of 0.010 the print knowledge performance decreased which may indicate the implementation of the program negatively affected student scores.

	19-20 Mean	20-21 Mean
AP1 Print	7.4	8.2
AP3 Print	11.03	11.37**
Pt Change	3.63	3.17
% Change	49.05%	38.66%

\* Significant at the 0.05 level, \*\* Significant at the 0.01 level. \*\*\* Significant at the 0.001 level

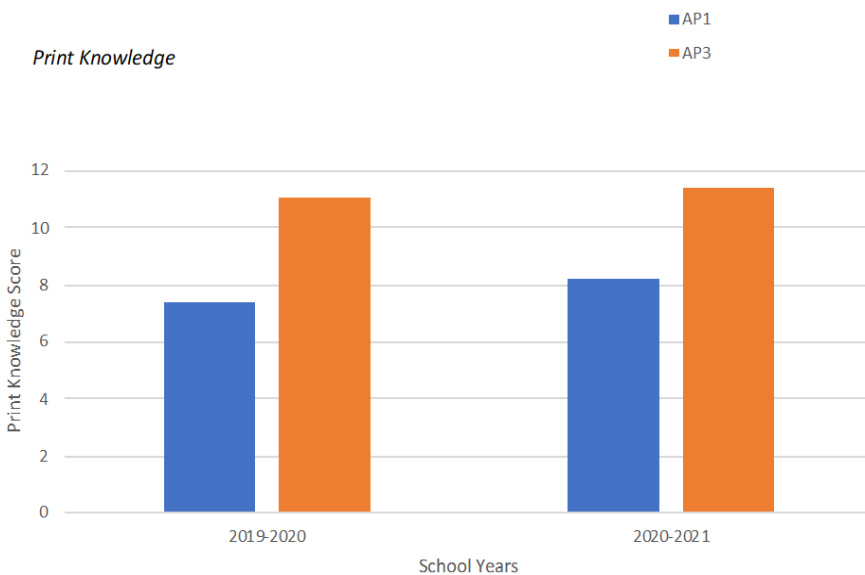


Figure 2. *Print Knowledge Comparison between 2019-2020 and 2020-2021*

***Phonological Awareness***

Phonological Awareness questions on the State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Assessment seek to determine a student’s ability to blend and segment words and phonemes. During the 2019-2020 school year, students exhibited a 3.97-point change or 59.70% change when comparing AP-1 to AP-3. Students enrolled during the 2020-2021 school year had a 4.14-point change: 48.76% change. Similar to the results of print knowledge, students in the control group outperformed the students in the treatment group by 10.94%. Like with print knowledge, I did not find a positive change in phonological awareness levels between the years of 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. There is not a statistically significant relationship with a score of 0.574 therefore the decrease in performance cannot be contributed to the implementation of the program.

	<b>19-20 Mean</b>	<b>20-21 Mean</b>
AP1 Phonological	6.65	8.49
AP3 Phonological	10.62	12.63
Pt Change	3.97	4.14
% Change	59.70%	48.76%

\* Significant at the 0.05 level, \*\* Significant at the 0.01 level. \*\*\* Significant at the 0.001 level

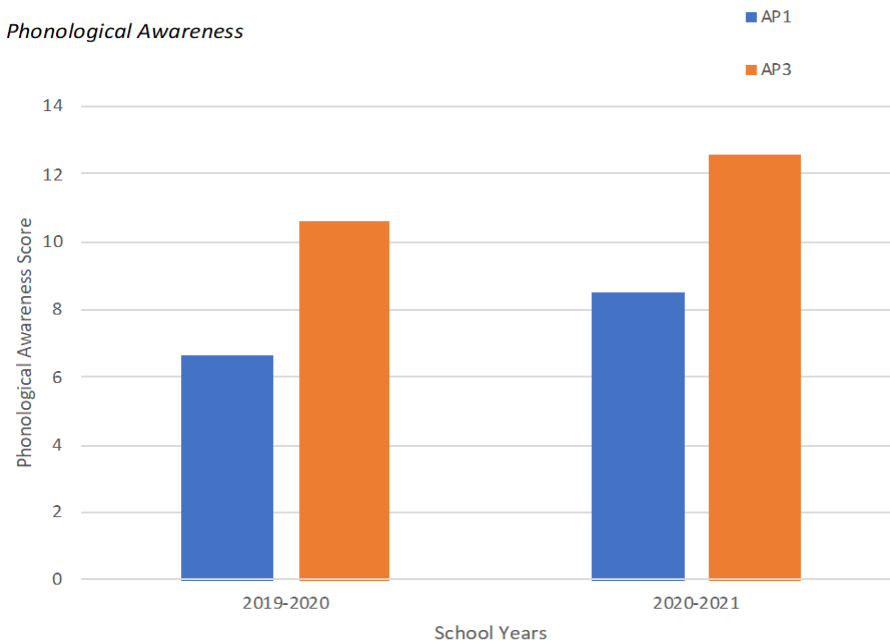


Figure 3. *Phonological Awareness Comparison between 2019-2020 and 2020-2021*

## Oral Language

Oral Language looks at the ability of students to receptively and expressively communicate. During the 2019-2020 school year, students' oral language abilities improved by a 1.94-point change or 10.84% change. The Oral Language skills of the students during the 2020-2021 school year also improved by a 3.17-point change or 17.48% change. Unlike the findings from print knowledge and phonological awareness, students in the treatment group outperformed the students in the control group by 6.64%. The fluctuation in Oral Language suggests that the lessons and activities in *The Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* strengthened the students' ability to verbally express themselves and, therefore, increased their oral language skills. A statistically significant relationship exists with a score of 0.001. The oral language levels improved as a result of the *Incredible Years Dinosaur School* program.

	19-20 Mean	20-21 Mean
AP1 Oral	17.89	18.14
AP3 Oral	19.83	21.31***
Pt Change	1.94	3.17
% Change	10.84%	17.48%

\* Significant at the 0.05 level, \*\* Significant at the 0.01 level. \*\*\* Significant at the 0.001 level

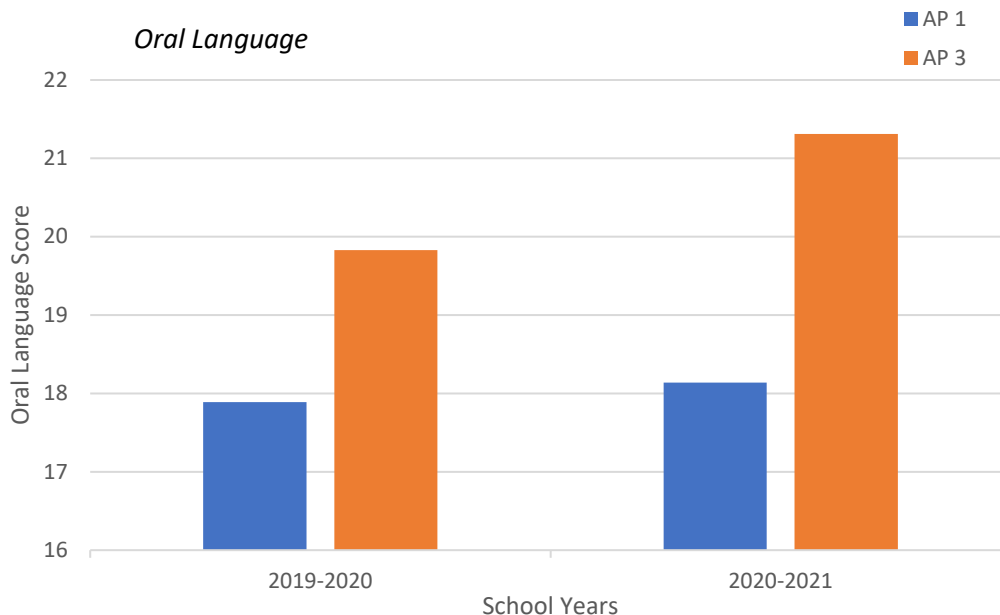


Figure 4. *Oral Language Comparison between 2019-2020 and 2020-2021*



## **Gender Relationship**

I further analyzed the data to present a comparison between both girls and boys in print knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language. By looking into the outcomes of gender, I was able to identify whether outliers such as the progression of girls or boys impacted the study and caused the scores to move in one direction or another. To measure the difference, the percent change of both AP-1 and AP-3 for girls and boys during 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 was noted by me for the subjects of print knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language. I added information for each domain below with a figure to illustrate the data.

### ***Print Knowledge***

For print knowledge, girls experienced a 57.82% change in 2019-2020 and a 56.49% change in 2020-2021. Based on this analysis, I found a decline in the print knowledge skills of girls by 1.33 percent. Like the girls, boys performed lower in print knowledge during both years, as indicated by a 49.05% change in 2019-2020 and 28.41% in 2020-2021. This data presented a decrease of 20.64% when comparing the two groups of boys, which is more than the decrease of the girls. When looking at the levels of significance, a statistically significant relationship did not occur with girls based on the score of 0.341. A statistically significant relationship occurred with boys based on a score of 0.001. The performance scores show the print knowledge levels of both girls and boys did not improve. The significance scores indicate the implementation of the *Incredible Years Dinosaur School* program may have negatively affected the levels of print knowledge for boys in 2020-2021.

<b>Girls</b>	<b>19-20 Mean</b>	<b>20-21 Mean</b>
AP1 Print	7.03	7.33
AP3 Print	11.1	11.48
Pt Change	4.01	4.14
% Change	57.82%	56.49%

<b>Boys</b>	<b>19-20 Mean</b>	<b>20-21 Mean</b>
AP1 Print	7.71	8.8
AP3 Print	10.97	11.3***
Pt Change	3.63	2.5
% Change	49.05%	28.41%

\* Significant at the 0.05 level, \*\* Significant at the 0.01 level. \*\*\* Significant at the 0.001 level

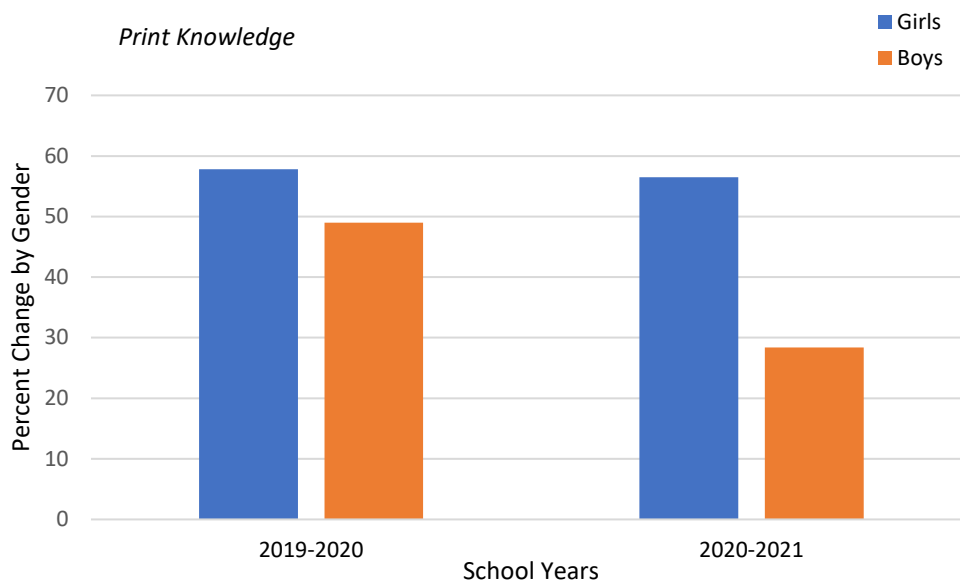


Figure 5. *Print Knowledge Comparison by Gender*

### ***Phonological Awareness***

Phonological awareness had similar results as print knowledge with girls outperforming boys. In 2019-2020, girls had a 66.34% change and a 57.58% change in 2020-2021. Boys, however had a 59.70% change in 2019-2020 and 43.28% change in 2020-2021. With this data I found both the progression of girls and boys declined in 2020-2021 similar to that of print knowledge. The main difference, however, is the decrease was more significant in the area of phonological awareness for both girls and boys. There is not a statistically significant relationship with a score of 0.822 for girls. Neither is there a statistically significant relationship

for boys with a score of 0.229. Performance did not improve for either group and cannot be attributed to the implementation of the program.

<b>Girls</b>	<b>19-20 Mean</b>	<b>20-21 Mean</b>
AP1 Phonological	6.73	7.86
AP3 Phonological	11.2	12.38
Pt Change	4.47	4.53
% Change	66.34%	57.58%

<b>Boys</b>	<b>19-20 Mean</b>	<b>20-21 Mean</b>
AP1 Phonological	6.57	8.93
AP3 Phonological	10.11	12.8
Pt Change	3.97	3.87
% Change	59.70%	43.28%

\* Significant at the 0.05 level, \*\* Significant at the 0.01 level. \*\*\* Significant at the 0.001 level

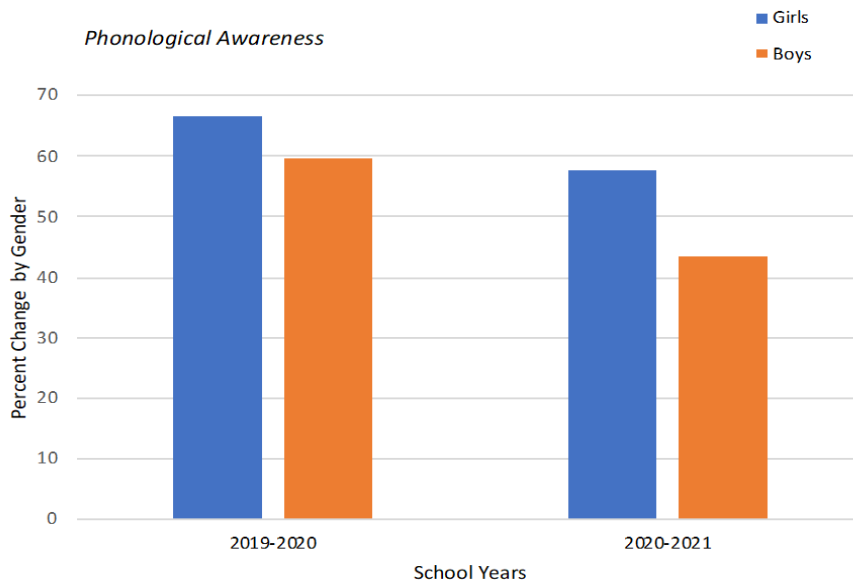


Figure 6. *Phonological Awareness Comparison by Gender*

### ***Oral Language***

While print knowledge and phonological awareness declined in 2020-2021 when compared to 2019-2020 Oral Language presented differing results with girls having a 10.19% increase in 2019-2020 and 17.22% change in 2020-2021. The boys performed slightly stronger in oral language compared to girls, with a 10.84% change in 2019-2020 and 17.72% change in 2020-2021. Both girls and boys made significant and similar improvements in oral language.

The girls, however, did not exhibit a statistically significant relationship as measured by a score of 0.334. When looking at boys, there is a statistically significant relationship with a score of 0.001. The performance levels of boys’ oral language did improve as a result of implementing the *Incredible Years Dinosaur School* program, but the girls increase in performance cannot be directly attributed to the program.

<b>Girls</b>	<b>19-20 Mean</b>	<b>20-21 Mean</b>
AP1 Oral	18	18.52
AP3 Oral	19.83	21.71
Pt Change	1.83	3.19
% Change	10.19%	17.22%

<b>Boys</b>	<b>19-20 Mean</b>	<b>20-21 Mean</b>
AP1 Oral	17.8	17.87
AP3 Oral	19.83	21.03***
Pt Change	1.94	3.17
% Change	10.84%	17.72%

\* Significant at the 0.05 level, \*\* Significant at the 0.01 level. \*\*\* Significant at the 0.001 level

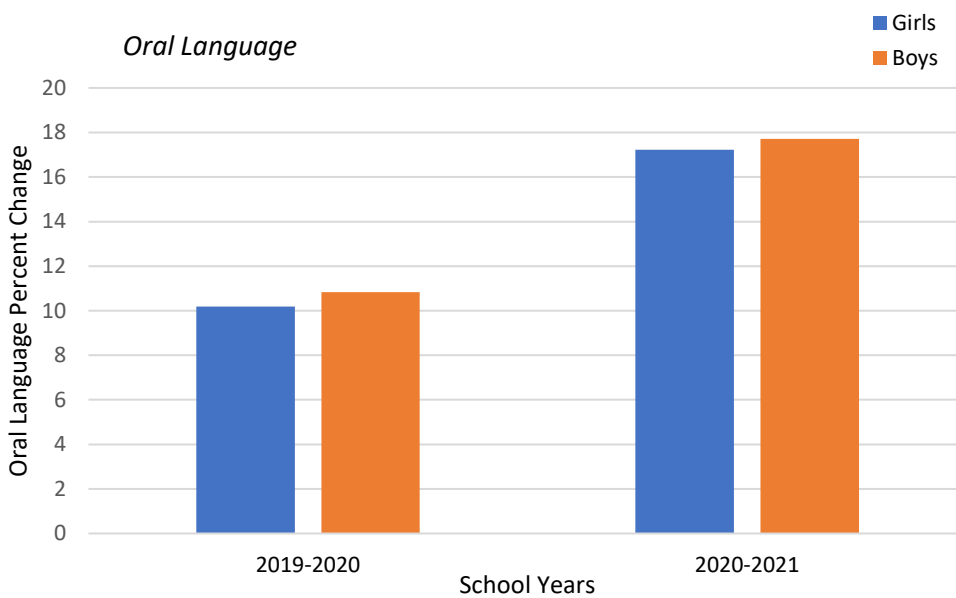


Figure 7. *Oral Language Comparison by Gender*

Additional discussion should occur regarding the boys’ and girls’ lack of print knowledge and phonological awareness with the social-emotional learning program. The percent change for both print knowledge and phonological awareness decreased in 2020-2021 compared to 2019-

2020. Although the literacy programs remained the same between both school years, this data raises the question for me as to whether the implementation of *Incredible Years Dinosaur School* prevented the teachers from focusing more time on print knowledge and phonological awareness skills during the 2020-2021 school year. A further discussion of this topic occurs in the recommendations section.

### **Age Relationship**

I further examined the impacts a prekindergarten student's age had on print knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language when a social-emotional learning program is or is not in effect by dividing students from the control and treatment groups into two categories. The first cohort, classified as Cohort 1, consisted of students born September 2<sup>nd</sup> through January 31<sup>st</sup>, with these students turning five years of age while enrolled in prekindergarten during these months. The second set, identified as Cohort 2, turned five years of age on February 1<sup>st</sup> through September 1<sup>st</sup> during their prekindergarten year.

### ***Print Knowledge***

During the 2019-2020 school years, Cohort 1 had a 26.67% increase in print knowledge and a 22.8% change in 2020-2021. Cohort 2, however, exhibited a drastic difference with a 60.76% change in 2019-2020 and a 62.50% change in 2020-2021. This suggests the younger group of students performed stronger in print knowledge than the older group. In addition, Cohort 1 (older students) declined in 2020-2021 compared to 2019-2020, whereas students in Cohort 2 (younger students) improved when comparing the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 scores. Even though a statistically significant relationship exists for Cohort 1 in reference to print knowledge with a significance score of 0.001, the performance of these students decreased. When looking at Cohort 2, there is not a statistically significant relationship with a significance

score of 0.429. The scores from Cohort 1 indicate the possibility exists the implementation of the program may have had a negative impact on the treatment group.

<b>Cohort 1 (Older)</b>	<b>19-20 Mean</b>	<b>20-21 Mean</b>
AP1 Print	8.68	9.26
AP3 Print	11.00	11.37***
Pt Change	2.32	2.11
% Change	26.67%	22.80%

<b>Cohort 2 (Younger)</b>	<b>19-20 Mean</b>	<b>20-21 Mean</b>
AP1 Print	6.87	7.00
AP3 Print	11.04	11.38
Pt Change	4.17	4.38
% Change	60.76%	62.50%

\* Significant at the 0.05 level, \*\* Significant at the 0.01 level. \*\*\* Significant at the 0.001 level

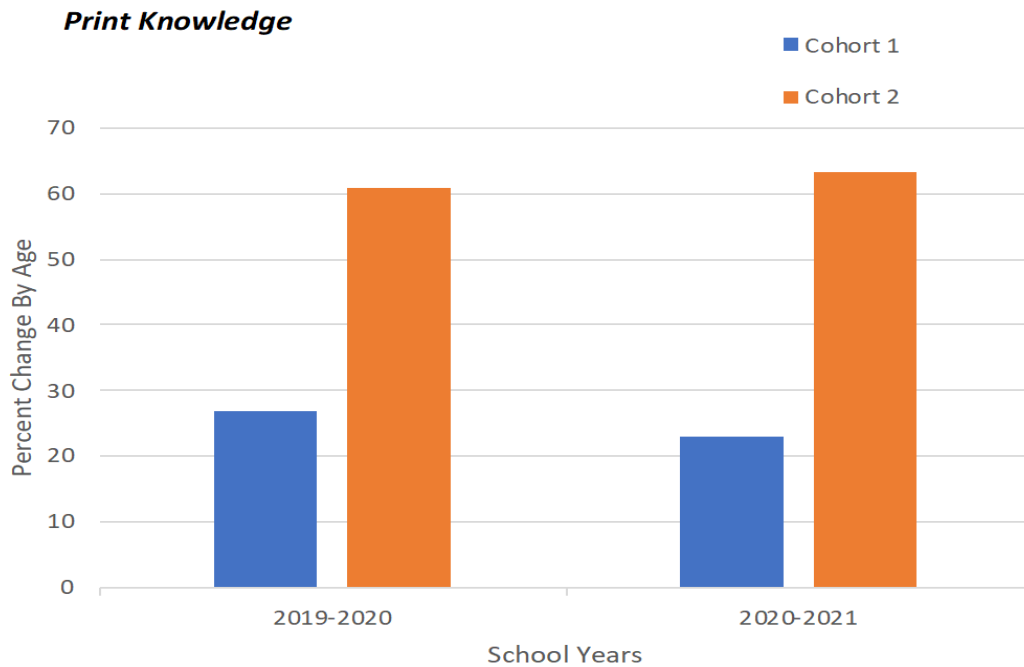


Figure 8. *Print Knowledge Comparison by Age*

### ***Phonological Awareness***

I found phonological awareness had similar results as print knowledge, with the younger students outperforming the older students. During 2019-2020, Cohort 1 had a 37.59% change and a 40.9% change in 2020-2021. When reviewing the results of Cohort 2, students exhibited a 70.45% change in print knowledge and 59.24% change in phonological awareness. Although

Cohort 2 performed stronger than Cohort 1, the results indicate Cohort 1 exemplified improvement in 2020-2021. Cohort 2, however, declined in 2020-2021. Like the discussion with print knowledge, the additional programming offering possibly prevented teachers from focusing on phonological awareness. In addition, teachers possibly provided more instruction in print knowledge than phonological awareness. No evidence of a statistical relationship exists for Cohort 1 (0.811) nor Cohort 2 (0.934). The phonological awareness performance of Cohort 1 slightly increased while it decreased for Cohort 2, however, the program did not impact the performance of either group of students as indicated by the significance scores.

<b>Cohort 1 (Older)</b>	<b>19-20 Mean</b>	<b>20-21 Mean</b>
AP1 Phonological	7.42	9.22
AP3 Phonological	10.21	13.00
Pt Change	2.79	3.78
% Change	37.59%	40.96%

<b>Cohort 2 (Younger)</b>	<b>19-20 Mean</b>	<b>20-21 Mean</b>
AP1 Phonological	6.33	7.67
AP3 Phonological	10.78	12.21
Pt Change	4.46	4.54
% Change	70.45%	59.24%

\* Significant at the 0.05 level, \*\* Significant at the 0.01 level. \*\*\* Significant at the 0.001 level

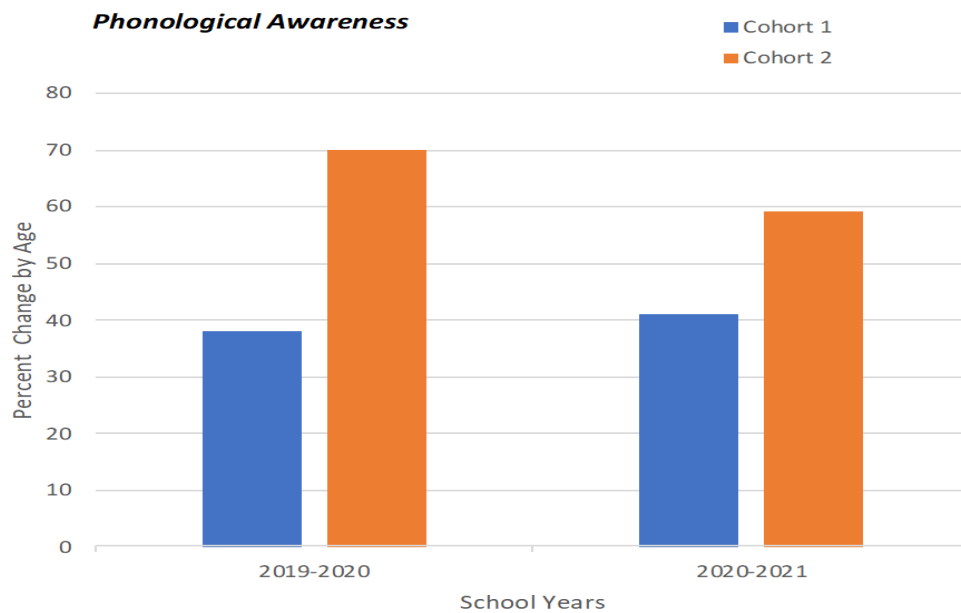


Figure 9. *Phonological Knowledge Comparison by Age*

## ***Oral Language***

Oral language appears to be the subject area where both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 improved. During 2019-2020, Cohort 1 (older students) experienced a 14.03% increase and a 16.27% increase in 2020-2021. Cohort 2 (younger students) had a 9.54% change in 2019-2020 and an 18.97% in 2020-2021. Although both groups improved, Cohort 2 doubled their oral language progression when comparing the results from 2019-2020 with 2020-2021. Similar to the overall results of this study, the social-emotional learning program allowed students in Cohort 2 to strengthen their ability to verbally express their thoughts and feelings, as indicated by the improvement. Out of the three areas we have examined, (print, phonological, and oral), only oral language has both a positive improvement in performance scores as well as a statistically significant relationship. Cohort 1 has a statistically significant relationship with a score of 0.007 and a positive 2.24% change in performance. Cohort 2 has a statistically significant relationship with a score of 0.033 and a positive 9.43% improvement in performance over the control group.

<b>Cohort 1 (Older)</b>	<b>19-20 Mean</b>	<b>20-21 Mean</b>
AP1 Oral	17.63	18.44
AP3 Oral	20.11	21.44**
Pt Change	2.47	3.00
% Change	14.03%	16.27%

<b>Cohort 2 (Younger)</b>	<b>19-20 Mean</b>	<b>20-21 Mean</b>
AP1 Oral	18.00	17.79
AP3 Oral	19.72	21.167*
Pt Change	1.72	3.38
% Change	9.54%	18.97%

\* Significant at the 0.05 level, \*\* Significant at the 0.01 level. \*\*\* Significant at the 0.001 level

Figure 10. *Oral Language Comparison by Age*



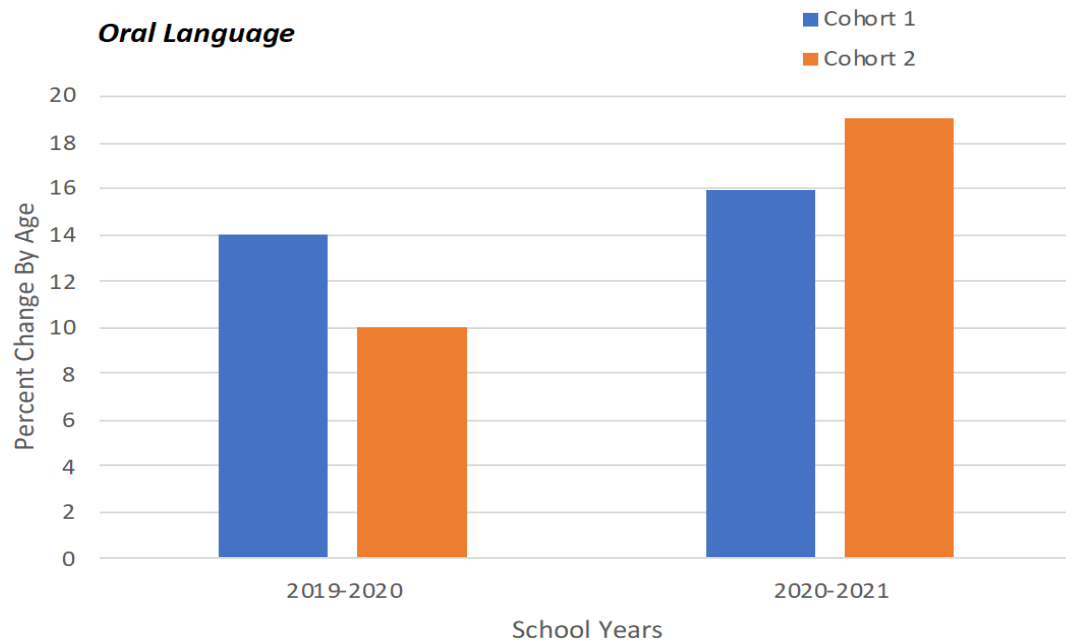


Figure 10 - continued

### Comparison of Control and Treatment Verbal and Physical Aggression

*RQ 2: How does the implementation of a social-emotional learning program correlate to number of negative behaviors in a prekindergarten program as measured by the student’s behavioral data?*

*The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* program was introduced during the 2020-2021 school year and replaced the “Morning Meeting” format used in 2019-2020. Outside providers initiated the various components in the classroom during the classroom’s Morning Meeting time. In addition, a requirement for classroom teachers to participate occurred to generalize the instruction from the classroom setting to other times of the day, including more unstructured settings like outdoor learning and recess. As designed, *The Incredible Years-Dinosaur School Program* (Dinosaur Curriculum n.d.) program provides lessons and activities to address “school rules, doing your best in school, expressing feelings, problem-solving, anger management, and building friendships.” Literacy components such as journal entry writing and making class books

add literacy activities to the program. Data obtained from Student Behavioral Incident Forms during the 2020-2021 school year indicates that 0 verbal aggression occurred with six attempts of physical aggressions. Additional information regarding these statistics can be found below.

I first tabulated behavior data in the number of verbal and physical aggression occurrences. As a result, I found the number of verbal and physical aggressions declined during the 2020-2021 school year compared to the 2019-2020 school year, indicating the addition of a research-based social-emotional learning curriculum successfully decreased the negative behaviors witnessed at Country Wide School. It increased the social-emotional development of the prekindergarten students, as referenced in Figure 11.

	<b>Physical Aggression</b>	<b>Verbal Aggression</b>
2019-2020	37	8
2020-2021	6	0
Pt Change	-31	-8
Percent Change	-84%	-100%

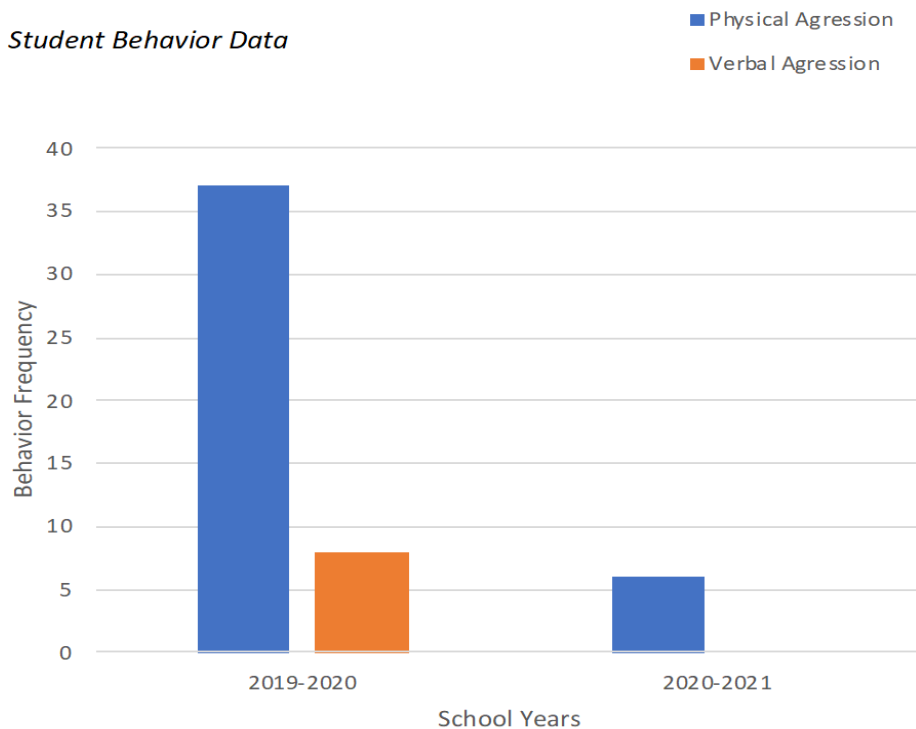


Figure 11. *Student Behavioral Data Comparison by Year*

## **Social-Emotional Learning**

### ***Verbal Aggression***

Students who demonstrate verbal aggression communicate frustrations by protesting or using inappropriate language. During the 2019-2020 school year, eight occurrences of verbal aggression were noted within the control group. No occurrences were reported during the 2020-2021 school year after the implementation of the social-emotional learning program. The comparative analysis of the two years results in a 100% percent reduction. Similar to the scores of Oral Language, the data received suggests, the implementation of *Incredible Years Dinosaur School* decreased the number of verbal aggression attempts noted. This is possible because the program provides alternative language and encourages the students to verbalize feelings and actions proactively.

### ***Physical Aggression***

Physical Aggression occurs when a student physically strikes another student, staff member or throws an object. Thirty-seven physical aggression attempts were recorded during the 2019-2020 school year. Six were noted during the 2020-2021 school year resulting in an 84% reduction over the two years. By adding the program and strategies to the daily instruction of students, teachers could incorporate these techniques throughout the school day. This infusion of social-development learning potentially decreased the number of physical aggressions captured during the 2020-2021 school year.

### ***Oral Language in Relation to Physical and Verbal Aggression***

Figure 11 provides oral language data from both the control and treatment groups in conjunction with the physical and verbal aggression data. I graphed the percent changes of oral language from both AP-1 and AP-3 for both the control and treatment groups. In addition, I

added the percent change of physical and verbal aggressions for both years to show the comparison. The data and graphs indicate when the students demonstrated an increase in their oral language skills, their occurrences of physical and verbal aggression decreased.

	19-20 Mean	20-21 Mean
AP1 Oral	17.89	18.14
AP3 Oral	19.83	21.31
Pt Change	1.94	3.17
% Change	10.84%	17.48%

	Physical Aggression	Verbal Aggression
2019-2020	37	8
2020-2021	6	0
Pt Change	-31	-8
Percent Change	-84%	-100%

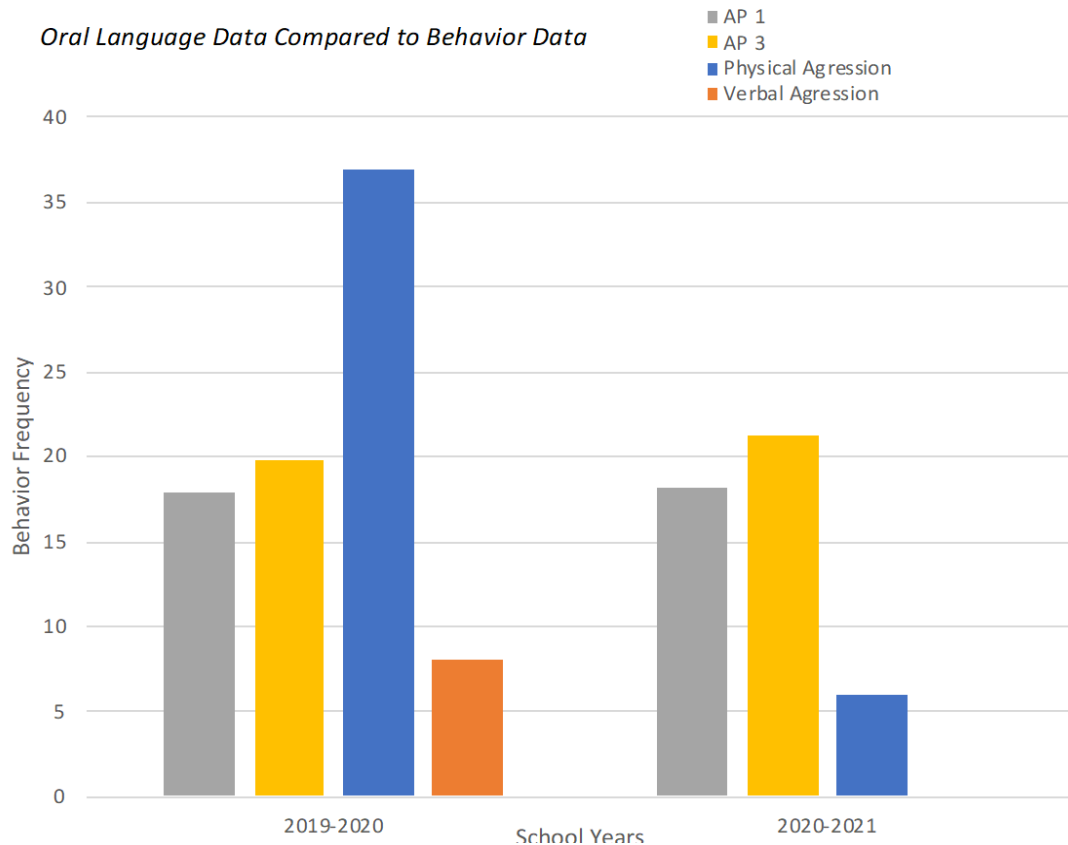


Figure 12. *Oral Language Data Compared to Behavioral Data*

## **Implications, Discussion, and Recommendations**

The findings of my study, as illustrated in the figures and tables, sought to learn whether the implementation of a social-emotional learning program such as the *Incredible Years Dinosaur-School*, that focused on the communication of feelings, anger management, peer relationships, and problem solving skills provided the strategies and tools prekindergarten students needed to increase their ability to acquire new academic knowledge in the form of print knowledge, phonemic awareness, oral language while decreasing the incidences of both verbal and physical aggression at Country Wide School. At the time I launched this research, the COVID-19 Health Crisis had yet to emerge as a potential factor that would alter the results of my study. The pandemic, however, had to be reflected on in order to understand whether the alterations in lesson presentation at Country Wide School along with the safety and health guidelines played a role in the social-emotional learning and pre-reading development of prekindergarten students. Implications regarding social-emotional learning in isolation and in relation to the pre-reading skills for prekindergarten students can be found in this section as well as factors to consider when analyzing the data due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. My intention of this section served to provide information for school-based leadership as well as prekindergarten providers as to whether allocating more time to social-emotional learning potentially relates to increased pre-reading skills for students.

### **Pre-Reading Skills Implications**

Students classified under the umbrella of “early childhood” who exhibit difficulties in self-regulation, have the potential of developing reading deficiencies later in their school career (Loomis & Mongro, 2019). On the contrary, students who present self-regulation skills demonstrate stronger literacy skills (Skibbe, Montroy, Bowles, & Morrison, 2019). Through my

findings of this study, I learned the students in treatment group (2020-2021) demonstrated higher levels of oral language based on the data obtained from the VPK Assessment than those in the control group (2019-2020). The implementation of a social-emotional learning program such as *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* provided opportunities for prekindergarten students to increase their communication skills as they learned tools and strategies for communicating feelings of frustration as well as how to positively develop friendships. When looking at the outcome of how adding a social-emotional learning program to teach students more self-regulation skills has on print knowledge and phonemic awareness, however, I found the strategies did not increase the levels for the students during the 2020-2021 school year. In fact, the scores of the students decreased when compared to the previous year.

### **Social-Emotional Learning Implications**

The skills such as making friends, adhering to class and school rules, being aware of feelings, strategies to attack problems, and self-regulation taught through *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* program serve as necessary components to foster in the development of prekindergarten students to provide students with the language necessary to communicate their frustrations and refrain from verbal or physical aggression. By adding *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* program to the weekly offerings of the student's prekindergarten classroom, I found a decrease in both verbal and physical aggressions during the 2020-2021 school year when compared to the number of incidences in 2019-2020. In addition, students learned methods to increase their communication skills to replace verbal frustrations with language that involved more proactive means such as learning how to understand both the verbal and non-verbal communication of others, specific words to use when communicating feelings and instances of frustration, how to employ coping techniques, when to apologize for actions, identifying what

anger looks like and how to avoid feelings of anger, and how to positively facilitate friendships. The decrease in verbal and physical aggression in 2020-2021 coincides with the information provided by Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (2013) with the need for teachers to provide more instruction in “self-awareness, self-management, relationship building, and decision-making” to increase a student’s ability of demonstrating self-regulation skills. The facilitation of this program taught teachers how to encourage students to use verbal expression to express needs and wants.

### **Age Implications**

My study added an age and gender component when analyzing the data to see whether these two factors had an effect on the outcome of the results. While teachers strived to provide effective instruction in print knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language, the analysis of the younger cohort, allowed me to see an increase in the students’ ability to demonstrate print knowledge skills (slight increase) and oral language skills. However, the data I analyzed indicated the younger cohort presented a decrease in their phonological awareness skills. Considering the print awareness increase was limited, the data does not justify enough of a progression to indicate whether the slight increase was due to the implementation of the social-emotional learning program or whether it was because teachers worked with this younger cohort more than those in the older cohort. What the data does suggest, however, is the leadership team should visit the progression of the younger cohort and examine the literacy instructional practices at the school to better understand how teachers are remediating and enriching both the weaknesses and strengths of these groups.

## **Gender Implications**

Finally, the study examined the role gender of the prekindergarten students played in the reading and social-emotional learning development of students during the years of 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. Similar to the other results found in this study, focusing on social-emotional learning increased the oral language skills of both girls and boys. The results, however, indicated both boys and girls experienced a decreased in print knowledge and phonological awareness when comparing the data from both the control and treatment groups. In fact, I found the boys, regressed more than the girls during the years of 2020-2021 which presents a concern for future reading progression.

## **Discussion**

Perhaps overtime, these skills learned from *Incredible Years Dinosaur School* will coincide with the research of Humphries, Williams, and May (2018) and provide students with the ability to utilize the information to promote the long-term success of academic standards in kindergarten. Until then, phonological awareness skills are critical components of the State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Standards and require explicit instruction in order to remediate deficiencies. Although the teachers feel more confident with teaching phonological awareness than social-emotional learning, the lack of progression in the student scores indicates teachers at Country Wide School should strengthen their ability to differentiate instruction to remediate the phonological awareness deficiencies for these students.

## **Recommendations**

In chapter 2, I provided information regarding the importance of social-emotional development in prekindergarten students and the need for prekindergarten students to have exposure to social-emotional learning programs to facilitate these skills. As I referenced in



Chapter 2, Goldstein et al. (2017) argue, “We must develop prevention and early intervention strategies that ensure children are entering school with the skills needed to become successful readers” and avoid reading delays (p.89).” In addition, Sezgin and Demiriz (2019) find that self-regulation plays a critical role in the social-emotional development of prekindergarten students, as students who can regulate their emotions are more likely to achieve reading success later in life.

Although limited in quantity, the studies reviewed in Chapter 2 to demonstrate the importance of increasing the teacher’s understanding of social-emotional learning, providing adequate training for teachers to teach social-emotional learning. Humphries, Williams, and May (2018) state teachers desire to implement social-emotional learning strategies in their classrooms but lack the understanding and time to facilitate these skills. Based on this information along with specific results from my study, I have identified the following recommendations for each area at both the local context and wider landscape.

### ***Oral Language***

The data collected from this study indicate that the prekindergarten students at Country Wide School improved their levels of oral language while simultaneously decreasing the number of verbal and physical aggression at the school. My findings suggest that students who have strategies to increase their oral language levels can decrease their levels of verbal and physical aggressions. Based on this evidence, I found a need exists to support *The Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* program at Country Wide School during the subsequent school years. The allocation of outside providers to assist with this program provides additional fidelity and accountability to ensure the sessions occur as designed while decreasing the stress an additional curriculum would place on teachers.

### ***Social-Emotional Development***

At the school level, I learned Country Wide School should continue implementing a social-emotional learning program to target vocalizing feelings, problem-solving, and self-regulation in prekindergarten students. The number of verbal and physical aggressions should continue to be monitored to ensure the students demonstrate growth. If continuing with *Incredible Years Dinosaur School*, I encourage the leadership team at Country Wide School to not only consider the usage of trained experts to provide the social-emotional learning curriculum but should also look into providing teachers with the training to facilitate the program when facilitators are not present. Country Wide School is located in and serves students in an affluent part of North Florida. The school has the financial resources to provide this program to students by allocating additional funds towards training and program facilitation. This process might not be affordable for other schools. Allowing more opportunities for teachers to be trained, allows other schools to participate in the program as a way to increase the social emotional development of their students.

### ***Reading Curriculum***

Based on my analysis of the reading data obtained from the VPK Assessments, a concern continues when comparing the data in the areas of print knowledge and phonological awareness. The leadership team initially met to search for an option that would improve students' reading performance in these domains. To address the lack of progress in these two areas, I would recommend the school implement an additional reading curriculum to provide a strong foundation for students. The leadership team should also meet with the teachers to ensure the teachers have an understanding of how to implement effective literacy instruction. The State of Florida Department of Education recently required all Voluntary Prekindergarten Teachers have

additional hours of Literacy Training by the 2022-2023 school year. Although a step in a positive direction, Country Wide School should look at other training options to ensure teachers have the skillset needed.

### ***Parents***

The recommendations, however, do not solely involve the teachers at Country Wide School. The leadership team should examine the possibility of allocating time for parent nights where parents can learn about the importance of reading and social-emotional development and how to increase their student's understanding in the home setting. These skills can only be strengthened with both a teacher and parent partnership.

### ***Incredible Years Dinosaur School***

Initially, Country Wide School implemented *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* as a potential solution to decrease the verbal and physical aggressions of students. Country Wide School looked experienced and to trained program facilitators to implement this program onsite as a means to support both teachers and students knowing teachers feel at times overwhelmed and lack the understanding as to how to improve the social-emotional learning development of prekindergarten students. After reviewing the data from this study, I would recommend *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* program consider adding scripted lessons as an added resource to assist teachers. Not all schools have the ability to allocate experienced counselors to facilitate the program so having this additional component would assist teachers with the lesson presentation.

In addition, Country Wide School was fortunate to send facilitators to receive training in *The Incredible Years Dinosaur School* program. The program, should however, seek other training options to increase the participation of those who desire to learn more about the

curriculum, but do not have the ability to attend training in another state. The curriculum writers should also consider periodic sessions with teachers to provide a comprehensive training process that allows for teachers to share experiences and seek guidance as to how to support students more.

### ***School-Based Recommendations***

The recommendations previously stated address the social-emotional learning, oral language, and reading curriculum of students. The school featured in this study, utilizes Academic Student Achievement Plans to provide goals and objectives for students in the lowest quartile based on the results of the State of Florida VPK Assessment. This methodology of focusing on those in the lowest quartile potentially led to the success and contributed to the learning gains made by the students in Oral Language as well as the younger cohort of students. The school, however, should examine this approach and simultaneously seek to find ways to enrich students categorized in the higher quartile as well as well as the older cohort. Using a similar approach to those who need remediation can potentially improve the academic functioning of students who necessitate a curriculum that surpasses the State of Florida VPK Standards.

### **COVID-19 Implications**

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, County Wide School transitioned to providing both onsite and offsite learning for students from March 2020-May 2020. The onsite group size decreased to on average of 10-students which provided teachers with more time to devote to the social-emotional learning and pre-reading deficiencies of students. During this time, the number of both verbal and physical aggressions also decreased at Country Wide School. This could be part due to the fact the class sizes were smaller or possibly because some of the students who

exhibited difficulties with social-emotional learning were potentially offsite. The students' levels of print knowledge and phonological awareness appeared to progress at a slightly higher rate in 2019-2020 than in 2020-2021. The instruction students experienced onsite may have provided a stronger foundation due to the reduced class size and therefore allowed for more progression in the areas of print knowledge and phonological awareness.

The organization of student pods also serves as a COVID-19 implication. Although a relationship between the treatment group's levels of Oral Language and social-emotional development exists, the school should also examine the role the instructional pods played in this practice. Students in pods had limited access to other students within the class unless the students were outdoors. The re-organization of students in pods potentially provided another factor as to why both the verbal and physical aggression levels of students decreased as the pods provided more of a small group instructional format and limited external stimuli that could over stimulate students and thus cause more verbal and physical aggression.

### **Future Studies**

Those who wish further to study social-emotional learning and students' reading development should continue the research on the role oral language skills have on the self-regulation skills of prekindergarten students. With self-regulating feelings, prekindergarten students can verbalize how they feel and communicate their needs and wants with aspirations. These skills will assist them with more challenging academic tasks in the future. A plethora of social-emotional learning programs are available, and prekindergarten programs should select one that has feasibility for success in each program.

## Conclusion

The State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Program provides financial assistance for families who seek instruction for their four-year-old students by paying for 540 hours of schooling for one year. In addition, the State of Florida attempts to provide quality assurance by requiring VPK Providers to administer a state-created assessment two times a year. These assessments occur the first 30-days of the prekindergarten year and 30-days prior to the end of the school year. Students receive scores on this assessment to assist schools with identifying student strengths and weaknesses.

Country Wide School provides instruction for infants through fifth grade, and serves as a VPK Provider in Florida. Country Wide School identified two areas of concern, including the reading progression and social-emotional development levels of prekindergarten students enrolled in the school during 2019-2020 as measured by the VPK Assessment and Student Behavioral Forms. Aware of previous research regarding the importance of social-emotional development and the long-term academic benefits for prekindergarten students, the school sought a prescriptive social-emotional learning program that would also potentially target reading skills for students. Limited research, however, exists in curricular options for prekindergarten providers to build a student's capacity for reading and social-emotional development simultaneously. Therefore, after careful consideration and review of various curricular options, Country Wide School selected *The Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* with aspirations that the program would foster reading skills while at the same time decreasing the number of negative behaviors from students.

In this study, I reviewed the Country Wide School Voluntary Prekindergarten Assessment Reading Data from the 2019-2020 school year (control group) and 2020-2021

(treatment group) and the Student Behavioral Forms to track verbal and physical aggression. Mean Scores from both years were tabulated to compare the percent change for each group's scores from Assessment Period 1 to Assessment Period 3. When analyzing the percent change between the control and treatment groups, the school experienced a decrease in print knowledge and phonological awareness but an increase in oral language proficiency after the onset of *The Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* program. In addition, the school witnessed a decrease in both verbal and physical aggression.

Glancing at the larger landscape, Country Wide School should continue to implement prescriptive social-emotional learning programs such as *The Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* to improve the social-emotional development levels of the prekindergarten students in its program. The school, however, should research other reading programs to address print knowledge and phonological awareness skills. In addition, other prekindergarten facilities, including VPK Providers in the State of Florida, should consider adding additional social-emotional learning programs to foster the social-emotional development levels of their students as well as oral language skills. Providers, however, should not solely use curriculums such as these to take the place of reading instruction and instead supplement skills students need to be successful later in the elementary setting.

### **Dissemination Plan**

The dissemination plan for this study focuses on both primary and secondary stakeholders. Primary stakeholders, which include the leadership team at Country Wide School, will review the data from both the treatment and control groups to make decisions regarding the continuation of *The Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* program and the potential for future curricular programs to promote reading levels in prekindergarten students. Secondary

Stakeholders, which include the prekindergarten teachers, will receive the policy recommendations from the leadership team and ensure the incorporation in the daily instruction of prekindergarten students. The tertiary stakeholders for this study include the parents and potentially the State of Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten Program. Both can assist with ensuring the prekindergarten students receive a well-rounded program that promotes instruction in both the home and long-term setting. Dissemination plans will look different for each group.

### **Primary Stakeholders**

Country Wide School Leadership will receive the data after the study in the form of a PowerPoint and will review it for future curricular policy revisions. Discussion topics will include but are not limited to budget provisions to ensure that programs such as *Incredible Years-Dinosaur School* receive funding to foster social-emotional development in prekindergarten students continually. In addition, the leadership team should begin the search for another reading curriculum to alleviate the decrease in performance of prekindergarten students in the areas of print knowledge and phonological awareness. This information will be get communicated with the secondary stakeholders.

### **Secondary Stakeholders**

Although considered secondary stakeholders, teachers play a role in policy recommendations at Country Wide School. While the school-based leadership team may decide to allocate funds for a new reading curriculum, the secondary stakeholders will have the opportunity to vocalize their input which will be considered in the final decision. The secondary stakeholders will receive the research from this study to understand the benefits of social-emotional learning on the social-emotional development levels of prekindergarten students. In addition, they will receive the data from this study to see how social-emotional learning



programs can benefit oral language skills and understand how the school needs to address the deficits in print knowledge and phonological awareness. The teachers can also assist with formulating goals to improve the reading performance of the prekindergarten students for the next school year.

### **Tertiary Stakeholders**

Parents share in the education process and partner with teachers helping to reinforce and continue education while at home. The tertiary stakeholders in this case are the parents and will receive the results following the meetings with the primary and secondary stakeholders. The parent(s) will listen to the information provided in a parent curriculum meeting as well as learn the goals formulated to understand the next steps for the prekindergarten program. In addition, tertiary stakeholders will have the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification. Although many of the parents who had students participating in the study have since graduated from the program, the school can potentially use this meaningful information to market the program to parents considering private elementary education at Country Wide School.

Finally, the State of Florida should review this study as a means to review curricular components for the Voluntary Prekindergarten Program. The VPK Program requires providers to select a specific curriculum from a list of approved resources to facilitate instruction. Based on my findings from this study, phonological awareness continues to serve as an area of weakness for Country Wide School. If this is the case for other VPK Providers in the State of Florida, the VPK Program should seek other curricular options that address the specific components of phonological awareness to foster growth in prekindergarten students.

# APPENDIX

## IRB DETERMINATION LETTER

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
OFFICE of the VICE PRESIDENT for RESEARCH



### EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

April 29, 2021

Tiffany Clark, 850-644-5260  
[REDACTED]

Dear Tiffany Clark:

On 4/29/2021, the IRB staff reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Exempt (1) Educational settings; (4) Secondary research on data or specimens (no consent required)
Title:	Impacts of Social-Emotional Learning on the Reading Development of Prekindergarten Students
Investigator:	Tiffany Clark
Submission ID:	STUDY00002263
Study ID:	STUDY00002263
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• T. Clark Protocol , Category: IRB Protocol;

The IRB staff determined the protocol qualifies for exemption, effective on 4/29/2021.

You are advised that any modification(s) to the protocol for this project that may alter this exemption determination must be reviewed and approved prior to implementation of the proposed modification(s).

Modifications to the research may invalidate the exemption determination (because the research no longer meets the exemption criteria described in HRP-312 – WORKSHEET – Exemption Determination).

Examples of minor changes to exempt research that would *not* alter the exemption determination and should therefore not be submitted to the IRB for further review include the following:

- Making administrative (formatting, grammar, spelling) revisions to the protocol, consent or recruitment materials or other study documents
- Adding or revising non-sensitive questions or non-identifiable response options to a survey, interview, focus group or other data collection instrument
- Increasing or decreasing the number of study subjects—*unless* adding a new study sample such as children or prisoners or adding a new source of data or records
- Making study team/personnel changes—*except* a change in Principal Investigator (PI)

Examples of changes to exempt research that *do require* prospectively submitting a modification to the IRB before implementing changes include the following:

- Making substantive revisions or additions (e.g., change in PI; funding source; sample; source of study subjects or their data; study sites or settings; procedures, interventions or interactions with study subjects; use of any drug, device, supplement or biologic; study subjects' time or duration spent performing or participating in study activities) to the protocol, consent or recruitment materials or other study documents
- Adding or revising sensitive questions or identifiable response options to a survey, interview, focus group or other data collection instrument
- Adding a new study sample such as children or prisoners or adding a new source of data or records
- Obtaining, using, studying, analyzing, generating, storing or maintaining identifiable information or identifiable biospecimens in addition to or in lieu of de-identified or anonymous information or specimens
- Change in study risks (e.g., impact upon study subjects; impact upon students' opportunity to learn educational content or assessment of educators who provide instruction; any disclosure of study subjects' responses outside of the research may place study subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement or reputation)
- Change in Principal Investigator (PI) or (for students) faculty advisor
- New or change in financial interest

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the applicable requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the Library within the RAMP IRB system.

Sincerely,

Office for Human Subjects Protection (OHSP)  
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## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Tiffany Anne Clark completed the doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Florida State University. Prior to beginning the program at Florida State University, Tiffany attained a Masters Degree in Curriculum and Instruction from The University of West Florida in Pensacola, Florida in 2010. Prior to entering graduate school, she earned a bachelors degree in Special Education from The University of North Florida in Jacksonville, Florida in 2001. Tiffany's career includes teaching students from prekindergarten through seventh grade both in the brick and mortar and virtual setting. Most recently, Tiffany served as an educational administrator for five years, including a role as the Head of School where this study took place. Tiffany enjoys coaching teachers on how to utilize best practices as well as disaggregating data to provide meaningful instruction. In the future, Tiffany would like to observe schools incorporating more opportunities for social-emotional learning to increase the self-regulation levels of students.