



# Program Evaluation Results 2003

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Data analysis and reporting conducted by Dr. Beth Manke, Associate Professor in the Human Development Department at the California State University, Long Beach, and Adjunct Professor at the University of Houston.

## Executive Summary

Since 1992, Project Wisdom has been committed to providing schools with character education materials that encourage students to reflect upon the meaning of civic and personal values and the application of those values in their daily lives. The centerpiece of the program is a collection of thought-provoking messages designed to be broadcast over the PA or in-house television system. These messages inspire and teach. They take less than one minute a day to broadcast. There are three series (collections) of messages. Each series contains enough messages to broadcast for an entire school year. The messages are not dated and are, therefore, recyclable. All three series come with reproducible components for the classroom and a lifetime licensing agreement for broadcast.

In the spring of 2003, the company asked Dr. Beth Manke to design an on-line survey in order to assess the benefits of the program. Dr. Manke is an Associate Professor at the California State University, Long Beach, and an independent program evaluator. Dr. Manke has over 10 years of evaluation experience with organizations serving children and families. Please see Appendix A for more information about Dr. Manke.

Licensed schools for which Project Wisdom had been provided an e-mail address (a total of 3,550) were invited, via e-mail, to complete the survey. Six hundred and ninety surveys were completed by schools using the program during the 2002-2003 academic year. This represents a 19% response rate, well above the typical response rate for online surveys.

Surveys were completed by someone at the school familiar with the implementation and impact of Project Wisdom. These individuals held a variety of different school positions,

although the majority were principals (50%) or counselors (23%). Although, on average, schools have had the program for 2½ years, some schools had purchased the program in the last nine months, whereas others have had it for almost nine years.

Respondents were asked, for example, whether or not the daily messages encourage students to reflect on the values being fostered, stimulate student conversation about character education issues, and help decrease discipline referrals to the office. Respondents were also asked about their general satisfaction with the program.

Respondents rated each question on a five-point scale (1 = not at all, 2 = a little bit, 3 = somewhat, 4 = quite a bit, 5 = very much).

Included in this report is a summary of the evaluation results extracted from Dr. Manke's report. All analyses were conducted using the 8.00 version of SAS, a widely used statistical package in the social sciences. In order to characterize the data, several different types of analyses were conducted. At the most basic level, frequencies, percentages, and means (averages) were explored. For example, the percentage of respondents who said that Project Wisdom helps reduce teasing and bullying was examined. In addition, mean level differences using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were explored in several circumstances. For example, whether the mean level of satisfaction with the program was statistically different for schools that used the Project Wisdom Weekly Journals (as compared to schools that do not use the journals) was assessed.

### Key Findings

Key findings from the evaluation indicate that Project Wisdom:

- Reduces incidents of disruptive behavior, such as bullying and teasing.



Character education is a deliberate effort to teach students to understand, care about and act upon core ethical values.

- Helps develop a more positive school climate.
- Reduces discipline referrals.
- Creates perceived benefits that are immediate (no sleeper effects).
- Produces benefits that do not dissipate with time.

## Chapter 1: Character Education

### Definition

Character education fosters values in a way that generates an internal motivation for improved behavior. It is a deliberate effort to teach students to understand, care about and act upon core ethical values. By helping students to "know the good, love the good, and do the good" (Ryan, 1999), they begin the process of making wiser choices which will create better outcomes for themselves and those around them.

### Rationale

We have witnessed a rise in unethical and potentially destructive behaviors both on school campuses and in the business community. Sixty-five percent of high school students reported they would cheat on an important exam; forty-eight percent have taken illegal drugs; seventy-five percent are engaged in sexual activity before they graduate, and there has been a forty-nine percent increase in hate-inspired vandalism (Kirschenbaum, 1995). Greed and materialism are also on the increase

with two-thirds of all high school students reporting they would lie to achieve a business objective (Kidder, 1990).

Many believe these escalating social problems are a direct result of the declining influence that families, schools, and faith organizations have in the moral development of our youth, coupled by the increasing influence of media which often promotes antisocial and insensitive behavior (Vincent, 1996). Thomas Lickona, a developmental psychologist and educator who is considered an international authority on moral development and values education, writes that school reform, until recently, was focused on academic achievement. "Now we know that character development is needed as well . . . that teaching values in the schools is part of an 'ethics boom' that has seen more than a hundred institutionalized ethics programs established in the United States in the past few years" (Lickona, 1992).

### Benefits

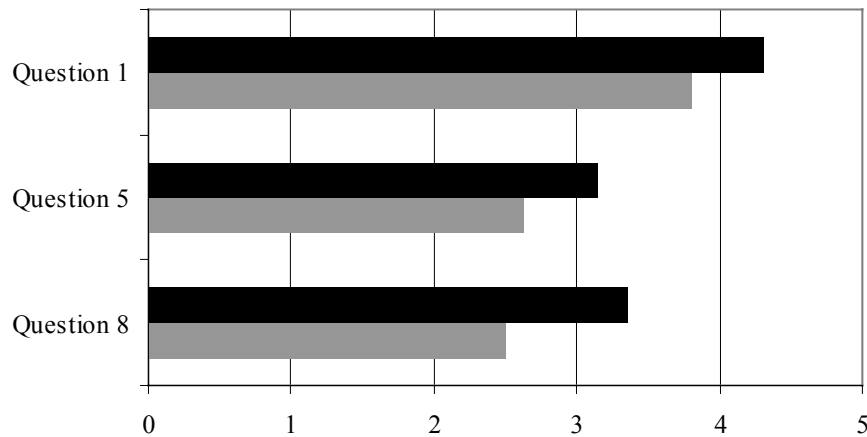
Our data shows that schools where teaching staff has a greater understanding of the concept and rationale behind character education experience *more* benefits from the program. These schools may devote more time and energy to ensuring that character education is a priority. In addition, these schools may be using other character education materials along with Project Wisdom, to reach their students. The following graph depicts *some* of the statistically significant group differences.



Evidence is building that proves character education reduces disorderly behavior on school campuses by creating a more caring and respectful school climate.

**Exhibit 1: Benefits When Staff Understands the Concepts and Rationale of Character Education**

- Schools where teachers understand the concept and rationale of character education
- Schools where teachers do not understand the concept and rationale of character education



Question 1 = The daily messages encourage students to reflect on the values being taught.  
 Question 5 = The program helps decrease student teasing and/or bullying.  
 Question 8 = Teachers report that the program generates structured discussion in the classroom about character education issues.

**Research**

Evidence is building that proves character education reduces disorderly behavior on school campuses by creating a more caring and respectful school climate. A new publication titled the *Journal of Research in Character Education*, sponsored by the Character Education Partnership in Washington, D.C. ([www.character.org](http://www.character.org)), will soon be publishing such research. The CEP is also building a web-based National Character Education Resource Center (NCERC). Project Wisdom will be included as a resource.

team of twelve. Please see Appendix B for a list of the original advisory team.

Six of the twelve advisors worked on-site. At the time, this middle school had a tri-ethnic student population consisting of one-third Caucasians, one-third Hispanic, one-third African-American and 10% other. The school itself included students from one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city and from some of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods, providing a very diverse audience of educators, students and parents coming from many different racial, religious, economic, cultural and educational backgrounds.

**Chapter 2: Program History**

Project Wisdom was piloted at a middle school during the school year 1992-1993 under the guidance of an advisory

The program developer is Leslie Matula, an expert in the field of character education. She initially created Project Wisdom as a parent volunteer effort to bring character



"One day, one of my friends wanted me to skip classes with her that day. After hearing the message that morning, I decided not to."  
7th grader

education to her community middle school. Please see Appendix C for more information about Leslie Matula. Within six months of implementation, demand for the program on other campuses in the area sparked the formation of a small business. Today there are more than 10,000 licensed Project Wisdom schools impacting more than four million students each school day.

## Chapter 3: Program Description

### Broadcast Messages

The Project Wisdom program consists of three series (collections) of broadcast messages. These messages take less than one minute to broadcast and reach every student and every staff member every day. Each series contains enough messages to broadcast for an entire school year. The messages are not dated and are, therefore, recyclable. All three series come with reproducible components for the classroom (including a weekly journal) and a lifetime licensing agreement for broadcast.

The program is very easy to implement and highly cost effective as a springboard for any school-wide character education initiative. Each series costs \$350 for a lifetime licensing agreement, making the cost for a campus of 600 students approximately fifty-eight cents per school year per student. Once a school invests in all three series, they can begin again, at no cost, to re-broadcast the messages. Some schools using Project Wisdom have been broadcasting these messages for as many as eight years, incurring no costs after the first three years of implementation.

### Current Event Messages

After the terrorist attacks on September 11th, Project Wisdom began deploying, via email, timely messages dealing with current events. To date these have included Memorial Day, Teacher

Appreciation, Wartime Events, Coping with World Events, Columbia Space Shuttle Disaster, Veterans Day, and September 11<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

### Reproducibles

In addition to the broadcast messages, the program includes the following reproducible components:

- Weekly and monthly themes
- Weekly journals
- Classroom introduction/discussion
- Quotations for the classroom
- Practical assessment tools
- Guide for creating a comprehensive character education initiative

## Chapter 4: Program Implementation

### Requirements

Implementing the Project Wisdom program requires a public-address system or in-house television system. A narrator is also required.

### Staff Development

Due to the ease of implementation, staff development is not required. However, our research indicates that schools where staff understands the concepts and rationale of character education experience an increased level of benefit from the program. Please see Exhibit 1, page 3.

### Narrators

Project Wisdom offers a great deal of flexibility in terms of implementation. Schools broadcast the messages over the public address system or in-house television system, normally during daily morning announcements.

On some campuses the principal narrates the messages. Students and guidance counselors narrate on other campuses. On many, guest speakers are invited to narrate the messages. Inviting community members to campus to narrate the Project Wisdom messages



"We have enjoyed your program and are seeing a good response from our students! Guest speakers from our community have commented about how professional the announcements are and are very happy to participate in such a worthwhile program."

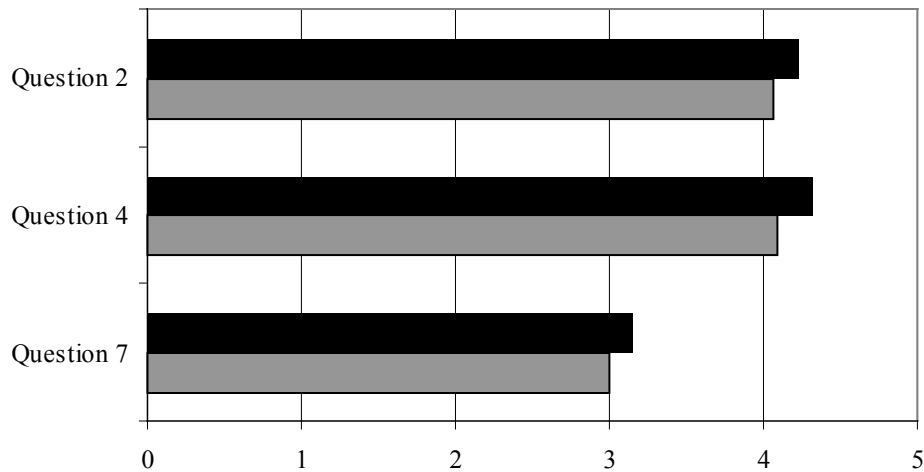
tells students that the larger community cares about their character development. Guest speakers include business leaders, law enforcement officers, elected officials, local celebrities, faith leaders, and parents.

Although Project Wisdom appears to have positive effects across the board, certain school characteristics and practices *enhance* the program's effectiveness. In general, schools that use community guest narrators

experience *more* benefits from the program as compared to schools that do not. Twenty-two percent of the schools surveyed report using community guest narrators. It may be that schools that make the effort to include guest narrators are generally more invested in enhancing character education on their campus. The following graph depicts some of the statistically significant group differences.

**Exhibit 2: Benefits When Schools Use Community Guest Narrators**

- Schools that use community guest narrators
- Schools that do not use community guest narrators



Question 2 = The program affects the school climate in a positive way.  
 Question 4 = The program helps foster students' understanding of multiple perspectives.  
 Question 7 = The program helps decrease discipline referrals to the office.



Opportunities for reflection are key to any effective character education initiative, so it is not surprising that schools that use the weekly journals experience more program benefits.

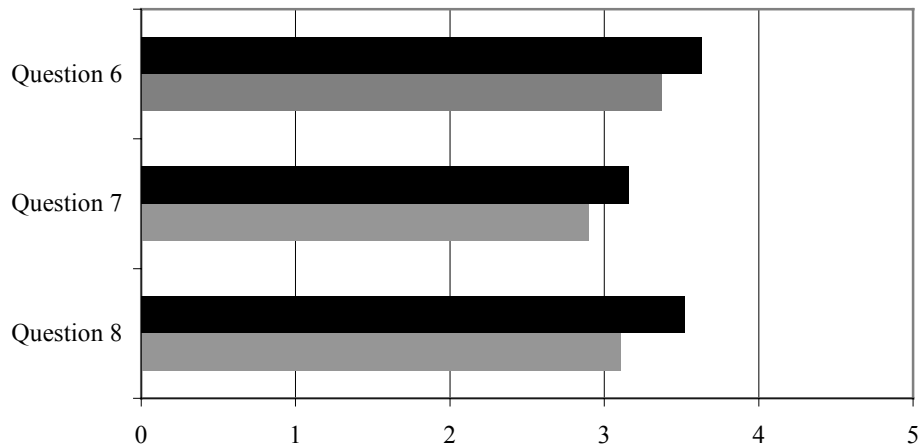
### Weekly Journals

The Project Wisdom materials include a reproducible weekly journal, which provides students with the opportunity to reflect on the values being fostered and the daily application of those values.

Opportunities for reflection are key to any effective character education initiative, so it is not surprising that schools that use the weekly journals experience more program benefits. The following graph depicts some of the statistically significant group differences.

**Exhibit 3: Benefits When Schools Use the Weekly Journals**

■ Schools that use Weekly Journals  
 ■ Schools that do not use Weekly Journals



Question 6 = The daily messages stimulate student conversation about character issues.

Question 7 = The program helps decrease discipline referrals to the office.

Question 8 = Teachers report that the program generates structured discussion in the classroom about character education issues.



Project Wisdom reaches a highly diverse student audience, including youth of all ages, ethnic backgrounds, and geographic locations.

## Chapter 5: Audience

### Customer Pattern Recognition Profile

As of July 2003, Project Wisdom had 9,800 licensed schools in all fifty states reaching an estimated audience of more than four million students. Campuses included 3,209 elementary, 6,488 secondary level campuses (including alternative schools) and 103 K-12 campuses. In July, 2003 Project Wisdom asked Market Data Retrieval (<http://www.schooldata.com/>) to create a "Customer Pattern Recognition Profile." By matching the Project Wisdom database of licensed schools with MDR's database, a clear profile of the Project Wisdom audience emerged. Data represented in the following

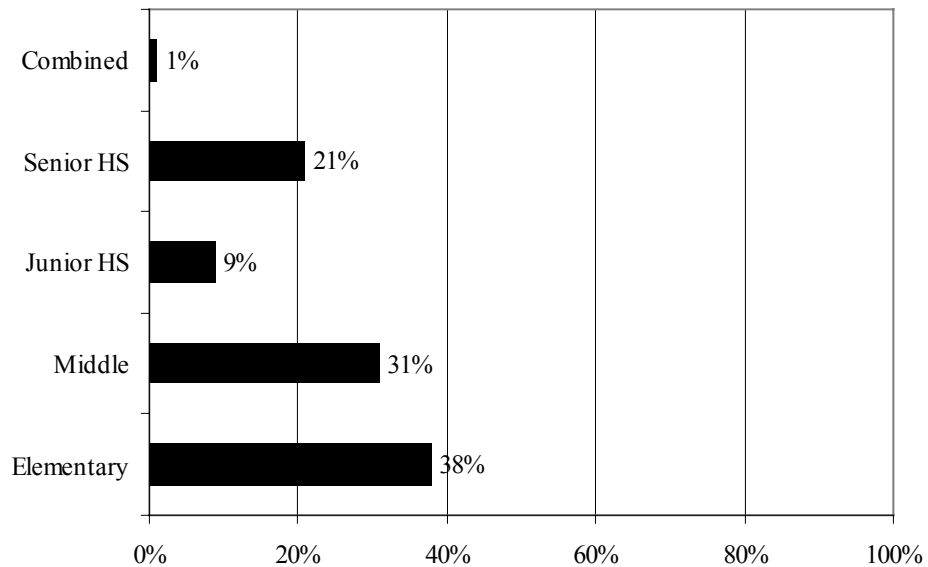
graphs is a result of this process. Nine thousand eighty-six Project Wisdom schools were analyzed.

#### Students

Project Wisdom reaches a highly diverse student audience, including youth of all ages, ethnic backgrounds, and geographic locations.

Although Project Wisdom was originally produced for secondary level students, all three series have recently been modified for an elementary level audience. The relevance of the Project Wisdom program to all grade levels is demonstrated by the fact that 38% of the Project Wisdom programs are implemented in elementary schools and 21% in senior high schools.

#### Exhibit 4: School Type

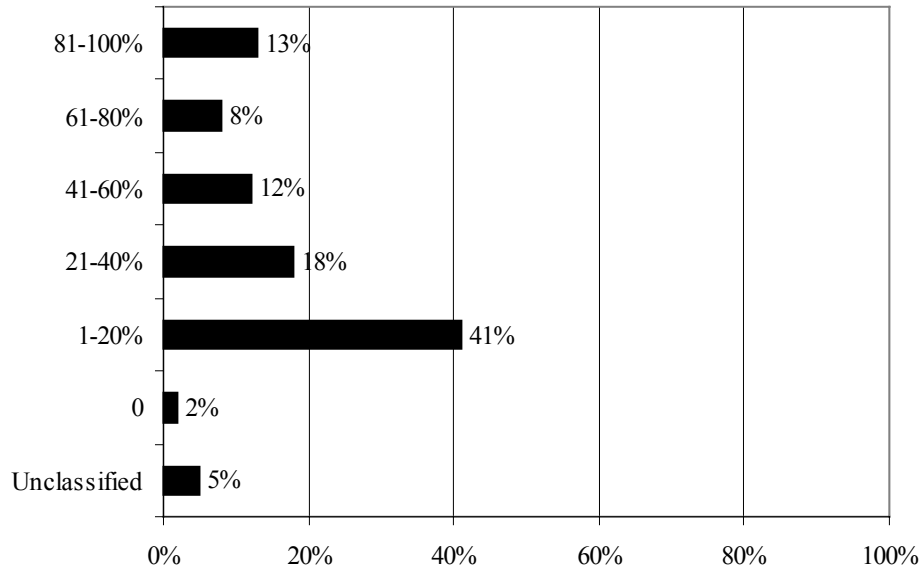




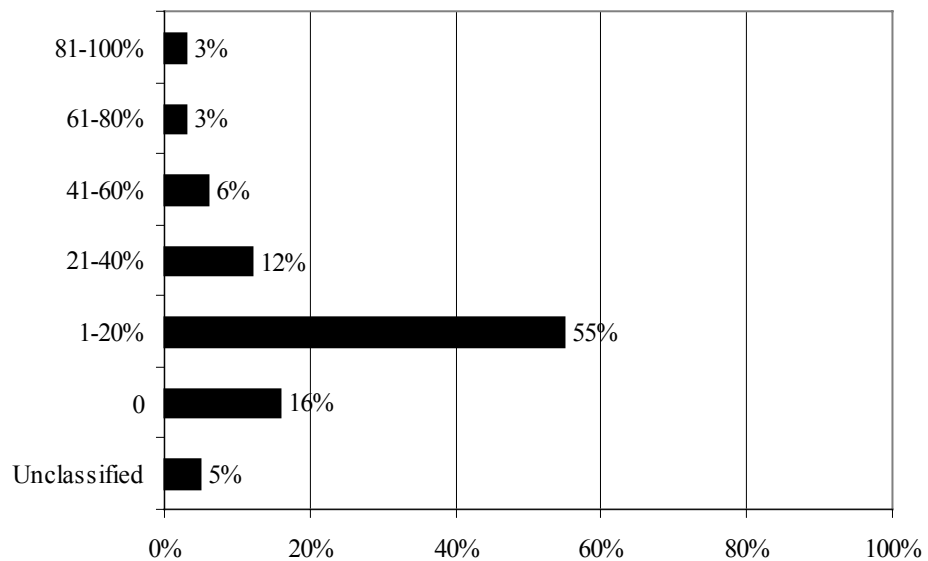
Twenty-one percent of Project Wisdom programs (747 schools) are in neighborhoods where at least 61% of the residents are ethnic minorities.

**Exhibit 5: Neighborhood Percent Ethnic Minority Total**

Twenty-one percent of Project Wisdom programs (747 schools) are in neighborhoods where at least 61% of the residents are ethnic minorities. Twelve percent of our schools (1,101) are situated in neighborhoods where 41-60% of the residents are ethnic minorities. These statistics suggest that Project Wisdom serves a diverse group of students.



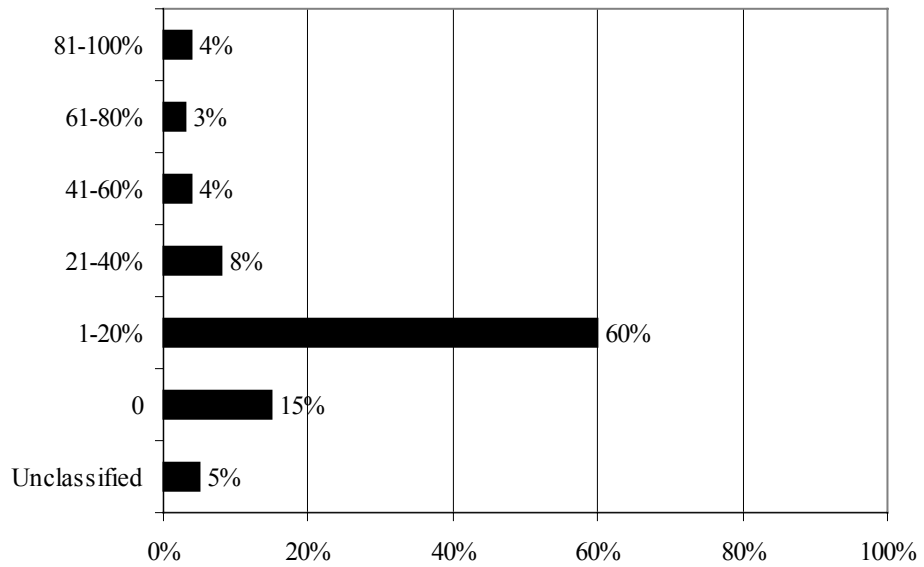
**Exhibit 6: Neighborhood Percent African-American Total**





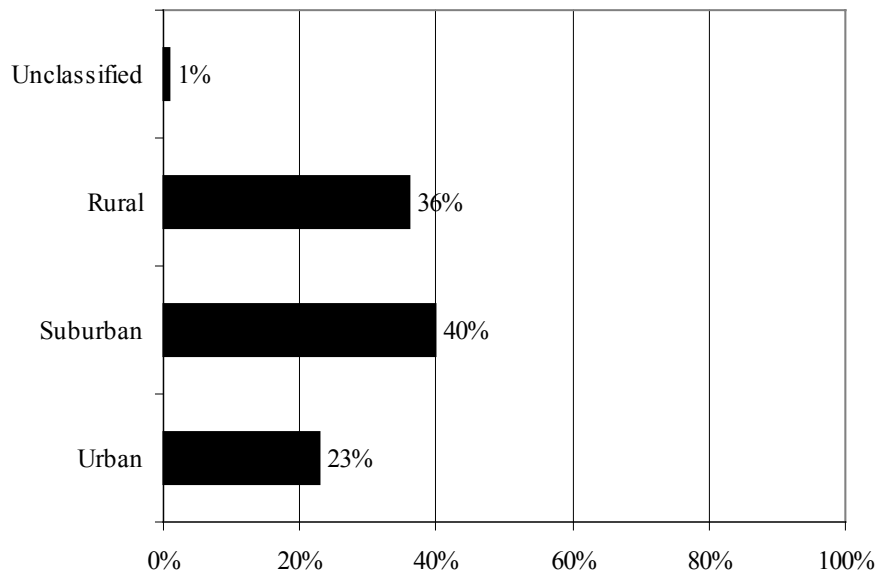
"Using Project Wisdom at the beginning of our day gives us a positive start. It also broadens our students' perspectives when it comes to diversity, since we have a pretty homogeneous ethnic population."

**Exhibit 7: Neighborhood Percent Hispanic Total**



**Exhibit 8: Geographic**

Project Wisdom serves students from a wide range of geographic locations, including all fifty states with schools in rural, suburban, and urban areas.





"Project Wisdom provides a positive beginning to each day for the students and staff. Parents have been very supportive of the program as well. I especially have enjoyed the updates that have been relevant to current issues in the world. Keep up the great work with the program!"

### Staff and Community

Although this program was produced for a student audience, educators frequently report that the messages make a positive impact on staff and community members as well as students.

"Serves as an excellent vehicle to get the entire school community - students and staff - off to a positive start each morning." Jeffrey L. Prouse, Principal, Millersburg Middle School, Millersburg, Pa.

"Staff members often come in and tell me that the morning's thoughts were 'just what they needed.'" Lorraine Colby, Principal, CYESIS Teen Parent Program (Middle/High), Sarasota, Fla.

"Students and staff look forward to hearing the messages." Anthony Smith, Assistant Principal, Brandywine High School, Wilmington, Del.

"The best thing about the program is that the whole school - staff and students alike - focus for a few minutes on a common thought, or idea." Marilyn Dodrill, Counselor, Alexander Jr. High School, Shade, Ohio.

"I look forward to sharing the message every morning and feel it has had a very positive influence on students and staff at our school. At parent meetings, they say the students talk about it to them at home as well. This is simple, takes very little time, and is so positive." Maureen Newell, Principal, Bernardo Heights Middle School, San Diego, Calif.

"My students, staff, and I would be lost without beginning the day with one of your messages. It sets the tone for the day." Barb Masciarelli, Principal, Creekside Middle School, Monument, Colo.

"This program has been a great way to involve our parents, community members, and our central office personnel. I can't say enough good things about this program!" Pat Miller, Principal, Maysville Elementary, Maysville, Ga.

"It provides a positive beginning to each day for the students and staff. Parents have been very supportive of the program as well. I especially have enjoyed the updates that have been relevant to current issues in the world. Keep up the great work with the program!" Jeannie Cummings, Principal, Charlie Brown Intermediate, West Columbia, Tex.

### Alternative Schools

"This is an alternative school. I have seen a decrease in the high school referrals . . . . The part that I believe Project Wisdom plays is in my talking with students. It has given us a basis for discussion, but more than anything has helped students realize that quite often it is the choices they make that really impact their lives. They now realize that life isn't just something that happens to you but you have choices in deciding what you do." Carole Niere, Principal, University City Alternative School, Olivette, Mo.

"Everyday consistency to help students think about decisions and the effect of their decisions on other people." Dr. Joseph Macharola, Principal, William P. Kimmel Alternative School, Altoona, Pa.

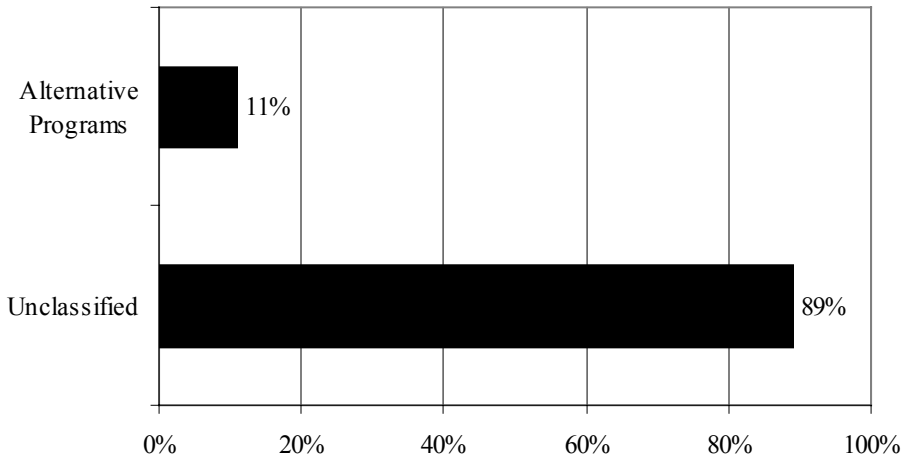
"The best investment I made in the first year as principal for the benefit of the entire population!" Melinda Voorhies, Principal, Valley Park Alternative School, Baton Rouge, La.



"Your thematic messages that address recent newsworthy events helps us to address difficult topics and provide teachers with a foundation to begin those discussions when appropriate."

**Exhibit 9: Alternative Programs**

Eleven percent of Project Wisdom schools offer an alternative program.



**National**

After the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, Project Wisdom began reaching out to our licensed schools with timely messages dealing with current events. These messages were written to help students deal with the stress and trauma of a national disaster. Samples of these messages can be found on our Web site under "Past Community Outreach Initiatives." These messages have also been offered to the public at-large via our Web site.

"Your thematic messages that address recent newsworthy events helps us to address difficult topics and provide teachers with a foundation to begin those discussions when appropriate." Stephen F. Beebie, Principal, Algonquin Middle School, Averill Park, N.Y.

**Chapter 6: Program Evaluation History Prior to Third-Party Evaluation**

**History**

Prior to Dr. Manke's involvement in data analysis and reporting, the company took a research approach to evaluating our program by collecting

both qualitative and quantitative data.

**Quantitative Data**

**2000:** Distributed a written survey by mail to all licensed schools in order to assess effectiveness of the program. Please see Appendix D for the results.

**2001:** Distributed written surveys through the mail. Please see Appendix E for the results.

**2002:** Launched the first online survey distributed to all licensed Project Wisdom schools for which we had an email address. Please see Appendix F for the results.

**Other:** Educators have voluntarily reported a quantifiable reduction in the number of discipline referrals. The following represents a sample:

"Drastic reduction in disciplinary referrals." Sandra Duckworth, Principal, Garfield Accelerated Academy, St. Louis, Mo.

"Our suspensions have decreased from over 350 a year to about 100 and declining." Joe Hernandez, AP, Suva Intermediate School, Bell Gardens, Calif.



Six hundred and ninety surveys were completed by schools using the program during the 2002-2003 academic year.

"Project Wisdom has helped decrease behavior problems and made the students more comfortable in school." Eileen Goldberg, Director, Francis Jr./Sr.High School, Staten Island, N.Y.

"Referrals to our alternative placement education program for discipline problems dropped by 35%." Sean Moyle, Principal, Yerington Intermediate School, Yerington, Nev.

"This and other efforts to decrease discipline referrals have resulted in a 25% decrease in discipline referrals this year." Joan Haynie, Clay County Middle School, Clay, W. Va.

"We have noticed a reduction [of discipline referrals] of at least 40%. . . . Referrals and cases [of bullying and teasing] have been reduced." David Thompson, Principal, Darlington High School, Darlington, S.C.

"This is our third year in using Project Wisdom materials. Each year the number of referrals to administrators has dropped significantly. This year the number of referrals has almost been insignificant!" Pat Miller, Principal, Maysville Elementary, Maysville, Ga.

### Qualitative Data

**1996:** Project Wisdom began asking licensed schools to share local newspaper stories written about the program and its effect on students and school campuses. These articles are posted on the Project Wisdom Web site at [www.projectwisdom.com](http://www.projectwisdom.com).

**1997:** Project Wisdom launched an annual national essay contest in order to collect the stories and testimonials of students whose lives have been touched by the program. The winning essays can also be found on the Web site.

**2000:** Project Wisdom sponsored a video essay contest in order to observe program effectiveness on school campuses around the country.

## Chapter 7: Third-Party Data Analysis and Reporting

### Overview

In the spring of 2003, the company asked Dr. Beth Manke to design an on-line survey in order to assess the benefits of the program. Dr. Manke is an Associate Professor at the California State University, Long Beach, and an independent program evaluator. Dr. Manke has over 10 years of evaluation experience with organizations serving children and families. Please see Appendix A for more information about Dr. Manke.

Licensed schools for which Project Wisdom had been provided an e-mail address (a total of 3,550) were invited, via e-mail, to complete the survey. Six hundred and ninety surveys were completed by schools using the program during the 2002-2003 academic year. This represents a 19% response rate, well above the typical response rate for online surveys.

Surveys were completed by someone at the school familiar with the implementation and impact of Project Wisdom. These individuals held a variety of different school positions, although the majority were principals (50%) or counselors (23%). Although, on average, schools have had the program for 2½ years, some schools had purchased the program in the last nine months, whereas others have had it for almost nine years.

Respondents were asked, for example, whether or not the daily messages encourage students to reflect on the values being fostered, stimulate student conversation about character education issues, and help decrease discipline referrals to the office. Respondents were also asked about their general satisfaction with the program. Respondents rated each question on a five-point scale (1 = not at all, 2 = a little bit, 3 = somewhat, 4 = quite a bit, 5 = very much).



Seventy-seven percent of respondents indicated that Project Wisdom helps decrease discipline referrals.

Included in this report is a summary of the evaluation results extracted from Dr. Manke’s report. All analyses were conducted using the 8.00 version of SAS, a widely used statistical package in the social sciences. In order to characterize the data, several different types of analyses were conducted. At the most basic level, frequencies, percentages, and means (averages) were explored. For example, the percentage of respondents who said that Project Wisdom helps reduce teasing and bullying was examined. In addition, mean level differences using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were explored in several circumstances. For example, whether the mean level of satisfaction

with the program is statistically different for schools that used the Project Wisdom Weekly Journals (as compared to schools that do not use the journals) was assessed.

One of the simplest ways to determine if Project Wisdom has positive effects on students and the general school climate is to examine how many respondents rated each item on the survey favorably. What follows are the percentages of all respondents who rated each question as "somewhat" (3), "quite a bit" (4), or "very much" (5). *The majority of these respondents indicated "quite a bit" or "very much."*

**Exhibit 10: Summary of Findings**

Questions	Percent of respondents who indicated "somewhat," "quite a bit," or "very much"
<b>Impact of Program/Perceived Benefits:</b>	
• The daily messages encourage students to reflect on the values being fostered.	99%
• The program helps foster students’ understanding of multiple perspectives.	99%
• The program affects the school climate in a positive way.	98%
• The daily messages stimulate student conversation about character issues.	89%
• Teachers report that the program generates structured discussion in the classroom about character education issues.	80%
• The program helps decrease discipline referrals to the office.	77%
• The program helps decrease student teasing and/or bullying.	77%
<b>General Satisfaction:</b>	
• The teaching staff and parents are satisfied with the values being presented in the daily messages.	99%
• Students are disappointed when the narrator(s) miss(es) a daily broadcast.	80%



"Before Project Wisdom, everyone at school would hurl insults at one another because of their appearance. People were very self-centered. But now, after listening to those 'few words of wisdom' in the morning, there has been a significant change in our attitudes."  
7th grader

At least 77% of respondents rated each question favorably, revealing that an overwhelming majority of school officials feel that Project Wisdom is having positive effects on their students and the school climate. Remarkably, 99% of the respondents provided superior ratings for three of the items. The consistently high rating across questions suggest not only that Project Wisdom has positive effects but that the program is internally consistent. This means that the program impacts a variety of outcomes (e.g., understanding of multiple perspectives, reflection on values taught) in a similar way. When schools report a benefit in one area, there is a tendency to see benefits in other areas as well. This is important, especially for schools that have limited funds and therefore must limit their purchases to those programs that benefit the school in a number of ways.

The following quotes drawn from the 2003 survey illustrate the overwhelming positive effects of Project Wisdom:

"This program is everything you told us it would be — and more. What an inspiring way to start each day." Gretchen Cetin, Character Ed. Coordinator from Parkside Junior High School in Normal, Ill.

"Our discipline referrals are down by 65% this year!!" Beatrice Speir, Principal from William Keene Elementary in Newark, Del.

"Students make comments to the teachers on the messages and reflect on how it can apply to them. I used to see an average of at least 15 students a day. I don't see 15 a month now." Cathy Fulcher, Principal from Escatawpa Elementary in Moss Point, Miss.

"Teasing has dropped by over 75%." Kay Sledge, Principal from Jonesboro Middle School in Jonesboro, Ga.

"The Project Wisdom materials may have been designed to promote character education and to help reduce bullying and teasing. Side benefits include promoting a climate of literacy by the use of famous quotes, stories of interest, current events

and shared histories of famous people. We love the program and intend to use it every year." Mamie Duffendack, Principal from Jordahl Elementary in Fountain, Colo.

### Closer Look at Percentages

Although in general the ratings were high for all questions, respondents did have a tendency to rate the questions related to discipline referrals and teasing/bullying somewhat lower. For these program questions, 77% of the respondents provided favorable ratings. In some ways this is not surprising, as certain program effects are probably harder to detect or measure. That is, respondents are probably less knowledgeable about how the program impacts overall discipline referrals and teasing/bullying either because school statistics are not kept or because Project Wisdom is combined with other character education programs. When more than one program is used at the same time, it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which *each* program is independently responsible for observed improvements.

In order to examine this issue further, we assessed respondents' written comments. Our analysis confirmed our initial interpretations; many of the respondents who did *not* provide high ratings to the questions concerning discipline referrals and teasing/bullying commented that they could not accurately assess the program's impact on these outcomes, yet they suspect the program makes a difference.

Example quotes include:

"We can't tell for sure. We don't have concrete statistics but the numbers are down." Linda Bryden, Counselor from Bonneville Jr. High School in Salt Lake City, Utah.

"It is hard to isolate what changes are specific to Project Wisdom since it is part of our overall character education program." Don Burkhead, Principal from Clark Middle School in Winchester, Ky.



The research indicates that the benefits of Project Wisdom are immediate.

"Although we have made other changes in the school besides implementing Project Wisdom, in the three years that we have been using the program we have eliminated our Timeout Room and reduced suspensions to almost none. Is Project Wisdom the reason? At least some of the credit has to go there." David Burgher, Character Ed. Liaison from Clark-Moores Middle School in Richmond, Ky.

"It may not be so much the numbers but the types. We don't get the degree of fights we used to have. I haven't gotten exact documentation, but the overall feeling is more positive than in the years before Project Wisdom. We have used Project Wisdom for 8 years now." Fantina Garcia, Principal from Hebronville Junior High in Hebronville, Tex.

### Other Important Findings

It often takes time (perhaps years) before the positive effects of intervention and prevention programs can be seen. Is this the case for Project Wisdom? In order to examine this question, we assessed whether or not schools that have had the program longer (and are still using it) report greater program benefits than do schools that have had the program for less time. Of the schools surveyed, 155 schools had the program for less than one year, 218 schools had the program between one and two years, 129 schools had the program between two and three years, and 188 schools had the program for more than three years. Surprisingly, there was only one significant finding related to the time schools have been using the program. Schools that have been using the program between two and three years reported that teaching staff and parents are *more satisfied* with the values being presented in daily messages than did respondents from schools that have had the program for less time.

The lack of more significant findings related to the time schools have been using the program suggests that the benefits of Project Wisdom are immediate. That is, schools that have had the program for one year or less report as

many positive program effects as do schools that have had and continue to use the program for several years. In short, there do not appear to be any sleeper effects associated with Project Wisdom. These findings also suggest that the benefits of the program don't dissipate with continual use. Some may worry that programs are most effective in the beginning when people are excited about the implementation of a new program, that perhaps benefits wane over time as people become accustomed to the program. This, however, is not the case for Project Wisdom. Even schools that have had the program for up to eight years still see, for example, that their rates of discipline referrals continue to fall.

Finally, we examined whether or not the type of person responding on behalf of the school influences ratings. Specifically, we wondered whether or not principals, because of their greater access to overall school trends, might perceive more or fewer program benefits than do other respondents (e.g., teachers). Results revealed significant differences by "respondent position" for only two questions. First, principals were more likely than counselors and teachers to indicate that Project Wisdom decreased discipline referrals. In addition, principals and counselors were more likely than teachers to state that students comment when the narrator misses a broadcast. The lack of any other significant differences suggests perhaps that school staff, regardless of their position, perceive the benefits of Project Wisdom. These findings also suggest that the survey and corresponding data are not influenced by any systematic rater biases. This is important if we are to trust that the findings are valid.

### Future Evaluation Activities

Project Wisdom will continue to survey schools on a yearly basis in order to obtain feedback regarding the effects of the program. It is important to Project Wisdom that schools get the most out of the program and are able to meet the character education needs of their students. Although other, more complicated evaluation procedures could



When schools report a benefit in one area, there is a tendency to see benefits in other areas as well. This is important, especially for schools that have limited funds and therefore must limit their purchases to those programs that benefit the school in a number of ways.

be implemented, it has been decided (after careful deliberation) that the present on-line survey method is sufficient for our purposes. Other methods, such as adding a "control school" that does not use Project Wisdom, present a variety of problems. First, finding a control school that is *identical* in every way to one of the schools that currently uses Project Wisdom, except that it does not use the program, would be virtually impossible. Schools differ in so many ways. These differences may affect the types of outcomes we are interested in (e.g., discipline referrals). Thus, any attempt to compare schools that use Project Wisdom with schools that don't would most likely yield inconclusive results. Furthermore, more complicated evaluation procedures like control groups cost a great deal of money – a cost that would have to be passed along to our customers. In the interest of providing a quality, affordable program, we have decided to maintain our current evaluation procedures.

## Chapter 8: Project Wisdom as an Intervention Tool

### Group Intervention

The Project Wisdom Weekly Journals and messages are used as a springboard for conversation during group discussions such as those that take place in Advisor/Advisee periods.

"Many advisor/advisee classes use the message as a class discussion topic." Jenna Hall, Counselor, Milliken Middle School, Milliken, Colo.

"It goes hand-in-hand with the character education activities presented and discussed during the advisory period." Yolanda Gutierrez, Principal, KEYS Academy, Harlingen, Tex.

"As a school in a large urban area we appreciate the attentiveness to multiple cultures. The teachers really like having a good focus for the student's daily journaling. Your quotes have also developed several great classroom discussions." Nancy Henson, Instructional

Coach, Nowlin Accelerated Middle School, Independence, Mo.

"Students/staff listen. It does stimulate discussions in the classrooms." Bernard Balanay, Principal, Palomar High School, Chula Vista, Calif.

"I think that the messages help the school focus on themes for the month that are meant to stimulate classroom discussions and get the students to think about important issues. . . ." Bob Bush, Principal, Lakeview Junior High School, Santa Maria, Calif.

### Individual Intervention

We have on file hundreds of stories told to us in student essays. The most profound story involved a middle school student who, after hearing one of our messages about being kind and encouraging to others, reached out to another student she described as an "outcast." The result of her random act of kindness is the following note, found in her locker later that same day:

"Thank you for helping me today. I was very upset. I had planned on committing suicide because I hated myself. I didn't think anyone would ever like me. I know now that some people do like me."

### Students

Typical testimonials follow. More can be found at [www.projectwisdom.com](http://www.projectwisdom.com).

"My friend used to be bullied a lot, but when the one who was bullying heard the message, they stopped."

"I don't tease others anymore."

### Educators/Counselors

Educators and counselors use the messages as a springboard for discussion with individual students.

"The daily messages are used in classroom and in discipline or counseling situations with students." Christine Pappas, Counselor, Brookhurst Junior High School, Anaheim, CA.



"In today's world, teenagers are bombarded by bad influences. Project Wisdom has instead been a positive influence for me. It has helped me to especially focus on setting goals and making good choices. . . ."  
8th grader

"Discipline discussions often can be related to [Project Wisdom] on any particular day. Students then can reflect on how it all relates to their behavior and life." Paul Holland, AP, Learwood Middle School, Avon Lake, Ohio.

### Peer-to-Peer Intervention

On many Project Wisdom campuses, the students broadcast the messages. This allows for peer-to-peer encouragement and intervention.

"We have students from 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade rotate, reading the daily announcements. So, it's a peer-to-peer type situation which probably has more influence than adults reading them. This also promotes reading skills, and makes students feel special for being featured on the school's intercom, delivering specific positive messages to all their friends and the entire student body." Connie Johnson, At-Risk/Prevention Coordinator, Kirksville Junior High School, Kirksville, Mo.

## Chapter 9: Life Skills

The Project Wisdom messages teach the importance of Life Skills such as goal setting, teamwork, and conflict resolution. The following comments are taken from essays submitted in our national essay contest.

### Conflict Resolution

"Before Project Wisdom, everyone at school would hurl insults at one another because of their appearance. People were very self-centered. But now, after listening to those "few words of wisdom" in the morning, there has been a significant change in our attitudes . . . . We now also try to go out of our way to do favors for people. If one needs help on their homework, we willingly teach them how to do it. If someone is left out, we try to include that person in our group. When we walk out of classrooms, we hold the doors open for people. Project Wisdom has taught us that being courteous to other people costs nothing but goes a long way." 7th grader

"Project Wisdom has really changed my school life, academically and socially. Last year I was struggling and could not seem to pull my educational weight. I could not seem to help myself from getting into some kind of conflict, physically, mentally, and/or verbally. This year Project Wisdom has really changed me. I am more open, I speak to people, and I make better grades. I can truthfully say that Project Wisdom is part of why I am adjusting well in school this year." 8th grader

"These 'words of wisdom' changed my life that day for two reasons. First, the message helped me look at my middle school experience in a new light. Second, these words reminded me that kindness is a circle, and that when you share friendliness and kindness, it tends to come back to you. Since then, I have made many new friends at school, and I credit Project Wisdom with helping me to transform a bad school experience into a growing up experience." 8th grader

### Goal Setting

"In today's world, teenagers are bombarded by bad influences. Project Wisdom has instead been a positive influence for me. It has helped me to especially focus on setting goals and making good choices. . . . The quotes from Project Wisdom have helped me to keep focused on my goal." 8th grader

### Teamwork

"At my high school the 'Words of Wisdom' are read every day. Several of the daily readings ask the question 'What are you waiting for?' As Student Council President, I am always encouraging students in my school to participate in community service projects and school pride activities . . . It is difficult to exactly measure the effectiveness of Project Wisdom, except by careful observation of the students' facial expressions while they listen to the daily 'Words of Wisdom,' and to attribute the general improvement in test scores, work ethic, and student relations to Project Wisdom." 12th grader



Character education helps shape the attitudes and behaviors of young people, fostering an internal motivation to make wiser choices.

## Chapter 10: Conclusion

Character education helps shape the attitudes and behaviors of young people, fostering an internal motivation to make wiser choices. Project Wisdom will continue to survey licensed schools on a yearly basis as a means of both assessing our effectiveness and providing educators with the opportunity to provide us with valuable feedback. However, after careful consideration, we have ruled out the notion of implementing more complicated evaluation procedures because of the variety of problems it would present and the cost to our small business. The data we have collected over the years ensures us that we are providing students and educators with a program that is affordable and gets results.

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"One day someone I knew was faced with a problem, should she steal something with her friends and be considered cool, or take a chance of being called a chicken, and a loser if she didn't? I am happy to say that she had used what her principal said in his Project Wisdom reading to help her with her problem, and again I am happy to say she made the right decision not to steal."  
5th grader

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"It is difficult to exactly measure the effectiveness of Project Wisdom, except by careful observation of the students' facial expressions while they listen to the daily 'Words of Wisdom,' and to attribute the general improvement in test scores, work ethic, and student relations to Project Wisdom."  
12th grader

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Dr. Manke has over 10 years of program evaluation experience and is presently coordinating the evaluation efforts for several Houston and Los Angeles organizations.

## Appendix A: About Dr. Beth Manke

Dr. Beth Manke received her Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Studies (with a minor in statistics) in 1995 from the Pennsylvania State University and is currently an Associate Professor in the Human Development Department at the California State University, Long Beach. Dr. Manke has over 10 years of program evaluation experience and is presently coordinating the evaluation efforts for several Houston and Los Angeles organizations. Dr. Manke has expertise in on-line surveys, paper-and-pencil questionnaires, clinical interviews, and observational techniques. Dr. Manke has described her evaluation findings in written professional reports and community-wide presentations. Her results have also been featured in several newspaper articles.

In addition to conducting evaluation studies, Dr. Manke maintains an active research program focused on the interplay of children's familial relationships (parent-child and sibling), broader contextual factors and developmental outcomes including mental health, academic achievement and behavior problems. Dr. Manke has co-authored over 20 empirical articles and chapters in scholarly journals and edited books. She has also presented her research findings in over 30 conference presentations and has been the invited guest speaker at several universities including the Institute of Child Development in Minneapolis, MN, Oxford University, George Washington University and the University of Oregon. Dr. Manke has received international recognition for her work. For example, she was an invited research fellow at the Institute of Psychiatry in London England; served as the guest presenter at a methodology workshop at the University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands; and was the recipient of the 1999 International Visiting Scholarship awarded by the University of Surrey, Guildford, UK. Dr. Manke is a current member of the American Psychological Association,

the National Council on Family Relations, and the Society for Research in Child Development. Dr. Manke currently serves as an ad hoc reviewer for several scholarly journals including *Developmental Psychology*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Social Development*, *Merill Palmer Quarterly*, *Family Communication*, and the *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*. Dr. Manke is also on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Marriage and Family*.

As a faculty member, Dr. Manke has taught courses on child development, research methods and design, and program evaluation. Dr. Manke was awarded the 2000 College of Social Sciences Teaching Excellence Award at the University of Houston, Houston, TX.

### Example Publications:

Manke, B., Pike, A. (2003). Combining the social relations model and behavioral genetics to explore the etiology of familial interactions. *Marriage and Family Review*, 33, 179-204.

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Manke, B., Corbitt-Shindler, D., Cizik, P., and Powers, L. (2003). *Mentoring programs and children's depression: the role of life events*. Paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Tampa, FL, April.

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In 1992, Leslie Matula created a parent volunteer effort to bring character education to her community middle school.

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Phyllis Green, BLS, LCDC, CADAC  
Institute for Child and Family Services  
Alcohol and Drug Intervention  
Specialist

Gail Goodwin  
Editor, *Our Kids Magazine*

## Appendix B: Pilot Advisory Team (1992 – 1994)

### District Level

Jocelyn Mouton, Ph.D.  
Director of Non-Instructional Training  
And Development/Character Education

Jorge Carillo, Ph.D.  
Clinical Psychologist

### School Level

Patsy Finch  
Principal

Mary Garcia  
Dean of Instruction

Carol Greenberg  
Guidance Counselor

Hortense Murphy  
Teacher and Graduate of the Dr. Martin  
Luther King Center for Non-Violence

Janet Carr  
Guidance Counselor

Jeff Amerson  
Teacher and Pilot Narrator

### Community Members

Karen Rilling, Ph.D.  
Humble Middle School, Principal

Kay Wallach, Ph.D.  
Texas Accelerated Schools  
Collaborative Network  
Texas A&M University

## Appendix C: About Leslie Matula

Leslie Matula, Founder, Project  
Wisdom and Co-founder, MindOH!  
K-12 Education Programs.

In 1992, Leslie Matula created a parent volunteer effort to bring character education to her community middle school. Her efforts eventually sparked the creation of Project Wisdom, Inc., a leading producer of character education materials that encourage students to reflect upon the meaning of civic and personal values and the application of those values in their daily lives. Leslie developed, published and is presently marketing this daily character-building program for K-12 students. The program has been implemented in more than 10,000 schools nationwide and reaches more than 4 million students each school day.

Prior to founding Project Wisdom, Leslie established a writing and desktop publishing service and served as an apprentice to the founder/director of the Wilhelm Schole, an international, interdisciplinary school. A veteran public school volunteer, Leslie's community service roster spans almost 20 years of volunteer efforts, and she has received a number of awards for donating her time to educational and social causes.

In 2000, Leslie joined five other like-minded individuals as co-founder of MindOH!, an online character education



Ninety-one percent of those surveyed in 2000 responded favorably when asked if Project Wisdom affects the school climate in a positive way.

company that uses the latest Web tools for the benefit of students involved in the disciplinary process or at-risk of dropping out.

Leslie is a recognized public speaker on the topic of character education. She has presented at conferences such as the Character Education Partnership Annual Forum, the Center for International Character Education Academy at the University of San Diego, the Young Leaders in Action Conference at Rice University, and the Texas Middle School Conference. Her most recent presentations include the 2003 National PTA Conference, Charlotte, North Carolina, June 2003 and the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual CharacterPlus Conference, St. Louis, Missouri, July 2003.

*Recent published articles include:*

Looper, Amy and Leslie Matula (2003, June 16). "A Wiser Workplace: Managers Should Apply Lessons Learned from Students." Houston Business Journal:  
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Matula, Leslie (2002) "The Concept and Rationale of Character Education Specific to the Disciplinary Process."  
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## Appendix D: 2000 Survey

Total number of respondents 176.

Questions	No opinion	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Responses of 5 and above
1) The daily messages encourage students to reflect on values being fostered.	5%	0%	0%	1%	5%	15%	27%	48%	90%
2) The program affects the school climate in a positive way.	5%	0%	0%	2%	2%	11%	35%	46%	91%
3) Staff and parents are satisfied with the values being presented.	5%	0%	1%	1%	2%	10%	28%	55%	92%
4) The program helps foster students' understanding of multiple perspectives.	6%	0%	1%	1%	7%	19%	36%	29%	84%
5) Program has helped improve students' behavior.	25%	1%	1%	7%	11%	24%	19%	11%	55%
6) Staff members report that they benefit as much as the students.	7%	0%	1%	3%	11%	28%	26%	23%	77%
7) The program has helped decrease discipline referrals to the office.	22%	1%	2%	8%	11%	30%	20%	6%	56%
8) Students refer to or talk about the daily messages.	8%	0%	2%	3%	5%	28%	31%	23%	82%
9) The program helps decrease racial/ethnic incidents and/or bullying.	26%	1%	1%	2%	4%	10%	19%	36%	66%



Seventy-eight percent of those surveyed in 2001 responded with an above average response, when asked if staff members report that they benefit as much as the students.

## Appendix E: 2001 Survey

Total number of respondents: 303.

Questions	No opinion	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Responses of 7 and above
1) The daily messages encourage students to reflect on values being fostered.	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	3%	8%	29%	17%	39%	93%
2) The program affects the school climate in a positive way.	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	3%	7%	23%	22%	41%	93%
3) Staff and parents are satisfied with the values being presented.	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	1%	3%	19%	23%	48%	93%
4) The program helps foster students' understanding of multiple perspectives.	6%	0%	0%	1%	1%	4%	4%	12%	30%	20%	23%	85%
5) Program has helped improve students' behavior.	11%	0%	0%	1%	1%	4%	12%	16%	28%	14%	12%	70%
6) Staff members report that they benefit as much as the students.	10%	1%	0%	0%	2%	5%	5%	9%	22%	21%	25%	78%
7) The program has helped decrease discipline referrals to the office.	23%	3%	0%	3%	3%	12%	9%	15%	17%	8%	6%	46%
8) Students refer to or talk about the daily messages.	6%	0%	1%	3%	3%	7%	9%	15%	21%	19%	17%	71%
9) The program helps decrease racial/ethnic incidents and/or bullying.	23%	1%	1%	4%	4%	7%	9%	14%	17%	11%	8%	50%
10) The program helps improve students' attitude toward school and learning.	11%	1%	0%	1%	2%	7%	8%	18%	26%	17%	9%	70%
11) Teachers report program generates discussion in the classroom.	11%	0%	0%	0%	2%	7%	8%	15%	20%	18%	19%	72%
12) Students comment when narrator(s) miss(es) broadcast.	22%	1%	2%	0%	3%	2%	6%	6%	13%	15%	30%	64%



In 2002, sixty-seven percent of those surveyed responded favorably when asked if the program has helped decrease teasing and/or bullying.

## Appendix F: 2002 Online Survey

Total number of respondents: 420

Questions	No opinion	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Responses of 5 and above
1) Messages encourage students to reflect on values being fostered.	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	11%	18%	67%	96%
2) The program affects the school climate in a positive way.	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	15%	15%	68%	98%
3) Staff and parents are satisfied with the values presented.	1%	0%	0%	1%	2%	6%	14%	76%	96%
4) Program fosters an understanding of multiple perspectives.	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	10%	14%	74%	98%
5) Program has helped decrease discipline referrals.	14%	3%	3%	3%	16%	27%	9%	25%	61%
6) Students refer to or talk about the daily messages.	1%	0%	3%	5%	12%	23%	15%	40%	78%
7) Program has helped decrease teasing and/or bullying.	9%	1%	3%	7%	14%	30%	15%	22%	67%
8) Teachers report that the program generates discussion.	3%	1%	3%	4%	9%	19%	19%	43%	81%
9) Students comment when narrator(s) miss(es) a broadcast.	13%	3%	3%	3%	5%	14%	12%	48%	74%
10) Staff understands the concept and rationale of character education.	0%	0%	0%	1%	3%	10%	11%	75%	96%