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Is Project Wisdom Scientifically Research Based?

As specified by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, teachers and administrators are now required to provide documentation that the programs they purchase are scientifically research based. This means that the program has been evaluated using rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures and that the reliable and valid information obtained from these procedures indicates that the program is effective. In other words, there must be evidence that the program works.

This form was created to help schools document that **Project Wisdom is scientifically research based**. The sections below are taken directly from the No Child Left Behind Act (Section 37, part B) and represent the criteria for scientifically based research. For each section, we provide documentation pertaining to Project Wisdom.

Scientifically based research includes research that:

A. Employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment.

Project Wisdom has been evaluated using widely recognized quantitative and qualitative methods. The design and implementation of empirical methods were overseen by Dr. Beth Manke, a third-party evaluator with over 12 years of program evaluation experience. Dr. Manke's credentials are detailed in the 2004 program evaluation report (www.projectwisdom.com).

Web-based surveys (a quantitative approach) have been used since 2002 to assess the impact of Project Wisdom on school climate and student adjustment (e.g., discipline infractions and socio-emotional development). The most recent Web-based survey was conducted in 2004 — a total of 913 surveys were completed by schools using the program during the 2003-2004 school year. Surveys were completed by someone at the school familiar with the implementation and impact of Project Wisdom. These persons held a variety of different school positions, although almost half were principals (48%), followed by counselors (26%) and assistant principals (10%). To supplement Web-based data, information was extracted from Customer Pattern Recognition Files produced by Market Data Retrieval (MDR), a company of Dun & Bradstreet.

Qualitative methods such as unstructured interviews with principals, assistant principals, teachers and students have been used to collect information about the implementation of Project Wisdom. In addition, excerpts and testimonials were taken directly from student essays submitted to the yearly national Project Wisdom essay contests (held since 1997).

B. Involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn.

Hypotheses regarding the impact of Project Wisdom are clearly articulated in numerous places, including the Project Wisdom Web site (www.projectwisdom.com), company brochures, and the 2004 evaluation report. In short, Project Wisdom has been providing schools with a series of messages that encourage students to reflect upon the meaning of civic and personal values and the application of those values in their daily lives. It is hypothesized that the use of Project Wisdom reduces discipline problems and enhances socio-emotional development (e.g., leadership skills, interpersonal skills, etc.).

Data analyses were conducted using the 9.1 version of SAS, a widely used statistical package in the social sciences. In order to characterize the data and test the various program claims/goals, several different types of analyses were conducted. At the most basic level, frequencies and means (averages) were explored. More complicated analyses, including analysis of variance (ANOVA) and multiple regression, were used to test hypotheses regarding differential program effects. For example, in order to examine whether or not Project Wisdom is more effective in improving student socio-emotional development (e.g., social awareness, relationship skills) when schools use the weekly journals, a two-way ANOVA was conducted with journal use (yes/no) as the between-groups factor and socio-emotional development as the dependent variable. In all cases, appropriate levels of statistical significance were used and attention was paid to issues of sample size and power when drawing conclusions.



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C. Relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers, across multiple measurements and observations, and across studies by the same or different investigators.

The cause of unreliability is random error. The most common sources of random errors are errors due to coding or test scoring, ambiguous instructions/poorly standardized measures, differential emphasis on different words during an interview, interviewer fatigue, differences in testing environment, and guessing. Although some sources of random error may be operating with the use of Project Wisdom Web-based surveys (i.e., differences in testing environments across respondents), Project Wisdom staff addressed other sources of random error by having the survey delivered via the Web instead of face-to-face interviews.

In addition, the instructions and questions included on the survey were tested and revised to maximize clarity, and Project Wisdom worked with educators and those trained in statistics to develop Likert rating scales that are reliable. It is important to note that because data is collected via a Web-based survey, staff members do not need to code or enter the data, thereby further minimizing random error.

Validity refers to whether or not the measurement tool actually measures what it claims to measure. The most frequently discussed type of validity is construct validity, which is the extent to which a measure performs in accordance with theoretical expectations. In many ways, the questions on the Web-based survey and the corresponding results are in concordance with theories of educational effectiveness. That is, schools that reported using the weekly supplemental journals and forming character education teams reported greater benefits to using Project Wisdom.

D. Is evaluated using experimental or quasiexperimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest, with a preference for random-assignment experiments, or other designs to the extent that those designs contain within-condition or across-condition controls.

Although an experimental study was not conducted, within-condition controls were included in the cross-sectional study in order to optimize our ability to answer the research questions of interest. We made sure, for example, to assess factors such as length of time using the program and school demographics that could impact our findings and our interpretations. We also have longitudinal survey data for many schools, making it possible to assess the degree to which schools experience benefits (e.g., reductions in discipline referrals) over time. This method allows us to use schools as their own base of comparison.

E. Ensures that experimental studies are presented in sufficient detail and clarity to allow for replication or, at a minimum, offer the opportunity to build systematically on their findings.

Details regarding the collection of evaluation data, analyses, findings, interpretations, and future evaluation efforts are detailed in the 2004 program evaluation report (www.projectwisdom.com). The information included in this report would allow other researchers to replicate or build on previous findings. Suggestions for enhancing the evaluation of Project Wisdom are given and include the use of pre and post tests and qualitative case-study of how Project Wisdom is introduced and implemented.

F. Has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review.

A paper presentation documenting the effectiveness of Project Wisdom has been given at the biennial conference of the Society for Research in Child Development in Atlanta, GA, (spring 2005) by Dr. Beth Manke, the third-party evaluator, and Leslie Matula, President of Project Wisdom. The title of the presentation was, Addressing Discipline Problems and Socio-Emotional Development with Character Education Programs: Evaluating Project Wisdom. This conference is the flagship venue for research focused on child development and is extremely competitive. The Project Wisdom presentation proposal (along with all other proposals) was peer reviewed by a panel of independent experts who were not part of the current research.