Is Project Wisdom Scientifically Research Based?

Our program has been evaluated using rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures and the reliable and valid information obtained from these procedures indicates that the program is effective.

Scientifically based research includes research that:

- **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 19 years of program evaluation experience. Dr. Manke’s credentials are detailed on our Website at (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 2013 — over 1,000 surveys were completed by schools using the program during the 2012-2013 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, the largest response came from teachers (35%), principals (28%), followed by counselors (19%) and assistant principals (4%). 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 data from principals, assistant principals, counselors, and teachers have been used to collect information about the implementation of Project Wisdom.

- **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 three third-party evaluations. 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 version 20 of SPSS, 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.

- **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.

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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 program for a longer period of time and using the program every day of the week reported greater benefits to using Project Wisdom.

- 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.

- 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 and 2013 program evaluation reports (www.ProjectWisdom.com). The information included in these reports 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.

- 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.