

IRIS Educational Media has completed the IES-funded *Student Self-Management System (SSMS): Reducing Problem Behavior in Upper Elementary Classrooms by Transferring Externally Applied Teacher Controls to Internally Applied Student Controls* grant (R324A110074). The grant had three objectives: (1) conduct formative research to develop the content for the program components, (2) produce and assemble the program components, and (3) test the program for promise of effectiveness.

IRIS produced a fully developed version of this program, which has been retitled as *We Have Choices* (WHC). This program is designed to increase self-management skills in upper level elementary school students, with particular benefits for students with behavior challenges. We gathered evidence of the feasibility and usability of WHC in upper elementary classrooms. We developed a teacher-training component that can be used in a train-the-trainer model. Finally, we collected pilot data describing WHC's impact on students' behavioral and academic performance, and on teachers' satisfaction, self-efficacy, knowledge, and attitudes about the intervention.

WHC is based on a multi-tiered implementation approach and includes procedures and materials for use in universal, small group, and/or individual settings, for use in contained classrooms, and for use in families. WHC is initially presented to the entire class. Through the use of a curriculum-based measurement, teachers are then able to provide follow-up activities with small groups or individual students using explicit instruction, frequent practice opportunities, feedback, and ongoing review. The pilot study examined the impact of the universal approach, with particular focus on WHC's effect on students with behavioral challenges. This sets the stage for follow-up studies that can focus on applying WHC with students in Tier 2 and 3 conditions.

The WHC program is built on the premise that the skill of self-management benefits students, and that, like most skills, it can be developed and improved through repeated guided practice. Through WHC instruction, students can acquire a common understanding and vocabulary for self-management and self-control. Most importantly, they learn and receive guidance on a self-management process consisting of self-monitoring, recording, and evaluating. The self-management process is applied to specific classroom practices that have an impact on academic performance: (1) Paying attention, (2) Focusing on the task, (3) Asking for help, (4) Doing your best work, (5) Getting along, (6) Following class expectations, (7) Managing feelings, and (8) Participating in classroom activities. The WHC curriculum focuses on one of these skills each week, allowing students to practice and receive appropriate support at their individual level.

The WHC pilot study (n = 86) showed that teachers who used WHC reported significantly greater improvements in self-efficacy and reported significantly greater gains in students' prosocial behaviors than did teachers in a business-as-usual (BAU) condition. This was especially

true for students who at the outset had greater behavior difficulties. Teachers using WHC also reported high levels of satisfaction with the program. Students in the WHC condition self-reported greater gains in how often they used self-management skills and how well they performed self-management tasks than did students in the BAU condition.

Development of the WHC program involved a test-develop-test process. We carried out developmental sprints of components in conjunction with focus groups, small informal studies, and discussions with students, teachers, and administrators. We also conducted several formal tests of feasibility and social validity, measurement psychometrics, and student and teacher outcomes (pilot study) during the development of the program, which we describe below.

We completed nine (9) modules in digital media (web/DVD) and print forms. The modules included an introductory lesson that gave students a scientific understanding of how young people learn and master new skills and laid the foundation for a “growth mindset.” Each of the successive modules or lessons provide explicit instruction in one of the classroom self-management skills associated with academic success mentioned above. To facilitate students’ use of each of the eight (8) self-management skills, we developed and provided students with *My Daily Tracker*, a tool that supports noticing, recording, and evaluating behaviors. *My Daily Tracker* aids in the gradual and systematic transfer of responsibility for behaviors from a teacher to a student. The *Tracker* also builds student awareness of how emotional stability and impulse control are affected by physiological factors such as sleep and nutrition. The *Tracker* provides a system for charting behavior that allows students to identify behavioral patterns. This data supports teachers and students in rewarding progress and problem-solving challenges.

We developed professional development resources in the form of Lesson Plans for teachers. Specific steps are provided on how to introduce content, provide explicit instruction, provide frequent practice opportunities, deliver feedback, and offer ongoing review. This includes procedures for universal, small group, and/or individual support as well as resources for families and materials for use in contained classrooms. The Lesson Plans are presented in a simple step-by-step format to make daily implementation achievable by classroom teachers and/or substitute teachers, when necessary. The professional development component contains all information in written form. In addition to the Lesson Plans, it contains digital media resources that provide background research, rationale for the methods outlined in WHC, and special considerations for tiered levels of support. The Implementation Multimedia Presentation provides models for training teachers on program implementation as well as instructions on using the uESBA tool (described below) for universal screening, progress monitoring, and data-driven decision-making.

The behavioral self-management skills taught in WHC correspond to items in a curriculum-based measurement, the upper-Elementary School Behavioral Assessment (uESBA).

The uESBA allows teachers to screen entire classrooms as well as progress-monitor individual students on the extent to which they exhibit prosocial behaviors, and is modeled after the ESBA (Pennefather & Smolkowski, 2013; Walker et al., in press). Teachers rate students on behavioral skills that research (Hersh & Walker, 1983; Walker & Rankin, 1980; 1983) has found teachers most prefer from the children in the classroom and that teachers agree are important for student success. The items measure behaviors such as listening, cooperating with others, following teacher directions, and working with effort. The ESBA and uESBA use a 3-point rating scale, including *masters the skill*, *needs more instruction and practice*, and *needs significant instruction and practice*. Rating of a classroom is estimated to require 15–20 minutes of a teacher’s time. Internal reliability for the ESBA from the pretest and posttest showed Cronbach’s alpha = 0.95 and 0.94, with test-retest reliability = 0.77 (Pennefather & Smolkowski, 2015). The uESBA, which maps onto the eight (8) WHC lessons taught to students allows the teacher to rate students on 15 behavioral items (12 items derived from previous research conducted by Walker and colleagues and three (3) items added to reflect concerns of upper elementary school classrooms). The 15 items of the uESBA include the following: (1) listens to and respects the teacher, (2) follows the teacher’s directions, (3) works with effort, (4) does seatwork as directed, (5) makes assistance needs known in an appropriate manner, (6) follows rules, (7) avoids breaking rules even when encouraged by a peer, (8) behaves appropriately outside the classroom, (9) works out strong feelings appropriately, (10) can have “normal” conversation without becoming hostile, (11) gets along with peers, (12) resolves peer conflicts adequately without teacher assistance, (13) completes homework, (14) turns homework in on time, and (15) participates in class.

We conducted a pilot test of the entire program. This consisted of a randomized waitlist-controlled trial with classrooms (grades 4, 5 and 6). We collaborated with 12 school districts across the country including California (San Diego Unified School District, Napa Valley Unified School District, San Juan Unified School District), Oregon, Washington, Kansas, and Wisconsin. Within each school, classrooms were randomly assigned to either an intervention or Business as Usual (BAU) condition. The WHC group (intervention, $n = 44$) received training and access to all program components, while the BAU group ($n = 42$) was not given WHC until after completion of post-assessments. Teachers in the WHC condition followed the program’s protocol and taught one self-management lesson each week for nine (9) weeks. All teachers rated their students’ social skills pre and post with the uESBA and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. The WHC pilot test measured teacher-reported student outcomes, teacher self-efficacy, and user satisfaction. Teachers in the intervention condition reported greater gains than teachers in the control condition in self-efficacy, $F(1, 83) = 4.7, p < .05$ and in student behavior on both the uESBA, $F(1, 75) = 4.07, p < .05$ and the prosocial subscale of the SDQ, $F(1, 75) = 4.91, p < .05$. Student outcomes by condition were moderated by student pretest

scores, with a great effect due to condition for students who had more difficulties at pretest, $F(1, 74) = 18.9, p < .001$ for uESBA) and $F(1, 74) = 5.53, p < .05$ for the prosocial subscale of the SDQ. Students in the WHC condition self-reported greater gains in how often they use self-management skills, $F(1, 56) = 50.68, p < .001$ and how well they perform self-management tasks, $F(1, 56) = 9.99, p < .01$ than did students in the control condition.

The results of our evaluation study of WHC converged into three major messages: First, WHC has promise to increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy in teaching self-management. Second, WHC has promise to improve teachers' perception of their students' behavior, especially in the case of students they identified as having behavioral difficulties. Third, WHC has promise to improve students' self-reported use of self-management skills.

Teachers continue to identify students exhibiting inappropriate behavior as one of the greatest challenges to effective teaching (New Teacher Project, 2013). Inappropriate student behavior becomes even more challenging as children advance through the grades and teachers' instructional focus shifts from social skills to academics. Upper elementary school teachers thus face the challenge to teach social skills and simultaneously teach students to become self-managers in preparation for middle and high school where teachers will expect their students to have self-management skills. Teaching social skills and at the same time transferring management of those skills from teacher to student can be difficult. WHC was designed to assist teachers precisely with this difficult task. The positive effect of WHC on teachers' sense of self-efficacy in teaching self-management suggests that WHC is of great value for teachers.

As academic demands increase, the impact of behavioral challenges on students' academic performance tend to become more consequential. Research has shown that social skills are not only associated with greater academic achievement in third and fourth graders, but also predict future academic achievement (Malecki & Elliot, 2002). Reducing students' inappropriate behavior appears therefore imperative, especially in the upper elementary grades when students are beginning to be exposed to increasing academic demands. Our study outcomes suggest that WHC has the capacity to improve student behavior based on teacher ratings of social skills.

While social skills become more and more critical for student success as students advance through elementary school and get ready for middle school, upper elementary students who are at the cusp of adolescence are likely to become less and less responsive to adult direction and more and more desirous of being autonomous individuals (Kuperminc, Leadbeater, & Blatt, 2001). As such, primarily adult-driven efforts to teach self-management are likely to meet with some resistance from upper elementary students. An approach to teach self-management while giving students the opportunity to engage in activities that prepare them for being autonomous individuals are likely to be more successful. WHC was designed precisely for this purpose. Its student-centered approach and emphasis on transferring

management of social skills from the teacher to the student is highly sensitive to the developmental needs of upper elementary students. Our study outcomes suggest WHC appeals to upper elementary students, as it resulted in improved student self-reported use of self-management.

Publications describing findings on WHC pilot test and psychometrics of the uESBA are being prepared and will shortly be submitted to peer-reviewed scholarly journals.

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