

**Evaluation of the Peaceful People Curriculum in the Utica City School District
September 2007 to June 2008
Conducted by Renie Kehres, Ph.D.**

Abstract

The Peaceful People curriculum was evaluated during the 2007-2008 school year as part of a Character Education Initiative in the Utica City School District which also included Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), and Mediation in four elementary schools (two pilot schools and two comparison schools). The evaluation of the Peaceful People Curriculum using the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) produced interesting results. The most robust finding was that Kernan and Watson elementary schools teachers rated students as showing significant improvement in their social skills after participating in the Peaceful People sessions indicating that the curriculum was effective in teaching these skills. These social skills also remained relatively stable demonstrating that, from the teacher's perspective, students were able to maintain the various social skills they learned four months after the intervention. The comparison schools (Albany and Hughes) did not show the same effects from the Peaceful People Curriculum, however, it was determined that these students had fairly high levels of social skills before the intervention.

Description of the Peaceful People Curriculum and Implementation

Peaceful People is designed for grades K-5 and is presented in 30-45 minute segments by trained Peaceful Schools personnel, with the classroom teacher participating. Peaceful People sessions are interactive. The C.A.R.E.S. skills are taught through songs, games, discussion and role plays. The active role the students take allows them the opportunity to experience the curriculum and to practice the skills that are being taught.

(<http://www.peacefulschools.com/education/elementary/people/overview.aspx>)

Peaceful Schools' staff pushed in to all classrooms in the two pilot buildings (Kernan and Watson Williams) served by the PCEP grant and taught students the skills to support the PBIS building wide expectations. For example, at Kernan School, the expectations are to: Be Safe, Be Responsible and Be Respectful. Classroom presentations covered topics such as personal and internet safety. Students were able to practice their safe responses to dangerous situations in their neighborhoods, at school, or at home. The theme of "Respect" is repeated throughout the twelve, 45 minute classroom visits. Students are taught to respect themselves, others and property. Responsibility is another reoccurring theme that is addressed within the context of making good choices and being a productive community member.

Character education lessons are presented using a variety of strategies including but not limited to: literature, drama, music, art, puppetry, and physical activities that require teamwork. In some activities, students are asked to keep score or rank importance, calculate the average score, or add up tallies. In a Self Control lesson, an experiment was conducted using a heart rate monitor to measure the effects of deep breathing on pulse rate. Brain Gym activities were a part of each lesson to give students calming activities that help improve focus. Quotes by famous historical figures are often used to introduce a lesson. When the Peaceful Schools presenter leaves the classroom, teachers are given follow-up worksheets that help to reinforce the lessons. The classroom presentations and follow-up materials help to support learning in the areas of language

arts, music, art, math, science, health, physical education and social studies. Peaceful People staff have a Bachelor’s degree or relevant experience in education, human services, psychology or a related field that promotes youth development and a minimum of 1 to 2 years experience working with youth in a leadership capacity.

The Social Skills Rating System

The **SSRS (Social Skills Rating System)** uses teacher and student rating scales to sample three domains: social skills, problem behaviors, and academic competence. The social skills domain includes four subscales on the student survey (cooperation, empathy, assertion and self-control) and three subscales on the teacher survey (cooperation, assertion and self-control). In addition, teacher’s also rate students on a problem behaviors scale which measures behaviors that can interfere with the development of positive social skills. It assesses behavior in three subscales: Externalizing Problems, such as aggressive acts and poor temper control; Internalizing Problems, such as sadness and anxiety; and Hyperactivity, such as fidgeting and impulsive acts. The Academic Competence Scale which teacher’s also complete provides a quick estimate of academic functioning. Teachers rate reading and mathematics performance, general cognitive functioning, as well as motivation. The SSRS survey instrument has been tested (internal consistency, test-retest and interrater agreement) and has demonstrated reliability. Typically, teacher forms showed the highest degree of reliability followed by the student forms. Three approaches were used to demonstrate validity: content validity, criterion-related validity and construct validity. (<http://ags.pearsonassessments.com/group.asp?nGroupInfoID=a3400>)

Sample and Demographics

The Utica City School District follows the same geographic boundaries as the city of Utica (which has a population of 60,651, according to the 2000 Census). The four city elementary schools chosen for this initiative are located in the city of Utica and serve students from kindergarten to the 5th grade. The time period for this study is from July 2006 through June 2008.

The median income for a household in the city is \$24,916, and the median income for a family is \$33,818. The [per capita income](#) for the city is \$15,248. About 19.8% of families and 24.5% of the population are below the [poverty line](#), including 38.0% of those under age 18 and 12.1% of those age 65 or over. (U.S. 2000 Census) The free and reduced lunch rate for students at the two pilot schools (Kernan and Watson Williams) and the two comparison schools (Albany and Hughes) are listed below:

School	Free and Reduced Lunch Percentage
Albany	73%
Hughes	93%
Kernan	95%
Watson	93%

Fourth and fifth grade students in the four schools were recruited into the study for the Peaceful People Character Education Curriculum (after receiving approval from the Syracuse University IRB. All students were recruited by sending a letter to parents in the opening school packet in

September of 2007. Parents who approved of their child participating in the study signed an active consent letter and returned it to the child's teacher. Sixty percent of the parents gave consent for their child to participate. The students who received active consent to participate in the study were also asked to give their assent before they took the Social Skills Rating System Survey (SSRS).

Students in the pilot schools (Kernan and Watson Williams) participated in the Peaceful People Curriculum in the Fall of 2007 and students in the comparison schools participated in Spring 2008. Students in all four schools completed a pre-test of the Social Skills Rating Survey (SSRS) in October of 2007 before the Peaceful People began in the pilot schools. Following the completion of the Peaceful People sessions, students in all four schools again completed the SSRS in February of 2008. Following the Peaceful People sessions conducted in the two comparison schools, all students completed a final post-test in June of 2008.

Since the data was collected in three waves only students who participated in all three waves were counted as participating in the study (for a total of 388 students which represents 60% of the 4th and 5th grade student population). The total number of fourth and fifth grade students and the number of participating students (along with other demographics) are below:

Enrolled 4 th and 5 th Grade Students						
	Albany	Hughes	Kernan	Watson	Total	Grand Total
4 th	72	68	105	65	310	645
5 th	76	79	104	76	335	

Total Number of 4th & 5th Grade Students in SSRS Study

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Albany	93	24.0	24.0	24.0
	Hughes	80	20.6	20.6	44.6
	Kernan	108	27.8	27.8	72.4
	Watson	107	27.6	27.6	100.0
	Total	388	100.0	100.0	

Grade

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	4	197	50.8	50.8	50.8
	5	191	49.2	49.2	100.0
	Total	388	100.0	100.0	

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	196	50.5	50.5	50.5
	female	192	49.5	49.5	100.0
	Total	388	100.0	100.0	

Ethnicity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Asian or Pacific Islander	22	5.7	5.7	5.7
	African American	104	26.8	26.8	32.5
	Hispanic	59	15.2	15.2	47.7
	White	163	42.0	42.0	89.7
	Other	40	10.3	10.3	100.0
	Total	388	100.0	100.0	

Presentation of Peaceful People in the two pilot schools

The Peaceful People curriculum was delivered at the two pilot schools (Kernan and Watson Williams) during the Fall of 2007. The curriculum consisted of a series of twelve sessions, all of which were conducted in every 4th and 5th grade classroom. The specific session topics are listed below:

1. What is Peace?
2. Community & Cooperation
3. Manners
4. Diversity
5. Choices
6. Understanding Conflict
7. Getting Along
8. Personal and Internet Safety
9. Practice Solving Conflict Peacefully
10. It's Okay to be Angry
11. Bullying Behaviors
12. Review Session

The two comparison schools (Albany and Hughes) did not receive the Peaceful People curriculum in the Fall of 2007 but did receive it during the Spring of 2008. Hughes received all 12 sessions but due to scheduling issues and snow days, Albany only received 8 sessions (topics covered are listed below).

1. What is Peace?
2. Community and Cooperation
3. Manners
4. Diversity
5. Choices
6. Understanding Conflict
7. Getting Along
8. Personal and Internet Safety

They did not receive:

- Practice Solving Conflict Peacefully
- It's Okay to be Angry
- Bullying Behaviors
- Review Session

SSRS (Social Skills Rating System) Results

Paired Sample T Tests

The SSRS data was gathered in three waves to assess both short term and longer term effects of the Peaceful People curriculum. Paired Sample T Tests were conducted on the SSRS data for students and teachers on three waves of data as described below:

- Wave 1 & 2: Kernan and Watson Williams receive Peaceful People Curriculum, Albany and Hughes do not.
- Wave 2 & 3: Albany and Hughes receive Peaceful People Curriculum, Kernan and Watson Williams do not.
- Wave 1 & 3: Kernan and Watson Williams pretest Wave 1 compared to post test from Wave 3 to assess longer term effect.

The results from the data analysis are as follows (the mean difference is significant at the .05 level). For social skills higher means indicate more skill while for problem behavior a higher mean indicates a worsening of the behavior (lower means indicate behavior improvement).

Student Paired T Tests

There were only three significant findings on the student paired t-tests. At Hughes Elementary, there were significant results for Wave 2 vs. 3 for cooperation ($p = .048$) and social skills ($p = .027$). However, when comparing the means it was apparent that the students rated themselves as decreasing in these skills (higher means indicated more skill). The means for cooperation went from 15.24 to 14.68 while the means for social skills went from 56.68 to 54.75. At Watson Elementary there was a significant finding for assertion ($p = .042$) in Wave 1 vs. 3. However, the means also decreased from 14.32-13.71.

Teacher Paired T Tests

Kernan Elementary (Pilot School)

In Wave 1 vs. 2, at Kernan Elementary there were significant positive results for social skills and the subscales of cooperation, assertion and self-control (all at the $p = .000$ level) indicating that these skills had increased after the intervention. There were also significant negative results for problem behaviors ($p = .000$) including the subscales of externalizing ($p = .000$) and internalizing ($p = .003$) behavior and hyperactivity ($p = .008$) and a review of the means indicated that these behaviors were increasing.

In Wave 2 vs. 3, there were significant results for problem behavior ($p = .031$) and the subscales of externalizing behavior ($p = .037$), internalizing behavior ($p = .008$). Comparisons of these means with the means from Wave 1 vs. 2 indicated that problem behavior was continuing to increase.

In Wave 1 vs. 3, there were again significant positive results for social skills and the subscales of cooperation, assertion and self-control (all at the $p = .000$ level). A comparison of means from Wave 2 vs. 3 indicated cooperation increased from (15.28 to 15.63), assertion showed a very slight decrease (15.09 to 15.07), self-control showed a

small decrease (16.11 to 15.87), and total social skills showed a slight decrease (16.54 to 16.43). However, teacher's also rated problem behaviors as continuing to increase based on a review of the means from Wave 2 and Wave 3. Problem behaviors ($p = .000$) went from 6.09 to 6.75), externalizing behavior ($p = .000$) went from 1.89 to 2.12, internalizing behavior ($p = .000$) went from 1.85 to 2.25 and hyperactivity ($p = .023$) went from 2.35 to 2.40.

Watson Elementary (Pilot School)

In Wave 1 vs. 2 at Watson Elementary there were significant positive results for social skills and the subscales of cooperation, assertion and self-control (all at the $p = .000$ level) indicating that these skills had increased after the intervention. There were also significant negative results for problem behaviors including the subscales of externalizing and internalizing behavior and hyperactivity (all at the $p = .000$ level) and a review of the means indicated that these behaviors were increasing.

In Wave 2 vs. 3, there were significant results for problem behavior ($p = .015$) and internalizing behavior ($p = .003$). Comparisons of these means with the means from Wave 1 vs. 2 indicated that these behaviors were continuing to increase.

In Wave 1 vs. 3, there were again significant positive results for social skills and the subscales of cooperation, assertion and self-control (all at the $p = .000$ level). A comparison of means from Wave 2 and Wave 3 showed that cooperation (15.60 -15.69) and assertion (15.33 – 15.40) showed slight increases while self-control (14.72-14.44) and social skills (45.74 – 45.49) showed slight decreases. However, teacher's also rated problem behaviors as continuing to increase based on a review of the means from Wave 2 and 3. Problem behaviors ($p = .000$) went from (7.81 to 9.29), externalizing behavior ($p = .000$) went from 2.61 to 3.04, internalizing behavior ($p = .000$) went from 2.28 to 3.02, and hyperactivity ($p = .000$) went from 2.92 to 3.19.

Albany Elementary (Comparison School)

In Wave 1 vs. 2 at Albany Elementary, there were significant positive findings for social skills ($p = 0.25$) and the subscale of assertion ($p = .039$) indicating that these skills had increased without the intervention. The cooperation subscale had marginally significant positive findings ($p = 0.55$). The externalizing behavior subscale was also significant ($p = .010$), however, a review of the means revealed that these behaviors were increasing.

Following the intervention (Wave 2 vs. 3) there were only significant results for problem behaviors ($p = 0.44$ and internalizing behavior ($p = .016$), while externalizing behavior was marginally significant ($p = 0.53$). However, a comparison of the means from Wave 2 and 3 indicated that teacher's rated these behaviors as continuing to increase.

Hughes Elementary (Comparison School)

In Wave 1 vs. 2 at Hughes Elementary the only significant result was that assertion ($p = .025$) was rated as increasing even though the intervention had not yet occurred.

In Wave 2 vs. 3 there were significant positive findings for social skills ($p = .029$) and assertion ($p = .016$) indicating an increase in these skills after the intervention.

Repeated Measures ANOVAs

A repeated measures ANOVA was used to analyze the student and teacher data for each pilot and comparison school (Kernan with Hughes and Watson Williams with Albany).

Student Data

The student data only produced significant results between Watson and Albany for the following scales: Social Skills ($p = .006$), Self-Control ($p = 0.42$), Assertion ($p = 0.23$) and Cooperation ($p = .002$). In all waves, students at Albany ranked themselves higher in these skills than the students at Watson (based on a comparison of the means).

Teacher Data

There was no significant difference among the schools on problem behaviors except that a comparison of means indicates that problem behavior was increasing from the beginning to the end of the school year (consistent with the Teacher Paired T Tests).

The comparison between Watson and Albany showed significant results for social skills and the subscales of self-control, assertion, and cooperation (all at the $p = .000$ level). Kernan and Hughes had a significant finding for cooperation ($p = .004$).

Given the difference in each of these schools it was decided that the means could provide more useful information in determining not only the intervention's effect on each school but could also provide information about baseline ratings before the intervention (to determine how the schools compared to each other before the intervention occurred).

The means for the social skills scale and subscales (cooperation, self-control, and assertion) indicate that Kernan and Watson teachers ranked their students lower in these areas initially than the teachers at Albany and Hughes. However, after the intervention the means from Watson and Kernan are similar to the means from Albany and the Kernan and Watson indicating that students "catch up" to the Albany and Hughes students after the Peaceful People intervention.

Discussion Of Results

Student Results

Student results on the Paired T-Tests produced few significant results and the results that were obtained showed a decrease in skills when the means were compared. This is not uncommon given that students sometimes inflate their scores on pre-tests and then give more realistic ratings on post tests after gaining knowledge about the topic during interventions.

On the repeated measures ANOVA, significant results were only found between Albany and Watson on the social skills scale ($p = .006$) and the subscales of self-control ($p =$

.042), assertion ($p = .023$), and cooperation ($p = .002$). However, in all waves the Albany students rated themselves as more skilled in these areas (based on a comparison of the means). This was most apparent at the pre-test stage indicating that the Albany students viewed themselves as more skilled in these areas than the Watson students before the intervention occurred. This is not surprising given that some of Albany's students are from less challenged environments.

Teacher Results

The Kernan and Watson (the pilot schools that participated in the Peaceful People Curriculum in the fall) teachers rated students as showing significant improvement in their social skills on the Paired T-Test from Wave 1 to Wave 2 indicating that the curriculum was effective in teaching these skills (the literature has shown that teacher evaluations of student behavior are more accurate than student self-evaluation). Even more impressive is that these social skills remained relatively stable from Wave 1 to 3 demonstrating that from the teacher's perspective students were able to maintain the various social skills they learned four months after the intervention.

The only positive significant results at Albany occurred on the pre-test before the intervention was administered indicating that these students already had some social skills and assertion and cooperation skills. However, the teachers rated problem behaviors as increasing. At Hughes, the only significant finding was an increase in assertion before the intervention and an increase in social skills after the intervention. Based on a review of the means it appears that Albany and Hughes teachers rated their students as more socially skilled than the Kernan and Watson students even before the intervention.

On the repeated measures ANOVA a review of the means revealed that Kernan and Watson teachers rank their students lower in the various social skills than the Albany and Hughes teachers. This makes sense given that they are working in more challenging environments and have students with greater needs than Hughes and Albany. However, it also appears that the students at Kernan and Watson benefitted more from the intervention than the students at Albany and Hughes (which was also indicated by the Teacher's Paired T-Tests). Thus the Peaceful People curriculum appears to be especially successful with students who are especially lacking in these skills.

While it does appear that the Peaceful People curriculum has a positive effect on social skills it is not sufficient on its own to decrease problem behaviors given the fact that problem behaviors continued to worsen while social skills significantly improved and then remained relatively stable. Thus embedding the Peaceful People curriculum within a larger character education model such as PBIS can provide a more comprehensive intervention when seeking to address both the acquisition of positive social skills and the reduction of significant problem behaviors.

Limitations Of The Study

Due to snow days and holidays, the Albany students only received 8 sessions of the Peaceful People Curriculum instead of the 12 sessions that were administered in the 3 other schools however this does not seem to have made a significant difference in the outcomes since the Albany students ranked themselves as having more skills before the intervention.

Students in all four schools most likely had already received some instruction in Peaceful People in previous grades therefore findings may be more modest than in schools that have never received the curriculum.