

**Yes Pa  
Character Education Program  
Phase II Outcome Study  
Final Report**

**September 2005**

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**Executive Summary**

The Yes Pa Character Education Program began as a live presentation by Fred Sarkis, who grew up during the depression and overcame many hardships through perseverance, positive attitude and belief in his ability to control his own outcomes. Mr. Sarkis' biography *Prisoner of the Truck* (Sarkis, 2000) details the character traits he developed to become a successful businessman. However, single exposure programs rarely have significant or lasting affects. In order to expand Yes Pa into a character education program, several professional educators worked to develop a digest version of the biography intended for use by students in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. A pilot study (Lillis, 2004) found that compared to a control group, students who read the Yes Pa book and attended a presentation by Fred, showed significant improvement in belief in their own control and reduction in belief in luck, powerful others and unknown factors as the controlling factors in their lives. A Teachers' Guide was subsequently developed to provide consistency in implementation and provide teachers with classroom and homework exercises to complement the book. In addition, as the program is implemented in more schools it has become impractical to provide live presentations. The program now provides a 30-minute video featuring segments of Fred's live presentation as well as reenactments of events in his life.

The current report presents findings from the Yes Pa Phase II Implementation Project. Approximately 825 students in eight school districts participated in the Yes Pa character education program including reading the *Yes Pa* book, completing classroom and homework exercises from the *Teachers' Resource Guide* and either attending a live presentation by Fred or viewing the 30-minute video. In each school district classrooms were randomly selected to either complete the program or serve as a control group. Compared to the control group, students who participated in Yes Pa demonstrated greater control belief and belief in effort while they demonstrated less belief in personal attributes or luck as factors that determine outcomes in their lives. Of the students who completed *Yes Pa* with a live presentation by Fred, 7.7% had increased scores on the Control Belief scale compared to 1.7% of controls. Of the students who completed Yes Pa with a video, 7.4% had increased scores on the Control Belief scale compared to 1.7% of controls. These results are not only statistically significant but meet or exceed the level of impact found by many science-based prevention programs.

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**Introduction** Recent emphasis on Character Education has focused attention on the need to develop positive traits in order to assure personal growth and development. The Yes Pa program is a youth development and character education project developed by Mr. Fred Sarkis. Mr. Sarkis was a below average student in grammar school with very low self-esteem. From age 8 to 14, he was the “Prisoner” of his father’s fruit and vegetable truck for 100 hours a week. On winter Saturday nights, he was locked in the back of the truck for four hours waiting for his warden-father to sell fruits and vegetables. He would try to keep warm huddled next to a kerosene lamp. At the age of 12, two dramatic five-minute conversations with his father changed his attitude, study habits and goals. He graduated from business school at 16, 1st in his class. After serving in the Navy, he attended the University of Rochester. At age 24, he pioneered a coffee vending business in Rochester, NY. He was a multimillionaire by the age of 34. He later developed two major \$40 million resorts in the Canandaigua area - Bristol Mountain Ski Resort and Bristol Harbor golf course, marina and condominium complex. At age 51, he was on the verge of bankruptcy but embraced his failures and turned them into success.

The Yes Pa program consists of a digest version of Fred’s biography tailored to a middle school reading and interest level. A teachers’ guide provides discussion points and lesson assignments related to the book. The curriculum is implemented over a six-week period and culminates in a video presentation by the author. Mr. Sarkis emotionally relives, in mini-stories, the extreme hardship he experienced as a child both in school and in his father’s truck, which he refers to as his “prison.” His conversations with his “Pa” taught him the critical lessons he tries to relay to the young people in the audience. Using the acronym ACED he discusses the importance of Attitude, Courage, Enthusiasm and Determination and how each of these affect one’s life.

**Pilot Study** A pilot study of the Yes Pa Character Education Program (Lillis, 2004) found that students who participated in the Yes Pa program showed a significant decrease in the belief their outcomes or successes were directly related to qualities they do or do not possess. The Yes Pa students also had a significant reduction in the belief that outcomes or successes are related to unknown factors or fate and increased belief that outcomes are due to their efforts. While children involved in the Yes Pa program showed these changes in attitude, the children who did not participate in the Yes Pa program showed no change in attitude from pre- to post- testing. In addition, following the program, Yes Pa students were significantly less likely than students who did not receive the program to attribute their outcomes or successes to powerful others, such as teachers, parents or other authority figures. This finding suggests that students who received the Yes Pa program were less likely to believe that people in authority will determine their

success but rather they have control over whether they will be successful. Yes Pa students were also less likely to believe luck controls their destiny. In one of the two schools, Yes Pa students showed significant improvement in 5 out of the 10 scales and were significantly more likely than students who did not receive the Yes Pa program to perceive that they have control of their outcomes or successes in their lives.

However, the pilot was limited to two schools with similar student populations. In addition, since the pilot study, the Teachers' Resource Guide was revised to help add consistency to program implementation. The original Yes Pa program concluded with a live presentation by the programs founder, Fred Sarkis. As the program is scheduled for wider distribution, live presentations for all schools implementing the program, are no longer practical. Thus, a video was developed with scenes from Fred's life and segments of Fred's presentation to student audiences.

*...students who received the Yes Pa program were less likely to believe that people in authority will determine their success but rather they have control over whether they will be successful.*

Character education, youth development and substance abuse, violence and other prevention efforts can only be effective if young people believe there is a connection between their behavior and outcomes in their lives. Yes Pa is a character education program designed to increase young people's perceived self-efficacy. Results of the pilot study indicated that the Yes Pa program is a highly effective program for altering young peoples' view of the control they have over their own lives. Previous research has shown that when young people believe that they have control over their lives (internal locus of control) there is a reduced risk of substance abuse and other problem behaviors, an increase in healthier lifestyles and greater levels of achievement.

*Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by sustained effort raises observers' beliefs that they too possess the capabilities to master comparable activities to succeed.*

**Outcome Study** In order to test the effects of the Yes Pa program, video and presentation, participating 6<sup>th</sup> grade students in eight school districts completed the Control Agency Means-Ends Interview (CAMI) prior to the Yes Pa program (pre-test) and following the Yes Pa program (post-test). A control group of students from the same schools who did not participate in the Yes Pa curriculum and presentation also completed the CAMI.

Accomplishment and healthy lifestyles are generally associated with personal character that includes a belief in control over outcomes and that outcomes result from effort as opposed to luck or other external factors. The Yes Pa program addresses young people's perceived self-efficacy and locus of control, that is, perception of influence over their lives and their social environment. The lessons presented promote a sense of empowerment and control over one's life choices and outcomes. Increased internal locus of control has been demonstrated to predict positive development and reduced problem behaviors (Nowicki, S. and Strickland, B.R., 1973). Several studies have demonstrated

that locus of control can be affected, at least temporarily, by profound events. Albert Bandura developed the theory of social learning, that is, learning by interaction with and observation of one's environment. Recently Bandura outlined the elements of a model of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982, 1989) defined as, "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave."(Bandura, 1989). He describes several ways that individuals acquire a sense of self-efficacy one of which is observation of others. Bandura says, "The second way of creating and strengthening self-beliefs of efficacy is through the vicarious experiences provided by social models. Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by sustained effort raises observers' beliefs that they too possess the capabilities to master comparable activities to succeed." (Bandura, 1989)

A major objective of the Yes Pa presentation is to increase young participants' positive attitudes and increasing young participants' perception of control over outcomes in their lives. Through indirect observation (reading Yes Pa and attending Fred's talk or seeing the video) of Fred Sarkis' sustained efforts and positive attitude, young people embrace their own self-efficacy. Furthermore, both the Yes Pa book and Fred's live or video presentation emphasize the similarities of his childhood to the issues faced by young people today.

*The Yes Pa program addresses young people's perceived self-efficacy and locus of control, that is, perception of influence over their lives and their social environment.*

For example, Fred talks about being socially rejected and teased because he was different. This is an emotional issue faced by most young people at one time or another during their formative years. This adds considerably to the potential impact of the Yes Pa program because as Bandura states, "The impact of modeling on perceived self-efficacy is strongly influenced by perceived similarity to the models. The greater the assumed similarity, the more persuasive are the models' successes and failures." (Bandura, 1989)

## **Method**

In order to test the effects of the Yes Pa program, video and presentation, participating 6<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms in eight school districts were randomly assigned to one of three groups. One group read the Yes Pa book and attended a live presentation by the author (Fred Group). The second group read the Yes Pa book and viewed a video about Fred's life (Video Group). The third group did not read the book or see either a live presentation or video (Control Group). All students completed the Control Agency Means-Ends Interview (CAMI) prior to the Yes Pa program (pre-test) and following the Yes Pa program (post-test). A control group of students from the same schools who did not participate in the Yes Pa curriculum and presentation also completed the CAMI.

**CAMI** One of the major objectives of Yes Pa is to enhance perceived self-efficacy and internal locus of control in young people. An evaluation of the Yes Pa live presentation (Lillis, 2003) found that one of the traditional Locus of Control measures (Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale for Children (M23), did not yield satisfactory results

since most students scored well toward the internal end of the simple scale prior to the program. More comprehensive models of control with more subtle measures have been developed and were reviewed for potential use in evaluating Yes Pa. The measure identified was the Control, Agency and Means-ends Interview (CAMI). The CAMI is a 64- item survey intended to measure 10 components of a young persons' perceptions of control and the relationship between cause and effect. The model set forth by Skinner, Chapman and Baltes (1988) addresses three major components of perceived control. First is "Control" beliefs that is, the general perception that one has control over outcomes in one's life. The second is "Agency" beliefs, that is, the degree to which agents, e.g. one's self, can control outcomes. The third is means-ends beliefs or the belief that having and/or using certain means will effect an outcome. The concept of control is central to the Yes Pa program. Fred's message is intended to increase enthusiasm and promote a positive attitude with perseverance and courage. These concepts depend on the underlying belief that one can control or influence outcomes. The CAMI includes 10 scales addressing Control, Means-end and Agency. Within Means-ends and Agency there are scales for the specific concepts of effort, attributes, powerful others, luck and unknown factors. Fred's basic message is that despite one's attributes, luck, powerful others or unknown factors, effort and perseverance will lead to success. Specifically, Yes Pa addresses five lessons related to this model. These are:

- I. Individuals have control over outcomes in their lives.
- II. Effort lead to accomplishment
- III. Luck is not enough to succeed nor an excuse to fail.
- IV. Powerful others do not control one's life.
- V. Unknown factors will not lead to success nor guarantee failure.

The CAMI was selected to assess change in these concepts following exposure to the Yes Pa program. Use of the CAMI in a pilot study (Lillis, 2004) proved effective in discriminating students' perceptions of self-efficacy and control.

The CAMI was administered to all students in the program and control classrooms approximately one week before beginning implementation of the Yes Pa curriculum. Surveys were administered again approximately one month after completion of the curriculum and either Fred's presentation or viewing the video. Instructions were given verbally and all items were read aloud, pausing to allow students time to select and answer. Students recorded answers directly on the survey form. Data were coded and entered in a computer database for analyses.

## Results

**CAMI** Each of 10 scales on the CAMI consists of several items scored as 1 - Strongly Disagree or Never; 2 – Disagree or Seldom; 3 – Agree or Sometimes and; 4 – Strongly Agree or Always. Range of scores depends on the number of items in each scale. Individual scores were standardized using the combined program and control pre-test means and standard deviations (N=1,155).

**Analysis I-Change in Scale Scores.** The initial analysis of student responses addressed students' positive change or improvement in each of the 10 scales. Students were asked to write their numeric lunch code on the CAMI form. This served as a study ID allowing the researcher to link individual pre- and post-tests while not being able to identify any individual student. Of the 1,155 completed CAMI forms, 650 (56.3%) provided accurate lunch number-IDs on both pre- and post-tests and were thus matchable.

Table 1 presents the proportion of students who showed a positive change in each scale. Comparisons are made between students who read *Yes Pa* and attended Fred's live presentation and control group students. Of the students who completed *Yes Pa* with a live presentation by Fred, 7.7% had increased scores on the Control Belief scale compared to 1.7% of controls. This difference is statistically significant ( $\text{Chi}^2=4.20$ ,  $p<.04$ ). Compared to controls, the proportion of program students showing improvement was also significantly greater for Means-Ends Attributes ( $\text{Chi}^2=8.20$ ,  $p<.005$ ), Means-Ends Powerful Others ( $\text{Chi}^2=3.88$ ,  $p<.05$ ), Means/Ends/Luck ( $\text{Chi}^2=5.30$ ,  $p<.03$ ), Means-Ends/Unknown ( $\text{Chi}^2=5.60$ ,  $p<.005$ ), Agency/Attributes ( $\text{Chi}^2=5.55$ ,  $p<.005$ ) and Agency/Powerful Other ( $\text{Chi}^2=4.36$ ,  $p<.04$ ).

***Of the students who completed Yes Pa with a live presentation by Fred, 7.7% had increased scores on the Control Belief scale compared to 1.7% of controls.***

Table 2 presents comparisons between students who read *Yes Pa* and viewed the *Yes Pa* video and control group students. Of the students who completed *Yes Pa* with a video, 7.4% had increased scores on the Control Belief scale compared to 1.7% of controls. This difference is statistically significant ( $\text{Chi}^2=3.83$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Compared to controls, the proportion of program students showing improvement was also significantly greater for Means-Ends Attributes ( $\text{Chi}^2=7.67$ ,  $p<.006$ ), Means-Ends Powerful Others ( $\text{Chi}^2=5.55$ ,  $p<.02$ ), Means/Ends/Luck ( $\text{Chi}^2=6.98$ ,  $p<.009$ ), Means-Ends/Unknown ( $\text{Chi}^2=13.57$ ,  $p<.001$ ), Agency/Attributes ( $\text{Chi}^2=11.48$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and Agency/Luck ( $\text{Chi}^2=6.13$ ,  $p<.02$ ).

***Of the students who completed Yes Pa with a video, 7.4% had increased scores on the Control Belief scale compared to 1.7% of controls.***

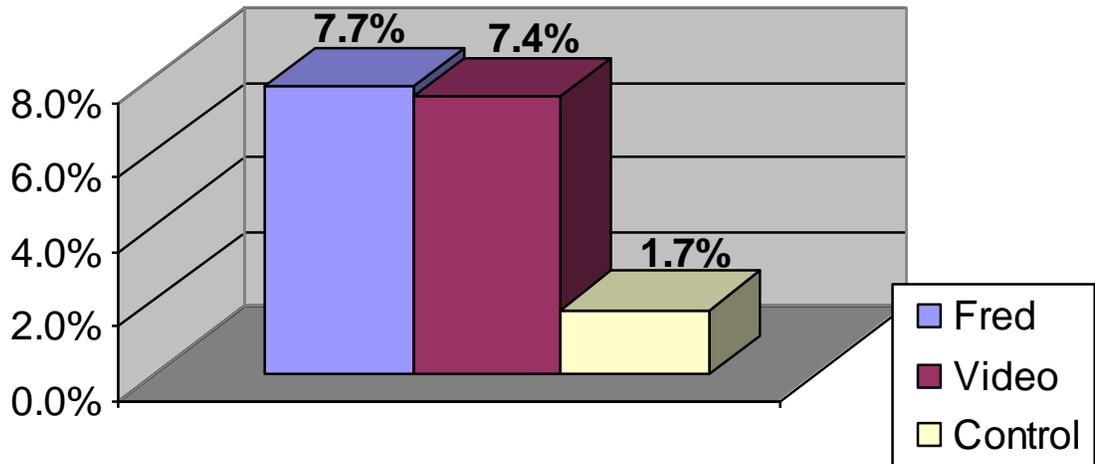
**Table 1**

Scale	Program W/Fred Proportion Improved N=300	Control Group Proportion Improved N=117	Chi2	P
Control Belief	7.7%	1.7%	4.30	<.04
Means-Ends/Effort	7.2%	1.8%	3.49	Ns
M-E/Attributes	8.0%	0.0%	8.20	<.005
M-E/Powerful Others	7.4%	1.7%	3.88	<.05
M-E/Luck	7.1%	0.9%	5.30	<.03
M-E/Unknown	5.8%	0.0%	5.60	<.005
Agency/Effort	5.7%	0.9%	3.65	Ns
Agency/Attribute	5.7%	0.0%	5.55	<.005
Agency/Powerful Others	7.7%	1.7%	4.36	<.04
Agency/Luck	6.7%	1.7%	3.27	Ns

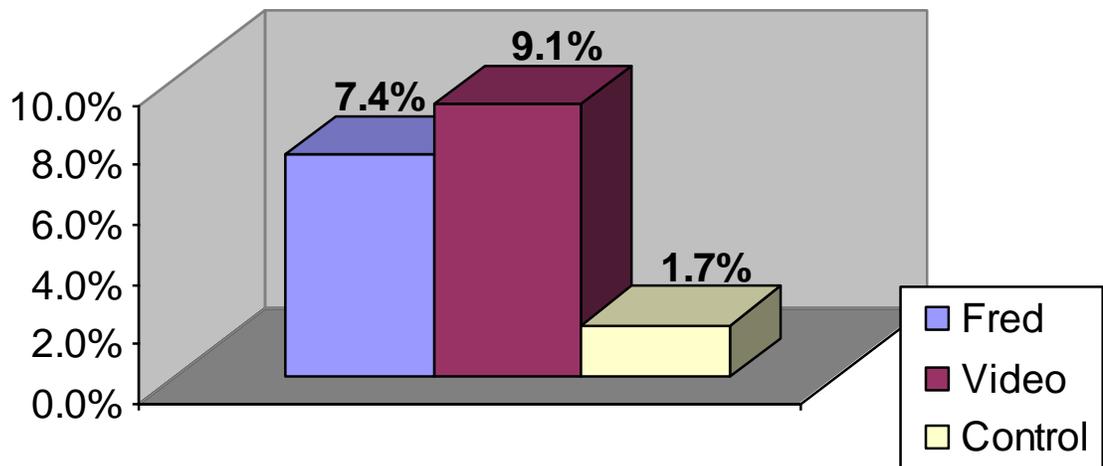
**Table 2**

Scale	Program W/Video Proportion Improved N=233	Control Group Proportion Improved N=117	Chi2	P
Control Belief	7.4%	1.7%	3.83	<.05
Means-Ends/Effort	5.6%	1.8%	1.86	Ns
M-E/Attributes	7.6%	0.0%	7.67	<.006
M-E/Powerful Others	9.1%	1.7%	5.55	<.02
M-E/Luck	8.6%	0.9%	6.98	<.009
M-E/Unknown	12.0%	0.0%	13.57	<.001
Agency/Effort	6.9%	0.9%	4.92	<.03
Agency/Attribute	10.3%	0.0%	11.48	<.001
Agency/Powerful Others	4.7%	1.7%	1.25	Ns
Agency/Luck	9.4%	1.7%	6.13	<.02

## Proportion of Students With Improved Control Belief



## Proportion of Students With Decreased Belief in Powerful Others



## ***Analysis II-Change in Proportion of Students At-risk***

The second analysis consists of comparison of the proportions of students who scored significantly (standard score < -1.96) below the mean on positive scales, e.g. Control Belief, or significantly above the mean (standard score > 1.96) on negative scales, e.g. Luck. These students were deemed to be at “risk” from lack of positive attributes or presence of negative ones.

Table 3 compares students who read the Yes Pa book and attended a live presentation with Fred to the controls that neither read the book nor saw Fred. Table 3 indicates that following the Yes Pa program; the proportion of students at risk from lack of belief in means-ends efforts ( $\text{Chi}^2=4.03$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and from belief in means-ends attributes ( $\text{Chi}^2=4.23$ ,  $p<.04$ ). Compared to the control group, students exposed to Yes Pa with Fred’s presentation showed a significant reduction in risk from belief in luck ( $\text{Chi}^2=3.160$ ,  $p<.04$ ).

***...the proportion of students at risk from lack of control belief decreased significantly among students who were exposed to Yes Pa plus the video...***

Table 4 compares students who read the Yes Pa book and viewed a video about Fred’s life and messages and controls that neither read the book nor saw Fred. Table 4 indicates that following the Yes Pa program; the proportion of students at risk from lack of control belief decreased significantly among students who were exposed to Yes Pa plus the video compared to students in the control group. ( $\text{Chi}^2=10.49$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Yes Pa plus the video also resulted in significant reduction in risk from lack of belief in means-ends efforts ( $\text{Chi}^2=7.08$ ,  $p<.005$ ) and from belief in means-ends attributes ( $\text{Chi}^2=6.89$ ,  $p<.009$ ). Compared to the control group, students exposed to Yes Pa with the video showed a significant reduction in risk from belief in luck ( $\text{Chi}^2=2.80$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

***...students exposed to Yes Pa with the video showed a significant reduction in risk from belief in luck...***

**Table 3**  
**Proportion of Students**  
**at Risk**

Scale	Pre-Yes Pa	Post-Yes Pa	Pre-Yes Pa	Post-Yes Pa	Chi2	p
	Program	Program	Control	Control		
	W/Fred	W/Fred				
	Proportion	Proportion	Proportion	Proportion		
	At Risk	At Risk	At Risk	At Risk		
	N=505	N=432	N=227	N=313		
Control Belief	5.1%	3.9%	6.5%	6.4%	1.74	ns
Means-Ends/Effort	4.0%	3.7%	0.9%	3.2%	4.030	<.05
M-E/Attributes	4.0%	3.5%	2.6%	5.4%	4.230	<.04
M-E/Powerful Others	5.6%	4.2%	0.9%	1.9%	2.250	ns
M-E/Luck	1.6%	1.6%	0.0%	1.9%	3.160	<.04
M-E/Unknown	4.0%	3.3%	4.7%	3.5%	0.140	ns
Agency/Effort	3.6%	4.4%	8.7%	8.2%	0.060	ns
Agency/Attribute	5.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	na	na
Agency/Powerful Others	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	na	na
Agency/Luck	2.6%	2.3%	0.0%	0.6%	0.630	ns

**Table 4**  
**Proportion of Students**  
**at Risk**

Scale	Pre-Yes Pa	Post-Yes Pa	Pre-Yes Pa	Post-Yes Pa	Chi2	p
	Program	Program	Control	Control		
	W/Video	W/Video				
	Proportion	Proportion	Proportion	Proportion		
	At Risk	At Risk	At Risk	At Risk		
	N=323	N=329	N=227	N=313		
Control Belief	4.0%	0.0%	6.5%	6.4%	10.49	<.001
Means-Ends/Effort	2.1%	0.3%	0.9%	3.2%	7.08	<.005
M-E/Attributes	4.0%	1.5%	2.6%	5.4%	6.89	<.009
M-E/Powerful Others	2.5%	1.5%	0.9%	1.9%	1.39	ns
M-E/Luck	2.4%	2.3%	0.0%	1.9%	2.80	<.05
M-E/Unknown	1.5%	2.8%	4.7%	3.5%	0.25	ns
Agency/Effort	3.4%	1.8%	8.7%	8.2%	1.47	ns
Agency/Attribute	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	na	na
Agency/Powerful Others	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	na	na
Agency/Luck	0.9%	1.3%	0.0%	0.6%	0.08	ns

## Discussion

Results of the current study indicate that Yes Pa is a highly effective program for altering young peoples' perception of self-efficacy, that is, control over outcomes in their lives especially as it relates to increased belief in control and effort and reduced attribution to powerful others or luck. The magnitude of the results is not only statistically significant but meets or exceeds the level of impact found by many science-based prevention programs. Perceived self-efficacy, control, or an internal locus of control, has been demonstrated to be related to reduced risk of substance abuse and other problem behaviors and to healthier lifestyles and greater levels of achievement.

Students' "character" includes their perception of control over outcomes in life. Without such perceived control, concepts such as perseverance, enthusiasm and positive attitudes are less relevant. Thus, influencing perceived control over outcomes is central to developing other desirable components of character.

Prior to the Implementation Project, the Yes Pa program included a live presentation by Fred Sarkis, the program's author. As the program is implemented in more schools this approach has become impractical. The program now includes a 30-minute video featuring highlights of Fred's presentation and reenactments of salient events in Fred's life. Results of the current study indicate that the Yes Pa program with the video version of Fred's presentation resulted in significant effects on control beliefs and was as effective as the live presentation.

The CAMI proved to be a reasonable measurement instrument but was limited in two ways. First, even in the pre-test, students in the current sample scored near the high end on most scales allowing for limited upward change. This might also reflect the environment of the schools used in the current study. Comparisons of means were thus limited. The use of tests of proportions however resulted in detection of significant differences in positive change as well as in statistical risk levels. The second limitation of CAMI is that all items are school related, that is, they ask about performance and accomplishment in school. Future evaluations should employ measures of belief in control in other domains such as community and family.

The current study was conducted as part of an implementation project. Eight school districts and 33 teachers participated. All teachers in the two program groups were provided the Teachers' Resource Guide and were encouraged to implement as many activities as possible. A follow-up survey, asking teachers which activities were used, was incomplete with less than half returning the form. This inhibited analyses of the effectiveness of specific activities. Future evaluations should include measurement or observation of implementation to determine effectiveness of specific activities and to develop standards for program fidelity.

Finally, the current study measured the impact of Yes Pa approximately one month after the program. Because of the nature of the implementation study, after post-testing was completed, students who served as controls ultimately attended a live presentation by

Fred and most read the Yes Pa book. Thus, long-term effects cannot be measured since the control group was “contaminated” by exposure to the program. Future evaluations should employ comparison schools or unexposed controls to assess long-term effects.

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