



# National Institute of Justice *Update*

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## The D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> Program: A Review of Prevalence, User Satisfaction, and Effectiveness

Prevention programs have proliferated in response to concern about substance abuse,<sup>1</sup> particularly among young people. An understanding of the effects of these programs is only beginning to emerge, however. One such program is the school-based Drug Abuse Resistance Education Program (D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup>). D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> is distinctive for a number of reasons, among them: its widespread adoption throughout the country; its use of trained, uniformed police officers in the classroom; and its combination of local control and centralized coordination.

A recent study, conducted by the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) and sponsored by the National Institute of Justice, confirmed the prevalence and popularity of D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup>; revealed that its appeal cuts across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines; and indicated considerable support for expansion of the program.<sup>2</sup>

Created in 1983 by the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles Unified School District as a substance abuse prevention program for grades K–12, D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> uses a core curriculum consisting of 17 hour-long weekly lessons taught to fifth- and sixth-graders. Since it was founded, D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> has expanded to encompass programs for middle and high school students, conflict resolution, gang prevention, parent education, and after-school recreation and learning. The curriculum has also been revised over the years as a result of research findings and is now more interactive; that is, it promotes active participation by students. D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> has also established a Scientific Advisory Board to aid in self-evaluation and recommend program changes.

### The Questions Asked About D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup>

The RTI evaluation was two-fold. In the first part the researchers looked at program structure and operations, how the program is perceived by program coordinators at

the school-district level, and factors that make for effective implementation. The second part of the study used “meta-analysis,” a method of analysis involving synthesis of previous studies, to examine the short-term effectiveness of D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup>’s core curriculum. The researchers also compared the effectiveness of D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> to other school-based substance abuse prevention programs.

Among the questions the researchers sought to answer were:

- How extensively is D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> implemented nationwide?
- How is D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> managed and funded at the national, State, and local levels?
- How does D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> compare with other substance abuse prevention programs in community support, satisfaction, and effectiveness?

### “User Satisfaction” Is High

The study confirmed some of the beliefs about the prevalence of D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> and the extent of support for it. D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> has been extremely successful at placing substance abuse education in the Nation’s schools. More than half (52 percent) of the school districts nationwide have adopted the program in one or more of their schools. This is a rate far higher than for the next most frequently used curricula.

Support for D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> is strong, as is user satisfaction and the involvement of teachers. School district drug use prevention coordinators generally indicated that support for D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> among students, school staff, parents, community representatives, and law enforcement agencies is strong. Ratings of other substance abuse prevention programs were also high, but approval of D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> was substantially stronger. In assessing the D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup>

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curriculum and how it is taught, most drug use prevention coordinators gave it higher ratings than they did other programs. D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> outranked these programs on other components, most often by wide margins.

The D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> program appeals to students irrespective of race. Students' receptivity to D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> was rated higher than for other programs, but coordinators in districts with a large proportion of minority students were even more likely than those in districts serving predominantly white students to rate students' receptivity to D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> as very high.

Not only is D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> widespread and popular, but demand for it is high: more than 40 percent of the drug use prevention coordinators plan to expand the program, and 21 percent of those whose districts do not have the program said they are interested in adopting it.

### **Impact of D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup>**

The meta-analysis of D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> programs showed them best at increasing students' knowledge about substance abuse and enhancing their social skills. The effect of D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> on attitudes toward drugs, attitudes toward the police, and self-esteem were more modest. Its short-term effects on substance abuse by fifth- and sixth-graders were small, however. Only the findings for tobacco use were statistically significant. These findings should be

interpreted cautiously because of the small number of studies used for analysis and the low level of drug use among fifth- and sixth-graders.

D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup>'s teaching methods, which combine traditional didactic and interactive elements, were compared to those of other programs. While not conclusive, the findings suggest that D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> may benefit from using more interactive strategies and emphasizing social and general competencies. A revised D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> curriculum that includes more participatory learning was piloted in 1993 and is being launched nationwide this fall. The effects of the new curriculum on learning and behavior may in turn call for a new evaluation.

### **Notes**

1. For the purposes of this study, substance abuse was defined as use of marijuana, alcohol, and tobacco by school-age children. D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> targets multiple drugs, including alcohol and tobacco.

2. The full report, *Past and Future Directions of the D.A.R.E.<sup>®</sup> Program: An Evaluation Review*, by Christopher L. Ringwalt et al. (Research Triangle Park, NC: Research Triangle Institute, September 1994), will be available from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, at 800-851-3420.

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