

KICKSTART KIDS¹

SUMMARY

Evaluation Results²

The KICKSTART KIDS Program

The **KICKSTART KIDS (KSK)** Program is an in-school, life-skills, martial arts/character development program, primarily targeting middle students. The ultimate goals of the **KSK** Program are to *develop character and leadership skills* and to *enhance resiliency* by encouraging students to resolve conflict productively, avoid participating in gangs, choose drug-free lifestyles, and remain in high school until they graduate. The Program's curriculum combines martial arts practice and character development and is an alternative to the standing Physical Education program at host campuses.

KICKSTART KIDS Program Objectives

The Program's annual implementation objectives are to:

- (a) provide martial arts instruction during and after the school day and over the summer to new and returning Program students;
- (b) create an on-campus classroom environment and implement a rigorous curriculum that encourage students to develop and practice conflict resolution, leadership, and value-driven behavior;
- (c) provide highly trained instructors who serve as leadership, value-driven role models, who build authentic, caring relationships with their students, and who collaborate with parents, campus faculty and administrators to ensure student success.

Primary annual and long-term outcome objectives, which are related to the overall **KSK** goals and to Program implementation, include the following:

- (a) to positively impact students' school bonding/performance characteristics, including school attendance and course grades;
- (b) to enhance students' short- and long-term character development;
- (c) to develop students' leadership skills.

The **KSK** Program has expanded since it was first implemented in 1991-92. It currently enrolls approximately 8000 students in Southeast Texas (25 schools), North Texas (15 schools), and Central Texas (11 schools). Most **KSK** campuses are located in inner city environments, and most are listed as Title 1 and/or Free-or-Reduced Lunch schools because they enroll a majority of "at-risk" students.

The KICKSTART KIDS Program Evaluation

In the spring of the 1991-92 school year, **KSK** (then Kick Drugs Out of America) hired an outside consultant to evaluate the Program in Houston. Since that time, the consultant has provided feedback about Program implementation to administrative and instructional staff members as they have continued to develop Program goals and activities. In addition, she has conducted science-based³ evaluations of the Program's impact on student behaviors associated with positive character development and resiliency, including academic success/graduation, school attendance, and school conduct. She has also conducted surveys and interviews with parents, teachers, school administrators and student participants to explore the Program at more depth. The Summary on the following pages describes some of the highlights of findings detailed in her evaluation reports.

¹ **KICKSTART KIDS**, was first organized as the Kick Drugs Out of America Program and then renamed **KICKSTART** before it adopted its current name.

² All evaluation studies are described fully in program evaluation reports that have been submitted to the **KSK** Foundation by Deborah Pirie, Ph.D., PO Box 2277, Asheville, N.C., 28802 (e-mail: deborah.pirie@gmail.com).

³ **KSK** evaluations are science-based because

- evaluation methods are appropriate for the questions. A combination of qualitative and quantitative strategies has been employed to develop an educationally-relevant theoretical perspective, to examine potential causal connections, and to assess implementation.
- survey and observation data are as reliable as instruments and other data sources allow them to be;
- evaluation strategies are clearly described; and
- data and analysis results are presented in enough detail that the reasoning behind study conclusions can be tracked.

KSK Student behaviors associated with performance in school

Results of analyses of data maintained by the school district

During middle school

- **KSK** student groups who participate in the Program for three years out-perform comparable student groups who have not participated in the Program. Specifically, **KSK** students have higher grades and better attendance records at the end of the three-year, middle school period than do students in non-participant groups. Differences between groups are statistically significant.
- Although students benefit most from **KSK** activities if they participate for three years, one-year participants also benefit. “Failing student” and “unexcused absence” percentages in one-year groups are *lower* during their participation year than they are during the years they do not participate. Also, one-year students are more likely to earn “excellent” conduct grades during their **KSK** participation year than they earn during the years they are not enrolled in the Program.

Transitioning to high school

- Third-year, **KSK** students transition to high school at higher rates than do students in non-participant comparison groups. Differences in rates are statistically significant. As an example, 96% in a **KSK** three-year group transitioned from middle to high school as compared to 83% of non-participants.

*Former middle school **KSK** students, during their high school years*

- **KSK** Program activities may contribute to students successfully transitioning through high school. Former three-year **KSK** students have lower dropout and higher grade-to-grade transition rates during the four years they are enrolled in high school compared to similar high school students who did not participate in the Program.

Behavior/perceptions associated with character development: qualitative and statistical studies KSK students (current and former), parents, and middle school teachers

Survey Results

Middle school students

- Responses to questions on the *Texas Prevention Impact Index: Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behavior Student Survey* (the *TPII*) suggest that beliefs and behavior of third-year, eighth-grade **KSK** students differ from those of comparable students who have not participated in the Program. Differences are statistically significant. Specifically, Survey results suggest that **KSK** students are
 - more likely to refrain from engaging in drug-related activity;
 - farther along in adopting cultural norms related to drug use, and in understanding about problems related to drug use.

TPII Survey results also suggest that **KSK** students, when compared to non-participants, feel (a) less alienated, (b) socialize with friends who are less likely to engage in drug-related behavior, (c) view themselves more positively, (d) and feel more competent socially.

- Survey results, as indicated in **KSK** students' responses to the *Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of Students*, show that the Program is fulfilling its mission related to character development. **KSK** students report that their **KSK** peers behave in the positive, character-related ways targeted by the **KSK** Values Curriculum more consistently than do students in the general population at their campuses. Differences are statistically significant. As an example, **KSK** students view other Program participants as compassionate, cooperative, honest, courteous, forgiving, responsible, patriotic, and humble "75% of the time", whereas they see students at the campuses who are *not* participating in the **KSK** Program exhibiting behaviors related to these traits, as a group, only "a little", or 25% of the time.
- Cross-campus results from survey studies reveal a profile of the "typical" **KSK** student to be a person who can be counted on to persevere, exhibit self control in his relationships with other students and with adults, is tolerant of others who may be different from her/him, and demonstrates good sportsmanship.

Results of analyses of data maintained by the school district

*Former middle school **KSK** students, during their high school years*

- Results of analyses of high school disciplinary action data suggest that a student's involvement in the **KSK** Program for three years in middle school contributes to behavioral self-discipline in high school. The percentage of former **KSK** students for whom there are discipline records in high school is significantly lower, statistically, than the percentage of students in a comparison group who did not participate in the **KSK** Program in middle school.

Interview Results (Responses to Open-Ended Questions)

During middle school

- **KSK** middle school participants report that in general, Program activities boost their self confidence, enhance the respect they receive from peers, and help them view their overall school experience positively.
- More specifically, middle school students report that
 - **KSK** allows them to form supportive social networks,
 - the instructor is approachable and supportive,
 - the Program teaches good self-defense techniques, and discipline.
- Interviews with 6th grade students suggest that the **KSK** is an effective Program for creating support for incoming elementary school students. Specifically, students report that Program activities are challenging and provide the safety of community and meaningful relationship, addressing the necessary cognitive and social needs of students in this age group.

*Former middle school **KSK** students, during their high school years*

- High school students who have participated in the **KSK** Program in middle school report that they are less likely to have serious confrontations with others. (Discipline records maintained by the Houston Independent School District support this claim.) These students also report that the **KSK** Program provides them with an alternative to disruptive, adolescent group membership.

*Parents of **KSK** students*

- Parents of participants are enthusiastic about the Program. Many have reported in interviews that their children have more self-control and self-confidence because of their participation. In addition, the large majority of parents want their children to continue with the Program.

Middle school teachers

- Teachers report that multi-year **KSK** participants as a group exhibit good in-class behavior and achieve at higher levels than do students in other groups.

Additional findings

Results of other studies, including interviews with campus administrators

Middle school campus administrator interview findings

- Campus administrators are enthusiastic about the Program. They comment that the instructors are productive members of the campus community and that parent participation has increased as a result of the Program, that parents of **KSK** students are more likely to attend campus functions, including belt ceremonies. And finally, administrators believe that **KSK** activities may serve as the only connection many families have with the campus.
- Campus administrators report that parents of students who are *not* enrolled in the Program call the school expressing interest in the Program.
- Administrators in middle schools claim that **KSK** connects students to school and that the students bond easily with the instructors. In addition, administrators report that the Program “fits”, or complements other initiatives, at their campuses.

General findings from other studies

- The Program is successful in attracting boys and girls in nearly equal percentages.
- The Program attracts students in all ethnic groups, including and especially those who are in the minority at Program campuses.