

Preliminary Short-term Results from the Evaluation of the G.R.E.A.T. Program* – December 2008

Principal Investigator: Finn-Aage Esbensen

Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Missouri-St. Louis

NIJ Award No. 2006-JV-FX-0011 (June 1, 2006 – December 31, 2011)

The Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program is a school based gang and violence prevention program. From 2000 – 2003, the program underwent a comprehensive revision. The revised curriculum was introduced in 2003. In 2006, the National Institute of Justice awarded a five-year grant to the University of Missouri-St. Louis to evaluate the revised G.R.E.A.T. program. The evaluation consists of both a process and outcome evaluation. This brief focuses on the preliminary short-term outcome evaluation results.

The G.R.E.A.T. program has three primary goals: 1) teach youths to avoid gang membership; 2) prevent violence and criminal activity; and 3) assist youths to develop positive relationships with law enforcement. The outcome evaluation examines the extent to which G.R.E.A.T. is achieving these goals utilizing an experimental, multi-site, longitudinal panel design implemented in seven cities across the continental United States. Cities were selected based upon: 1) the existence of an established G.R.E.A.T. program; 2) an acknowledged youth violence or gang problem; and 3) the overall population and geographic sample diversity. Within the 31 participating public middle schools, classrooms at the G.R.E.A.T. grade level were randomly assigned to treatment or control conditions. Of the 195 participating classrooms, 102 received G.R.E.A.T. and 93 did not receive the program. The researchers were required to obtain active parental consent for students to be involved in the evaluation; 78 percent (N= 3,820) of students' parents gave permission. The research design called for surveys to be administered prior to and immediately following program delivery with annual follow-up surveys for four years. This report utilizes the pre- and post-test data and the one-year follow-up questionnaire; these results, therefore, represent short-term program effects.

The student questionnaire contains a number of questions that tap program components, including measures of gang membership, self-reported delinquency, and attitudes toward the police. A number of other program relevant questions were also included in the 24-page questionnaire. Given the research design (individuals are nested within classrooms and classrooms are nested within schools), hierarchical linear modeling techniques were used to assess program effectiveness. In these preliminary analyses we included a subset of seven attitudinal measures and two behavioral measures. The analyses revealed six significant differences between the G.R.E.A.T. and non- G.R.E.A.T. students. Specifically, the G.R.E.A.T. students compared to non-G.R.E.A.T. students reported:

- More positive attitudes to police
- Less positive attitudes about gangs
- More use of refusal skills
- More resistance to peer pressure
- Lower rates of gang membership
- Lower rates of self-reported delinquency.

There were *no* statistically significant differences between the groups on measures of *empathy*, *risk-seeking*, and *conflict resolution*.

At this juncture, we can say that the preliminary results are supportive of a one-year post program effect. That is, students completing the G.R.E.A.T. program have lower rates of gang affiliation and self-reported delinquency than do students in the control group. Additionally, the G.R.E.A.T. students report a number of more pro-social attitudes, including more positive attitudes to the police, than do the control students.

These results are preliminary and reflect only short-term program effect. An important question remains: will these short-term program effects be sustained across time. The longitudinal design of the evaluation (i.e., surveying students annually for four years post program) will allow us to answer the question of whether the program has long-term effects on student attitudes and behavior. These results, however, will not be available for several more years.

**This research was made possible, in part, by the support and participation of seven school districts, including the School District of Philadelphia. This project was supported by Award No. 2006-JV-FX-0011 awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this summary are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice or of the seven participating school districts.*