

**Is G.R.E.A.T. effective? Does the program prevent gang joining?
Results from the National Evaluation of G.R.E.A.T.**

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In 2006, the University of Missouri-St. Louis was awarded a grant from the National Institute of Justice to determine what effect, if any, the G.R.E.A.T. (Gang Resistance Education and Training) program had on students. G.R.E.A.T., which is a 13-lesson general prevention program taught by uniformed law enforcement officers to middle school students, has three stated goals: 1) to reduce gang membership, 2) to reduce delinquency, especially violent offending, and 3) to improve students' attitudes toward the police. To assess program effectiveness, we mounted a multi-strategy research design that included the following components: 1) assessment of G.R.E.A.T. officer training; 2) surveying of a) officers teaching the program and b) teachers and school administrators in whose classrooms and schools the program was delivered; 3) observation of more than 500 classroom sessions; and 4) a randomized control trial involving 3,820 students nested in 195 classrooms in 31 schools in 7 cities. These students were surveyed six times in the course of five years thereby allowing assessment of both short- and long-term program effects. We have produced a number of reports in which we have provided detailed summaries of each of these evaluation components. In this brief report, we will highlight the results from the student surveys to answer the questions, "Is G.R.E.A.T. effective? Does the program prevent gang joining?"

In order to survey students we developed a questionnaire that would allow us to assess the three primary program goals and to tap social skills and risk factors addressed in the G.R.E.A.T. curriculum. We developed multiple indicators of these social skills and risk factors to effectively capture the G.R.E.A.T. lessons.

Approximately half of the G.R.E.A.T. grade-level classrooms within each school were randomly assigned to experimental or control groups, with 102 classrooms assigned to receive G.R.E.A.T. (2,051 students) and 93 classrooms (1,769 students) assigned to the control condition (i.e., students in these classes did not receive the G.R.E.A.T. program). Active parental consent, in which parents explicitly gave permission for their child's participation in the study, was obtained for 78% (3,820 students) of the students enrolled in the 195 classrooms (11 percent of parents declined and 11 percent failed to return consent forms). These students completed pre-and post-test surveys in Year 1 (2006-2007, when students were in 6th or 7th grades) and annual follow-up surveys in each of the following 4 years. The completion rates for the surveys were: 98%, 95%,

87%, 83%, 75%, and 72%. These rates are quite impressive given the mobility of these students; we surveyed virtually all students still enrolled in schools within the original seven school districts, which meant we surveyed students in more than 200 different schools during each of the last two years of data collection.

In a previous publication (Esbensen et al. 2012), we reported on the results of the one-year post-program treatment effects. At that point we found statistically significant differences between the treatment (i.e., G.R.E.A.T.) and control students on 14 out of 33 attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Specifically, the G.R.E.A.T. students compared to non-G.R.E.A.T. students reported:

- More positive attitudes about police (ES = .076)
- More positive attitudes about having police in classrooms (ES = .204)
- Less positive attitudes about gangs (ES = .114)
- More use of refusal skills (ES = .090)
- More resistance to peer pressure (ES = .079)
- Higher collective efficacy (ES = .125)
- Less use of hitting neutralizations (ES = .105)
- Fewer associations with delinquent peers (ES = .083)
- Less self-centeredness (ES = .054)
- Less anger (ES = .057)
- Lower rates of gang membership (39% reduction in odds)
- Less use of lie neutralization (ES = .066; $p < .10$)
- More pro-social peers (ES = .051; $p < .10$)
- More pro-social involvement (ES = .047; $p < .10$)

These results can be considered quite favorable and reflect sustained program effects, one year post-program. Importantly, our earlier process evaluation (see Esbensen, Matsuda et al. 2011) determined that the program was implemented as intended by G.R.E.A.T. officers, giving confidence that these positive results can be attributed to the program itself, and not to some outside or random influence. However, the question remained whether the program had long-term impacts that persisted into high school. To address this question, we continued to survey

this group of students for three more years (most of the students were in 10th or 11th grade at the time of the last survey administration). Remarkably (in light of the rather small program dosage of 13 lessons that averaged 40 minutes per lesson), the analyses revealed results similar to the one-year post program effects, albeit with smaller effect sizes. Across four years post program the following 10 positive program effects were found:

- More positive attitudes to police (ES = .058)
- More positive attitudes about police in classrooms (ES = .144)
- Less positive attitudes about gangs (ES = .094)
- More use of refusal skills (ES = .049)
- Higher collective efficacy (ES = .096)
- Less use of hitting neutralizations (ES = .079)
- Less anger (ES = .049)
- Lower rates of gang membership (24% reduction in odds)
- Higher levels of altruism (ES = .058)
- Less risk seeking (ES = .053)

These effects are all in the direction of beneficial program effects, but again, the effect sizes are modest (some would say small). Importantly, although the other comparisons between the two groups were not statistically significant, all indicated more pro-social attitudes and behaviors among the G.R.E.A.T. students.

Some of these results might appear abstract to those not familiar with the G.R.E.A.T. program or with evaluation methodology. To help make sense of these findings, we provide examples of the actual questions that students were asked to measure these more general content areas.

Attitudes to police – a total of 5 questions including: “Police officers are honest.” (“How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?”)

Police in the classroom – 3 questions including: “Police officers make good teachers.” (“How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?”)

Attitudes about gangs – 3 questions including: “Getting involved with gangs will interfere with reaching my goals.” (“How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?”)

Refusal skills – 5 questions including: “Every now and then we try to avoid doing things that our friends want us to do. How often have you done the following? Said no like I really mean it.”

Collective efficacy – 5 questions including: “It is my responsibility to do something about problems in our community.” (“How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?”)

Hitting neutralization – 3 questions including: “It’s okay to beat up someone if they hit you first.” (“How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?”)

Anger – 4 questions including: “I lose my temper pretty easily.” (“How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?”)

Gang Membership – 1 question: “Are you now in a gang?”

Altruism – 6 questions including: “It feels good to do something without expecting anything in return.” (“How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?”)

Risk seeking – 4 questions including: “Sometimes I will take a risk just for the fun of it.” (“How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?”)

To recap, our multi-component evaluation found that the G.R.E.A.T. program is implemented as it is intended and has the intended program effects on youth gang membership and on a number of risk factors and social skills thought to be associated with gang membership. Results one year post-program showed a 39% reduction in odds of gang-joining among students who received the program compared to those who did not and an average of 24% reduction in odds of gang joining across the four years post-program. To learn more, please see the resources provided below.

Consult the following website for more information about the G.R.E.A.T. program:

<http://www.great-online.org/>

Consult the following website for more information about the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation,

http://www.umsl.edu/ccj/About%20The%20Department/great_evaluation.html.

G.R.E.A.T. has been identified as a promising program by Crime Solutions:

<http://www.crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=249>

REFERENCES

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