

**KICKSTART KIDS  
PROGRAM EVALUATION  
Overall Executive Summary<sup>1</sup>**

***The KICKSTART KIDS Program***

The **KICKSTART KIDS (KSK)** Program is an in-school, life-skills, character development program for elementary, middle and high school students. In addition to *promoting physical fitness*, 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, resist negative peer pressure, remain in high school until they graduate, strive for a higher level of academic success and become productive members of society. The Program's curriculum is based on martial arts practice 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 environment in which students can develop and practice conflict resolution skills; and
- (c) provide role models who exhibit appropriate conflict-resolution-related behaviors, and who encourage students to reflect on and discuss solutions related to conflicts they may be having in their lives.

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' resiliency (i.e., school bonding/performance characteristics including school attendance and course grades);
- (b) to enhance students' character development;
- (c) to enhance physical fitness; and
- (d) to develop students' leadership skills.

The **KSK** Program has expanded since it was first implemented in 1991-92. It currently enrolls approximately 6000 students in 38 schools in Texas in the Houston (27 schools) and Dallas (11 schools) areas. Most **KSK** campuses are located in inner city environment. 90% are listed as Title 1 and/or Free-or-Reduced Lunch schools because they enroll "at-risk" students.

***The KICKSTART KIDS Program Evaluation***

In the spring of the 1991-92 school year, **KICKSTART KIDS** 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-based<sup>2</sup> 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 about the Program. Following is a summary of some of the findings described in her evaluation report

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<sup>1</sup> All evaluation studies are described fully in program evaluation reports submitted to the **KICKSTART KIDS** Foundation by Deborah Pirie, Ph.D., 48 Sunset Terrace, Asheville, N.C., 28801 (e-mail [deborah.pirie@gmail.com](mailto:deborah.pirie@gmail.com)).

<sup>2</sup> **KICKSTART KIDS** 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.

## *Student behaviors/perceptions associated with resiliency (i.e., school bonding/performance)*

### Results of analyses of data maintained by the school district

- **KICKSTART KIDS** student groups who participate in the Program for three years outperform similar student groups who have not participated in the Program at any time during the middle school years. **KICKSTART KIDS** students have higher grades and better attendance records at the end of the three-year period than do students in the non-participant group. (*Kick Drugs Out of America Program Evaluation, 1993-94; Kick Drugs Out of America Program Evaluation, 1994-95; Kick Drugs Out of America: Third Ward Schools, Houston Independent School District: School bonding/Performance and Demographic Data, 1995-96*)
- Even though students appear to benefit most from **KICKSTART KIDS** activities if they participate for more than one year, students who participate for one year also show improvement. “Failing student” and “unexcused absence” percentages in the one-year group are *lower* during the year they participate in the Program. On the other hand, the percentage of students earning “excellent” conduct grades in this group increases during their **KICKSTART KIDS** participation year. (*Kick Drugs Out of America Program Evaluation, 1995-96*)
- Students who participated in the Program during middle school have gone on to high school at higher rates than students in the non-participant comparison group have. According to analyses described in the evaluation that explored this issue, 96% in the **KICKSTART KIDS** three-year group “graduated” from middle to high school, compared to 83% in a comparable group of non-participants. (*Kick Drugs Out of America Program Evaluation, 1994-95*)
- **KICKSTART KIDS** Program activities may contribute to students successfully transitioning through high school. Specifically, **KICKSTART KIDS** students who participate for three years in the Program during middle school have lower dropout rates and higher grade-to-grade transition rates during the four-year high school period than do students in a non-participant comparison group. (*Kick Drugs Out of America 1997-98 Program Evaluation, Report 1; Kick Drugs Out of America, Student Tracking Report*)

### Results of interview and survey data analyses

- **KICKSTART KIDS** middle school participants report that Program activities boost their self confidence, enhance the respect they receive from peers, and help them view their overall school experience positively (*Kick Drugs Out of America: Student Survey – Pilot, 1996-97*)

## *Behavior/perceptions associated with character development*

### Results of analyses of data maintained by the school district

- A preliminary study of disciplinary infractions shows that the number of third-year **KICKSTART KIDS** middle school students with discipline records was significantly less than the number of "disciplined" first- and second-year students. (*Kick Drugs Out of America: 1997-98 KDOOA Participants: Disciplinary Action Account for First-, Second-, and Third-Year KDOOA Students, 1997-98*)
- Results of analyses of high school disciplinary action data suggest that a student's involvement in the **KICKSTART KIDS** Program for three years in middle school contributes to behavioral self-discipline in high school. The number of **KICKSTART KIDS** students who were identified as having a discipline record in high school was significantly lower, statistically, than the number of students in a comparison group who had never participated in the **KICKSTART KIDS** Program. (*Kick Drugs Out of America Report #1, 1998-99: High School Disciplinary Action Account for Three-Year and Comparison Students*)

### Results of survey data analyses

- Responses to questions on the *Texas Prevention Impact Index: Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behavior Student Survey* (the *TPII*) suggest that beliefs and behavior of eighth-grade **KICKSTART KIDS** students who have participated in the Program for three years differ from those of non-participants. Survey results suggest that **KICKSTART KIDS** 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 **KICKSTART KIDS** 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. (*Kick Drugs Out of America: Texas Prevention Impact Index Survey – Eighth Grade Comparison Study*)

- **KICKSTART KIDS** students report, as indicated in their responses to the *Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of Students*, that their **KICKSTART KIDS** peers behave in positive, character-related ways more consistently than do students in the general population at their campuses. Differences within all character trait categories included in the survey instrument are highly significant statistically at each of the campuses considered individually. An especially noteworthy cross-campus trend is that **KICKSTART KIDS** 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 **KICKSTART KIDS** Program exhibiting behaviors related to these traits, as a group, only "a little" 25% of the time". These character traits are among those emphasized by the **KICKSTART KIDS** curriculum. A reasonable interpretation of survey results, therefore, is that the Program is fulfilling its mission at each campus; **KICKSTART KIDS** activities cultivate and encourage positive behaviors related to character development. (*KICKSTART KIDS: An Investigation of Observations of Behaviors Associated with Character Development, Aug. 2003; KICKSTART KIDS: An Investigation of Student Behaviors Associated with Character Development, Sept. 2004; KICKSTART KIDS: An Investigation of Student Behaviors Associated with Character Development – Report #3, Oct. 2005; KICKSTART KIDS: An Investigation of Student Behaviors Associated with Character Development – Report #4, Oct. 2006*)

- Results based on the *Survey of the Behavioral Characteristics of Students* administered at four **KICKSTART KIDS** campuses reveal a profile of the “typical” **KICKSTART KIDS** student from a character development perspective. A typical **KICKSTART KIDS** student 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. (*KICKSTART KIDS: An Investigation of Student Behaviors Associated with Character Development, Sept. 2004*)

### Results of interview data analyses

- Teachers report that multi-year **KICKSTART KIDS** participants as a group exhibit good in-class behavior and achieve at higher levels than do students in other groups. (*Kick Drugs Out of America Program Evaluation, 1992-93; Kick Drugs Out of America Program Evaluation, 1993-94*)
- Middle school students report that **KSK** allows them to form supportive social networks (especially important to the girls), that the instructor is approachable and supportive, that the Program serves an important need (girls in particular are looking for ways to learn how to defend themselves) and that they are more self-confident (especially true for girls) and disciplined (an important leadership skill) because they participate in the Program<sup>3</sup>. (*KICKSTART KIDS: Report #1: Interview Summary; Pflugerville Middle School Program, Fall, 2009*)
- High school students who have participated in the **KICKSTART KIDS** Program in middle school report that they are less likely to have serious confrontations with others, and that the **KICKSTART KIDS** Program provides an alternative for students to disruptive adolescent groups. (*Kick Drugs Out of America 1997-98 Program Evaluation, Report 1*). Discipline records maintained by the Houston Independent School District support the first claim. (*Kick Drugs Out of America: Report #1, 1998-99: High School Disciplinary Action Account for Three-Year and Comparison Students*)
- High School students who participate in the in-school high school **KICKSTART KIDS** Program clearly "get the message" that Program administrators and staff are trying to convey, especially regarding conflict resolution with others. (*Kick Drugs Out of America Interview Summary, Northbrook High School, Spring, 1999*).
- 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, of the 151 parents who responded to a survey, 99% responded that they wanted their children to continue with the Program. (*Kick Drugs Out of America Program Evaluation, 1993-94; Kick Drugs Out of America: Third Ward Survey Results, 1995-96*)

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<sup>3</sup> Other key features of the Program are noteworthy within this context. The martial arts activities themselves allow students to progress and to view themselves as successful. Additionally, students have a clear understanding of, and develop skills related to, the Program goals and curriculum activities that focus consistently on respect and self-discipline (an important leadership skill).

## *Additional findings*

### Results of analyses of data maintained by **KICKSTART KIDS** staff and of interviews with campus administrators

- Campus administrators report that not only are parents of participants more likely to attend campus functions, including belt ceremonies, but that parents of students who are not enrolled in the Program call the school expressing interest in the Program. For many families, **KICKSTART KIDS** activities may provide their only contact with the campus.
- Campus administrators are very 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. (*Kick Drugs Out of America Third Ward Survey Results, 1995-96; Kick Drugs Out of America Program Evaluation, 1992-93*)
- Administrators in middle schools claim that **KICKSTART KIDS** connects students to school and that the students bond easily with the instructors. These administrators are also enthusiastic about the Program because it complements other initiatives, and because the instructors engage fully in the life of the school. (*KICKSTART KIDS: Report #1: Interview Summary; Pflugerville Middle School Program, Fall, 2009*)

### Results of analyses of data maintained by the school district

- At campuses where the Program is fully implemented, it is successful in attracting students year after year. As documented in the evaluation report that focuses in part on this issue, 75% of the students who begin in the Program during sixth grade continue to participate voluntarily through middle school. Another prevention program that has been implemented in the Houston Independent School District and for which good attendance records are available was successful in providing services to approximately 10% of the original eligible student group over a three-year period. (*Kick Drugs Out of America Program Evaluation, 1993-94*) In addition, many students who leave to go on to high school return to continue their training with Program instructors.
- The Program is successful in attracting boys and girls in nearly equal percentages. (e.g., *Kick Drugs Out of America Program Evaluation, 1992-93*)
- The Program attracts students in all ethnic groups, even those who are in the minority at Program campuses. (e.g., *Kick Drugs Out of America Program Evaluation, 1992-93*)