

Important Points from the University of Minnesota Article – March 2000

- D.A.R.E. has been both maintained and disseminated in communities throughout the United States, and continues to be the most widely implemented drug use prevention program in the nation.
- Several evaluations of the D.A.R.E. elementary curriculum reported short-term changes in knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and cigarette smoking behavior, which were only modest in size, and not sustained in long-term studies. A meta-analysis concluded that D.A.R.E.'s short-term effectiveness for delaying drug use was small, and substantially less than that of more interactive prevention programs.
- These interactive programs, however, have primarily been implemented in middle or junior high school, not in elementary school. Even successful curricula have not shown encouraging results when they were evaluated in dissemination studies that have less control over implementation by the investigators.
- Evaluations of D.A.R.E. might be compared with these studies rather than with results from controlled trials.
- The elementary school D.A.R.E. curriculum is enormously popular with students and community members, who cite improved anti-drug attitudes among young people and more positive relationships with police as consistent outcomes of the program.
- D.A.R.E. America also has been concerned with the modest outcomes of the elementary school program and the negative publicity the evaluations generated. Partially in response to these, middle/junior high school and high school programs were developed. In addition, a program of after-school activities, D.A.R.E., + P.L.U.S. (play and Learning Under Supervision) has been piloted in several cities around the country.
- D.A.R.E. has achieved what has been difficult for many prevention researchers to do – to organize and implement an effective dissemination strategy. It seemed important to capitalize on this strength and to work with the D.A.R.E. organization to see if longer-term and more robust outcomes could be achieved.
- The Minnesota D.A.R.E. PLUS Project was funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and was created to build on the successful elements of D.A.R.E. and supplement the curriculum with comprehensive, state-of-the-art prevention strategies.
- D.A.R.E. has public support, perhaps because community members perceive one part of the "safety net" being implemented for young people by connecting them in a positive way with the police.
- D.A.R.E. has responded to criticism and developed a curriculum for middle/junior high school as well as a program of after-school activities, which had not yet been evaluated.
- Conceptualizing a "safety net" for young people may be quite a bit easier than actually creating one. The various sectors of a community schools, police departments, businesses, city and county managers, churches, etc – have independent agendas that need to be at least partially merged for consistent and coordinated prevention messages and opportunities to be implemented.
- Creation of a "safety net" for young people requires a community-level goal and vision, as well as significant buy-in by the various community sectors, so that each sector can more effectively be involved.