

The H.E.R.O. Program

White Paper Executive Summary – K-8 Pilot Program

Based on the increase in violent events threatening the children in our country, it is evident there is a pressing need for a survivability program that can be taught in a non-threatening manner to children as young as 5. Two safety experts collaborated with an educator to address this need. The question they attempted to address was: **Could children as young as kindergarten be taught safety strategies without triggering adverse effects?** Their attempt to answer that question was the development of the **H.E.R.O. Program**, a comprehensive program including of a curriculum introducing and teaching best practices in education and safety. It was predicted teaching and practicing the most effective safe-thinking strategies in the safe environment of a classroom *prior* to engaging in pre-announced drills would be more effective and less threatening than “cold” drills without training, preparation, and dialogue before or after.



Nothing like this had been conceived or developed previously. As such, there were important and valid questions, such as:

- Does the H.E.R.O. program work as designed?
- Does the H.E.R.O. program reach the targeted goals of teaching safe-thinking strategies?
- Would teachers feel more or less confident handling a violent event at school with students under their care after participating in this program?
- What resistance, if any, would be faced from teachers/staff, and parents?
- Would such a program designed for students as young as Kindergarten make them feel *more* safe or *less* safe as a result of participating?
- Could students this young actually learn how to take safe measures?
- Would students in middle school take such a program seriously?



In their attempt to answer these questions, the authors of the H.E.R.O. program conducted a three-phase pilot study in different contexts. The first phase took place in a prominent afterschool program with students, representative of 3 districts, the second phase was with all students in grades K-8 in an entire public-school district, and finally, the third phase was in a large private school. The entire **three-phase pilot study** took place during the fall of 2017 and through the spring of 2018. A total of **19,433 students (K-8)**, **747 staff**, and **38 schools** representing 4 districts and 1 private school participated in the pilot study.

Despite the broad range of diversity represented in the participants of this pilot, the findings were surprisingly uniform. There was very little variance in the findings, regardless of the type of data: questionnaire, field notes, interviews, journals, and testimonials. All forms of artifact evidence such as photos and videos, including student-featured video journals voluntarily submitted, demonstrated remarkably similar outcomes, regardless of context. In addition, the program was featured on local news channels following a lethal gang shooting adjacent to an elementary school that was in the process of teaching H.E.R.O. The school administrator, teachers, and students were interviewed for this local broadcast. This artifact underscored the findings of the pilot study, while being filmed by a television crew and airing on television and online.



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The findings were as follows:

1. The efficacy of the program **exceeded expectations**. Students were able to successfully employ effective safety strategies even in a real-life scenario, while **demonstrating less fear**, rather than more.
2. Prior to starting H.E.R.O., students did not feel safe at school. When asked why, the students responded, “Shootings happen at school.”
3. After participating in the H.E.R.O. Program, students, teachers, and administrators all reported (**without exception**) they felt safer at school as a result of H.E.R.O. Testimonials emerged without solicitation, such as, **“Prior to H.E.R.O. my daughter was anxious and afraid to go to school. Now she is confident and no longer afraid. H.E.R.O. changed her life.”**
4. Students, as young as kindergarten, demonstrated **without exception** and **without hesitation** an ability to hide, build barricades, escape, run and overcome quickly and quietly after being trained in H.E.R.O.
5. **A real-life shooting occurred** adjacent to a school participating in H.E.R.O. Half of the school had been trained in H.E.R.O. The half that **had** been trained **responded safely**. The half that had not did not respond safely. The principal reported her observations to the authors of this paper as well as the local news. One student with **special needs**, who is known to be disruptive, who had been through H.E.R.O. training, was in one of the locked-down classrooms. The teacher reported she was so quiet that after 45 minutes they had to search the room to find her. **She did *not* demonstrate any adverse effects of the event.**
6. **Teacher resistance was expected** when asked to teach children how to survive a violent event. **Surprisingly, this was *not* experienced.** And after the Parkland, Florida shooting, the teachers expressed how scared they were. Positive teacher receptivity increased after Parkland.
7. **Parent resistance was likewise expected**, but as with teachers, resistance was **also *not* experienced**. Out of the nearly 20,000 students who participated, only one parent requested their child be excluded from participating. **There was *not* one negative comment from a parent** in the entire pilot study. The comment heard most from parents was, **“Thank you!”**
8. The results of a Pre-Test/Post-Test given to the teachers indicated a **substantial increase of public school teacher confidence (*at least doubling*)** after participating in the program. In the private school study, teacher confidentiality likewise **moved from less than 50% feeling confident handling a violent situation to 100%** of the teachers who fell on the confidence side of the continuum after teaching H.E.R.O.
9. The teachers participating in the pilot study critiqued the curriculum via a “Survey Monkey” questionnaire. In the public schools, **92.7% of the teachers in K-3, 100% in grades 4/5, and 100% of the teachers (grades K-8)** in the private school reported the curriculum was perceived as **non-threatening by their students**, students were able to learn the stated learning objectives, and the curriculum was easy to use. As one teacher wrote: **“the lessons worked!”**
10. Multiple students with disabilities successfully participated in the program without an accessibility guide, including cognitive impaired, visually impaired, and students who fell on the spectrum. However, an accessibility guide is still a valued aspect of the program that is in process of development.



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