

**Project L.E.A.D.
(Legal Enrichment And Decision-making)**

**Program Evaluation Report
2002-2004**

**Submitted to the Office of the District Attorney,
Los Angeles County**

January 2005

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This evaluation was funded through the Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant administered through the state Office of Criminal Justice Planning and through the County of Los Angeles. The authors take sole responsibility for the information and conclusions presented in this report. Please direct all inquiries about this report to Bernadette Chi at bschi@comcast.net.

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Program Evaluation (2002-2004) Report
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Executive Summary

Background

Project L.E.A.D. (Legal Enrichment And Decision-making) is a law-related education program designed by the Office of the District Attorney of Los Angeles County in 1993. Project L.E.A.D. creates classroom experiences that are intended to give students the motivation and skills to avoid risky or illegal behavior (e.g. shoplifting, vandalism, truancy or dropping out of school, and bullying or discriminatory behavior) in the future. The program was implemented at the fifth-grade level with this prevention goal in mind.

In 2002, the Constitutional Rights Foundation (CRF), a national leader in law-related education (LRE), was contracted by the District Attorney's office to revise the Project L.E.A.D. curriculum. To evaluate the potential effect of the revised curriculum, CRF staff hired outside evaluators, Dr. Bernadette Chi and Ellen Middaugh, for a two-year evaluation. Because there are few formal evaluations of LRE programs, it was necessary to conduct considerable pilot work in the first year of the evaluation to better understand the goals and potential outcomes of Project L.E.A.D., to examine program implementation and to design and test data collection instruments.

Methodology

The first year of the evaluation focused on developing and piloting student attitudinal surveys, a content assessment, student focus group protocols and teacher interview protocols. These instruments were revised in the second year and administered to paired classrooms – one classroom that participated in Project L.E.A.D. and when possible, a similar comparison classroom in the same school that did not participate in Project L.E.A.D. The student surveys and content assessments were administered at the beginning and end of the school year. The student focus groups and teacher interviews took place near the end of the school year. Student survey data was analyzed for pre-post changes as well as for comparisons between the Project L.E.A.D. and non-Project L.E.A.D. classrooms. The student focus groups provided qualitative data that enhanced our understanding of the survey data.

Results

The evaluation found the following:

- **Project L.E.A.D. was implemented well across the classrooms. Teachers and students all recommended that the program be made available to more classrooms.**
- **The program provided students the tools and experiences to help assess difficult situations and make appropriate decisions with clearer understanding of the consequences.**
- **Significantly, participation in Project L.E.A.D. appeared to provide an important protective factor that maintained students' positive attitudes about laws and lawyers;**

reinforced the importance of tolerance; increased student understanding of consequences of their decisions; and maintained positive educational and career aspirations. In contrast, comparison students showed declines in many of these survey items at the end of the year.

- **Overall, findings from this evaluation suggest that Project L.E.A.D. provides a positive, protective effect during early adolescence, a critical period of youth development.**