

Abstract from the 2013 SHAKTI Warriors Program Evaluation

Los Angeles Unified School District – Beyond the Bell Division

Conducted by: Research Support Services (RSS)

On a daily basis, school-age children today are challenged by school violence, bullying, harassment, health-related issues, and academic failures; yet, evidence shows these children enter school lacking the skills needed to manage their behavior and emotions in order to succeed in all areas of their lives (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Stoiber, 2011; Zins et al., 2004).

One of the greatest present challenges in educational programs is that in this digitally driven 21st century society, there is a deficit in holistically integrated approaches to social and emotional learning curriculum embedded with opportunities for real-world applications of the academic, and social and emotional competencies students acquire (Calderon, 2009; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Watson & Emery, 2010; Zins et al., 2004). SHAKTI Warriors was designed to fulfill this deficiency and lead other innovative programs in this mission. However, in order to establish effective, evidence-based practices that support the interconnected continuity of academic, social and emotional learning, all stakeholders, policy makers, educators, administrators, community and school-based organizations, must be willing to pilot innovative programs in order to test them (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Payton et al., 2008).

In 2013, the SHAKTI Warriors program, held by the non-profit Healthy Heroes Alliance, was evaluated for a second time by the Los Angeles Unified School District's (LAUSD) third party evaluator, Research Support Services (RSS).

SHAKTI Warriors was integrated as the Social and Emotional / Healthy Lifestyle Literacy program utilizing a Digital Education platform in 18 elementary schools with on-site after-school programs. The after-school program sites are managed by the LAUSD's, Beyond the Bell department who staffed the 18 school-sites with Traveling Supervisors, Site Coordinators and Coaches. The program began in February 2013, after all staff members participated in an on-site, Professional Development seminar

(Pre-Service) designed and led by members of the Healthy Heroes Alliance team. The SHAKTI Warriors program lasted until the end of the FY13 school year, June 2013.

On average, students participated in the SHAKTI Warriors program two-three times per school week between 1-2 hours each session. This frequency includes time spent both using the Online Academy as well as time spent engaging with the myriad of other experiential components of the SHAKTI Warriors curriculum.

The RSS team purposefully sampled five of the 18 participating schools. These schools had the largest number (*n*) of students participating in the SHAKTI Warriors program for the second consecutive year, a total of 125 participating students. RSS based their current findings on 10 unannounced observations made at the five purposefully sampled schools - two unannounced observations at each of the five schools. Highlights excerpted from the RSS Evaluation Report (2013) of the SHAKTI Warriors program follow.

Compared to the 2012, RSS Evaluation findings, the 2013 SHAKTI Warriors program was:

A newer and more promising approach to after-school academic enrichment that provides fourth and fifth grade students with technological and psycho-emotional [social and emotional learning] skills that are usually not taught at any grade level in traditional schools; much less as part of an elementary education curriculum.

[Professional Development] staff training and lesson plans were greatly improved.

SHAKTI Warriors program assessment capabilities have been considerably improved by appointing a staff member to create and handle training and assessments on a nationwide basis. Links between student ID numbers and the students' online work [point tracking, reading and content-based questions] have been established; and work samples of off-line work [student artifacts produced from the evidence-based (SAFE) experiential lesson plans] are being collected as an additional evaluative measure.

Generalized findings of the SHAKTI Warriors program's quality, curriculum design and content from the RSS Evaluation (2013):

The SHAKTI Warriors program is a true 'disruptive technology'. Rather than using traditional worksheets, and cut-out and color activities, the SHAKTI Warriors program's academic enrichment activities include computer graphics, fantasy, storytelling, bi-lingual authentic reading and listening, and dramatic skits. Regardless of the students' reading levels and the skill with which the program was taught, virtually all students appeared to be relating to, and benefiting from, the SHAKTI Warriors curriculum content.

Computer activities and overall program was 'HIGHLY RATED'. [In fact], the SHAKTI Warriors computer software is truly revolutionary, groundbreaking and easy to use.

There is no question that the ability of students to 'read' many of the written articles through their headphones – and listen to them in either English or Spanish- is nearly as revolutionary as the SHAKTI Warriors digital, Avatar design software. Time-after-time, students were observed being totally absorbed in these articles, most of which present relatively sophisticated information. This is one of many reasons that we consider SHAKTI Warriors to be a highly effective academic support program.

References

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