

# The H.E.R.O. Program

## White Paper Executive Summary – High School Pilot Program

Recent mass shootings at high schools across the country have prompted various attempts to mitigate and ameliorate the effects of this increasing problem. A new attempt has been the H.E.R.O. Program, a set of age-appropriate curriculum and training resources developed by Safe Kids Inc. **The H.E.R.O. Program is unique in that it includes student-facing materials taught in classrooms by teachers *prior* to drills.** Additionally, the H.E.R.O. Program was intended to *empower* students and help them feel safer in school.

The H.E.R.O. Program was initially developed for students in grades K-8 in 2016. The findings of the pilot study for this program indicated numerous positive findings which are iterated in the H.E.R.O. Executive Summary (K-8) available from Safe Kids Inc. While private schools and school districts implemented the H.E.R.O. program in grades K-8, there was an increasing demand for a similar program for grades 9-12.

Based on the demand for a high school version of H.E.R.O., Safe Kids Inc. developed a similar program, modifying it specifically for this age group. The high school version of H.E.R.O. was first piloted in a charter high school with 3,056 students. A second case study was piloted in a public school district with 23,103 students in four high schools. Both case studies took place over winter through spring of 2019.

The question the Safe Kids Inc. team attempted to address was: **Could a program like H.E.R.O. provide students with “best practice” active shooter survivability strategies without increasing anxiety or giving away information to students at risk of becoming an active shooter?**

The case studies were designed to mirror those of the 2017 K-8 studies. However, there was one challenge in the implementation of the program that was not predicted and threatened the study. The high school in Case Study 1 altered the program without the consent and vetting of the safety experts. The program being studied was no longer the H.E.R.O. program, but a modification that no longer met the safety standards set by Safe Kids Inc. After considerable discussion, the team made the decision to continue the study, while making note of the serious limitation of the findings. Nevertheless, important unintended findings emerged during the study which are iterated herein.

Although Case Study 2 did not run into the same challenge as in Case Study 1, there was yet another challenge in the implementation of the questionnaires. Although the questions were written to elicit responses from teachers, a large number of student responses were included in the data gathered. Because this was not part of the study design, it was not possible to disaggregate the data by teacher and student. But as the responses were previewed it became clear the unintended inclusion of the students actually brought a vital dimension to the study. Indeed, **the voice of the students in a student-leader focus group as well as in the survey responses emerged as a very important aspect of the studies.** Consequently, their voices are included in the data and the following findings.



**H.E.R.O.**<sup>®</sup>  
HIDE. ESCAPE. RUN. OVERCOME.

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### The findings were as follows:

1. Student testimonials regarding feeling safe at school and teacher support:
  - “[I] don’t feel safe – school shootings happen anywhere. [It] sits in the back of your mind. It’s always a possibility.”
  - **“We are the generation of active shooters.”**
  - “The teachers didn’t take it seriously. **The teachers need to take it more seriously.** These are **our lives** we are concerned about and we felt that the teachers blew it off.”
  - Recurring appeals for “more caring” among the students, “less bullying”, “stop being mean”.
2. Students repeatedly expressed the following opinions on a program like H.E.R.O.:
  - Student-facing lessons taught in a classroom, with opportunities for collaboration and empowerment, as well as instruction in specific safety strategies were deemed very important – even more important than academics by students (including AP students).
  - A program like H.E.R.O. **increased a sense of security in addition to awareness.**
  - Current school wide drills alone are insufficient.
  - They desired a program that is realistic, but not too graphic.
3. **Student testimonials** of the H.E.R.O. program:
  - “I feel more secured and empowered.”
  - “The acronym is easy to remember. I cannot tell you what (another acronym) stands for.”
  - “I liked the interaction and collaboration.”
  - “It started conversations between teachers and students.”
  - “It’s more than just a drill.”
  - “I feel prepared and it’s an investment that will last a long time.”
  - “This was the first time we students were told what we could do and how to do it.”
4. Participant responses on the perceived efficacy of the program (teachers and students):  
When the responses for “Strongly Agree” and “Somewhat Agree” were collapsed and averaged across the five lessons, the combined participants responded they agreed for the lessons Prevention, Hide, Escape, and Run were: age-appropriate (94.08%), concepts were easily understood (96.57%), students were able to attain the objectives (96.47%), and the lessons were perceived to be non-threatening (97.11%).
5. A **special education class** was observed participating in the program. The teacher did not appear to have any difficulty modifying the program for the class. They all demonstrated **awareness and ability to perform the safety strategy being taught.** An accessibility guide has been developed for grades K-8 and a companion guide for grades 9-12 is in development.



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