The Science Behind Kids at Hope
1993-2005

Executive Summary

This research synthesis provides a compelling body of evidence, which laid the foundation for the Kids at Hope initiative. Most striking in this report is the tremendous and life changing influence each individual’s personal belief and feelings about children offers, followed by a simple but powerful expression of the four common elements of success that support the achievement of all youth, including our most vulnerable young people. The synthesis also underscores the critical notion that to experience and practice hope and optimism children need to understand and define the destinations where life’s journey will lead them. Furthermore, a cultural strategic framework is explored which demonstrates how a community could effectively rally around its youth and be dramatically more successful than any one group, institution, program or service could alone. Lastly, this study presents a series of university led evaluations, which strongly validates the effectiveness of the Kid at Hope design.

The conclusion is clear; all children can succeed, NO EXCEPTIONS!
Beginning in 1994, Kids at Hope decided to take a fresh look at the current understanding of youth development.

The goal of this effort was to ensure that the Kids at Hope conclusions, recommendations, practices and evaluations would be driven by evidence-based research, including:

**Empirical Methods**
- Rigorous and adequate data analyses
- Measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data
- Experimental or quasi-experimental design
- Replicating findings
- Expert scrutiny

**The Research and Literature Reviews**

**Teacher Expectation on Student Learning and Behaviors**

Decades worth of research has been conducted on the impact of teacher expectation for student achievement (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Cooper, 1984; Chaikin, Sigler and Derlega, 1974; Beez, 1970; Brophy & Good, 1978; Doubliss, 1964; Rowe, 1969; Mackler, 1969; Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1978; Brophy & Evertson, 1976; Cooper & Good, 1983; McDonald & Elias, 1976; Rutter, et al., 1979; Andrews, Soder & Jacoby, 1986; and Bamburg & Andrews, 1989). Consistently, these studies found that teachers’ expectations of their students play a significant role in the quantity of student knowledge and the quality of the relationship between student and teacher - whether positive or negative.

Bamburg (2002) summarizes effectively the factors associated with low teacher expectations:

...while some expectations result from the action and belief of teachers, others occur as a result of factors that exist both inside and outside of the classroom.

**Background**

**Evidence of Effectiveness**

Kids at Hope was founded in 1993 as an effort to reverse the stigma and stereotype exhibited in the phrase “youth at risk,” which was created to summarize the many threats to our children. The term “youth at risk” has unwittingly taken on a life of its own and has been used, abused and misused in an effort to express the many negative consequences facing young people. The “at-risk” stereotype has prematurely judged our youth guilty until proven innocent.

Scientific literature abounds with studies about subliminal priming (Lowery, 2004), which affects our actions toward stereotyped individuals. This attribution theory is based on the impact of our unconscious impressions about other people. The term at-risk is heard and seen in the mass-media, at conferences, in literature, in staff meetings and through one-on-one communication. We form negative assumptions about children viewed as being “at risk.” The expression is all too simple and too broad to apply to our youth. Labeling our children “at risk” is a weak and dangerous attempt to neatly summarize many of the problems children and youth face today.

Educators have long understood the consequences of becoming trapped in the self-fulfilling paradigm. In 1968, Jacobson and Rosenthal studied the self-fulfilling prophecy in their landmark investigation into the Pygmalion Effect. This study, which has been validated every decade since its publication, proved that teachers' expectations of students, whether valid or invalid, affect their learning achievement.

Armed with this information, and much more, Kids at Hope pursued the simple yet crucial question:

**Why do some children succeed and others fail?**
He discusses the impact of misused testing, misdiagnosing of students’ potential to learn (innate abilities versus hard work), teacher efficacy (level of expectations of their own performance), classroom and instructional strategies, lack of resources, level of parent involvement and lack of vision and leadership. Bamburg notes:

If educators are truly committed to creating schools in which expectations are high for all children, then it is incumbent upon them to recreate schools as learning organizations in which teachers, administrators, students and parents work together to create the kinds of schools they desire.

According to Baker (1999), programs should not focus solely on preventing negative behaviors. This limits the programs from targeting positive behaviors. If program participants are only expected to reach a minimum standard, they will probably fail to reach their full potential. The most persuasive argument in changing the youth at risk paradigm is rooted in what educators call the Pygmalion effect, or the idea that one’s expectations about a person can eventually lead that person to behave and achieve in ways that confirm those expectations (Brehm & Kassin, 1996). Originally presented to educators in Rosenthal and Jacobson’s “Pygmalion in the Classroom” (1968), few educators, youth workers, law enforcement officials and others understand how the use of the Pygmalion effect or the self-fulfilling prophecy is used to convey positive expectations and, maybe even more importantly, to avoid conveying negative expectations. Tauber (1998) sums it up well, “the basis for the self-fulfilling prophecy is that once a student has been pegged ahead of time as a troublemaker, nonscholar or likely to be self-centered the chances are increased that our treatment of this student will in effect help our negative prophecies or expectations come true.” Here the self-fulfilling prophecy would work to the detriment of the student.

Baker adds, “On the other hand, we could peg a student as ‘cooperative,’ a ‘scholar’ or likely to be a ‘self starter,’ thus increasing the chances that our treatment of him or her will convey these expectations and in turn contribute to the student living up to our original positive prophecy.” If, as Wagar claims, “The ultimate function of prophecy is not to tell the future, but to make it” (1963, p. 66), then each time adults size up or size down a child, they are in effect, influencing the child’s future behavior and achievement.

During this entire investigation the primary focus continued to be:

Why do some children succeed and others fail?

As a result of this interdisciplinary examination several profound recurring themes consistently appeared in the literature. The most prominent of those themes include:

- Children who succeed seem to do so when they have people in their lives who believe they can succeed.
- Children who succeed have meaningful relationships with caring adults. (Children who fail are disconnected from those meaningful relationships and grow up in our institutions, programs, services and activities anonymously.)
- Children who succeed have multiple goals and an understanding that their futures must include contributions made in home and family; education and career; community and service; and hobbies and recreation.
- Children who succeed are offered greater opportunities to develop their strengths rather than to correct their weaknesses
- Children who succeed are nurtured by a culture that is focused on success and strengths.
The following are just a few examples that highlight our findings and which are found throughout the literature:

- According to Emmy E. Werner, a University of California child psychologist who followed a group of students from 1955 to 1985, "resilient children had at least one person who unconditionally accepted them as they were."

- According to UCLA Professor Linda Winfield, educators need to look at students in a more positive light, paying greater attention to their inherent strengths and developed abilities. "We need to downplay student inadequacies and risks and instead foster daily success."

- In the July 1987 issue of the American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, British psychiatrist Michael Rutter recommended a number of "protective processes" to foster resilience in youngsters. Included in this list were opportunities for children to experience success. The fact that success breeds success creates a future for children, and they become more determined to reach post-high school goals.

- Cornell Professor James Garbarino discusses the issue of terminal thinking, and how the inability to articulate one's future may be a clue as to why some children succeed while others fail.

- Accordingly, authors Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton recommend in their book, NOW Discover Your Strengths, a work based on two million interviews over 30 years, a new language to help us explain strengths, not frailty (or risks). The authors state that, "the language must be common; it must be a language in which we are all fluent so that no matter who we are or where we are from we will know exactly what is meant."

- Dr. Leonard Valverde, executive director of the Hispanic Border Leadership Institute, a seven-university consortium based at Arizona State University comments from a 2002 HBLI report, "If you perceive kids as not willing to learn or not having the conditions favorable for learning, then teachers don't challenge them." The HBLI report calls for an adoption of "a totally new mind set" among policymakers and educators, one that views Latino students as capable of learning, not students who are "disadvantaged and deficient."

- And finally, Yale University psychiatrist Dr. James Comer, in a 2005 interview with Hedrick Smith of Making Schools Work, addresses the issue of success by suggesting that schools need to create a culture in the school that will allow all staff to support the development of children.

Furthermore, the Kids at Hope research review addressed issues including stereotypes, unconscious attitudes, and belief systems affecting youth. Armed with this information Kids at Hope was prepared to determine a course of action designed to rally entire communities around an outcome-based strategy, wherein ---

all children can be seen as capable of success, NO EXCEPTIONS!

Literally hundreds of journals, books, articles and lectures were examined, along with those cited, to establish the Kids at Hope response.

Kids at Hope analyzed the breadth of its research and created the following remarkable, innovative and now well-tested cultural strategic framework in support of all children's success, without exception.
**Anchor Parent** - That person who is responsible for the child’s emotional and physical well-being offered with unconditional love 24/7.

**Other Caring Adults** - Successful people seem to have lots of caring adults in their lives who demonstrate some level of caring. These adults value and validate children as assets and can include (but are not limited to) uncles, aunts, neighbors, teachers, school bus drivers, youth workers, probation officers, physicians, custodians, store clerks, etc.

**High Expectations** - Successful people share the fact that they had one person (or more) who believed in them, sometimes more than they believed in themselves. These adults see many of the treasures that others often miss in children; others may have written them off too quickly. We call these people treasure hunters and they can come from any walk of life or socio-economic status.

**Opportunities to Succeed** - Successful people will acknowledge that they understand that success breeds success, but they also recognize that failure breeds failure. Creating opportunities for children to succeed can be accomplished by helping a child:

1. Belong to something positive
2. Feel useful
3. Feel competent
4. Feel empowered

**Responding to the Research**

After a careful interdisciplinary review and analysis of the research, Kids at Hope recommends the following:

**First,** eliminate the expression “at risk.” This expression demeans children and has been so maligned that its meaning sways in the wind according to the person or group using it. It offers no real value to help children succeed. Replacing “youth at risk” with “kids at hope” focuses on strengths and opportunities, and sets the child up for success. Even the child who is considered most “at risk” is now treated as an asset, rather than a liability.

**Second,** create a cultural belief system rather than just another well-meaning program on top of thousands of well-meaning but disconnected programs. Offer a courageous and bold action-driven statement, which resonates throughout an agency, institution, and community. Kids at Hope offers the self-fulfilling expression that all children are capable of success, without exception. Unlike organizational mission statements, belief systems aren’t owned by any one group, but can be used to share a common cause and unite communities around the strengths of a child.

**Third,** understand that one of the great differences between children who succeed and those who fail is the fact that children who succeed seem to have meaningful relationships with caring adults. Children who fail are disconnected from those meaningful relationships and grow up in our institutions, agencies, programs and communities anonymously.

Furthermore, it is not acceptable just to express such meaningful relationships with such ill-defined words as mentor, good teacher, caring parent, or role model. These terms must be defined according to associated behaviors that describe the types of relationships needed by young people.
Fourth, create a language of strengths and opportunities for children. Ensure that an entire community can use the language. This language must be simple and specific and describe behaviors.

Fifth, ensure that all children are able and empowered to articulate their future. Identify the four major destination points in life where we expect and need our children to contribute. Terms such as “contributing member of society,” “realizing one’s full potential,” or “helping children succeed,” are another set of ill-defined expressions which need to be fully examined. To advance the knowledge of these expressions, Kids at Hope defines success as positive action that results in contributing to one’s Home and Family; Education and Career; Community and Service; and Hobbies and Recreation. The capacity to contribute to each of these destination points results in success, achieving one’s potential and becoming a contributing member of society. Catch-phrases are no longer appropriate; instead, we need a clear understanding of what is required for success in terms of abilities, talents, traits, characteristics and knowledge, and where it must happen for one to truly achieve success.

Therefore, Kids at Hope has constructed a cultural framework and strategy that houses a community’s beliefs, knowledge and practices.
Armed with this powerful and enabling knowledge, Kids at Hope has now trained over 12,000 individuals (through 2005) who are using the Kids at Hope belief system and its strategies to positively promote the strengths and futures of all children.

As of 2005, Kids at Hope is in regular contact with over 250 schools, youth groups, community organizations, police, fire and recreation departments across the country, which have adopted Kids at Hope practices and are positively and intentionally affecting the lives of over 250,000 children with a message and strategy which promotes hope, optimism and success.

Kids at Hope uses the expertise of university faculties to study the effect of its training on those working in schools and community service organizations. Additional academic research has been conducted in school settings to determine if youth in Kids at Hope settings report higher measures of success than those in non-Kids at Hope settings.

**What Kids at Hope Studies and Evaluations Reveal**

In 1999, the first study was conducted to determine the impact of Kids at Hope training on teachers and their students (Baker). Teachers trained in Kids at Hope were found to be more conscious and capable of identifying student problems, and were more proactive in getting parents involved. These teachers developed strategies with parents to achieve student success more than teachers who were not trained.

Since then, two additional studies on the effect of Module I training on teachers, counselors and other trainees have shown that the training is very well received (Bernat). After the training, trainees strongly believe in the Kids at Hope cultural belief system and want to learn how to implement it more fully in their workplaces. On the basis of the studies’ findings, additional forms of training and training exercises were developed.
Accordingly, every year, youth in schools with a strong Kids at Hope culture report that they firmly believe they can be successful, and are filled with hope.

### Study of Experimental and Control Schools

In subsequent years Bernat (2003) studied the impact of the Kids at Hope culture within two schools: one experimental and one control. Those students in the experimental group (adopting the Kids at Hope culture) can identify clear family, school and community based goals they seek to achieve; with 80 percent identifying goals for the present and 30 percent identifying long-term goals. Most youth wish to excel in their studies. Youth in Kids at Hope schools are able to rely on the assistance of various caring adults in their lives, with most indicating that their parents and teachers care about them and have high expectations for them to succeed. These same results were not demonstrated in the control group.

### Study of Seven Schools

A long-term evaluation of the impact of Kids at Hope on children and youth, also conducted by Fran Bernat, Ph.D and J.D., has begun with baseline information collected. Students attending seven schools, of which at least one staff member has participated in Kids at Hope trainings, have completed surveys about their grades, favorite subjects, caring adults and high expectations. Overall, about 50 percent of all students surveyed believed they have a wide variety of people in their lives who care about them, including:

- Parents / Step-parents
- Aunts and Uncles
- Grandparents
- Principals
- Teachers
- Counsellors
- Bus Drivers
- Minister / Church Staff
- Community Organization Staff
- Cafeteria Workers
- Friends’ Parents
- Police at School
- Neighbors
- Coaches

These findings are significant inasmuch as it is proven that unless you believe strongly that all children are capable of success, NO EXCEPTIONS, you will treat those who you don’t believe are capable differently than those you do. This perpetuates the problem of the at risk stigma and stereotype and plays negatively into the self fulfilling prophecy.
U.S. Department of Education Counseling Grant Evaluation

Over a three-year period Kids at Hope was contracted by Dysart Unified School District in Arizona, which had received a U.S. Department of Education Counseling Grant. It was the goal of the district and Kids at Hope to create a positive school climate/culture of success for all students without exception. In order to accomplish this lofty expectation the district had Kids at Hope train all employees certified and noncertified within the Kids at Hope belief system and strategies.

According to the Arizona Prevention Resource Center an Arizona State University entity the following results were defined:

1. Increase in School Attendance
2. Students learned to deal with their feelings
3. Students achieved a sense of empowerment
4. Students increased their self-confidence
5. Increased secondary aspirations; younger children can set goals and are aware of careers
6. A peaceable environment was created - “last year there were 270 fights and this year there were only 30; there were nine students in detention on average last year and this year only four to five”

Additionally, the report cites that 90 percent of the teachers surveyed indicated that Kids at Hope had a positive impact on their school environment and students. The study underscored, “By training all staff, the culture of the program was developed. The foundation was established for improving the school climate for all students, teachers, staff and parents.”

A bus driver who had been trained noted that he began to understand the importance of being the first school official to greet the children each day and saw his role as responsible in setting the tone. The bus driver noted that he practiced what he had learned through Kids at Hope and witnessed much less disruptive behavior on his bus.

U.S. Department of Education Grant Performance Evaluation

In 2003 Kids at Hope and Blueprint Education formed a partnership promoting the Kids at Hope cultural framework. The Kids at Hope belief system and strategy was subsequently adopted by a new charter High School in Phoenix, Arizona. The school was born of the belief system that all students can succeed, NO EXCEPTIONS! The goal at the Kids at Hope Academy is to teach all students effectively, especially children living in poverty.

External evaluator, Dr. Nancy Haas, Department Chair, Secondary Education, Arizona State University at the West Campus, reviewed and summarized data collected as part of U.S. Department of Education Grant awarded to the high school. The data was judged to be both valid and reliable and included both quantitative and qualitative information. The overall finding strongly suggested that the administration, faculty and staff are committed to improving student achievement and overall success of the students.

The following data reflects that outstanding improvement experienced by the Kids at Hope Academy from academic year 03-04 through 04-05.

The goals of the High School included improvement in the following areas:

- Average Daily Attendance
- Mobility Rate
- Student Satisfaction
- Parent Satisfaction
- Passing the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS)

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<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>2003-2004</th>
<th>2004-2005</th>
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<tr>
<td>Average Daily Attendance</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>89%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mobility Rate</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Satisfaction</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>92%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Satisfaction</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>95%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passing AIMS</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>63%</td>
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Conclusion

This research synthesis was prepared to summarize the solid, research driven data from which Kids at Hope drew its conclusions and subsequently designed its cultural strategic framework. Accordingly, this summary further captures the many university led evaluations about the effectiveness of the Kids at Hope strategy, its principles, and practices offering the reader a powerful perspective about the breadth of this initiative’s achievements.

Moving Forward-Rethinking Our Youth Development Strategies

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>20th Century Youth Development Strategies</th>
<th>21st Century Kids at Hope Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizations driven by mission</td>
<td>Organizations driven by belief systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program design makes a difference</td>
<td>Quality of the relationship between adult and child is what makes a difference</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children are viewed as at risk</td>
<td>All youth are viewed as at hope</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on the institution or agency as the change agent</td>
<td>Focus first on the community culture that enables institutions to be the change agent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus is driven by job description</td>
<td>Focus is on the shared responsibilities of all staff and volunteers to make a difference</td>
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<tr>
<td>Success is selective and defined in terms of “things”</td>
<td>Success is defined in terms of life’s destinations: Home &amp; Family, Education &amp; Career, Community &amp; Service, Hobbies &amp; Recreation</td>
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Kids at Hope Research Partnership Receives Awards, Presents at Conferences

- Kids at Hope’s Research Partnership was awarded a Service to Communities Award at WESTMARC’s 12th Annual Best of the West Awards, 2004. The Research Partnership included Arizona State University, the Deer Valley Unified School District and the Glendale Elementary School District.
- National Conference American Society of Criminology 2001, Denver, Colorado – Dr. Frances Bernat and Rick Miller
- American Alliance of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 2000, Orlando, Florida – Dr. Dwayne Baker

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