

# Does Conflict Resolution Education Reduce Antisocial Behaviors in Schools? The Evidence Says YES!<sup>1</sup>

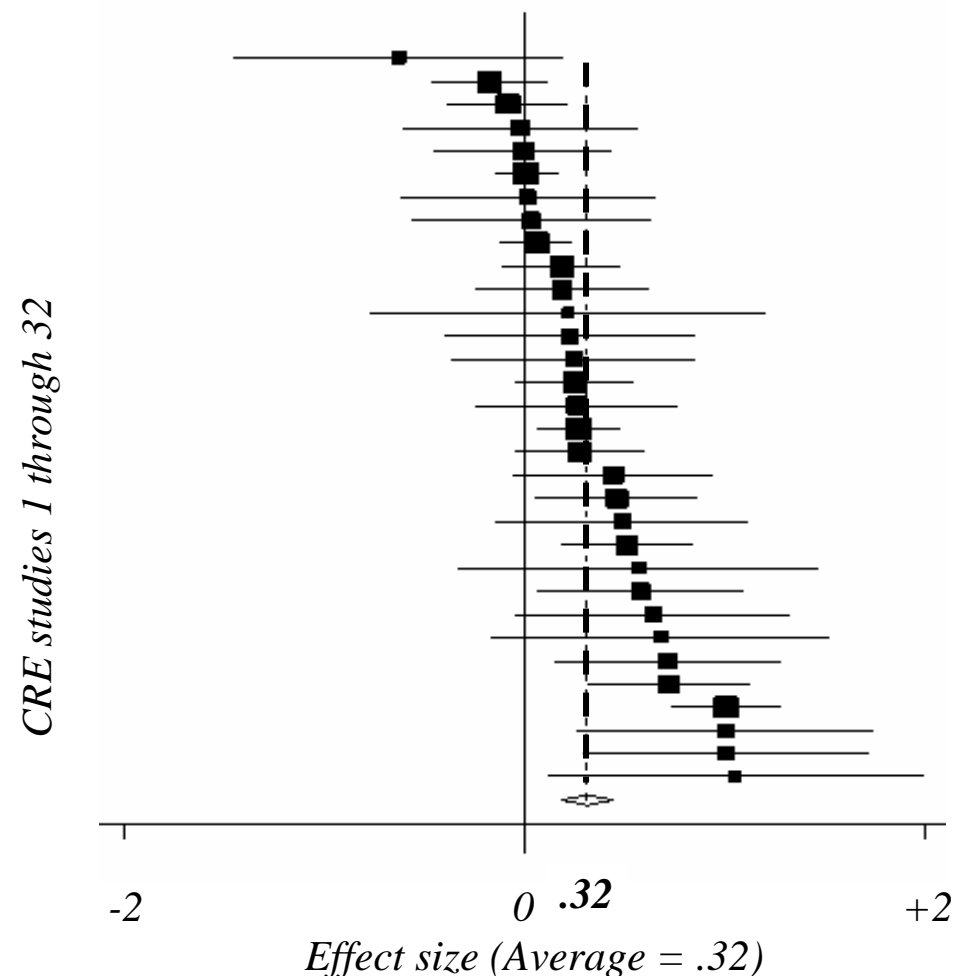
Wendy M Garrard  
Vanderbilt University  
Email: wendy.garrard@vanderbilt.edu

**Background:** Conflict resolution education (CRE) is a popular intervention in schools, but previous reviews of its effectiveness have generated little rigorous evidence to justify its wide-spread adoption. This review examines more than 25 years of evidence to determine whether participation in CRE contributes to reduced antisocial behaviors in K-12 schools, and if so, whether the effects differ by age groups or have practical significance.

**Method:** This review encompasses 32 studies, representing 4,981 students, which compare CRE and control groups on quantitative indicators of antisocial behaviors (ASB) such as office discipline referrals (ODRs) and ratings of problem social behaviors. The standardized mean difference effect sizes ( $ES_{sm}$ ) are pooled systematically and analyzed using random-effects meta-analysis.

**Results:** The overall  $ES_{sm}$  is .32 for ASB, favoring CRE participants. The effects for middle adolescence ( $ES_{sm} = .57$ ) and early adolescence ( $ES_{sm} = .23$ ) are greater compared with middle childhood ages ( $ES_{sm} = .06$ ). Regression analysis reveals that implementation rigor, type of ASB measure, student age, and initial group equivalence account for a substantial amount of variability in the model.

*Distribution of Effects for Antisocial Behaviors  
for 32 School-Based CRE Studies*



The overall effect size of .32 can be interpreted literally as an improvement (less ASB) of about one-third standard deviation for CRE participants. A more intuitive use of the CRE effect size is to translate it into

the percentage of familiar antisocial behaviors it represents. For example, the overall  $ES_{sm}$  can be applied to the percentages of middle and high school students engaging in antisocial behaviors reported by the 2004 Indicators of School Crime and Safety (DeVoe et al., 2004) to show the differences expected due to CRE participation. Based on the report, 13% of students were in a fight on school property, 8% had been bullied at school, and 12% were called hate-related words. When the overall  $ES_{sm} = .32$  is applied to these figures, it translates approximately to a 69% reduction in the students involved in fights (i.e., a 9 percentage point reduction: 13% without CRE, 4% with CRE), a 75% reduction in students being bullied (8% without CRE vs. 2% with CRE), and a 67% reduction in students harassed with hate language (12% without CRE vs. 4% with CRE). Although these problem behaviors have relatively low base rates, they are serious problems, and the reductions that might be expected with CRE programs are not trivial. This interpretation suggests that the statistically significant  $ES_{sm} = .32$  obtained for CRE programs has practical significance as well.

**Conclusions:** Evidence asserts that CRE contributes to a reduction in ASB as typically measured in school-based research that is both practically and statistically significant. The evidence for age effects warrants further research to understand the relationship between maturation, CRE, and ASB.