



Minnesota
Department of Natural Resources
Division of Enforcement
Education Section

1999 Legislative Report

Value Neutral Firearm Safety
Pilot Program

February 1999

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Enforcement is directed by 1997 Minnesota Session Law, Chapter 226, Section 49 to submit a report to the Minnesota Legislature in regard to the efficacy of a value neutral firearms safety program. Pursuant to this request, the following report is submitted to the Legislature and the Legislative Reference Library.

Summary

During the past two years, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources organized and implemented a value neutral firearm safety training program directed at elementary school children in grades K through 6. This is the **Eddie Eagle** program, which is a product of the National Rifle Association (NRA). This pilot program was taught at an out-state school by school staff and presented at a second out-state school by a DNR Enforcement Training Officer. The **Eddie Eagle** pilot program was presented to the curriculum staff in both Minneapolis and St. Paul school districts, but neither school district opted to try the pilot program.

First Pilot Program (out state)

During the 1997/1998 school years, the **Eddie Eagle** program was initiated in the Sioux Valley Elementary school in Jackson County. The program was tried in all grades K through 6. To help formulate conclusions of whether or not the students were learning, a pre/post test was developed and used in all grades. The test was administered before and after the program was presented.

Test Results from Sioux Valley

The results were very encouraging. In all grades the scores improved from the pre-test to the post test. In some cases dramatically.

Kindergarten

14% scores stayed the same
71% scores improved
14% scores were worse

First Grade

23% scores stayed the same
61% scores improved
15% scores were worse

Second Grade

25% scores stayed the same
50% scores improved
25% scores were worse

Third Grade

24% scores stayed the same
70% scores improved
6% scores were worse

Fourth Grade

41% scores stayed the same
53% scores improved
6% scores were worse

Fifth Grade

45% scores stayed the same
50% scores improved
5% scores were worse

Sixth Grade

55% scores stayed the same
45% scores improved

Teacher critiques from Sioux Valley Elementary

Comments:

"The kids loved the eagle. They looked forward to the lessons each day."

"They really liked the video and workbooks".

"Students were very enthusiastic with the video and workbook."

"Excitement - created a high level of interest and conversation."

"I would use this curriculum in my class next year if available."

Second Pilot program

A different approach on presenting **Eddie Eagle** was tried at the Jefferson Elementary school in Mankato. The entire school body was brought into the gymnasium to learn about **Eddie Eagle**. There were approximately 240 children K-through 6th grade for the twenty-five minute presentation by a DNR Regional Training Officer.

Result from Jefferson Elementary

By using the educational technique of "whole group processing", we were able to determine that almost every person who saw this presentation had learned the basic safety message presented in the **Eddie Eagle** program . **If you see a gun, what do you do? STOP, DON'T TOUCH, LEAVE THE AREA, TELL AN ADULT.**

Teacher critiques from Jefferson Elementary

Once again, the response from the teachers was the same:

"Excellent program."

"We need something like this just like the fire prevention program that says **STOP, DROP, and ROLL.**"

"Very controversial, but worth the positive safety message about guns and gun safety."

Twin Cities Metropolitan Area Schools

The NRA **Eddie Eagle** program was presented to the Instructional Services Department of the Minneapolis schools in November of 1997. At that time, Minneapolis schools were very interested in the pilot program and began a survey of teachers at their elementary schools as to who was willing to be part of the pilot program. In early 1998, Minneapolis schools stated that they had narrowed the list to a couple of schools and everything appeared to be progressing smoothly. In early March of 1998, Minneapolis schools declined to be part of the pilot program. Minneapolis schools cited several reasons such as the current testing of students, the implementation of the profiles in learning, and they did not currently have enough time left in the school year to add the **Eddie Eagle** pilot program to their curriculum.

St. Paul Public Schools were contacted in March of 1998 after Minneapolis declined to participate. St. Paul Schools attempted to find an elementary school to adopt the pilot program but given the short time frame and similar conflicts with testing and implementing new curriculum they also declined to participate.

Discussion

Firearm safety programs appear to have a negative connotation in many metropolitan area schools. Many schools that have offered DNR youth firearm safety classes in the past have now declined to sponsor any type of firearm safety training. They often cite their zero tolerance of firearms in the schools as the reason. The **Eddie Eagle** program, even though it is value neutral and offers a simple but important message, is possibly perceived negatively because it is a product of and sponsored by the National Rifle Association (NRA). In discussions with the NRA, they reluctantly provided us with data that showed approximately **50,000 Minnesota youth** have been provided with the **Eddie Eagle** materials in the last 5 years. Typically, this program has been presented to church groups, elementary schools, community groups, and children's organizations. It has been presented to these groups by sheriff's departments, police departments, private citizens, and community education programs.

Conclusion

Eddie Eagle is a fantastic value neutral firearms safety program that has been proven successful in increasing a safety awareness and reducing youthful firearms accidents over the past 5 years across the state and more recently through the DNR pilot program.

As shown by evidence from the pilot program if **Eddie Eagle** were presented to school districts throughout Minnesota, school administrators and teachers would realize that this program is not about hunting and shooting but rather teaches the value neutral gun safety message that is so important for young children who happen across a gun: **“STOP, DON'T TOUCH, LEAVE THE AREA, TELL AN ADULT.”**

Recommendation

After reviewing the DNR **Eddie Eagle** Pilot Program and looking at the wide spread use of **Eddie Eagle** by over 50,000 students in Minnesota, there are two recommendations we would like to make.

First, the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Enforcement sponsor and promote the **Eddie Eagle** program to each school district in Minnesota. If a district realizes the value of the program and decides to adopt **Eddie Eagle**, the Division of Enforcement would ensure that all **Eddie Eagle** materials are ordered delivered to that district. Additional funding would be necessary to support a minimum of one FTE in the Education Section of DNR Enforcement to coordinate and promote **Eddie Eagle** in Minnesota.

Second, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources develop their own value neutral firearm safety program designed for grades **K** thru **6** modeled after the NRA **Eddie Eagle** program. This may be more palatable to school districts after removing the NRA affiliation. This would be at considerable cost and would take additional FTE's to both develop and promote the program.

The NRA Coordinator for the **Eddie Eagle** program at the national level advises that costs for administering the program to entire schools are at approximately **.17 per student**. This cost is inclusive and appears to be less costly than what it would cost to develop a new program.

To see the real success of this program, it may be necessary to mandate its use. The school districts that could use it the most, metro area schools, are the most reluctant to implement the program.