



# DASH (Dynamic, Active, Safe and Health) Evaluation Executive Summary 2024

## Overview

The Assessment and Evaluation Research Centre (AERC) in the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne was commissioned by Blue Light Victoria (BLV) to evaluate the DASH program.

DASH is an in-school, whole-class program for upper primary school students that aims to increase student wellbeing and improve community connectedness.

BLV Program Leads deliver eight 90-minute weekly sessions to students involving a range of activities and discussions, including participation in selected sessions of Community Partners from organisations like Victoria Police.

The evaluation was guided by five Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) and associated evaluation criteria.

Key Evaluation Questions	Evaluation criteria
1. How well is DASH being managed and delivered?	Well-managed
2. How engaging is DASH for all program participants?	Engaging
3. How safe is DASH for all program participants and program partners?	Safe
4. How well is DASH creating an atmosphere of community and connectedness during program activities?	Connected
5. How effective is DASH in producing positive outcomes for participants (including considering unanticipated and negative effects)?	Effective

AERC has completed two interim reports:

1. describing the program, best practice in programs of this type, and the evaluation design (2022)
2. providing initial formative findings on the five KEQs (2023)

This third and Final Report provides summative findings, focusing on DASH's implementation and effectiveness in Terms 2-4, 2023, when it was operating as a mature program. Findings are based on pre-program and post-program surveys of student participants; feedback surveys from teachers and Community Partners; interviews with Community Partners; a focus group with Program Leads; and analysis of Program Leads' end-of-term written reflection reports.

## Key Findings:

### Well-managed | Overall program experience and stakeholder perceptions

Students, teachers, and Community Partners were overwhelmingly positive about the program. 92% of surveyed students said the program was fun and most said that nothing needed to be changed. Teachers and Community Partners said the program exceeded their expectations and 100% of teacher survey respondents said they would recommend the program.

**DASH exceeded my expectations. I knew the program was very valuable but was really impressed. (Teacher)**

## Community Partner contribution, participation, and support

The data showed the Community Partner role is working exceedingly well and is well-supported by BLV. In terms of Community Partners' contribution, teachers and Program Leads reported they played a valuable and effective role in program sessions.

Community Partners said that BLV's professionalism, communication, and support for Partners' participation was excellent.

**The communication has been second to none, really. Keeping us involved, providing all the information that we need...we knew exactly what we were expected to do and what we are expected to do with the students. So, it was all clear. (Community Partner)**

## Results: Engaging

### Program content and activities

The program content was found to be engaging for students. Most students (83%), teachers (89%), and Community Partners (100%) agreed that the DASH program was interesting and relevant. Elements included team work, project development that led to real change, forming new connections with community, feeling like they were connected to their local community and exposure to diverse opinions.

Teachers and Community Partners commented that students were interested and actively participating in sessions.

**The content was engaging, and the students enjoyed the hands on activities. (Teacher)**

### Quality of facilitation from Program Leads

Teachers and Community Partners were uniformly positive about the high quality of BLV's Program Leads. Their facilitation skills, responsiveness, and agility in the moment were essential to make the program an engaging experience for students.

**The facilitator was able to create, sustain and harness energy in both classes, and the level of student enthusiasm was high as a result. (Community Partner)**

### Teacher participation

Program Leads and Community Partners reported that having teachers actively participate in sessions supported and enhanced student engagement in the program.

**The schools where the teachers were actively involved made the sessions easier to deliver and the students enjoyed doing something different with their teachers. (Program Lead)**

## RESULTS: Safe | Program atmosphere

This was the highest rated criterion in student survey data, with 94% of student respondents agreeing that the DASH program felt welcoming (**Error! Reference source not found.**). In qualitative data from students about their favourite part of the program, there were several positive comments about the program being welcoming and inclusive. All teachers and Community Partners responding to the

survey agreed that DASH program sessions were a safe and welcoming environment for students. In interviews, Community Partners described the atmosphere in the program using words like “relaxed”, “fun”, “happy”, and “friendly”.

That we all got a chance and I felt welcomed. (Student)

## Emotional and psychological safety

The data indicates that the program is supporting and safeguarding participants’ psychological and emotional safety. Community Partners and Program Leads commented on the seriousness of the topics covered in DASH sessions and felt that students’ willingness to engage in activities and discussions demonstrated that program sessions were an emotionally and psychologically safe space for students.

## Results: Atmosphere of connection, inclusion, and belonging

The data indicate the program is working well to create a participatory ethos that supports connection and belonging. 90% of student survey respondents agreed that the DASH program made them feel like they were part of something worthwhile. All teachers and Community Partners responding to surveys agreed that DASH sessions had a good vibe that helped students feel connected and included.

Getting to make a difference in the community and feeling welcome and a part of it [was my favourite part]. (Student)

## Empowerment and self-efficacy

The data indicates students increased their knowledge of possibilities for empowerment and self-efficacy through the program with 75% of students feeling confident to ask questions and express opinions”.

[my favourite part was] that we all got a voice/say. (Student)

[my favourite part was] Getting to help in your own way. (Student)

[my favourite part was] being able to express and share my ideas and feelings. (Student)

[I will] express my opinion, I am much more confident now. (Student)

[I will] use my voice and share my opinion. (Student)

## Conclusions

Overall, DASH **performs strongly** in **engaging young people** and **providing a safe space** that builds a **growth mindset** and **connection to community**. The program is working well to **enhance collaboration** between youth participants and community to deliver the student-led projects, build their confidence and ability to work and communicate as a team to reach a common goal.

To learn more about Blue Light Victoria programs, impact and evaluation contact us on email: [programs@bluelight.org.au](mailto:programs@bluelight.org.au)