

Hearing Is Believing

Changing youth attitudes with KIDJAM! Radio



Prepared by Summit Education Initiative

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Summit Education Initiative is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) research and policy organization dedicated to increasing personal and regional prosperity through educational attainment.

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OVERVIEW

KIDJAM! is an online listening experience produced by WAPS-FM in Akron, Ohio. The primary mission of KIDJAM! is to empower and entertain children while enhancing self-motivation, good nutrition, and creating high self-esteem. KIDJAM! achieves this through peer-to-peer communication which introduces a variety of appropriate music styles and, between songs, offer messages designed as motivators for kids to be their best.

KIDJAM! works to accomplish its mission in the following ways:

- providing an extensive variety of commercial-free music for ages 7-12 from all eras that kids and parents can enjoy together without corporate influence or ulterior motives;
- developing and respecting the intelligence of kids and, in their own voices, presenting concepts of healthy choices;
- emphasizing an integrated value system based on principles created and endorsed by teachers, parents and professionals for children;
- celebrating harmony in everyday choices kids make in school, at home and with their friends;
- offering parents a positive, safe place for their children, commercial-free with no per-usage fees.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the introduction of KIDJAM! Radio into after-school programs can contribute to the positive social-emotional development of youth served in such programs. This report highlights changes in youth attitudes and beliefs at a specific after-school program site in 2013 and 2014 where KIDJAM! was introduced.

EVALUATION METHODS

This evaluation employed surveys and a focus group interview, taking a mixed method approach to measuring the impact of KIDJAM!

Survey

We created a survey asking children about the importance of certain lifestyle habits and personal behaviors, all of which reflect the philosophy and messaging behind KIDJAM! Radio. The survey asked children to pretend they were talking to a friend who was their own age, and to determine the importance of each habit or behavior.

Children rated each item as *not very important*, *kind of important* or *very important*. The specific items on the “If you were my friend...” survey are provided along with results in Table 1. Because these items reflect values and habits that are socially acceptable, we assumed most students would rate items favorable. As such, we were most concerned with measuring the extent to which students rated items as *very important*.

The survey was administered approximately 1 week before KIDJAM! began playing at the site, and again approximately 8 weeks after KIDJAM! Radio had been introduced. There were no other significant changes to the after-school program during this time period.

To facilitate understanding, the survey was administered in a group setting during the academic portion of the program by an adult member of the program staff who was able to answer questions as needed. There was no mention of KIDJAM! on the survey, and program staff were not told of the purpose of the survey.

Focus Group Interview

Several months after the full implementation of KIDJAM! Radio, we conducted a focus group with 12 children who had been attending the program throughout the process. The goal of the focus group interview was to collect more descriptive feedback from children about their impressions of KIDJAM! itself.

The focus group interview was conducted in the presence of the after-school program’s operations director.

Participants

There were 29 children in the program who completed pre- and post-surveys; twelve children were randomly selected from that group to participate in the focus group interview.

Children who completed the survey were between the ages of 7 and 10 (mean: 8.4 years). Follow up interviews were conducted approximately 10 months after the surveys, when KIDJAM! was no longer a novelty in the after-school program. Roughly 70% of the participants were girls. The majority of participants (83%) were African American; this is reflective of the population served in the program, which is situated in an urban community. A significant proportion of children (72%) attended the program 5 days per week.

RESULTS

Survey Results

Table 1 highlights changes in the proportion of surveyed children who rated each attitude or behavior as *very important*. Among the 16 attitudes and behaviors presented, children's ratings of importance increased in 10 areas, and declined in only 5 (1 remained constant). There were five areas where ratings of importance increased by 10% or more. Declines in positive attitudes were not more than 5%.

The largest changes in attitudes were related to: taking responsibility for one's own actions (*always tell the truth, even if it means you will be punished; admit to your mistakes and learn from them*); healthy eating habits (*eat healthy foods, not junk foods*); resisting peer pressure (*do the right thing, even if other kids are doing bad things*); and living a grateful life (*always be thankful for the things you do have in life*).

Table 1: Changes in children's assessments of the importance of 16 positive behaviors and attitudes aligned with the KIDJAM! Radio philosophy at one after-school program site in 2013 (n = 29).

If you were my friend... Pretend you are talking with a friend who is your age. Tell your friend how important each of these things is for other kids. How important is it to...	Proportion of students rating attitudes or behaviors as <i>very important</i>		
	Pre	Post	Change
Get a good night sleep?	71%	72%	+1%
Eat healthy foods, not junk food	62%	79%	+17%
Take care of yourself, be clean	86%	82%	-4%
Be active and exercise	69%	69%	--
Always tell the truth, even if it means you will be punished	73%	90%	+17%
Ask for help when you can't find the answer to a problem	60%	66%	+6%
Do the right thing, even if other kids are doing bad things	80%	90%	+10%
Admit to your mistakes and learn from them	74%	97%	+23%
Tell an adult if you see someone getting bullied	87%	83%	-4%
Be nice to others, even if they are different from you	82%	90%	+8%
Be respectful of parents, teachers and other adults	84%	83%	-1%
Always be thankful for the things you <i>do</i> have in life	80%	90%	+10%
Follow rules	84%	83%	-1%
Make good choices and think about right and wrong	77%	83%	+6%
Not be wasteful; reduce, reuse & recycle to protect the Earth	77%	72%	-5%
Do your work before you play and have fun	78%	83%	+5%

Focus Group Results

Focus group questions centered on KIDJAM! music and messaging. The focus group session lasted approximately 30 minutes. During that time, the following questions were posed to the group:

- How would you describe the music you hear on KIDJAM! radio?
- How would you describe KIDJAM! radio to someone else?
- Who do you think should be using/listening to KIDJAM! radio?
- What can you say about the messages you hear between songs on KIDJAM! radio?

Listed below are the general themes that emerged from the focus group.

KIDJAM! music is different from most commercial radio music

In general, there was agreement among children that KIDJAM! is different from contemporary commercial radio. When asked about the music played on KIDJAM!, most children described the music in terms of being different from what they hear on popular commercial radio. Two children described the music played on KIDJAM! as “inspiring”.

KIDJAM! is more appropriate for children than commercial radio

Children in the group clearly understood that KIDJAM! is intended to be appropriate content for children. When asked to describe KIDJAM! to someone else, children provided the following descriptions: “all about kids”; “music that kids should be hearing”; “it plays music that inspires people...the words are better...more gentle.”

Two boys indicated a desire to hear more hip-hop music. The rest of the group, however, immediately acknowledged that the music they hear on (a popular hip-hop station) is “not appropriate” for children. Even one of the boys who made the suggestion agreed, saying “most of the music played on (a popular hip-hop station) is inappropriate. It shouldn’t be played where kids can hear it.”

Ten children (83%) indicated they would want their own children/students listening to KIDJAM! if they were a parent or a teacher.

KIDJAM! messaging promotes wellness and personal growth

When asked whether the messaging between songs on KIDJAM! radio was good for kids, all children agreed that it was. Specifically, children identified the following as messaging they hear on KIDJAM! that they would not hear on commercial radio: “Be active”; “Get outside and play more”; “Try your best”; “Never give up”. Many of the messages children recalled are directly related to KIDJAM! principles.

One girl shared the following: “Between songs, they inspire you to try new things...something you haven’t tried before. They want you to live a good life.” Every child in the group agreed that the messaging on KIDJAM! was positive and good for children.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of after-school programs is to not only provide safe supervision and activities for children beyond the school day, but to also develop in children the attitudes and behaviors that can enhance their lives and lead to increased success. Results of this pilot implementation and evaluation suggest KIDJAM! Radio can enhance the promotion of positive values and behaviors of children in after-school programs.

Additionally, it is clear that children hearing KIDJAM! Radio can distinguish it from commercial radio. Children recognize a difference between KIDJAM! and commercial radio, both in the qualities of the music and in the messaging delivered between songs. The fact that messaging related to health, wellness and persistence were specifically recalled by children in the focus group is most encouraging, as these represent some of the foundational values of KIDJAM! Radio. These messages may, at least in part, help to reduce unhealthy lifestyle choices as children age into adolescence.

LIMITATIONS

While it is clear from this investigation that KIDJAM! can change attitudes in children, it is unclear at this time whether attitudinal changes would lead to changes in children's actual behaviors. None of the children in the focus group indicated they listened to KIDJAM! Radio outside their after-school program. In acknowledging the clear differences between KIDJAM! and commercial radio, it was clear the children are more exposed to inappropriate commercial radio in their personal lives than they are to the positive messaging of KIDJAM!

RECOMMENDATIONS

Children may not view KIDJAM! as a full replacement for commercial radio, but they clearly perceive it to be another voice promoting healthy living and personal growth in their lives. One way to strengthen the impact of KIDJAM! may be to encourage program leaders and other adults to direct children's attention to the messaging between songs, and to build periodic discussions around these messages. As KIDJAM! radio was universally perceived as positive among children in the focus group, it can provide ready-made a platform for discussion and personal reflection. This will also increase the likelihood that children will attend to the messages between songs, and that they will carry the lessons learned beyond the after-school program.

Another opportunity to increase the impact of KIDJAM! Radio on children would be to continue to expand the diversity of appropriate music played. The more engaged children are with the music, the more likely it is that children will hear the messaging between songs.