



INTRODUCTION: Illinois State PREP

The Center for Prevention Research and Development (CPRD) at the University of Illinois serves as the external evaluator of the Illinois State Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP), which is overseen by the Illinois Department of Human Services.

Fourteen providers across the state administer an adolescent pregnancy prevention (APP) evidence-based curricula (EBC) in middle and high school settings. The providers are a combination of youth and family services, health departments, treatment agencies, and community centers.

CPRD utilizes the PREP Surveys to capture youth knowledge, experience, and the effect of the EBC on intended behaviors to inform project implementation and continuous quality improvement (CQI) planning.

PROBLEM: Parent Consent

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) required parent consent for youth survey participation, i.e., only youth who returned parent consent could take the survey. As a result, Illinois State PREP was losing a significant percentage of youth voice every year due to a lack of parent consent. CPRD implemented the following strategies to increase response rates:

- Trainings on the importance of youth surveys;
- Consent forms that detailed the benefits of participation; and
- Incentives for parents to complete the consent forms

However, response rates remained low, with COVID further exacerbating the problem. Comparing the number of surveys completed with the number of youth served, raised serious concerns about the overall representativeness of the PREP Survey data for guiding project implementation and CQI (see table 1).

Table 1. IL State PREP Completed Surveys for Youth Served

Survey Year	Youth Served	Surveys Completed	Response Rate
2018/19	5508	2123	39%
2019/20	6936	3723	54%
2020/21	8105	900	11%
2021/22	8523	3900	46%
Totals	29,072	10,646	37%

SOLUTION: Parent Notification

Looking for a way to reunite youth with their voices to express their knowledge, experiences, and the impact of EBC on intended behaviors, CPRD investigated how to argue for a waiver of parent consent in favor of parent notification.

Parent notification would include all the information of parent consent to ensure that parents were informed before making their decision. However, only parents who did not want their child to participate would need to complete and return an opt-out form.

Utilizing Public Act 102-0522, Senate Bill 0818, and collaborating with the Illinois State Board of Educations (ISBE), CPRD advocated for parent notification to the IRB by arguing that:

- Comprehensive sexual health education had been normalized by ISBE, like other core classes (i.e., language arts, math, science);
- The evaluation was being conducted in an accepted educational setting involving normal educational practices; and
- Since school districts could not require signed parent consent forms for participation in comprehensive sexual health education, a parent notification process for youth participation in the survey would be more aligned to state requirements.

RESULTS: Improved Response Rates

Since the IRB approved the new parent notification process on October 4, 2022:

- **Youth survey response rates increased from 46% to 71%** for the fall 2022 semester (see figure 1).
- **Response rates are expected to be higher during for spring 2023** as youth will start the EBC with the new parent notification process already in place.

Future studies may look at the differences in the youth population now that the parent consent barrier has been removed.

Figure 1. Fall 2022 Youth Voice from PREP Survey



DISCUSSION OF RESULTS:

Lessons Learned

By collecting implementation data, grantees obtain an important resource in better understanding their program and improving the overall health of their youth. Therefore, youth voice is crucial to guiding project implementation and CQI. Since a representative sample is essential, identifying and removing any barriers to youth voice is necessary. CPRD learned the following lessons:

- **For Illinois State PREP, parent notification proved to be a more effective strategy than parent consent for engaging parents.** Making this crucial change in how we informed parents about youth participation significantly improved survey response rates.
- **Engaging ISBE as a collaborative partner facilitated a better understanding of how the state had normalized comprehensive sexual health education, which:**
 - Benefited both our providers facilitating the APP EBC; and
 - Allowed for a successful IRB amendment as concerns for youth exposure to risk were minimized.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Reunite, Reignite, Re-Energize: Innovating for the Future

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF), Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program Grantee Conference held May 23-25, 2023

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