



Working with Schools

July 2013

Partnering with schools is a practical approach to reaching a large number of youth with quality programming. This tip sheet includes key considerations for approaching and engaging schools in teen pregnancy prevention (TPP) work.

WHY WORK WITH SCHOOLS?

More than 37 million young people are currently enrolled in middle and high schools across the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), and in 2011, 47% of U.S. high school students surveyed reported ever having had sexual intercourse (CDC, 2012). Thus, partnering with schools is a valuable strategy for reaching a large number of young people with evidence-based and evidence-informed TPP programs. Retention rates are often higher in school-based programs when they are offered during mandatory school hours. Implementing TPP programming in schools is beneficial to the young people and may result in fewer girls missing school due to pregnancy, better health outcomes for students, and fulfillment of health education requirements. However, before implementation can begin, it is critical to cultivate relationships and fully engage schools and their stakeholders.

WHY SHOULD SCHOOLS WORK WITH US?

When trying to partner with a school on TPP, it is important to describe the benefits of partnering that align with the school's priorities. For example, highlight data on the impact of teen pregnancy on educational attainment:

- 62% of teen girls who have a child before age 18 still have not earned their high school diploma by age 22; (Perper, Peterson, & Manlove, 2010).
- 30% of teen girls who have dropped out of high school cite pregnancy or parenthood as a reason (The National Campaign, 2012a).
- Children born to mothers under the age of 18 score significantly worse than children born to older mothers on measures of school readiness, including math and reading tests (Mollborn & Dennis, 2011).

When approaching school administrators about partnering on TPP, consider using state- or district-level high school dropout data to illustrate the need for a TPP program. Incorporate national and local data to demonstrate the overwhelming parental support for sex education in schools. This may help ease administrators' fears about potential controversy associated with TPP programming. Consider leveraging support from teachers, parents, PTA members, and others in the community to help make your case.

Finally, highlight other benefits of program implementation. For example, some evidence-based programs include community service learning, which can benefit schools by providing campus improvement/beautification projects, peer tutoring, and even fundraising activities.

WHAT DO SCHOOLS NEED TO KNOW?

When partnering with schools, it is essential to set clear expectations. Consider developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that outlines the requirements of working together and what each party is expected to provide. The MOU might include the following:

- the roles and responsibilities for each partner, including who will be responsible for implementing the program;
- the benefits each partner will receive as a result of the partnership;
- the schedule for program implementation and the number of students expected to participate in the program;
- details about teacher training requirements and benefits for educators (e.g., Continuing Education Credits);
- language about the importance of fidelity and related activities (monitoring, data collection);
- project requirements, including the requirements of federal funding; and
- the expected level of commitment and duration of the project.

STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

Challenges to Working with Schools	Strategies for Addressing Challenges
<p><u>Scheduling</u>: Working around the school day can be challenging, particularly when modules in a curriculum do not align with standard periods of the school day. Standardized testing and students' sports schedules can also pose challenges to program implementation.</p>	<p><u>Be flexible</u>: Plan to hold trainings over the summer or during teacher in-service days to minimize the burden on educators and the cost of hiring substitutes. Minor adaptations can be made to lessons so that they fit within the school day. Another option is to implement the program during after-school hours.</p>
<p><u>Administrator buy-in</u>: Principals may be hesitant to add another project to an already full plate. Competing priorities can make it difficult to convince schools that TPP is worth their time and effort. To begin building relationships, it is imperative to identify key decision-makers at the state, district, and local level.</p>	<p><u>Frame your program in terms of benefit vs. cost</u>: Show how your TPP program aligns with state standards for health education, fits within the curriculum framework for the district, or fulfills graduation requirements. Be clear that the program will not cost schools anything. Emphasize that it may provide valuable teacher training and that student attendance will increase as a result of fewer teen pregnancies. TPP programs can also be framed as dropout prevention programs, helping schools to increase their graduation rates.</p>
<p><u>Communication</u>: Educators often use different language than those in the public health field, although we are talking about the same things.</p>	<p><u>Use appropriate terminology</u>: Familiarize yourself with the necessary terms to discuss your program with educators or administrators, such as standards, benchmarks, guidelines, and curriculum framework.</p>
<p><u>Lack of resources</u>: Schools may not have access to supplies, space, or time for additional programming.</p>	<p><u>Leverage available resources</u>: Work with schools to troubleshoot resource gaps. Partner with outside organizations to provide necessary materials or get creative by implementing a program during after-school hours or during other scheduled class time (e.g., when students are already scheduled to be in the computer lab). Look for partners in the community who are eager to donate snacks, art supplies, or other useful resources.</p>
<p><u>Discomfort or anxiety over content</u>: Principals and administrators may have some anxiety over the topic of sex education or TPP. They may fear a backlash from parents and want to avoid any controversy, particularly if they hold an elected position such as superintendent.</p>	<p><u>Cultivate champions</u>: Build community support for your program and show that support through partners who champion your work within the schools. Champions can include educators, parents, youth, physicians, faith leaders, and others in the community. Provide these champions with talking points about your program. Use community platforms such as school board meetings, PTA meetings, and back-to-school nights to build awareness and support for your program.</p>

Challenges to Working with Schools	Strategies for Addressing Challenges
<p>Existing policies: Policies may be in place at the school, district, or state level dictating what topics are taught and how. It is also important to note that often educators within a school are misinformed about policies and are operating under incorrect assumptions.</p>	<p>Be prepared: Research school-, district-, and state-level policies regarding health education. Learn the graduation requirements, state laws mandating sexuality or HIV education, as well as state standards and curriculum guidelines and how your program fits within these. Anticipating questions from parents, teachers, and administrators will instill confidence in your program and save the valuable time of those working in schools. If possible, get a letter of support from the state department of education.</p>
<p>Culture and community: As an outside organization entering a school to facilitate a program, you may face additional obstacles, competing priorities, and struggles fitting in to a tight-knit school community.</p>	<p>Learn your environment: Consider the fit and selection of a program, not only in terms of the population you are serving, but also in the broader context of school culture and environment. Make sure administrators are on the same page by being transparent and sharing curricula in advance of implementation. Consider including administrators in the program selection process from the beginning.</p>

RESOURCES & REFERENCES

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