The role of program components in youth outcome change: A components study of REAL Essentials Advance

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Progress Together

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACYF), Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program Grantee Conference

Core components within 1 TPP program: REAL Essentials Advance

Session objectives

/ **Learn about the REAL Essentials Advance components study**

/ **Understand what youth outcomes changed**

/ **Understand what program components and experiences seem to matter most for youth outcomes**

/ **Consider relevance of findings for the field**

Components study design and data source overview

Background on REAL Essentials Advance (REA) program

/ **Relationship education curriculum for high school–age youth, developed by Center for Relationship Education (CRE)**

/ **87 possible lessons organized in 11 topic areas**

/ **Flexible implementation of curriculum and lessons**

/ **Key feature – development of site-specific scope and sequence (S&S), tailored to meet site**

- Constraints (amount of time available, schedule)
- Needs of students (content, types of activities)

REA Topics

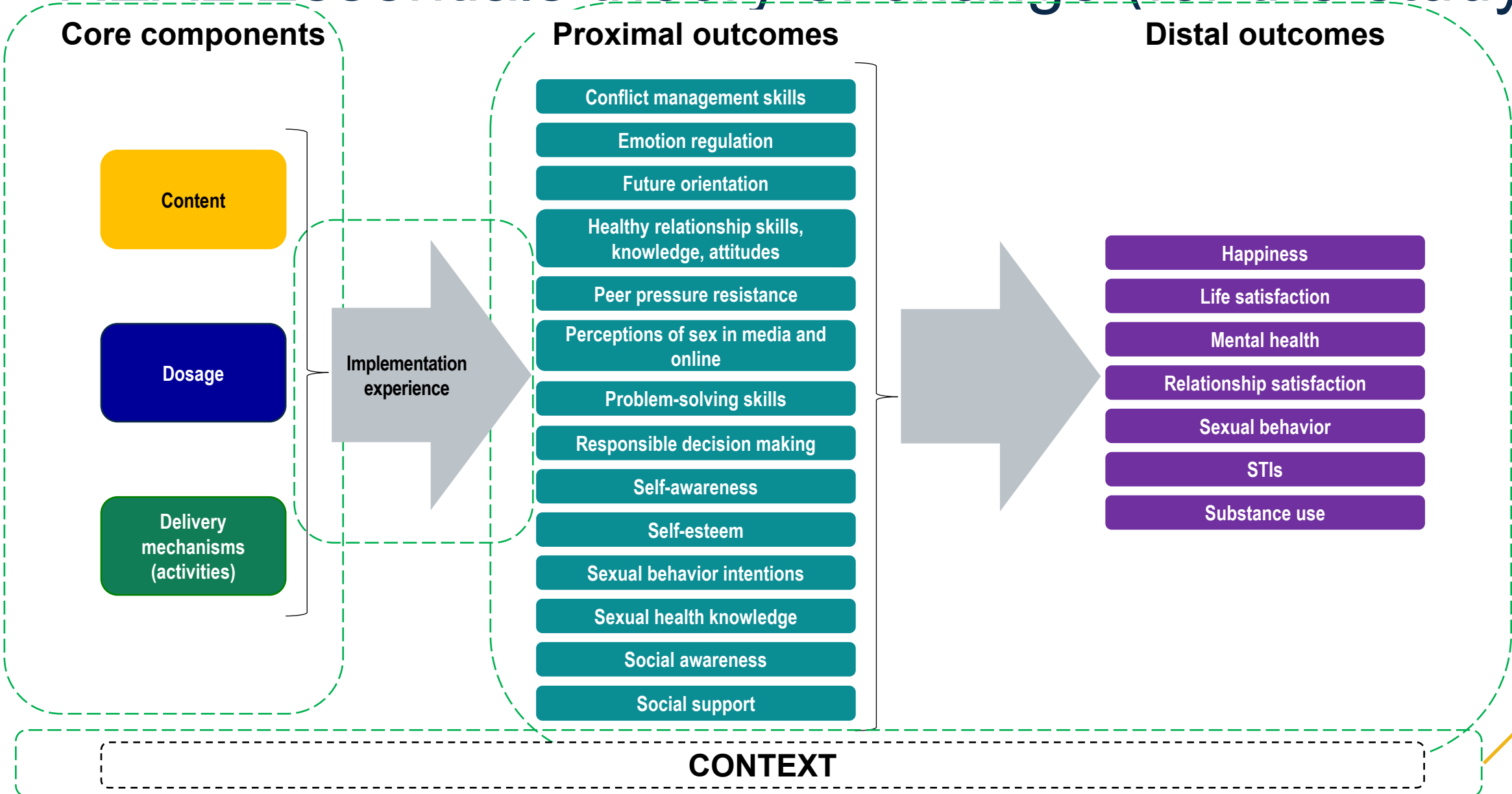| REA topic area |
| --- |
| **Bullying:** Minimizing incidence of bullying and violence |
| **Drug and alcohol usage:** Directing students away from drug and alcohol use and teaching healthier coping skills |
| **Peer pressure:** Tools to help navigate the power of peer pressure and learn to set healthy boundaries |
| **Mental health:** Skills for prioritizing self-care and improving mental health |
| **Suicide prevention:** Helpful strategies to combat increasing suicide rates |
| **Social media:** Navigating social media usage and its impact on relationships |
| **Polarizing viewpoints:** Bridging the gap among polarized viewpoints to heal relationship discord |
| **Conflict:** Responding to conflict with productive skills and problem-solving techniques |
| **Dating drama:** Tips and skills for establishing thriving dating relationships |
| **Teen pregnancy and STIs:** Best practices when navigating decisions about sexual health |
| **Planning for the future:** Practical strategies for accomplishing long-term goals |

REAL Essentials theory of change (for the study)

Core components

- Content
- Dosage
- Delivery mechanisms (activities)

Implementation experience

Proximal outcomes

- Conflict management skills
- Emotion regulation
- Future orientation
- Healthy relationship skills, knowledge, attitudes
- Peer pressure resistance
- Perceptions of sex in media and online
- Problem-solving skills
- Responsible decision making
- Self-awareness
- Self-esteem
- Sexual behavior intentions
- Sexual health knowledge
- Social awareness
- Social support

Distal outcomes

- Happiness
- Life satisfaction
- Mental health
- Relationship satisfaction
- Sexual behavior
- STIs
- Substance use

CONTEXT

Study sample

/ **27 schools**

- 22 HS (grades 9-12)
- 18 had at least 50% of student population white
- 11 had at least 50% of student population eligible for free-or-reduced price lunch
- Several schools participated in both cohorts, and/or with multiple grades (with different S&Ss)

/ **40 S&S**

- Programming most commonly offered during Health/PE, among 9th and 10th grade students
- On average, S&S included 20 lessons, students received ~13 hours of programming

/ **1,301 students consented to study (51% consent rate)**

/ **21 facilitators trained to provide REA**

Youth reported information (n = 1,301)

/ **Surveys**

- 3 timepoints: Baseline, immediate post-test, and long-term follow-up

/ **Exit tickets after each classroom session**

/ **Focus groups**

Implementation information

/ **Facilitator logs on attendance, quality, adaptations**

/ **Observations by Decision Information Resources (DIR)**

/ **Post implementation interviews with school staff and facilitators**

Questions covered today

/ **Which youth outcomes improved the most and least during the period the program was in place, and across S&Ss?**

/ **Which program components and experiences of the program were most influential in predicting outcome changes?**
- REA content areas?
- REA activities?
- Longer REA dose?
- Facilitator characteristics and training?
- Youth-reported level of connection and alliance with facilitators?
- Unplanned adaptations? Attendance?

Data used in this analysis

/ **Content, activities, dosage, attendance, adaptations, facilitator characteristics**

- Facilitator logs

/ **Implementation quality, youth connection and alliance with facilitators**

- Youth surveys & focus groups, facilitator logs

/ **Covariates: youth, facilitator, school characteristics**

- Youth surveys, youth & staff interviews

How do youth change after participating in REAL Essentials?

Methods overview

/ **Compared change in outcomes over the program**

  - Paired t-tests comparing average baseline and follow-up scores after ~1 month

/ **Assessed variation in outcome changes across S&S**

  - Intra-class correlations (ICC) – how similar/different were S&S

Finding: Half of outcome scores changed over program duration, S&S variability

15 favorable changes		3 unfavorable changes
• Expectations about sex shown in media • Self-awareness about emotions • Conflict resolution • Struggles to achieve goals • Plans to achieve goals • Self-esteem • Future orientation - goals • Conflict management	• Future orientation - life event sequencing • Emotion regulation • Peer resistance self-efficacy • Expectations about watching sex online • Knowledge about HIV/STIs • Negative bystander behavior • Positive bystander behavior	• Responsible decision making - social media attitudes • Responsible decision making about sex • Future orientation - impacts of risky behaviors

/ **Average change of .08 standard deviation units (SD), ranged from -.21 to .25 SD**

/ **Large variability across both S&S and youth**

Which program components and experiences seem to matter most for youth outcome?

Methods and interpretation

/ **Compared component variability across 40 S&S to predict outcome changes using multilevel regression models**

/ **Looked at direction of significant associations**

/ **Large numbers of component predictors, rather than interpret individual predictors…**

  - Aggregated frequency counts of individual components into categories
  - Proportion of significant associations for all component*outcome combinations
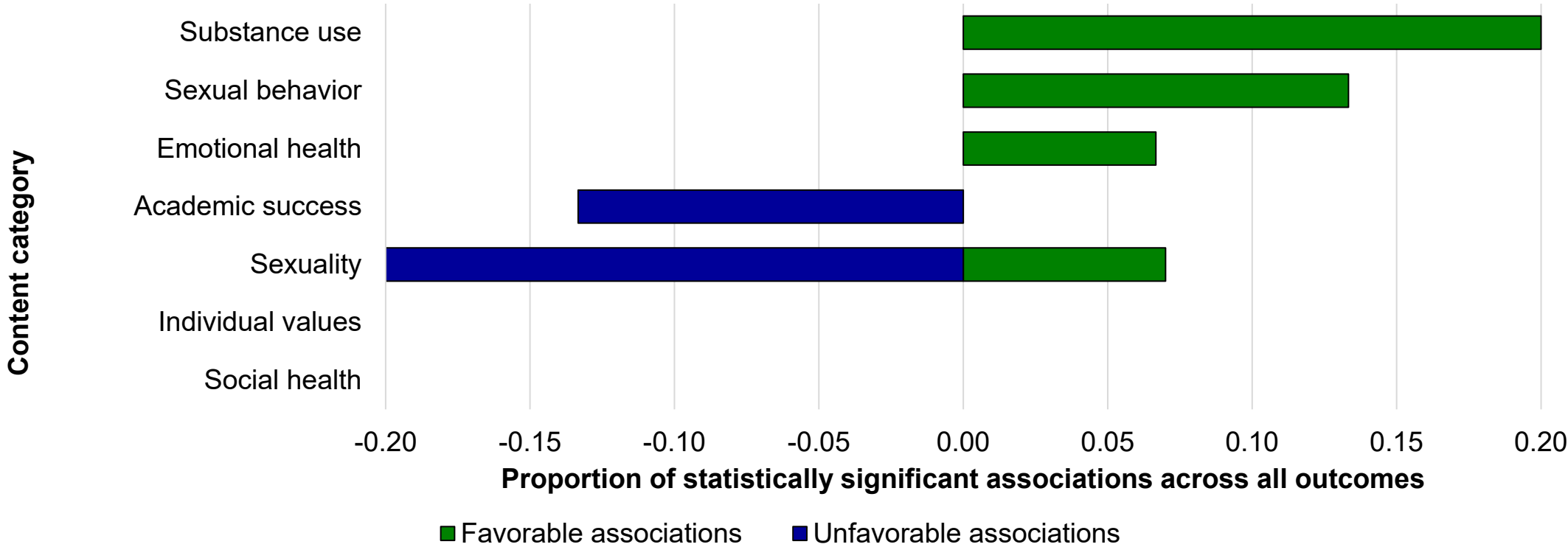
Finding: Content and activities matter, but it depends on the outcome

/ **Components matter, predict outcome improvements at large**

/ **No universally "best" component(s) – outcome associations vary**

Finding: Several REA content categories associated with outcome improvements

Proportion of statistically significant associations across all outcomes, by content

Finding: Unique sets REA content components emerge as core for each outcome

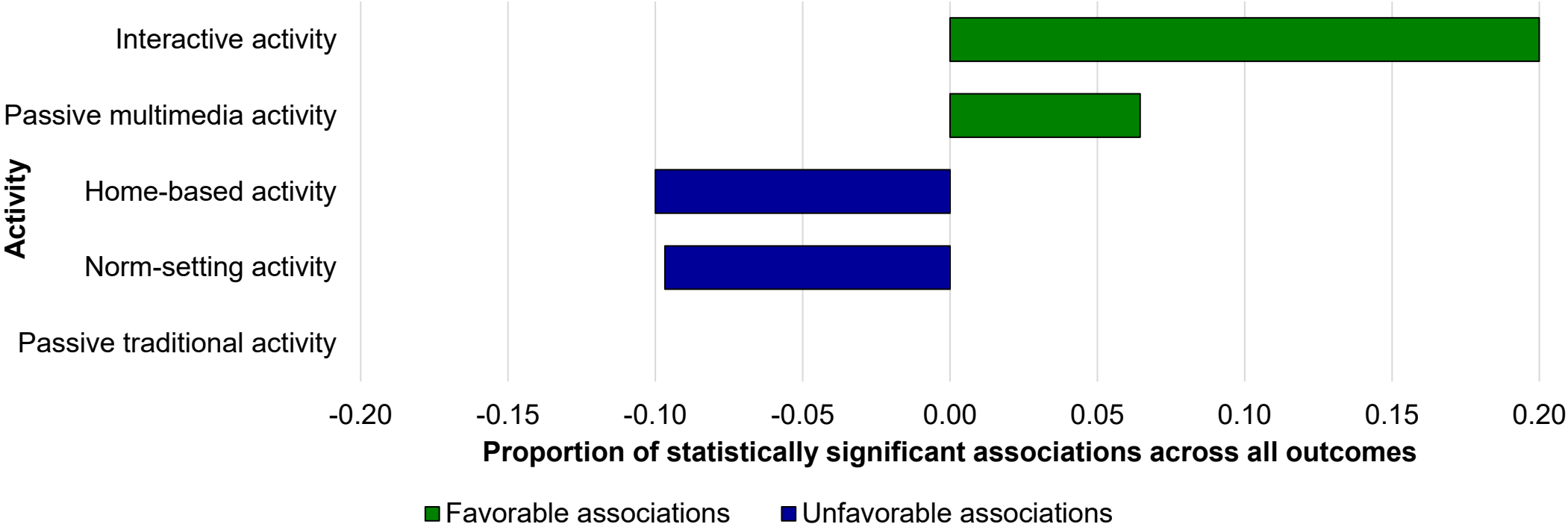**Evidence of core REA content category components for each outcome construct**

Content category	Conflict management skills	Emotion regulation	Future orientation	Healthy relationship skills, knowledge, and attitudes	Perceptions of sex in media	Problem-solving skills	Responsible decision making	Self-awareness	Self-esteem	Sexual behavior intentions	Sexual health knowledge	Social awareness	Social support
Substance use	+	+					+	+					+
Sexual behavior		+					+				+		
Emotional health				+							+		
Sexuality		-	-	+			-			+	-		-
Academic success		-	-				-						
Individual values													
Social health													

Note: Plus signs indicate components that showed favorable associations with one or more outcomes in the shown constructs and are therefore considered "core." Minus signs indicate components that showed unfavorable associations with one or more outcomes in the shown constructs. Blank cells reflect null associations.

Finding: Active and passive multimedia activities associated with proximal outcome improvements

Proportion of statistically significant associations across all outcomes, by activity

Proportion of statistically significant associations across all outcomes

■ Favorable associations   ■ Unfavorable associations

Finding: Unique sets of REA activity components emerge as core for each outcome

Evidence of core REA activity category components for each outcome construct

Content category	Conflict management skills	Emotion regulation	Future orientation	Healthy relationship skills, knowledge, and attitudes	Perceptions of sex in media	Problem-solving skills	Responsible decision making	Self-awareness	Self-esteem	Sexual behavior intentions	Sexual health knowledge	Social awareness	Social support
Interactive activity	+	+	+	+		+						+	
Passive multimedia activity			+				+						
Home-based activity			-								-		
Norm-setting activity							-						-
Passive traditional activity													

Note: Plus signs indicate components that showed favorable associations with one or more outcomes in the shown constructs and are therefore considered "core." Minus signs indicate components that showed unfavorable associations with one or more outcomes in the shown constructs. Blank cells reflect null associations.

Finding: Dosage matters, related to content and activities

/ **Each hour of instruction associated with improvements in 7 of 27 outcomes (m = .06 SD)**

/ **Likely explained by content and activity exposure**

Finding: Facilitator rapport matters

／ **Demographic characteristics of facilitators had inconclusive associations with changes in youth outcomes**

／ **Youth-reported level of connection and alliance with facilitators is generally associated with favorable changes in 20 out of 30 youth outcomes**

  - Average significant beta estimate = 0.29 (range = 0.15 – 0.39), $p < .01$

Finding: Unintended adaptations, youth attendance, implementation quality have little or no association with outcomes

Overall findings – Summary

No universal core component(s)
- Importance varies by outcome

Which components were most influential in predicting outcome changes?
- ✓REA content areas
- ✓REA activities
- ✓Longer REA dose
- ✓Youth connection and alliance with facilitators
- ✗Unplanned adaptations
- ✗Youth's individual attendance

Limitations

/ **Findings not causal**

/ **Short timeframe (~1 month) may underestimate change**

/ **S&S variation of certain components limited**

Implications for programs and evaluation

/ **Program component alignment with prioritized goals and outcomes**

/ **Amount (dosage) offered**

/ **Fostering connections between facilitators and program participants**

- *Components matter but vary by outcome; there are no universal core components.*

- *Longer dosage matters and is linked to exposure to content and activities.*

- *Youth-reported level of connection and alliance with facilitators is important and associated with youth outcome changes.*

Thank you!

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Session Evaluation

Please complete a brief evaluation form for all workshop, forum and networking sessions by scanning the following QR code or visiting the following link:

https://bit.ly/2024Evaluations

Content component categories

/ **The 54 individual content components were aggregated into seven categories:**

- **Academic success content** (4) addresses youth's options and plans for pathways to academic success.
- **Emotional health content** (10) addresses intrapersonal processes and strengths.
- **Individual values content** (4) addresses youths' personal identity and belief systems.
- **Sexual behavior content** (13) includes content that addresses the physical behaviors related to sexual activity, its preconditions (such as puberty), and its potential consequences (such as pregnancy).
- **Sexuality content** (7) addresses the non-physical behaviors and experiences related to healthy sexual behavior, its preconditions (such as consent), and its potential consequences (such as healthy relationships).
- **Social health content** (12) addresses interpersonal skills, relationships, and belief systems.
- **Substance use content** (4) addresses the avoidance of, reduction of, and risks related to using substances.

Activity component categories

/ **The 19 individual activity components were aggregated into five categories:**

- **Interactive activities** (8) include interactive delivery methods such as discussions, games, or role playing.
- **Home-based activities** (2) include activities intended to be completed outside of the implementation setting.
- **Norm-setting activities** (1) include introducing and establishing group norms or program goals, such as through icebreaker activities.
- **Passive multimedia activities** (4) include viewing or listening to pictures, videos, audio, or social media.
- **Passive traditional activities** (4) include viewing or listening to readings, experiments, or didactic lessons.