

## TIP SHEET

Personal Responsibility  
Education Program

# Increase Your Impact: Creating Mutually Beneficial Partnerships with Schools

September 2021

## HOW TO RECRUIT AND PARTNER WITH SCHOOLS

Before implementation can begin, it is critical to cultivate relationships and fully engage schools and their stakeholders.

- Adapt your recruitment strategies to the community context. Consider using some of these resources and approaches:
  - » Use customizable promotional tools on *The Exchange*, such as the Youth Voices video and The Studio tool.
  - » Create PowerPoint presentations to share in the community or host free and on-demand webinars to share program-specific questions.
  - » Set up a telephone line for partners to reach you about program-specific questions.
  - » Share information via Twitter announcements or host a Twitter chat with a set of community members.
  - » Use networks
    - If you know parents in the Parent Teacher Association, ask if they can connect you with a school counselor or nurse.
    - Share information with community organizations that partner with schools, such as Communities in Schools.

## WHY WORK WITH SCHOOLS?

Partnering with schools is a practical approach to reaching a large number of youth with quality programming. In fact, schools were the most common implementation setting among Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) grantees throughout 2013–2017 (Murphy et al., 2021). More than 49.9 million young people are currently enrolled in middle and high schools across the country (Bauman & Cranney, 2020), and in 2019, 38% of U.S. high school students surveyed reported that they ever had sexual intercourse (CDC, 2019). Thus, partnering with schools is a valuable strategy for reaching a large number of young people with evidence-based and evidence-informed Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (APP) programs aimed to empower youth with knowledge to prevent unplanned pregnancy and reduce sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Retention rates are often higher in school-based programs where youth have fewer transportation constraints and where APP programming is structured into the school schedule. APP programming also fulfills the requirements for sex education in the majority of states' (30 out of 50) public school systems (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020).

- Visit the local Boys and Girls Club or other mentoring organization and see which schools they partner with and ask about school connections.
- » Request a meeting with the district's Director of Student Support Services or a school's lead counselor to discuss the program.
- Set clear expectations once a school has agreed to partner. Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) help outline what each party is expected to provide. An MOU might include the following:
  - » roles and responsibilities for each partner, including who will be responsible for implementing the program;
  - » benefits each partner will receive as a result of the partnership;
  - » 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
  - » expected level of commitment and duration of the project.

Implementing APP programming in schools is also beneficial to young people, because it takes a holistic approach to sexual education. Not only does it include content related to abstinence and contraception, but it pulls in the six Adulthood Preparation Subjects (APS): Adolescent Development, Healthy Life Skills, Parent-Child Communication, Healthy Relationships, Financial Literacy, and Educational and Career Success. This tip sheet includes key considerations for approaching and engaging schools in APP work.



## DEMONSTRATING PROGRAM VALUE TO SCHOOLS

Key to building a successful relationship with schools is demonstrating the value of your programming to school stakeholders and showing how your programming aligns with the school's priorities and benefits the school community. Consider these strategies for demonstrating the value of your programming to school stakeholders:

- Describe how your program would provide students with content on APS and offer to tailor that content to the school's needs. APS topics such as Parent-Child Communication, Healthy Life Skills, and Financial Literacy may help garner support in communities that may be reluctant to provide sexual health programming.
- Explain that your program can fulfill the school's health education requirements and help it comply with state or local policies.
- Highlight direct benefits to schools and students from evidence-based programs that include community service learning. Benefits to schools include campus improvement/beautification projects, peer tutoring, and even fundraising activities. Benefits to students include meeting community service requirements, leadership development and practice with decision making.
- Provide data on the link between APP programming and educational attainment. For example, only half of 20- to 29 year-old women who gave birth in their teens have a high school diploma (Manlove & Lantos, 2018). Use district- or state-level attainment data to illustrate the need for an APP program.
- Incorporate national data to demonstrate the overwhelming parental support for sex education in schools, showing that 73% of likely voters support U.S. funding for APP programs (Kantor, Levitz, & Holstrom, 2020).
- Share local and state data on pregnancy prevention trends. Check out the 2019 data in this [database](#) from Power to Decide (2021).



## MEET SCHOOLS WHERE THEY ARE

School leaders, administrators, and teachers often deal with competing priorities. Meeting schools where they are by anticipating common challenges can lead to a more successful partnership. Implement the strategies below to gain administrator support, establish a strong partnership and reduce participation burden on schools.

Challenges to Working with Schools	Strategies for Addressing Challenges
<p><b>Scheduling/teacher burnout.</b> 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' schedules can also pose challenges to program implementation.</p>	<p><b>Be flexible.</b> Provide classroom teachers with scheduling options that minimize burden on them and meet their needs. Example strategies include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold trainings over the summer or during teacher in-service days to ensure that the school will not need to hire substitutes.</li> <li>• Schedule the program during after-school hours.</li> <li>• Offer synchronous and asynchronous programming.</li> <li>• Make minor adaptations to lessons so that they fit within the school day or planning period. This may mean more days, but if you can work 70 minutes within a 90-minute planning block, that can alleviate the before/after school substitute challenges.</li> <li>• Consider offering a virtual or hybrid (part in-person and part virtual) approach to programming. As many facilitators were required to do during the COVID-19 pandemic, consider making some green or yellow light adaptations to your curriculum using the <a href="#">Making Adaptations tip sheet</a> to give schools the flexibility they need to accommodate school district rules about limitations on in-person visitors. See the virtual implementation guide entitled <a href="#">Getting Tech Savvy: A Guide to Virtual Prevention Programming with Teens</a> for guidance on adapting your curriculum. It includes suggestions for ways to complete curricula within limited instructional time while still maintaining fidelity.</li> </ul> <p>You can also minimize burden on teachers by explaining to them how your curriculum will help them meet any state-specific learning standards or mandates.</p>
<p><b>Communication.</b> Educators often use different language than those in the public health field, although we are talking about the same things.</p>	<p><b>Use appropriate terminology.</b> <a href="#">Familiarize yourself with terms</a> to discuss your program with educators or administrators, such as “standards,” “benchmarks,” “guidelines,” and “curriculum framework.”</p> <p>If there are specific terms that are key to educators understanding the program, use and define them. Educators like to learn but shouldn't feel overwhelmed. Consider this also when designing informational flyers.</p>

Challenges to Working with Schools	Strategies for Addressing Challenges
<p><b>Administrator support.</b> Principals may be hesitant to add another project to an already full plate. Competing priorities can make it difficult to convince schools that APP is worth their time and effort.</p>	<p><b>Frame your program in terms of benefit vs. cost.</b> Show how your APP program aligns with state standards for health education, fits within the curriculum framework for the district, or fulfills graduation requirements. Recognize that administrators often see time as a cost. Outline your efforts to seamlessly fit programming into the school day.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To begin building relationships, it is imperative to identify key decision-makers at the state, district, and local level.</li> <li>• Demonstrate to decision-makers using the previous strategies how this programming can seamlessly fit into the school day and not overburden teachers. Administrators often want to know how much time the programming will take, what burden it will place on those who participate, and whether they will receive an incentive for anything outside normal working hours (i.e., if running an after-school program).</li> <li>• Consider the link between increased attendance and increased student achievement, a high priority for administrators. APP programs can also be framed as dropout prevention programs, helping schools to increase their graduation rates.</li> <li>• Emphasize that programming may provide valuable teacher training.</li> <li>• Highlight the evidence that links increased student attendance to fewer teen pregnancies.</li> <li>• Invite administrators, who may be cautious about who enters the school building, to provide input on your staff hiring process. Share your completed staff background check information with them.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Resource gaps.</b> Schools may not have access to supplies, space, or time for additional programming.</p>	<p><b>Leverage available resources.</b> 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>During the COVID-19 pandemic, programs focused more heavily on meeting the needs of students and families in their communities by delivering meals or providing Wi-Fi with the help of community-based partners. Consider taking an informal needs assessment and presenting potential solutions to schools to address gaps in resources. Potential gaps may be met in the context of in-person implementation, by providing food to youth and their families during holidays, or by providing transportation home after sessions. Work with community partners to create care packages for students who attend, with low-cost options in the package as a thank you for attending. Contents may include personal items (i.e., toothbrush, low-cost headphones, lotions) or school based items (i.e., pencils/pens, notebook).</p> <p>By meeting students' needs you can promote equity, while also ensuring that your programming can be delivered.</p>

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<p><b>Discomfort or anxiety over content.</b> Principals and administrators may have some anxiety over the topic of sex education or APP. They may fear backlash from parents and want to avoid any controversy, particularly if they hold an elected position such as superintendent.</p>	<p><b>Cultivate champions.</b> 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 leaders, physicians, faith leaders, Tribal elders, school board members, Parent Teacher Association members and others in the community.</p> <p>Provide these champions with talking points about your program. Use community platforms such as school board meetings, Parent Teacher Association meetings, and back-to-school nights to build awareness and support for your program. Approach champions in a spirit of respect and honesty. Treat them as partners and talk with them to learn about the reasons key stakeholders may be hesitant to allow you to administer your program. Seek their advice on ways to adapt your programming and recruitment strategies to local community norms and expectations. Cultivate patience as some communities may show more hesitancy than others to get on board.</p> <p>Demonstrate that there is overwhelming parental support for sex education in schools. Use local data to show support, if you have it. This may help ease administrators’ fears about potential controversy associated with APP programming. Highlight content taught in APP programming that benefits youth holistically. Share activities, discussion prompts, and other “sneak peaks” of the curricula that cover Parent-Child Communication, Financial Literacy, or other APS topics that speak to building life skills outside of pregnancy prevention specific topics. See the <a href="#">APS Resource Guide</a> for ideas.</p>
<p><b>Existing policies.</b> Policies may be in place at the school, district, or state level dictating what topics related to health education are allowed or forbidden. It is also important to note that often educators within a school are misinformed about policies and are operating under incorrect assumptions.</p>	<p><b>Be prepared.</b> Research school, district, and state level policies regarding health education. Check out this article from the <a href="#">National Conference of State Legislatures</a> (2020) and this <a href="#">graphic</a> from the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, Department of Nursing (2021). 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.</p> <p>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 or the local school board.</p>

Challenges to Working with Schools	Strategies for Addressing Challenges
<p><b>Culture and community.</b> 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><b>Learn your environment.</b> 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.</p> <p>Consider including administrators in the program selection process from the beginning. Potential questions for administrators include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the school culture?</li> <li>• What would success look like?</li> <li>• What challenges do you anticipate and what ideas do you have to mitigate those challenges?</li> </ul>



## RESOURCES

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