



Teen Pregnancy Prevention: Using Evidence-Based Programs in New York State Schools

Why should schools consider using evidence-based programs (EBPs) to prevent teen pregnancy? This brief from the ACT for Youth Center of Excellence provides an overview, with a focus on resources offered by the Comprehensive Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (CAPP) initiative. The Center of Excellence is based at Cornell University.

Teen pregnancy limits school success.

While teen pregnancy and birth rates have been declining in New York State, concern about the relationship between early pregnancy and low graduation rates has been growing.

- **Low graduation rates** are often linked to high teen birth rates.¹
- **Daily attendance rates** may be adversely affected by pregnancy and parenting. Teen pregnancy prevention has been cited as an anti-truancy strategy.²
- **Student achievement** is adversely affected by pregnancy and parenting.¹ **The achievement gap** for minority students may be exacerbated by teen pregnancy and parenting.³

Evidence-based programs protect against risky behaviors.

By definition, evidence-based programs have been shown to bring about changes in the behaviors that lead to adolescent pregnancy. To give just two examples, rigorous evaluation has shown that: *Be Proud! Be Responsible!* increased the frequency and consistency of condom use among students who were sexually active before participating in the program, and *Making Proud Choices!* reduced incidence of unprotected sex among students who were sexually experienced before participating in the program.⁴ **Importantly, EBPs do NOT bring about an increase in sexual behavior.**⁵

CAPP providers assist schools in implementing EBPs.

Funded by the New York State Department of Health, Comprehensive Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (CAPP) providers are charged with implementing EBPs as part of a broader community pregnancy prevention plan. Working with CAPP offers schools several advantages:

- Proven programs provided at no additional cost to the district.
- Trained facilitators from local community agencies.
- Technical assistance and evaluation support provided by the Center of Excellence.

EBPs help schools meet health education goals.

EBPs may help schools meet goals and expectations:

- **Compliance with state regulations regarding HIV/AIDS education.** Many of the programs currently used in teen pregnancy prevention were developed to address HIV/AIDS, and can help schools fulfill the New York State mandate for age-appropriate HIV education.
- **Alignment with New York State health education standards.** EBPs can be aligned with NYS health education standards at many points. CAPP can demonstrate linkage with the Health Education Learning Standards and the Health Education Skills from the New York State Guidance Document for Health Education for several of the most popular programs.

How do EBPs achieve positive results?

When implemented correctly, effective curricula work by strengthening protective factors and/or reducing risk factors that have an impact on sexual decision making.⁵ EBPs typically address relevant knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, and skills. Information alone will not bring results;

young people also need the opportunity to build skills. EBPs are interactive, giving youth opportunities to practice communication strategies, for example.

How can schools attain these results?

To achieve results, it is important to consider and plan for effective implementation, especially in the following areas:

- **Timing of modules:** With planning, some EBPs can be matched to school periods, but a sufficient number of periods must be allowed for the full program to be presented.
- **Overall program length:** Some EBPs are designed to be implemented over a particular period of time. To produce results, some EBPs will need to be presented more than once a week.
- **Teacher support:** While the program is delivered by trained facilitators, teachers play a critical supporting role by working with the facilitator in the planning phase, introducing the program to students positively, and assisting with basic classroom management.

More information

With generous support from the New York State Department of Health, ACT for Youth Center of Excellence connects research to practice in the areas of positive youth development and adolescent sexual health. ACT for Youth is a partnership among Cornell University, New York State Center for School Safety, and University of Rochester Medical Center. More information is available at www.actforyouth.net.

References

- [1] Shuger, L. (2012). *Teen pregnancy and high school dropout: What communities are doing to address these issues*. Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and America's Promise Alliance.
- [2] California Department of Education. (2000). *School Attendance Improvement Handbook*. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/cw/documents/schoolattendance.pdf>
- [3] Basch, C. E. (2011). Teen pregnancy and the achievement gap among urban minority youth. *Journal of School Health, 81*(10), 614-618.
- [4] U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Office of Adolescent Health. (2012). Teen pregnancy prevention: Evidence-based programs. <http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/tpp/programs.html>
- [5] Kirby, D. (2011). *Reducing adolescent sexual risk*. Scotts Valley, CA: ETR Associates.