

Re-imagining Health Education for Student Success

Urban Promise Academy - Oakland, CA

2014

WHY EXPAND HEALTH EDUCATION CLASSES?

With an already full set of academic requirements, teachers and administration at Urban Promise Academy (UPA) were having a hard time fitting health education into the curriculum. Yet the school-based health center staff knew that without sufficient time for health education, students would be unlikely to take on new behaviors related to healthy eating, reproductive health, and violence prevention, among other things. School Wellness Champions from the school-based health center partnered with the school to institute a month-long health education class that reaches every student with a curriculum that fits student interests and makes health education more interesting, accessible and stigma-free.

DEMOGRAPHICS

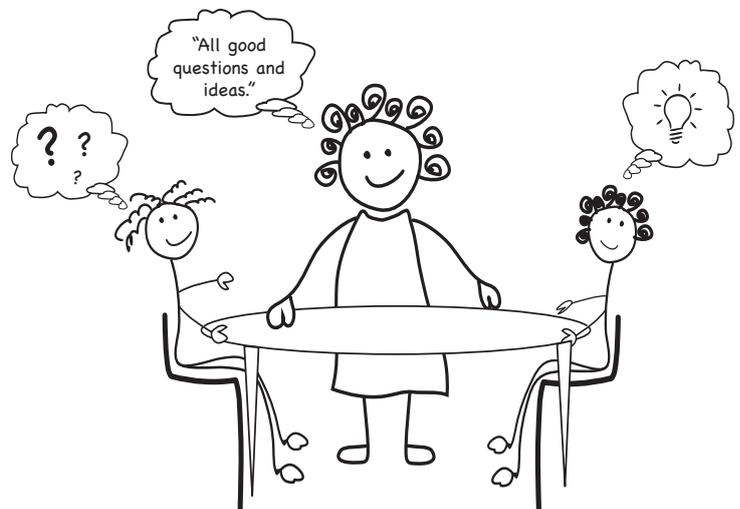
- 6th-8th grade
- 324 students
- 98% of students qualify for free/reduced-price meals

Ethnicity:

- 86% Hispanic/Latino
- 5% Other
- 4% Asian
- 3% African American
- 2% White

ACTION STEPS

UPA incorporated health education into its intersession program, which traditionally consisted of classes focused on music and dance. Wellness Champions partnered with school staff to develop a five-week health education curriculum with an additional four-week elective for students interested in more in-depth health education. With mentoring from an UPA faculty member, the health educator learned best practices for introducing sensitive topics to students in different grades, and at different learning levels, including English language learners. Wellness Champions aligned the curriculum with UPA's classroom management style: students interact in circles, sometimes with teachers, where they bounce ideas off of one another and build a sense of community and trust. The class links directly with the school-based health center through an on-site visit during which students learn about confidentiality, meet the staff, and learn about the center's services and referral system.



CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

A unique challenge has been balancing the Wellness Champion's role as health educator and teacher. Despite content expertise on a number of health topics, the health educator needed to develop the classroom management skills necessary to counsel students on very personal issues, such as birth control and reproductive health, while also successfully keeping a class of middle schoolers focused and on-task academically. Support from the UPA principal as well as one-on-one mentoring from an UPA teacher allowed the health educator to build the classroom management capacity necessary to foster a productive learning environment and trusting relationship with students. Sustainability of the health education intersession class is another challenge. The clinic and school staff are brainstorming creative ways to continue the health education classes in the absence of grant funding.

IMPACTS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

"Health is now integrated into the culture of the school," and students and teachers alike are grateful to have the new class, noted the Wellness Champion. Students receive at least sixteen sessions of health education and become familiar with clinic staff and services, which is more penetration of the student body than at any other health center in the Oakland Unified School District. UPA has experienced success in engaging boys in the health education curriculum—a group that is often harder to reach with health education messages. The boys are learning to comfortably discuss health and reproduction topics and have become very enthusiastic about the class. The Wellness Champion/health educator attributes a large part of the health education class success to continually assessing what's working and what's not, and adjusting the class to assure student needs and interests are met.

"What empowers the students is knowing that the health center is there and [knowing the] services it provides."

Wellness Champion

ADVICE FOR OTHER SCHOOLS

Cultivating a health educator who knows both health content and how to be effective in the classroom sets the class up for success. Mentoring from teachers on classroom management assures that the class structure is consistent with academic classes, creating an environment for learning with clear expectations for students. Another key to success is setting very clear educational objectives for all health education topics, assuring that the issues most important to students can be covered successfully in a short amount of time. Finally, informing parents of class content ahead of time is important when sensitive topics (such as reproductive health) are covered.

For More Information:

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The Oakland Unified School District Wellness Champion Program is funded by S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation.

Prepared by Ad Lucem Consulting
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