



Fact SHEET

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Strengthening Relationship Education and Marriage Services: An Evaluation to Improve Service Delivery and Effectiveness

Since 2005, Congress has authorized funding for programs that provide healthy marriage and relationship education services. The funding, administered through the Office of Family Assistance in the Administration for Children and Families, supports grants for programs that offer a mix of services—ranging from relationship education for high school students to marriage and relationship skills programs for adult couples. Some programs also promote families' economic stability by integrating job and career advancement activities with the healthy marriage and relationship education services.

An established body of longitudinal research indicates that children fare best when they are raised in stable, low-conflict, two-parent families. Conversely, unhealthy relationships can put individuals and their children at risk. To help identify strategies for improving the delivery and effectiveness of healthy marriage and relationship education programs for adults and youth, the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has launched the Strengthening Relationship Education and Marriage Services (STREAMS) project, a multi-site, random assignment evaluation of these programs. OPRE has contracted with Mathematica Policy Research and its partner, Public Strategies, to design and conduct the study.

STREAMS will feature detailed process and impact studies of programs funded by ACF's Office of Family Assistance at six sites. The sites were selected from a national pool of grantees (Figure 1), and reflect the breadth of the population the grantees serve, including both adults and youth in high school.

Mathematica designed a different study for each site to answer a distinct set of policy-relevant

research questions. In fall 2016, sites began enrolling participants and delivering services. Findings will be released throughout the project, with final results of the impact evaluation expected in summer 2020.

The researchers are seeking to learn as much as possible from each study and will focus on issues that will help strengthen the grant initiative and fill important gaps in the research. See Table 1 for an overview of the study taking place at each site.

For more information about the STREAMS evaluation, visit the project's web page at <https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/projects/streams>.

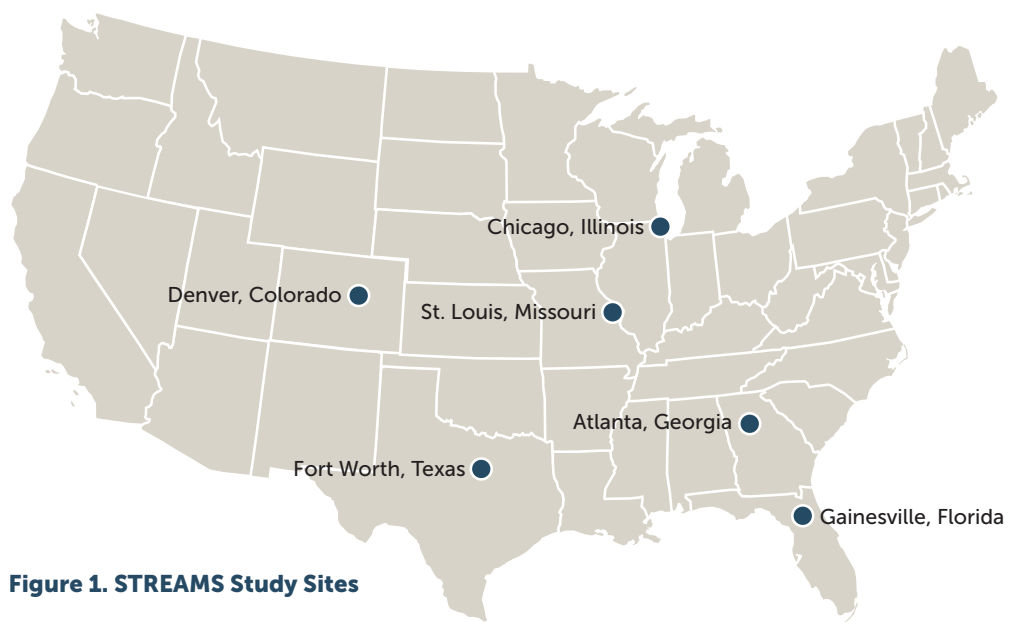


Figure 1. STREAMS Study Sites

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Table 1. Overview of STREAMS study sites

Family Bridges, Chicago, IL	
Research question	What is the effect of offering relationship skills education as part of a regular high school curriculum? Does enhanced training and coaching of a program’s facilitators show promise for augmenting a program’s effects?
Target population	Ninth-grade students in four public high schools in Chicago
Service delivery location	Regular, 50-minute health or freshman orientation classes in high schools
Curriculum and programming	12 sessions of the Relationship Smarts+ 3.0 curriculum
Family & Workforce Centers of America (FWCA), St. Louis, MO	
Research question	What is the effect of offering young adults workshops that integrate job readiness training and relationship skills education?
Target population	18–30 year olds seeking employment services
Service delivery location	Metropolitan Employment and Training Center in St. Louis, MO, with the possibility of expansion to satellite offices in Ferguson and Paddock Forrest
Curriculum and programming	Workshops that integrate 25 hours of job readiness training and 17 hours of relationship education into a two-week job readiness training program; 5 one-hour relationship education workshops offered after the initial two-week program
More Than Conquerors, Atlanta, GA	
Research question	What is the effect of offering relationship skills education as part of a regular high school curriculum? What is the effect of offering a shortened version of relationship skills education programming as part of a regular high school curriculum?
Target population	Ninth-grade students in two public high schools in Gwinnett County, GA
Service delivery location	Regular, 90-minute health classes in the two high schools
Curriculum and programming	8 or 12 lessons of the Relationship Smarts+ 3.0 curriculum
The Parenting Center, Fort Worth, TX	
Research question	What is the effect of offering integrated relationship skills education and economic stability services to low-income couples who are raising children?
Target population	Low-income couples who are raising children together and interested in both relationship skills education and economic stability services
Service delivery location	The Parenting Center’s offices in Fort Worth, TX
Curriculum and programming	20-hour core relationship education workshop series using the Family Wellness curriculum, as well as case management, employment services, and financial coaching
University of Denver, Denver, CO	
Research question	What is the effect of offering relationship skills education to low-income pregnant women?
Target population	Low-income pregnant women who seek prenatal services from a Denver Health location
Service delivery location	Denver Health hospital campus, community health clinics, and program office
Curriculum and programming	18-hour workshop series using the Within My Reach relationship skills education curriculum, supplemented with (1) content on mother-infant relationships, (2) case management services, and (3) optional workshops on relationships for participants and their partners
University of Florida, Gainesville, FL	
Research question	Can reminders based on behavioral theory improve session attendance and workshop completion? Which behavioral theory or combination of theories shows the most promise for improving attendance and completion?
Target population	Low-income couples who are interested in receiving relationship skills education
Service delivery location	University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Services Extension offices and community locations in five Florida counties: Citrus, Duval, Manatee, Palm Beach, and Santa Rosa
Curriculum and programming	Five 2.5 hour workshop sessions using either the ELEVATE or Smart Steps relationship education curriculum. Text messages based on behavioral theory encourage participants to attend workshops and complete the program.