



## Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) Evaluation

July 2020

### Evaluating a Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program for At-Risk Youth in Alternative Schools

More than 600,000 youth in the United States attend alternative schools or other specialized education programs for students at risk of academic failure. Many of these youth can be at high risk of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

To help expand the available evidence on teen pregnancy prevention services for youth in alternative schools, the Administration for Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funded Mathematica to evaluate the *Teen Choice* teen pregnancy prevention curriculum in alternative schools in and around New York City. Inwood House, a nonprofit agency based in New York City, developed the curriculum. The New York State Department of Health provided a Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) grant to Inwood House to deliver *Teen Choice* to high-risk youth in five local alternative schools. Within those schools, Mathematica randomly assigned youth to either (1) a treatment group offered *Teen Choice* as a voluntary, supplemental program during the school day or (2) a control group offered the standard school curriculum.

#### Key Findings

By design, *Teen Choice* enrolled highly at-risk youth with substantial academic and behavioral issues. Because the program served this high-risk population, maintaining regular attendance was a challenge, despite the considerable efforts of program staff to boost attendance. Across all study schools, youth enrolled in *Teen Choice* attended 53 percent of the sessions offered.

In spite of low attendance, *Teen Choice* improved some outcomes associated with sexual risk behavior. Based on a survey conducted six months after the program ended, *Teen Choice* had increased support for condom use as well as the students' perceived skills for saying no to sex measured relative to the study's control group. In addition, the program had reduced the percentage of youth who reported they intended to have sex in the year following the survey by 9 percentage points, from 66 percent to 57 percent. However, six months after the program,



#### Program Impacts After Six Months Relative to the standard school curriculum, *Teen Choice*:

- Increased students' exposure to information on romantic relationships, birth control, and STIs, but did not increase students' knowledge about contraception or STIs.
- Increased students' support for condom use and perceived skills for saying no to sex.
- Reduced the percentage of youth who said they intended to have sex in the year following the survey.
- Did not change the likelihood of having unprotected sex in the three months prior to the survey.

*Teen Choice* had not changed rates of unprotected sex relative to rates among control-group youth who received only the standard school curriculum. The short follow-up period limited the study's ability to detect effects on sexual risk behaviors and pregnancy.

## About the program

*Teen Choice* is a 12-session adolescent pregnancy prevention curriculum that covers abstinence, contraception, STIs, and healthy relationships through interactive exercises and guided discussions. The curriculum is designed to be flexible. The facilitator guide includes objectives, activities, discussion prompts, and key messages for each session. To implement *Teen Choice* with fidelity, facilitators must cover the key messages of each session, but they can adapt activities and discussions based on the group's needs and experiences.

Program staff reported that they liked the flexibility of the *Teen Choice* curriculum, which allowed them to tailor the focus of each module to the developmental needs of the youth (students in *Teen Choice* groups ranged in age from 12 to 19). Program staff also liked *Teen Choice*'s "mutual aid" approach, which they felt helped students develop trusting relationships with one another and identify with and retain the program's messages. During group sessions that the evaluation team observed, youth were generally engaged and willing to participate in discussions.

## Evaluation methods

Recruitment for the study occurred over three years, from spring of the 2013–2014 school year through fall of the 2016–2017 school year. The study team worked with school staff to identify youth who would be interested in and appropriate for this voluntary program. Evaluation and school staff worked to collect parental and guardian consents for eligible youth. The study team then randomly assigned eligible, consented youth to either the *Teen Choice* group or the control group. *Teen Choice* was implemented as a supplement to the sex education students in both groups received through their regular school curricula.

The study measured students' outcomes by collecting survey data six months after the program ended. Among the 462 youth enrolled in the study, 378 youth completed the follow-up survey, for an 82 percent completion rate. Survey response rates for the treatment and control groups were similar.

*Teen Choice* study participants were a diverse set of youth reflective of the student populations of the five study schools. Because two study schools served both middle and high school youth, the age of the youth ranged from 12 to 19 years old. The median age was 16 (not shown). Fifty-seven percent of participants were male. Nearly a quarter of the youth (23 percent) identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning.

### Student characteristics at study enrollment

Characteristic	Percentage
<b>Age</b>	
12 to 14	29
15 to 16	40
17 to 18	27
19	4
<b>Race and ethnicity</b>	
White, non-Hispanic	6
African American, non-Hispanic	30
Hispanic	55
Other	8
Male	57
Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning	23
Ever had sexual intercourse	53
Had sexual intercourse without contraception in past three months	12
Had any sex without a condom in past three months	30
<b>Sample size</b>	<b>462</b>

Source: Baseline survey conducted by Mathematica.

Study youth reported high rates of risky sexual behavior. At study enrollment, 53 percent reported ever having sexual intercourse. On baseline surveys, 12 percent of study youth reported having had sexual intercourse in the past three months without using contraception. A higher proportion, 30 percent, had had any sex without a condom in the past three months.

### The PREP Multi-Component Evaluation

This brief, and the accompanying full report, "[Delivering Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Services to High-Risk Youth: The Impacts of \*Teen Choice\* in New York](#)," are part of a series of products from the PREP multi-component evaluation. Learn more about the evaluation at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/personal-responsibility-education-program-prep-multi-component>. Learn more about the PREP initiative at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/programs/adolescent-pregnancy-prevention>.

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