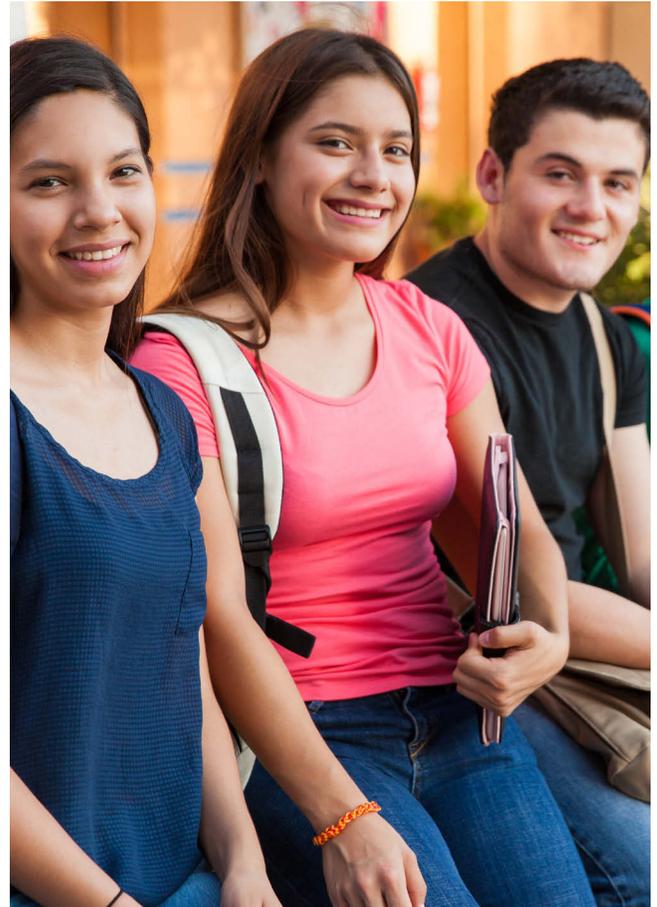


Developing and disseminating a self-sustaining program: The experience of Positive Prevention PLUS

Introduction

Federal funding, such as the Office of Adolescent Health's (OAH) Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) program, can help identify and provide short-term support for promising new approaches in teen pregnancy prevention. Some of this funding is designed for refining key components such as staff training, testing the program to understand its effectiveness, and expanding the program's reach. However, federal grants are limited and competitive, so grantees must look for reliable alternative strategies to sustain their programs in the long-term. In 2015, OAH launched a three-year effort to explore the key factors that affect program sustainability and identify the strategies that former OAH grantees have successfully employed to sustain their programs (see *About OAH's Sustainability Study*).

Positive Prevention PLUS is an HIV/STD and teen pregnancy prevention curriculum originally developed by two health educators in California for delivery in schools. The office of San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools (SBCSS) in California hired one of the developers to help run statewide training on an early version of their curriculum. Based on this experience, the developers partnered with SBCSS to apply for a grant through OAH's TPP program in 2010. Under this grant, they implemented and rigorously evaluated Positive Prevention PLUS in 21 high schools in southeastern California. Since the grant ended in 2015, the developers have been able to sustain Positive Prevention PLUS through ongoing sales of the program to schools and districts around the country. This case study highlights the experiences of the developers of Positive Prevention PLUS, their partnership with SBCSS, and the steps they took to develop a self-sustaining program.



Developers initially designed a curriculum to respond to new state requirements

In the early 1990s, California mandated through Assembly Bill 11 that schools provide HIV prevention information to students. The Orange County chapter of the American Red Cross wanted to publish a curriculum that met these state requirements. The Red Cross commissioned two health education experts to develop Positive Prevention HIV/STD Prevention Education for California Youth, a six-lesson curriculum. The developers relied on significant input from teachers and experienced health educators to ensure the relevance, usefulness, and accuracy of the curriculum. From the beginning, the curriculum was “written by teachers, for teachers” with a focus on creating materials that were easy to use and practical in a classroom setting. Within a few years of its development, the curriculum became the most commonly used HIV-prevention curriculum in California.

As the state requirements changed, the developers adapted the curriculum to make sure it continued to meet requirements. In 2004, California recommended that schools cover teen pregnancy prevention as well as HIV prevention. To comply with this guidance, the developers of Positive Prevention created an additional seven lessons around pregnancy prevention and relationships in a companion volume called Positive Prevention PLUS.

In 2010, the developers partnered with SBCSS to combine, evaluate, and package the original Positive Prevention HIV prevention content with the Positive Prevention PLUS pregnancy prevention and relationship content (Figure 1). This combined curriculum was also called Positive Prevention PLUS.

In 2015, the state again changed its requirements: beginning January 1, 2016, schools were required to provide comprehensive sexual health education. The developers made small changes to the Positive Prevention PLUS curriculum to align with the new law, including ensuring the curriculum was inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities. They also updated the curriculum with the most recent medical information.

About the Office of San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools

SBCSS works to meet the educational needs of students throughout San Bernardino County, California, and also advocates at the local, state, and national level for policies to best serve students. The office has an annual budget of \$350 million. Within SBCSS, the HIV/STD Prevention Education Project Center has overseen state-wide training on HIV prevention curricula since 2000.

In 2010, SBCSS applied for and received a five-year Tier II TPP grant of \$458,465 (annually) from OAH. The HIV/STD Prevention Education Project Center administered the grant.

Figure 1: Program Implemented Under OAH Grant

Positive Prevention PLUS

-  **Targeted outcomes:** Reduction in teen birth rates and sexual risk behaviors, and enhancement of prevention related attitudes, self-efficacy, and protective behavior
-  **Program length:** 11 lessons, each 45-60 minutes long
-  **Facilitators:** Health or science classroom teachers
-  **Implementation setting:** 21 moderate- to low-income suburban high schools in southeastern California
-  **Population served:** Over 3,000 9th-grade students

Source: SBCSS grant application, final report, and discussions with grantee staff.

The curriculum evolved to serve the needs of multiple stakeholders

When the developers initially created the curriculum and later made updates, they were sensitive to the needs of five types of audiences who would use the program: district administrators, school boards, teachers, parents, and youth themselves. According to the developer, it was important for the model to be “a moderate, middle-of-the-road curriculum” that could be used by administrators and school boards, and responsive to the needs of school staff and parents.

As the curriculum evolved over the years, the developers added features that would make the program useful to different stakeholders. For example, school staff recommended that they needed specific content for youth in special education as well as those in elementary and middle school grades, so the developers created adapted versions of the curriculum for these groups. Likewise, the developers heard from teachers that printing copies for all the activities was burdensome, so they began selling the curriculum with printed student workbooks. In addition, to address potential parent concerns about a curriculum covering sensitive sexual health topics, the developers included a letter in the student workbooks to introduce parents to the curriculum. They also added discussion questions at the end of each lesson for youth to use with their parents and required parents to sign each page of the workbook after youth complete it. The developers stated that “parents no longer seem to have a problem with this particular curriculum because...they have the tools now to actually sit down and continue the discussion with [their] child” using the materials in the workbook.

Extensive state and local outreach before and during grant period helped grow the program

To promote the curriculum, the developers built strong partnerships with the state and the SBCSS’s HIV/STD Prevention Education Center. Before the OAH grant period, the developers focused on building awareness for the original HIV-prevention focused Positive Prevention with key stakeholders at the state and local levels. In the 1990s, the state Department of Education awarded the developers grants to (1) update the curriculum with the latest medical information and (2) create a guide for

districts on how to implement HIV-related instruction. As state officials recognized that the curriculum met state requirements for HIV prevention, they began promoting the curriculum online, which further raised the exposure of Positive Prevention in California. Around the same time, the HIV/STD Prevention Education Center hired one of the developers, providing important resources and credibility for outreach with the state Department of Education, state public health officials, and community agencies. This support was critical for the developers in building new relationships with county staff and educating them about the curriculum.

“We really felt like we were insiders with ... a position of authority at the County Schools Office. That was invaluable as opposed to if we were a small [community-based organization] knocking on doors for the first time without a history of credibility [with the schools].”

—Curriculum developers

In addition, a neighboring county provided resources for the developers to conduct presentations on Positive Prevention in all 10 regional centers across California. Districts relied on these centers for assistance in implementing health content like drug and tobacco prevention education, so they knew and trusted them. The grantee realized that talking about the curriculum through the centers was “the perfect way to penetrate the market with the new curriculum,” given the existing relationships between districts and the centers. From the beginning, the developers invested a lot of time and energy in their outreach for Positive Prevention, which contributed to more people becoming aware of the program and its relevance.

During the grant period, the developers leveraged their connections with the HIV/STD Prevention Education Center to continue promoting the program statewide and with school districts. The developers indicated that being housed in the county office “put us in the position to be recognized at the state level by the state department of education...for the activities we were doing down here.”

After the grant period, direct outreach efforts helped inform people across the state and country about Positive

Prevention PLUS. For instance, developers presented at conferences such as the American School Health conference or the California School Nurses Organization conference. They also promoted the curriculum at local education and superintendent meetings. At each event, they tailored their message to market their curriculum to the specific audience. When they spoke to school boards, they focused more on how the curriculum met state requirements, whereas for nurses or teachers they emphasized the curriculum's structure and delivery.

Evidence of effectiveness further raised the program's profile and helped it become sustainable

During the OAH grant period, the Positive Prevention PLUS curriculum was rigorously tested using a cluster randomized controlled trial with 3,000 students in 21 high schools. The evaluation found that the curriculum affected two key behavior outcomes six months after the program ended: delaying sexual initiation and increasing the use of birth control. As a result, the Department of Health and Human Services' Teen Pregnancy Prevention Evidence Review added Positive Prevention PLUS to the list of evidence-based interventions. Being on the Evidence Review's list of federally approved programs raised the program's exposure beyond California. Developers saw a sharp increase in demand outside of California as organizations and schools around the country learned more about the program. In 2017, schools in Oklahoma, Washington, Hawaii, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, and Michigan were implementing the curriculum.

Responding to the increased interest and nearing the end of the OAH grant, the developers began exploring ways to sustain the program without federal funding. The Red Cross, the curriculum's long-time publisher, had decided to stop publishing the curriculum because the program had broadened its focus beyond HIV prevention. Instead, the developers decided to publish the curriculum themselves. They found a print shop that could do on-demand printing and set the price for the curriculum to be competitive with other major curricula used in the state. They also established a website where people could learn about the curriculum and order materials.

The program now sustains itself through the money earned from schools and districts. Using the funds from sales, the developers have invested in adapting the curriculum to respond to specific needs of the schools and students they serve, and they soon hope to add slides with animation and other visually appealing elements for schools to use. From 2015 through 2017, the middle school and high school curricula were the most popular, followed by the special education curriculum.

To help schools adopt and afford the program, the developers worked to understand the variety of funding sources and mechanisms available to fund teen pregnancy prevention programming. For example, California reimburses schools for activities that fulfill state mandates, including the 2016 comprehensive sexual health education requirements. Schools can draw upon this funding every year to reimburse their costs associated with training on the Positive Prevention PLUS curriculum. In their direct outreach efforts, the developers discuss these funding options and encourage districts to explore these routes to help sustain their programs.

Key lessons learned

The developers of Positive Prevention PLUS took several important steps that contributed to developing a self-sustaining program. They created a curriculum tailored to the needs of their community and designed to meet state mandates. They worked closely with school district administrators and county staff over several years to build strong relationships and demand for their program. The OAH grant provided an opportunity to bolster and expand their program, and evaluate its effectiveness. These experiences highlighted important lessons that may be useful for current and future grantees looking to develop a new program:

- ✓ **Consider all possible audiences for your program.** In developing or choosing a program, be mindful of meeting the specific needs of different beneficiaries and stakeholders such as district administrators, community partners and leaders, parents, school board members, teachers, and youth. Continue to solicit feedback from each group over time, and adjust as necessary to respond to their input and needs.
- ✓ **Educate stakeholders on ways that the program aligns with key requirements and standards.** Be knowledgeable about state mandates and requirements when you attend initial meetings, especially when meeting with school or district administrators. Staff are more inclined to listen, engage, and appreciate the need for the program if they understand how it helps them meet these requirements.
- ✓ **Identify and utilize existing networks to engage partners and participants.** The developers of Positive Prevention PLUS were able to embed themselves in SBCSS, which allowed them to easily reach a large network of schools, rather than having to start from scratch. To save time and resources, look for opportunities to work within or in close alliance with existing organizational or youth networks that bring credibility, access, and key contacts.
- ✓ **Look for funding sources that could sustain program delivery.** Local, state, or federal funding sources may fluctuate less from year to year and can allow a program to be more sustainable over time. For example, Title I grants from the U.S. Department of Education provide funds for schools with high percentages of students from low-income families, and some states (like California), have money available to implement state mandates. Staff implementing the program are not always aware of these sources of money and how to access them. Prepare information about potential funding opportunities and work with the relevant staff at the organizations implementing the program to increase sustainability.

About OAH's Sustainability Study

Since its inception in 2010, the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) has funded organizations across the country to deliver programs to prevent teen pregnancy. OAH's Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) program provides funding for the implementation, development, and evaluation of evidence-based, as well as new and innovative approaches to prevent teen pregnancy.

In 2010, OAH funded 94 grantees to either replicate evidence-based programs with new populations or in new settings, or evaluate new and innovative programs. Grantees were expected to not only implement their programming but also sustain their program over time. Over 60 percent of 2010 grantees did not receive renewed funding.

In September 2015, OAH launched a three-year study to help understand whether and how programs were sustained after federal funding ended. Interviews were conducted with 37 of the 64 former grantees who did not receive renewed funding. Twenty-eight of the former grantees that were interviewed sustained their programs in some form once OAH grants ended, whereas 9 programs are no longer operating.