



What does it take to implement high quality sexual health education?

Case Studies of three Local Education Agencies

In 2013, the Division of Adolescent School Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC DASH) awarded 17 Local Education Agencies (LEA) funding to strengthen sexual health education in their schools, as part of their efforts to reduce HIV and other STI. Funded partners were charged with providing guidance, materials and professional development to build teachers' knowledge and skills to deliver sexual health education effectively. They were encouraged to work more intensively with a set of priority schools with a relatively high proportion of youth at risk of HIV/STI.

To help LEA carry out this work, CDC DASH funded Healthy Teen Network to provide capacity building assistance, including professional development, technical assistance and resources. They also supported our efforts to document examples of how LEA have strengthened sexual health education

since the funded program began. This effort has culminated in three **case studies**.

Our Methods. Between December 2017 and March 2018, we visited the New York City Department of Education, Broward County Public Schools, and Oakland Unified School District. We conducted in-depth interviews with teachers and administrators at each district using a protocol approved by each district's institutional review board. We made detailed notes during each interview and collected copies of policies, guidance documents, and professional development agendas where needed. Immediately after each school district visit, we compared and analyzed interview notes and district materials for overall themes, challenges and how those challenges were overcome, impacts on staff and students, and other accomplishments. We shared draft versions of our case studies with each district to confirm accuracy prior to finalizing the content.



Keys to Success

The districts we interviewed were diverse in terms of their history of providing sexual health education, the demographic makeup of the students they serve, and their current policies. But they shared common beliefs about what makes them successful at implementing sexual health education in their districts. We distilled their thoughts into these keys to success:

Strong policies

Policies are especially helpful when they specifically list the topics that must be covered, and require that teachers receive professional development.

A designated champion

To keep sexual health education from falling to the bottom of the priority list, it's essential to have a point person whose job description includes coordinating sexual health education.

Relationships

The champion needs to make a plan to build and continuously maintain relationships. Showing up to meetings of counselors, nurses, wellness committees, teachers, and administrators takes time and effort—but pays off in the end.

Communications skills

People doing this work need to help stakeholders see the value of sexual health education, and need to know how to build awareness of supportive policies. This is not as easy as it sounds, and champions sometimes need support from communication experts.

A logical 'home'

Some districts don't offer health as a subject at all, and those that do may only offer it in high school. And even then, health is not always a required subject. But sexual health education can fit into other core academic subjects such as science and language arts, and the champion needs to help schools figure out where it fits.

High-quality materials

In addition to lessons that are consistent with the characteristics of effective curricula, this could include supplementary guides, student workbooks, slides, educator kits, etc. Teachers are much more likely to implement sexual health education when they don't have to do any extra work to get everything they need.

Listening to teachers

Taking the time to regularly gather teacher feedback on what works/does not work and revising the lessons and materials accordingly helps teachers feel more invested in the lessons and makes the materials even more user-friendly.

Professional Development

Districts need to make sure they have the right people teaching this topic, and that the teachers feel ready to teach it. In addition to providing skills-based professional development, this involves checking in with teachers and following up as needed with coaching and co-teaching or modeling of challenging activities/lessons.



Healthy Teen Network