



# COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

## CASE STUDIES Implementing a New Sexual Health Education Law in North Carolina

### OVERVIEW

In 2009, the Healthy Youth Act: HB 88 (SL 2009-213H) was signed into law. The law specifically mandates teaching sexual health education throughout the state, and indicates that the content of the sexual health education must include information about

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both abstinence and contraceptive methods. Materials used for sexual health education instruction must be age-appropriate for use with students, and information conveyed during the instruction must be objective and based upon scientific research that is peer reviewed and accepted by professionals and credentialed experts in the field of sexual health education. After passage of the act, the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina (APPCNC) worked with other partners to help school districts effectively implement the new legislation. This case study documents the critical role that stakeholder education can play in supporting policy efforts, and explores the future activities that APPCNC hopes to take in order to help school districts select and implement an evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention program.

### TEEN PREGNANCY IN NORTH CAROLINA

In 2009, there were more than 18,000 pregnancies to teen girls age 15-19 in North Carolina, for a teen pregnancy rate of 56.0 per 1,000 girls age 15-19. The teen pregnancy

rate decreased 4% between 2008 and 2009 in the state. Although there was a decrease in the teen pregnancy rate among all racial and ethnic groups, disparities in the teen pregnancy rate continue to exist. In fact, the pregnancy rate among white teens was 45.4 per 1,000 girls, while the corresponding rate for minority teens was 74.3, and the rate specifically for Hispanic teens was 118.4. In 2009, 51% of high school students in North Carolina reported that they had ever had sex (48% of girls and 54% of boys). Approximately 60% of sexually active high school students reported that they used a condom the last time they had sex (56% of girls and 65% of boys).

### BACKGROUND

APPCNC has been working to prevent teen pregnancy in North Carolina since 1985. Since its inception, APPCNC has become a key resource in the state for information and data related to teen pregnancy as well as evidence-based strategies for preventing teen pregnancy. As a grantee in the *Promoting Science-Based Approaches Through Getting to Outcomes (PSBA-GTO) Project*, supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), APPCNC staff developed very high capacity with respect to discussing evidence-based strategies, working with media, and educating key stakeholders. Thus, APPCNC staff were well suited to provide research and educational support to groups working on the passage of the Healthy Youth Act. APPCNC along with other members of Healthy Youth NC, a statewide coalition of organizations and endorsements aimed at educating stakeholders on the need for research informed policies for youth, were constantly available to provide informational



resources as needed. In particular, APPCNC staff supplied information on the scientific- and research-based rationale for the measure, the community support for evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention, as well as examples of how a school could easily meet the requirements of the bill. Educational efforts were supported through funding from the CDC, and were possible due to the high capacity of APPCNC staff on issues such as science-based programs. In addition, support from CDC allowed for other efforts to build support from key stakeholders and the general public such as a visit from Sarah Brown, CEO of The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. The visit included media interviews as well as educational activities with key legislators.

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### **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HEALTHY YOUTH ACT**

After the Healthy Youth Act was signed into law, APPCNC worked with partners to ensure that schools had the knowledge and capacity to implement the law. To this end, APPCNC has been working to increase awareness of the law, and to provide training and technical assistance to schools and teachers so that they are able to comply with the new requirements. Under the *PSBA-GTO Project*, which was funded from 2005-2010, APPCNC worked intensively with community partners from across the state. This work focused on increasing the capacity of community partners to select, implement, and evaluate science-based strategies to prevent teen pregnancy. Because these partners had been working with APPCNC and were familiar with teen pregnancy prevention, they were well positioned to help the schools in their communities implement according to the Healthy Youth Act. More specifically, with funding from the CDC, APPCNC was able

to offer schools in three districts in-depth training on evidence-based curricula. Approximately 45 middle school and high school teachers were trained on these curricula.

In addition to providing in-depth training, and in order to help other communities with implementation, APPCNC developed a workshop presentation and a guidebook which explained the law in more detail and provided an overview of evidence-based programs that would meet the requirements of the law. Local school officials, health officials, and others were contacted with information about both the guidebook and the workshop, and they had the opportunity to request an in-person training from APPCNC's training team to learn more about the requirements. APPCNC subsequently provided information to staff from local school systems, health departments, and community agencies in over 40 counties throughout the state. APPCNC was able to support some of these activities using their existing funding from the CDC.

The North Carolina Comprehensive School Health Training Center, a recognized statewide training center supported by the Department of Public Instruction, has also developed skills-based lesson plans for teachers and provided these plans along with training so that teachers would have examples of how to teach in accordance with the new law. As a result, many middle school and high school teachers have received professional development on the Healthy Youth Act. In fact, APPCNC estimates that approximately 95% of schools in the state have the knowledge and available resources to successfully implement the Healthy Youth Act.

Moving forward, APPCNC is continuing to work with partners across the state to help teachers incorporate the key provisions of the Healthy Youth Act into their practice in the classroom, which were required to be implemented in the 2010-2011 school year. Due in large part to the capacity that was developed through funding and support from the CDC, APPCNC successfully applied



for additional funding that has allowed them to focus on implementing the Healthy Youth Act in school districts throughout the state. With new funding from the Office of Adolescent Health/CDC, APPCNC has also initiated a community-wide project in Gaston County, and, as part of this project, continues to work with Gaston County Schools to encourage the use of evidence-based programs to prevent teen pregnancy. Some of the key activities that are underway through the project include the formation of a working group to address strategies for effectively working with schools in the county, providing professional development opportunities for teachers in Gaston County schools, and working with the schools to be an active agent in teen pregnancy prevention given the high rates of teen pregnancy in the county. In Gaston County in 2009, there were 430 pregnancies to teen girls age 15-19 for an overall rate of 62.9 per 1,000.

### CONCLUSION

APPCNC realizes that the passage of the Healthy Youth Act was just the first step of a longer process, and that the next phase—which includes developing the regulations and guidelines directing the law's implementation along with ensuring that school districts have the capacity to implement the law effectively—is equally important and requires their attention. The law provides legislative backing to encourage the implementation of evidence-based programs in schools, however much more work is needed to help increase the capacity of schools to implement evidence-based programs with fidelity. In addition, it is critical

to ensure that schools and communities are able to follow the guidelines and make appropriate changes to their sexual health curriculum. This case study illustrates how an organization can provide valuable stakeholder education in support of evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention, and increase the capacity of communities to implement evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention once new policies are established—two roles that have been and will continue to be critical elements in the policy's ultimate success. Moving forward, APPCNC will continue to work with partners across the state to ensure that schools have the support they need to implement programs that are in agreement with the law. ★★

### About The Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina:

The Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina (APPCNC) is North Carolina's only statewide nonprofit dedicated to preventing adolescent pregnancy. For more than 25 years, they have been working to help communities prevent adolescent pregnancy through a combination of advocacy, collaboration, and education. APPCNC's vision is that every North Carolina adolescent has the combined benefits of effective sexuality education, family and community support, and healthcare needed to prevent teen and unplanned pregnancy and become a healthy adult.

### About The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy:

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization supported largely by private donations. The National Campaign's mission is to improve the lives and future prospects of children and families and, in particular, to help ensure that children are born into stable, two-parent families who are committed to and ready for the demanding task of raising the next generation. Our specific strategy is to prevent teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy among single, young adults. We support a combination of responsible values and behavior by both men and women and responsible policies in both the public and private sectors.