

and reading. School attendance of participants also improved. During the program year, the average number of days missed was reduced by about four days for students in the program.

According to self reports by participants, rates of abstinence nearly doubled since the beginning of the program for those students who were sexually experienced. In another dramatic change, participants said that they thought the best age to have a first child was 22 compared to their report at the beginning of the program that the preferred age was 16.

Strategies for a Comprehensive Approach

As we strengthen the Peer Power and ADAM programs, we will continue to coordinate our efforts to enhance all aspects of teens' lives and to improve the environments in which teens and their families live. This larger strategy includes designing, monitoring, and evaluating services and advocating for public policies that give families a chance to obtain decent housing, health care, education, and employment. Without these opportunities, the future of America's children will remain in jeopardy.

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OPTIONS FOR PRE-TEENS PROGRAM PROVIDES SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

Each year, approximately one million women under 20 become pregnant. Pregnant adolescents and their children face increased health risks, including toxemia, anemia, low birthweight, and complications of birth. Adolescents most at-risk for early parenthood are disproportionately those least able to support children—those from low-

income families, those with poor academic skills, and those with weak family and community support.

Last year, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) introduced their Options for Pre-Teens (OPT) program. OPT is a primary prevention program serving fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh grade boys and girls in urban school districts. Its purpose is to provide pre-adolescents with the motivation and the skills to abstain from early sexual activity and other risky behaviors, and to be successful in school. Specific goals for participating students include developing life-planning and decision-making skills, improving school performance, developing closer ties with their schools and communities, involving their parents in the educational and social development of the children, and helping the students and their families ameliorate the effects of poverty.

The OPT model is composed of six components designed to provide a comprehensive intervention: (1) The Life Planning Curriculum teaches youngsters about risky behaviors, gives them skills for resisting these behaviors, and provides information on family life, sexuality, and careers. (2) The goal of the Academic Skills Improvement Curriculum is for students to achieve grade-level performance in reading, math, and content area subjects. The curriculum takes place in a computer lab with a teacher trained in Socratic dialogue techniques. (3) The Service Learning component gives students the opportunity to assume responsibility, to explore adult roles, and to learn about the world of work. (4) As part of the School Climate Enhancement component, staffs of OPT schools, along with student and parent representatives, participate in school climate improvement training and establish action plans that set clear school goals. (5) The Family Involvement component reaches out to involve and empower parents through a family volunteer program and the establishment of a family room within the school. This component also encourages parents to participate directly in their child's learning, and to communicate effectively with school staff. These goals are accomplished through training workshops for parents, structured home activities, and outreach by OPT staff. (6) The Student and Family

Advocacy component provides counseling and continuous case management for students and their families.

There are currently OPT sites in Norfolk, Virginia; Oakland, California; and Pontiac, Michigan. During the first year, approximately 360 students are being served. During the second year, this number will be doubled. OPT is being scientifically evaluated by Social Research Applications. The evaluation design spans a nine-year period and specifies that a pair of schools is chosen in each of the three sites. These schools are similar in size, socio-economic status of the student body, student test scores, and racial composition. One school from each pair is chosen randomly as the OPT school; the other school is the comparison school. In the OPT schools, the OPT program is integrated into the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade school years and includes summer programs. In the comparison schools, no formal intervention occurs during this time.

Students and parents in both the OPT schools and the comparison schools are administered questionnaires during each year of the nine-year evaluation. These questionnaires cover topics such as parents' involvement in their children's lives, and children's self-esteem, behavior, school aspirations, drug use, and sexual behavior. The teachers also indicate their perception of the children's behavior and their perceptions of the school climate. Finally, data are collected for all children on their grades, standardized test scores, and attendance records. In addition, in each of the three OPT schools, process questionnaires are completed. These questionnaires are used to gather information on the number of sessions that are held for each OPT component and on who attends these sessions.

Numerous statistical analyses will be conducted throughout the evaluation. Simple comparisons of the proportion of OPT children vs. comparison children becoming single parents, completing high school, using drugs, and engaging in sexual behavior will be conducted. Analyses will also examine the proportions of males vs. females experiencing negative outcomes, and the proportions of African Americans, whites, Hispanics and Asian Americans experiencing negative outcomes. Assuming that differences are found between OPT

participants and controls, further analyses will be conducted to explore what it is about participation in OPT that has a positive impact on youth. There are high expectations that OPT's multi-year, multi-component approach, working with boys and girls beginning as early as the 4th grade, will be successful in reducing the risk of early childbearing, school drop-out, and other negative behaviors.

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PREGNANCY PREVENTION IN THE MIDDLE GRADES

The Urban Middle Schools Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program (UMSAPPP) was initiated by the Academy for Educational Development (AED) in the fall of 1985—with support from the Carnegie Corporation and the Ford Foundation. The major goal of the program was to encourage middle grades educators to assume responsibility for pregnancy prevention, given growing evidence of increased sexual activity and pregnancy among young teens. Under UMSAPPP, eight school districts—Atlanta; Boston; Detroit; Kansas City, Missouri; Los Angeles; Milwaukee; Norfolk; and Oakland—established pregnancy prevention programs or strengthened components of existing programs in the middle grades at 55 schools.

The Middle Grade Years are Crucial

UMSAPPP was also based on an emerging understanding of the crucial nature of the middle grades in determin-

ing students' educational futures. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development's Turning Points concluded that the period of life from ages 10-15 represents the "last best chance" for many young people "to choose a path toward productive and fulfilling lives." Evidence is amassing that "teens, particularly younger teens, are...more troubled than teens ten to twenty years ago," and face risks that were "almost unknown to their parents or grandparents, and...at an earlier age." In the past, teens typically experimented with cigarettes and alcohol in high school. Today risk behaviors—smoking, drinking, taking drugs and having unprotected intercourse—often begin in the middle grades years, on average in the seventh grade.

Research has also shown that school failure is often the "precipitating event" in the onset of such behaviors. Here again, the middle grades are crucial. Twenty-eight percent of middle grades-aged youth are behind their modal grade or have already dropped out. A consensus is emerging that while many students may not actually drop out until later, it is in middle school that they "lose interest in learning and give up school for good."

A Life Options Approach

All UMSAPPP projects took a life options approach (as first described by researcher Joy Dryfoos in 1984) that young people need both the capacity and the motivation to avoid risk behaviors. To achieve these dual goals, UMSAPPP projects developed a range of activities, including family life/sex education; mentoring; counseling; after-school programs; and teacher development and parent involvement activities.

While all UMSAPPP projects encouraged students to remain abstinent, many agreed that promoting abstinence was not enough. It must be combined with other supports and activities to help young people stay in school and avoid risk behaviors. Pregnancy prevention in the middle grades must also deal with contraception. In the words of one UMSAPPP teacher: "I think in the middle grades school we can all agree to push for abstinence—but we have to be prepared for those that won't take our advice."

Lessons Learned

UMSAPPP provided a wealth of information and insights about undertaking pregnancy prevention education in the middle grades.

Making Pregnancy Prevention

Education Engaging. UMSAPPP project staff emphasized repeatedly that to appeal to early teens, who are concrete thinkers, pregnancy prevention activities must actively engage them, provide them with positive role models, and give them the skills for avoiding too-early sexual activity and pregnancy. Most projects tried a variety of approaches and activities to make the information presented in their family life education courses as concrete as possible, including videos, role-playing, small group discussions, and teen theater. Teachers and students alike reported that some of the best activities were those that helped teens understand the responsibilities of early parenthood, especially activities like the "egg baby" (from CPO's Life Planning Education) and presentations by teen parents.

Dealing with Controversy. Initiating pregnancy prevention activities in the middle grades often entails controversy focusing on the belief that pregnancy prevention education promotes sexual activity. This controversy often reflects the opinion of relatively few vocal individuals and groups. As one UMSAPPP project director said: "There is usually a vocal 10 percent minority that is opposed. In our case, the opposition boiled down to two parents and the cardinal."

It is vital that those involved in pregnancy prevention activities in the middle grades be prepared to handle such controversy. Assessing a community's readiness to accept a pregnancy prevention program at that level by talking to parent groups, educators, staff in community-based agencies, and holding a forum or speaking out on the problem of too-early pregnancy in the community is an important step. It is also important to determine which groups and organizations are most likely to be opposed to the envisioned program, establish contact with these groups, and work out some areas of agreement.