

Innovation in HIV Testing @ The Urban School of San Francisco

As a pilot program and proof of concept, Conant Foundation partnered with the students and administration of The Urban School of San Francisco to create a student-organized, student-run, in-school HIV education and testing program. The pilot program successfully launched on February 11, 2011.

Goals of the Urban program:

- Educate the senior class about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention, the benefits of regular testing, and discussing STI testing with their physician using a peer-education model.
- Test the entire senior class for HIV.
- Reduce the fear and stigma associated with HIV testing among high school seniors.
- Create an environment of open, honest dialogue among students regarding HIV and STI testing.
- Develop leadership, community organizing, project management, logistical scheduling and presentation skills in students.
- Create a replicable framework for testing to be implemented at other schools.

Features and Successes of the Urban program:

- 99% student participation rate from the senior class at The Urban School
- Significant interest from students in other grades, faculty and staff
- Student hosted HIV/AIDS and testing Q&A forums
- Student-created presentation materials
- Student-driven testing day scheduling, workflow and logistics
- Students were the primary educators of their peers
- Physician supervised HIV testing conducted by trained HIV testers
- Delayed results to protect student confidentiality

What we learned:

- Students can create and implement a sexual health education program tailored to their peers.
- Students will take advantage of confidential, in-school testing.
- Students are willing and able to make decisions about their sexual health when presented with the opportunity to do so.

Program Background/Rationale:

As the HIV/AIDS epidemic has evolved over the years, Conant Foundation has shifted its focus from educating gay and bisexual men about avoiding HIV infection to the new groups that are at risk of contracting this disease. More and more data shows that the epidemic is now affecting new and differing populations, such as women, minorities and youth. We have begun a new program that is designed to educate all teenagers about their sexual health and, most importantly, HIV/AIDS.

The CDC recommends getting tested for HIV once a year, unless you are specifically not at risk. As teenagers in this country are becoming sexually active at younger and younger ages, it is important that these teenagers are taught that HIV testing should be an important part of their routine healthcare; however, educating teenagers about sexual health is not always an easy endeavor. Many social barriers such as religion, or even antiquated belief systems, make it nearly impossible to educate teenagers on sexual health in many communities across the United States.

Recent polls and studies indicate that teenagers are getting the message on the risks associated with sexual activity. An Indiana University study published October 2010 in the Journal of Sexual Medicine showed that nearly 80% and 69% of teenage males and females are using condoms as compared to much lower rates in adults. However, another poll showed that, despite extensive sexual health campaigns, nearly 60% of teenagers did not know where to be tested for sexually transmitted infections (STI's), including HIV. Only 13% of teenagers have been tested for HIV according to the CDC.

Conant Foundation's Solution - Teens For Testing:

The Teens For Testing program seeks to engage teenagers in a peer-driven model of sexual health education and introduce regular HIV testing as a part of their normal healthcare routine. Conant Foundation believes that testing teenagers, even before they are sexually active, will greatly reduce the anxiety, fear and stigma associated with HIV testing as they move into adulthood and the risk of infection increases.

The Teens For Testing program uses a peer-education model. Each program is unique to the individual school as it is designed, developed and implemented by students for their classmates. A team of student educators will research topics related to HIV/AIDS, educate fellow students about HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, and create and implement an HIV testing program in their school.

Program Mission:

To provide HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted disease education and testing to high school students utilizing a peer to peer approach.

Primary Goals

- To educate high school students about the positive aspects of HIV testing through student-lead outreach and online resources.
- To test senior high school students for HIV/AIDS.

Secondary Goals

- To demonstrate that students in their final years of high school can accept responsibility for their sexual health and the sexual health of their classmates, family and community.
- To increase awareness of risk reduction strategies for HIV/AIDS prevention, infection and transmission.
- To implement a website and social media outlet for student to student dialogue regarding sexually transmitted diseases
- To create a repeatable and replicable testing program targeted at high school students.
- To provide volunteer opportunities for high school students while building skills in community outreach, public health education, peer education, and fundraising leveraging technology/social media and research.

Program Components

Eight Week Program:

We have designed an eight week project template that can be customized to the needs of each school. During the program, Conant Foundation staff will work with a group of student leaders to build an HIV/AIDS education and testing program at their school.

Student Educators:

A vital component of the program is it's Student Educators. We believe students are uniquely qualified to educate their peers about sensitive topics that would normally not garner the attention of teenagers if presented by adults. Each student educator will be a part of one of three teams of at least two students driving logistics, student education and communications.

Student Educators will be chosen by the Administration Sponsor and Conant Foundation staff from the senior class. Nominees should include: members of student government; students within various leadership positions; students involved in extracurricular clubs; students with an interest in medicine, public health, and/or community organizing; well networked students with strong social support; students with demonstrated leadership abilities and/or aptitude.

Educational Objectives for Student Educators:

- Develop community outreach, promotion and organizing skills.
- Research and document HIV/AIDS related topics.
- Develop presentation creation and delivery skills and abilities.
- Develop public speaking and discussion facilitation skills.
- Develop written communication skills.
- Develop leadership abilities and qualities.
- Develop project management and organizational skills
- Utilize technology for promotion, communication, research, presentation and organization skills.

HIV/AIDS Education:

Students will research, create and deliver an educational presentation on the following topics:

- History of HIV/AIDS - Changing Face of HIV/AIDS
- HIV/AIDS Symptoms and Treatment - Living with HIV
- HIV Transmission & Prevention - Staying negative
- HIV Testing - Why, How and Where
- Talking about HIV with your doctor

HIV Testing:

Confidential, in-school HIV testing is a critical part of the program. Conant Foundation will provide the following resources to the program:

- Physician supervised Testing Day
- HIV test kits from Orasure
- Trained testers and/or counselors for Testing Day
- Physician delivered results

Conant Foundation Support:

Success of the program is dependent upon facilitated learning and execution. Teens For Testing will provide the framework from which the Student Educators can create a customized program for their peers. Conant Foundation will provide the following:

- Overall program oversight, management and direction by Dr Marcus Conant
- Staff resource to work with Student Educators throughout the program
- Community resource/volunteer recruitment and alignment
- Student volunteer recruitment and engagement
- Community partner relationship management
- Relationship Management
 - School administration support
 - Parental support
 - Private physician support
- Budgetary oversight
- Program assessment

