

Moving Science-Based Approaches Forward: Working with Parents Success Stories: Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina (APPCNC)

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To ensure healthy, successful futures for North Carolina's teens, The Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina (APPCNC) embarked upon one of its most aggressive advocacy initiatives ever to ensure more comprehensive sexuality education would be taught in the public schools of North Carolina, which led to the passage of [The Healthy Youth Act](#)¹ in 2009. The Act is a product of four years of working with partners, schools, and parents, who helped champion and move legislators to replace the 15-year-old abstinence-only until marriage law giving students the critical fact-based education they need to make safe decisions about their bodies, sex, and relationships as they age into adulthood.

Getting Legislation Enacted

(Brief Description) The Healthy Youth Act, signed by North Carolina's Governor June 30, 2009 mandates the teaching of more comprehensive sexuality education along with abstinence education for students in grades 7-9. Materials used for sexuality education instruction must be age appropriate, factually accurate, objective, and based upon scientific research that is peer reviewed.

APPCNC credits success to dogged legislative leadership and strong collaborative partnerships. Among others, APPCNC collaborated with the American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina, Planned Parenthood Health Systems, Planned Parenthood of Central North Carolina, Equality North Carolina, NARAL Pro-Choice North Carolina, National Association of Social Workers of North Carolina, North Carolina Association of Educators, North Carolina National Organization of Women, and the North Carolina Pediatric Society. APPCNC and its partners dubbed themselves Healthy Youth NC and created their own logo for use in marketing The Healthy Youth Act. During the legislative process while legislators deliberated the bill, members of Healthy Youth NC were vigilant in



employing every conceivable strategy to educate and show visible public support for the bill and to retain the support of the sponsoring legislators.²

APPCNC emphasized the importance of using science to guide practice which, in turn, bolstered the importance of a law change and gave legislative supporters and the public information they needed to stand firm for the bill. One strategy used for this emphasis on science was to invite Sarah Brown, CEO of The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, to North Carolina for some prearranged events. She met with selected women legislators to highlight pregnancy prevention issues with a focus on garnering support for the Healthy Youth Act. She also interviewed on [The State of Things](#) radio show hosted by Frank Stasio. Sarah Brown and a panel of guests that included Jane Brown, University of North Carolina journalism professor, Amanda van Scoyoc, a fellow at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, and Sydney Brunson a member of Teen Health Now, the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina's Youth Council, discussed the provisions of the Healthy Youth Act and why the bill should be enacted.

Involving Youth and Engaging Parents

APPCNC worked innovatively to reach parents by creating a Youth Council for the North Carolina Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign (Youth Council), made of ten diverse youth from across the state in the fall of 2008. Through support from the Advocates for Youth Grant: Advocates for Youth's Cultural Advocacy and Mobilization Initiative (CAMI), APPCNC hired a youth coordinator and was able to provide a yearly stipend to each youth.

The Youth Council's first priority was the Healthy Youth Act, and the members actively worked to ensure the bill's passage. They devised ways to involve and garner support from parents and other young people. The Council developed postcards for parents, citizens, and other youth to use in sending a common message to legislators requesting support of the Healthy Youth Act. Over 6,000 postcards requesting support for the bill were either mailed or hand delivered to legislators. The Youth Council also organized and attended health fairs in order to educate parents about the bill and science-based approaches to preventing teen pregnancies.

In addition, the Youth Council had over 100 face-to-face meetings with legislators during the 2009 session. Moreover, APPCNC hosts an annual legislative day called The Adolescent Health Advocacy Day and during the 2009 legislative session, this day galvanized participation from more than 200 youth who were led by a sponsor of the bill in a procession to a Health Subcommittee meeting to promote the bill and demonstrate the importance the young people place on complete, effective education.

The youth council's involvement in the Healthy Youth Act did not end with the bill's enactment into law. The members of the Youth Council continue to be involved. During APPCNC's workshops on how to implement the Healthy Youth Act, members of the council opened the sessions and were active participants in providing insight from a student's perspective. They developed plans for educating their respective communities about law—what it does and does not do. Currently, the Youth Council is working on plans for activities during APPCNC's Let's Talk Month, which is held annually in October to help parents talk with their children about sexual health issues. A parent forum is among the many activities being planned for Let's Talk Month.

To assess what parents want their children to learn about sex in school, APPCNC partnered with the Gillings School of Global Public Health at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill to conduct a survey of public school parents, called the [Parent Opinion Survey](#). Nearly 92 percent of North Carolina parents expressed their desire for the kind of thorough education the law now requires. Moreover, two-thirds of parents thought sexuality education should start by the 6th grade. The Parent Opinion Survey made clear to legislators how parents felt about the importance of passing the Healthy Youth Act. According to a poll conducted by Public Policy Polling and released on February 23, 2009, 69 percent of North Carolina voters supported

the Healthy Youth Act. One other indication that parents desired more complete education came from testimonials of one school that had been offering parents a choice in the New Hanover County school system, where a two-track system³ is offered. For over a decade New Hanover parents had overwhelmingly (3:1) chosen an abstinence-based comprehensive option over an abstinence only track.

Along with Youth Council's efforts to continue to reach and involve parents, APPCNC will be creating and launching a text line for parents to use in getting responses to questions regarding adolescent sexual health.

Working with Schools

After the Healthy Youth Act was enacted, APPCNC's staff started discussing and outlining plans for assisting school officials and local school board members in ways to implement the law effectively. APPCNC developed a workshop module with a guidebook to present and explain the new law, provide an overview of various science-based curricula that fulfill the requirements of the law, and highlight appropriate resources that could be consulted. Local school officials, health officials, and others were contacted and given an opportunity to schedule a workshop with APPCNC's training staff. As a result, APPCNC worked with the staff members of local school systems, health departments and community agencies in over 40 counties.

In addition, APPCNC crafted and released a Request for Applications for technical assistance, trainings, and one-on-one assistance to implement science-based curriculum in accordance with the Healthy Youth Act. In response to the Request for Applications, APPCNC currently has conducted two trainings. The training in Bladen County was particularly notable because school personnel indicated that they were reluctant to replace their existing curricula with science-based curricula. However after the training, teachers who will be teaching sexuality education in the school system indicated that the training truly helped them understand the requirements of the Act. Additionally, they noted that the science-based curricula were invaluable and they look forward to introducing it to the students.

There were some challenges in working with schools, but none that were insurmountable. APPCNC had to devise a way to help teachers who will be teaching the sexuality education curricula separate personal viewpoints and values from the content of the science-based curricula itself. After the training, continued follow-up, support, and technical assistance, APPCNC was able to boost the comfort level of the teachers. Another challenge was addressing the frustration of school administrators who were dealing with a host of matters as well as having to add the Healthy Youth Act's requirements to the school's curricula offerings without additional funding. APPCNC was able to minimize such frustration by giving copies of the curricula to some school systems and demonstrating how the curricula would fit into the school's academic calendar.

APPCNC's dedication to the youth of North Carolina is apparent through their hard work in its advocacy with youth, parents, and partners to help support legislators to pass the Healthy Youth Act. In addition, APPCNC's strives diligently to make the law more pliable for schools. Through their successes, youth now have an opportunity to ~~and~~ ~~with~~ ~~facual~~, science-based sex education to ~~ZW~~ ~~fZW~~ become healthy adults.

About the Putting What Works to Work Project

Putting What Works to Work (PWWTW) is a project of The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy funded, in part, by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Through PWWTW, The National Campaign is translating research on teen pregnancy prevention and related issues into user-friendly materials for practitioners, policymakers, and advocates.

Author Information

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² Primary sponsors of the bill: Representative Bob England; Representative Susan Fisher; Representative Alma Adams; and Representative W.A. (Winkie) Wilkins. In the Senate, Senator Malcolm Graham, chairperson of the Mental Health & Youth Services introduced the companion bill.

³ The two-track system in New Hanover County school system included: one for abstinence until marriage and another for abstinence-based comprehensive sexuality education.



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.