

# Lessons Learned

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## TOP 10 TIPS FOR WORKING WITH SCHOOLS

### **10 KEEP IT SIMPLE**

Schools are under immense pressure to meet state requirements and district standards. When working with schools keep things simple. The development of an implementation plan prior to implementation is a critical step in this process. The key is to “plan the work and then work the plan.” While communication is necessary, don’t overdo it. Know how the school prefers to be contacted, as well as the best times to reach out.

### **9 BE PREPARED**

Anticipate the questions that schools may have regarding the program or the implementation process. Being knowledgeable about the approval process, state and local requirements, and other potential barriers helps ease the process of approval. It is also important to gain information about community members including parents, and assess their receptiveness towards adopting an evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention program. The more community support you obtain beforehand, the more likely the school is to enter into partnership. In addition to knowing the school’s processes and priorities, it is important to know the language of the school, including the acronyms and various committees and departments within the school. “Being able to walk the walk and talk the talk” go a long way when working with schools.

### **8 KNOW THE SCHOOL’S PRIORITIES**

In order to work effectively with a school, get informed about the school’s priorities, responsibilities, and other programs. A school’s top priority is to provide quality education to young people while

maintaining academic standards and testing requirements. In addition to understanding school’s priorities, it is important to be transparent about your own priorities and motives. In order to establish a successful partnership with a school, make sure your organization’s values and motives are in alignment with the school’s priorities. Identify ways to ensure that the school’s priorities can be met by incorporating a new program.

### **7 KNOW THE TEACHER’S SCHEDULE**

Knowing the teachers’ schedules, including when they have planning periods, helps plan communication with school partners. It is important to track this information so that teachers are only contacted when they have time to talk. Since schools have varying schedules (i.e., semester, trimester, quarter), it is important to update teachers’ schedules as classes change. Knowing the teachers’ schedules allows you to better understand when they might have time to plan, complete implementation logs, etc.

### **6 IDENTIFY EXISTING RESOURCES**

Schools often need training, money, and extra resources to implement a program. Program implementation may require anything from flip charts to laptops. It is important to assess resources available at the school prior to implementation so required resources can be obtained. Simply knowing the conditions of a school and available resources will ease implementation. However, in addition to knowing the school’s needs, it is also important to understand your organizational capacity to fulfill these needs. Can your organization provide the trainings, funds, and materials

that the school requires? If not, it may be best for your organization to partner with another organization, like the SC Campaign, to provide these resources.

## **5 KNOW THE ACADEMIC CALENDAR**

Knowing the school's academic calendar is crucial to planning for program implementation. Being aware of important dates (testing, spring break, etc.) helps to identify when the school can implement the program, the length of time it takes to implement, and if the amount of lessons implemented fits the program developer's requirements to maintain fidelity. Additionally, it is critical to know the length of time allotted for classes so that each lesson can be planned accordingly. Some academic classes are only 45 minutes and some teen pregnancy program lessons are 50 minutes or more, so it is important to plan how each lesson will be implemented within the class time. This may require for some lessons to be implemented in two consecutive classes (i.e., Lesson 1 part 1 and Lesson 1 part 2). Knowing the academic calendar helps build the school's confidence that you are knowledgeable of time restrictions and other requirements.

## **4 IDENTIFY DECISION MAKERS & PROGRAM CHAMPIONS**

Decision makers vary in each school and may differ depending on the issue. Sometimes the main decision makers are superintendents, principals or assistant principals; however, in other schools the curriculum coordinators or teachers have decision-making powers. It is also important to develop a relationship with the decision makers to better understand what is important in the school and how other changes may impact the program. These decision makers should be engaged very early in the planning process. They should be treated as equal partners and their input will prove invaluable to the approval and implementation of an evidence based program. Identifying a program champion who will advocate for your program, can also be beneficial to getting your program implemented.

## **3 KNOW POLICIES AROUND INCENTIVES, STIPENDS & PAYMENTS FOR SERVICES**

Some school districts have policies regarding incentives for students and staff participation. Depending on the financial support received, some allow incentives to teachers for attending planning meetings or completing surveys about their experience with the program. Additionally, some schools offer incentives to students for tasks such as returning a completed parental consent form or participating in a post-test survey. These policies can be very nuanced as well.

For instance, some schools do not allow staff to receive gift cards to stores but allow gift cards for food. Other schools may not allow individual incentives but do allow incentives on a classroom level. If a school does have a policy prohibiting incentives, talk with the school administration to identify another way to encourage participation in the program such as "dress down days" or extra time at recess.

## **2 KNOW POLICIES AROUND PROVIDING COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH EDUCATION**

It is important to educate yourself and program staff about any state specific laws and policies regarding comprehensive health education in schools. For example, in South Carolina, the school district approval process is guided by the Comprehensive Health Education Act (CHEA), enacted in 1988, which ensures that South Carolina students receive an age-appropriate, comprehensive education developed with community control in compliance with the provisions of the law. Given that this law is locally monitored in South Carolina, it is important to not only know the state law but also know the district level policies around providing comprehensive health education. Some districts choose to follow a regimented approval process with multiple layers of approval, while other districts have fewer steps to program approval. In South Carolina, it is required to get approval for all materials used in the program including handouts, flyers, survey instruments and the curriculum. In order to adequately plan for the review and approval process, it is important to understand the state and local laws.

## **1 BE FLEXIBLE**

When working with schools, it's important to realize that unforeseen issues often arise. Know that plans change, implementation dates change, and the processes sometimes change. When interruptions occur in the implementation of a program, track these deviations from the original plan and revise the implementation plan to account for the changes.

The SC Campaign recognizes that these tips are not all encompassing but believes that these are important lessons learned based on years of working with schools across the state. For more information about programs and the work of the SC Campaign, visit [www.teenpregnancysc.org](http://www.teenpregnancysc.org).