Our Approach to Adolescent Sexual Health

Summary

School-based health programs help young people increase their ability to prevent unintended pregnancy and the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).1 Across 19 San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) high schools, the Wellness Centers create a youth-friendly and confidential environment for students to learn about sexual health.

Students access sexual health information and support through a variety of Wellness pathways. These multiple points of entry make accurate and relevant sexual health information and services easily accessible to San Francisco’s youth:

- School-wide events, such as health fairs and assemblies
- Condom Availability Program (CAP)
- Classroom presentations by Wellness staff and student Youth Outreach Workers
- Co-ed, gender-specific and LGBTQ support groups addressing healthy relationships, positive decision making, and teen pregnancy and parenting
- School nursing services
- Burton Teen Clinic
- Behavioral health counseling, case management and other support services
- Referrals to community-based health care providers and organizations

Our Wellness Centers provide a safe space for students to discuss healthy relationships, reproductive health and sexual decision making with trusted health professionals.

“...This Wellness group has opened my eyes more about sex and other issues that concern young women.” — SFUSD High School Student

Approximately 1 out of 4 SFUSD high school students reports having had sexual intercourse.2

Core funding for the Wellness Initiative comes from the City of San Francisco’s Children and Youth Fund and the Public Education Enrichment Fund (PEEF) of the San Francisco Unified School District.
Context

Sexual risk behavior is linked to the academic achievement gap. It’s also associated with other health issues, such as depression, trauma and substance use. Addressing health problems that interfere with students’ ability to succeed is key to increasing academic achievement. In order to thrive, young people need access to accurate information and youth-friendly resources related to sexual and reproductive health.

According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, SFUSD high school students are engaging in behavior that puts them at risk for unintended pregnancy and STDs. Approximately one-fourth (25.8%) of all high school students report ever having sexual intercourse. While this is less than the national average, over one-third (35.5%) of sexually active SFUSD high school students did not use a condom the last time they had sex, and 18.6% used no contraceptive method at all. Nationwide, minority youth, including students who identify as black or Hispanic, are disproportionately reporting higher rates of early sexual activity and unprotected sex than the general student population.

Substantial evidence supports that education and services addressing sexual and reproductive health can help improve adolescent health behaviors and curb rates of disease and unintended pregnancy. The San Francisco Wellness Initiative contributes to this goal by providing different avenues and opportunities for young people to access medically accurate information, and to speak with trusted, caring adults about their health, relationships and important sexual health decisions.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>2013 High School—U.S. and SFUSD Youth Risk Behavior Survey</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>YOUTH</strong></td>
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<td>Ever had sexual intercourse</td>
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Health Outreach and Education

Comprehensive health education empowers young people with information and resources to make responsible decisions about their health and relationships. Wellness Centers and their community-based partners provide classroom presentations and school-wide health awareness events to reach all students. These activities complement classroom health education, as well as reinforce important messages throughout the year.

In 2013-14, Wellness Centers coordinated 195 educational events focused on sexual and reproductive health. Events included school-wide assemblies, classroom presentations, and outreach booths by community-based organizations (CBOs) and Wellness Staff.

(Chart) Student attendance figures indicate the total number of students participating in health events/activities at Wellness Schools, meaning the same student could have attended multiple events.
Group-Based Services

Wellness Centers serve a wide range of students through group-based services. In 2013–14, over 280 students participated in 28 groups addressing sexual and reproductive health topics, including young women’s groups, healthy relationships groups, and special groups and sessions for pregnant and parenting teens. Students experience a safe, structured setting to learn about sexual health. Groups give students an opportunity to discuss relationship issues and speak openly about their experiences. Most teens who have sex are in a relationship, and research suggests that understanding relationships is key to reducing sexual risk behavior.9

“I joined this group to gain more knowledge about healthy and unhealthy relationships. To be a part of a group of all females was really nice.”

—SFUSD High School Student

Individual Services

Wellness Centers provide a confidential, youth-friendly space to discuss health concerns with a trusted health professional. The welcoming atmosphere and caring staff reduce the sense of intimidation students may experience in accessing sexual health services.

In the 2013–14 school year, Wellness Nurses documented that 288 unique students received a total of 520 service encounters related to sexual and reproductive health. However, according to Wellness staff, the data represented here is under reported. To protect student confidentiality, many of the reproductive health services and referrals are coded more generally, as “medical” or other services.

“I can talk to the nurse about anything. She’s really cool. She listens and helps me out.”

—SFUSD High School Student

Wellness also serves as a gateway for access to other youth-friendly services in the community. While nurses and other Wellness Staff can provide basic health education and screening, many youth need to be referred to a community health provider for pregnancy and STD testing, contraception, options counseling, and other services. Approximately 20% of reproductive health visits included a referral to health care providers in the community. Most students were referred to one of the following agencies:

- 3rd Street Youth Center & Clinic
- Child Crisis Services (Department of Public Health)
- Cole St. Clinic (Huckleberry Youth Programs)
- UCSF New Generation Health Center
- San Francisco General Hospital

2013–14 One-to-One Services

- 288 = Total Students Receiving Reproductive Health Services
- 3,682 = Total Students Receiving Medical Services
- 7,289 = Total Students Served in Wellness
- 14,821 = 2013-14 SFUSD Student Population at high schools with Wellness Programs

Reproductive Health Services and Hours from Nurse Logs 2013-14, all other data from the Contract Management System (CMS) of the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families 2013–14.

2 CDC. (2013). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Results: San Francisco High School Survey. Results Table – Weighted Data. Atlanta, GA.
Program Highlight: GALILEO LOVE FEST

Every year around Valentine’s Day, the Wellness Center at Galileo Academy of Science and Technology partners with the school’s Gay Straight Alliance to organize Love Fest. This one-day health education event features classroom workshops and lunchtime activities that promote healthy relationships and engage students in learning about sexual health topics.

During the school day, local organizations provide over 30 workshops to students in their classrooms. The workshops cover a range of topics such as healthy relationships, sex and dating, contraceptive options, disease prevention, body image and media literacy, sexual harassment, and Internet safety. For example, San Francisco Women Against Rape (SF WAR) leads a workshop about cyber abuse. Students and school staff members learn how to spot warning signs of abuse and appropriate ways to respond. Through these workshops students learn more about community health providers and revisit key sexual health concepts taught in ninth-grade health education classes.

During lunch, the Galileo courtyard is transformed into a health fair—community organizations and student Youth Outreach Workers set up more than ten interactive and educational booths focused on fundamental sexual health themes and trending topics. At the booths, youth participate in activities designed to increase their knowledge and comfort level discussing sexual health topics. At the Planned Parenthood booth, students spin a wheel containing questions on safer sex, relationships, human sexuality, reproductive rights and the services available at Planned Parenthood. At another booth, the Wellness nurse demonstrates how to properly use condoms. Students have the opportunity to practice while wearing “drunk goggles” that mimic the impaired vision and judgment that can accompany alcohol use.

The Love Fest Marriage Booth is one of the most popular activities. Students invite their peers to “marry” each other and issue certificates affirming love and friendship in all its forms. This student-run activity acknowledges and celebrates all types of healthy relationships, from friendships to romantic ones. The booth also promotes marriage equality for all relationships. Love Fest is one of many Wellness health awareness events that fosters a safe and supportive space for students to explore important adolescent health topics.

In the 2013–14 school year, Wellness Centers distributed 4,653 condom packets.

CONDOM AVAILABILITY PROGRAM

In partnership with the Department of Public Health, SFUSD established the Condom Availability Program (CAP) in all San Francisco high schools in 1993. After participating in an initial education and information session on proper condom use, students can pick up free condom packets, which include six condoms, lubricant, information on STIs and HIV, condom use instructions, and a list of health centers. At the Wellness Centers, students participate in CAP group discussions and individual sessions facilitated by the nurse and staff from community health partners. These conversations promote an increased level of comfort talking about sexual health issues with their friends, partners and health providers.

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12 Survey (n=36) conducted by San Francisco Department of Public Health.
The Burton Teen Clinic opened in 2011 as a pilot program funded by the Department of Public Health. Housed within the Burton High School Wellness Center, the clinic is open eight hours a week during school hours. It is staffed by a doctor, a medical assistant and Wellness staff. Over the past three years, an average of 18 percent of the Burton Wellness clients have visited the clinic. Since the pilot year, the clinic has been highly successful in increasing the number of new students who access services and in providing services closer to the time of sexual initiation, thus reducing the amount of time youth may be without effective pregnancy and STI protection.

**Youth Who Attend the Burton Teen Clinic**

In 2013–14, 77 students went to the Burton Teen Clinic, for a total of 250 visits and 276 clinic hours. The number of clients has steadily increased since the clinic opened. Although the majority of clinic patients are female (95% in 2013–14), the number of male patients is increasing. The ethnic make-up of clients is shifting, with more Latina clients receiving services in 2013–14 than in previous years. The majority of students receiving services are between 15 and 17 years old.

**Services**

A study of the patient logs from 2011–2014 reveals that students are accessing the Burton Teen Clinic for their immediate sexual and reproductive health needs. Over the past two years, many students have visited the clinic before their first intercourse or within one month of the first time they had sex. **This suggests that the Teen Clinic is their first choice for reproductive health care.** While the reason for the first visit may be related to birth control for the majority of students, these visits provide an opportunity to discuss other issues, such as safer sex practices, STI testing and treatment, and referrals for additional services.

Visits to the Burton Health Clinic have also resulted in the adoption of long-acting reversible contraceptive (LARC) methods, such as implants and intrauterine devices. LARCs are highly effective methods of birth control, but, due to common myths and misconceptions, are often not requested by or offered to teens as a viable option. When they are educated about LARCs, teens are more likely to choose and be highly satisfied with a LARC method. This appears to be true for the Burton Health Clinic—the number of patients who chose a LARC method consistently increased from 2011–12 to 2013–14, especially the implant. Satisfaction with these methods may account for fewer visits per patient, providing the clinic with capacity to serve additional students.

**Clinic Satisfaction**

According to a spring 2014 survey, young people who visited the Burton Health Clinic were overwhelmingly satisfied, rating the clinic as “excellent” or “good.” All patients surveyed reported that they would recommend the clinic to a friend, and two-thirds had already done so. Suggestions for improvement pertained to increasing the capacity of the clinic, such as more clinic days, additional staff, shorter wait times and more outreach to students.
Because healthy students succeed