

Mikva Challenge Youth Health Council

2008 Summer Report

INTRODUCTION:

After researching Youth Health for eight weeks, the Youth Health Council had over one hundred possible recommendations. We researched youth health by having guest speakers, reading and discussing newspaper articles, and using clips of movies, and televised news broadcasts. After several days of discussion and elimination we have narrowed our work down to what we consider to be our 20 best recommendations. It is our hope that this document will be read and reviewed by policy makers, teachers, parents, students, and anyone who can and is willing to act as an advocate for the promotion of Youth Health and healthy lifestyle choices.

Physical Activity, Obesity, Nutrition

PROBLEM:

Nutritional fact labels are not visible to students in school cafeterias. This problem can lead to the consumption of unhealthy food by students.

GOAL:

To make nutritional fact labels visible in cafeterias, as a way of helping students to make an informed decision about their food selection.

RECOMMENDATION:

Nutritional fact labels should be visible to all students in school cafeterias.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS:

- Post food labels on the display window where food is located.
- Include a “how to read food labels” lesson plan in health class.
- Generate a clean and concise display board that explains how to read food labels; this should be in the cafeteria where food is served.
- There should be food labels based on different combinations of food.
- A white board or dry erase board should be used so that each day it can be cleaned and changed to display the nutritional information pertaining to the food of that day.

PROBLEM:

While in school students do not take their Physical Education classes seriously, usually because they believe that the class lacks structure and it fails to challenge them. When this happens students do not participate in their Physical Education class either by not dressing or by simply not participating.

GOAL:

To improve the overall health of youth in Chicago, by challenging them to stay physically fit throughout their four years of high school.

RECOMMENDATION:

Chicago Public High School students should be required to take a physical fitness test once a year for the four years that they are in high school.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS:

- Schools could test students using the President's Challenge, which includes curl-ups or partial curl-ups, shuttle run, endurance run/walk, pull-ups or right angle push-ups, and V-sit or sit and reach as the fitness test, or something very similar.
- There should be awards given to students that excel at this test.
- There should be awards given to schools that have the most students who pass the test.
- Students who do not pass the test should be required to take physical education additional years or they should be required to make arrangements to do some form of physical activity throughout the school year.

PROBLEM:

When students are given off campus lunch they usually go to the restaurants that are located closest to the school. Often times these are fast food restaurants. Fast food restaurants are among the major contributors to the growing number of youth that are considered obese.

GOAL:

To limit the number of fast food restaurants located near schools within the City of Chicago, as a means of helping students avoid eating of unhealthy food. It is important to stop the increase in the number of fast food restaurants now, before it gets worse.

RECOMMENDATION:

The City of Chicago should implement a moratorium on new fast food restaurants within a one mile radius of all Schools that are located within the city limits.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS:

- There should be strict zoning laws placed on the construction, opening, and licensing of new fast food restaurants within a one mile radius of schools.
- New restaurant owners should not be allowed to acquire permits and licenses for the restaurant unless a current restaurant is closing.
- Similar methods should be used to regulate the licensing of fast food restaurants as those that are used to regulate establishments that sell liquor.
- Stricter regulations on hours of operation should be placed on fast food restaurants.
- Restaurants that can be considered places of “healthy eating” should be granted more freedom when being operated near schools.

PROBLEM:

There are many students who try out for school sports teams in order to maintain an active lifestyle and to have fun. However, because Chicago Public Schools do not accept all students who try out for teams, many students are left without the opportunity to play sports. There are also students who wish to participate in sports but do not have the time or skill level to play competitively, but would still like the opportunity to run around and have fun.

GOAL:

Intramural sports should be seen as a way to allow students to be involved in school sports without the fear of being “cut” from the team. Intramurals give students who did not make the sports team or students who want the chance to be active the opportunity to be a part of a team. An environment should be created that promotes physical activity and team development through the use of intramural sports.

RECOMMENDATION:

Chicago Park Districts and Chicago Public Schools should increase the number of intramural sports available to youth in Chicago.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS:

- There should be different options for intramurals sports such as basketball, floor hockey, soccer, baseball, and football, to name a few.
- Students should be allowed to create their own teams, and the decision to have organized practices should be left to each team.
- There should be set times that are reserved for intramural teams to use the gym and outdoor fields.
- Teachers and students should become involved by coaching or referring games.
- There should be flyers posted around the school looking for players and teams.

PROBLEM:

The combination of poor nutrition and, lack of physical activity which leads to obesity is one of the leading causes of death for Americans. Students are inactive once they arrive at school, and most of them are inactive on their way to school. Most students either take public transportation or drive to work.

GOAL:

To increase the number of students who ride their bikes to school.

RECOMENDATION:

The Chicago Department of Public Health in conjunction with the City of Chicago, and the Chicago Public Schools should give incentives for students who bike to school.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS:

- The more times a student bikes to school the more incentives he or she will receive.
- Possible incentives can include discounts on helmets, new tires, locks, and possible bike maintenance.
- Book store coupons, healthy eating coupons, and movie tickets are other possible incentives.
- Bike racks should be installed at schools.
- More bike lanes should be established throughout the city.

PROBLEM:

Not many youth know how to successfully grow their own fruits and vegetables. Every neighborhood and community is not home to health food grocery stores or fresh food markets. Families do not have access to fresh and healthy foods, because of both cost and distance to stores selling fresh produce.

GOAL:

To help students learn how to garden. To provide students and communities with access to healthier foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables.

RECOMMENDATION:

There should be city sponsored youth gardening and urban gardening programs.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS:

- Vacant lots should be transformed into urban gardens.
- There should be gardening lessons for youth.
- Workshops should be provided on how to take care of plants in different weather conditions.
- Fruits and vegetables farmed and harvested in these gardens should be sold at a cheap cost to encourage members of the community to buy the food and to eat healthy.
- Gardening at these urban gardens can be used as volunteer, service learning, and after school work opportunities for youth.

PROBLEM:

Students are becoming very unhealthy, and schools are not being as proactive as they could be in helping to combat this growing problem. Parents are not aware of the environment in which their child attends school and do not have information to decide how healthy a school is.

GOAL:

To have a health segment added to school report cards so that parents and students can make an informed decision about what school a student will choose, using information on the types of food that are served at schools, the physical condition of the students, and the students knowledge about the current youth health topics.

RECOMMENDATION:

There should be a health category added to school report cards.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS:

- The Wellness Team at schools will be responsible for writing this report and helping to develop criteria for what goes in the school report cards.
- The report should be made available to families by being posted on the school website, in the school newspaper, as well as by being made available in the schools office.
- The school administration should use this report to help improve and make changes in the schools health and physical education curriculum.

Sex Education

PROBLEM:

All students do not have the basic information needed to make an informed decision about whether they should or should not engage in sexual activity. If students decide to engage in sexual activity they do not have the knowledge to properly protect themselves and their partners.

GOAL:

To determine the knowledge base of students in the area of sex education so that improvements can be made to the information that is taught and the way it is taught to them.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Chicago Department of Public Health should create a standardize sex education knowledge test. This test should be administered to all students that attend Chicago Public High Schools.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTION

- Chicago Public Schools should give students this sex education knowledge test at the beginning and end of each school year.
- Successful completion of this sex education knowledge test should be mandatory for graduation.
- Study guides should be provided to both students and teachers before the test.
- The test should include questions about both, abstinence until marriage and comprehensive sex education.
- Teachers should be provided with the answer key to this test so that they can review the test with their students, discuss the correct answers, and offer explanations for why certain answers are considered incorrect.

PROBLEM:

The main message that youth hear concerning sex education is that they should practice safe sex. Youth are not provided with an equal amount of information about sex education. The vast majority of information provided supports safe sex, and does not promote abstinence until marriage. Abstinence until marriage education does not receive as much advertisement and “air time” when it comes to youth education.

GOAL:

To create an environment in which youth are given equal information about abstinence until marriage and comprehensive sex education. The message of abstinence until marriage is just as important as comprehensive sex education. There should be a balance in the funding and time given to both messages.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Chicago Department of Public Health should spend equal time and money educating youth about abstinence until marriage and comprehensive sex education.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS:

- Establish an accountability committee that makes sure neither side of sex education receives more funding, and that neither one is being taught more often than the other.
- Posters, radio commercials, and television commercials for promoting abstinence until marriage should be used just as often as condom and other birth control campaigns funded by the City of Chicago and the Chicago Department of Public Health.
- Partnerships should be developed with abstinence until marriage organization and they should be used to help promote the message.
- An official measure should be developed or made public to determine the amount of time and funding that goes into abstinence until marriage and comprehensive sex education.

PROBLEM:

Students are not able to make an informed decision about their sexual activity due to the lack of abstinence until marriage message being promoted in the media. Youth are uninformed about the benefits of practicing abstinence until marriage. They are taught to practice safe sex, but not to practice abstinence until marriage. Youth are going to make their decision to become sexually active based of the information provided to them in the media, and peer pressure. It is important to provide youth with both sides of the discussion so that they can make an informed and educated decision. There are many big name companies that support safe sex, but there are few big name companies that support abstinence until marriage.

GOAL:

To educate students about all options related to sex education and sexual activity. To provide youth with as much information as possible so that they can use this information to make an informed decision about if they will engage in sexual activity.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Chicago Department of Public Health should produce more abstinence based advertisement, in an effort to help youth make an informed decision about sexual activity.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS

- Public service announcements should be created that address abstinence until marriage education and myths in the media.
- There should be an increased number of advertisements that promote abstinence as the only way to 100% protect oneself from STI's and pregnancy.
- There should be a city youth abstinence day in the City of Chicago, where youth who are practicing abstinence can show their pride in making this decision.

PROBLEM:

Youth do not always have money to purchase condoms, or they are simply too nervous and embarrassed to purchase them. Therefore, some youth may not have a condom when they need it, which can lead to the spread of STI's and youth pregnancy. There are a limited number of places that can be considered "private" where youth have access to condoms. Because of this, some youth may choose to have unprotected sexual intercourse.

GOAL:

To encourage those youth that are sexually active to have safe sex. If safe sex among sexually active teens is encouraged, then the number of STI's can be reduced as well as the number of teen pregnancies in the City of Chicago. In addition to promoting safe sex, condoms should be made more accessible.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Chicago Department of Public Health should provide and install condom dispensers in the bathrooms of high traffic youth areas such as schools, park districts, and clubs that are frequented by youth.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTION:

- Dispensers should be installed in high traffic areas such as public restrooms, school bathrooms, clubs that are frequented by youth, and park districts.
- There should be a free condom basket in school based health clinics for those youth who would not be embarrassed by obtaining condoms from the clinic.
- There should be a specific person designated to be in charge of making sure dispensers have condoms and that they are functioning properly.
- To prevent the abuse of condoms, dispensers should have a reasonable price associated with them, such as .25 cents.

PROBLEM:

Youth are exposed to sex at a very young age. With youth having more access to various media outlets, it is important to teach youth and educate them about sex and sexual activity at a younger age.

GOAL:

To encourage youth to practice abstinence until marriage at a young age. Therefore, when students begin to learn about their reproductive organs and the basic structure of the human body in grammar school, the City of Chicago should begin promoting the abstinence until marriage message.

RECOMMENDATION:

Chicago Public Schools should require that abstinence until marriage be taught in the curriculum for grades 5 through 8.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTION:

- Develop relationships with abstinence until marriage organizations that could help to create and teach an age appropriate curriculum.
- Curriculum should be age appropriate and engaging.
- There should be guest speakers and assemblies to promote abstinence until marriage.
- Abstinence until marriage clubs should be encouraged at schools.

Mental Health

PROBLEM:

Youth in Chicago have very few opportunities to express their feelings, or they do not feel comfortable expressing their feelings. This creates a problem because it adds to other factors that cause youth to become depressed, suicidal, stressed, and/or emotionally damaged, especially in situations where youth do not have healthy relationships with their parents.

GOAL:

To ensure that parents and youth are aware of different mental health issues, and know how to seek treatment. In addition this is a way for a child that is emotionally unstable to seek and receive help.

PROBLEM:

Chicago Public Schools should require a mental health assessment to be completed by the examining physician when students see them for physical exams and immunizations.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS:

- It should be mandatory for students to have a mental health assessment completed when they go for their physical exam and immunizations.
- If considered emotionally unstable after completing this mental health assessment, students should be encouraged to seek individual counseling.
- There should be a record kept verifying that students have had their mental health assessment, similar to the one saying that they have had their yearly physical or immunizations.
- Students should receive referrals to mental health clinics that are close to where they live.

PROBLEM:

There are youth that are insecure or unaware of their sexuality, and these teens deserve help and support while working through this time in their life. It is hard for youth to “come out” because they feel they may be rejected because of social norms. Students may live their entire life silenced and feeling uncomfortable because of their sexuality.

GOAL:

To create a safe and open environment for all students that may be questioning their sexuality. To have a staff member available in schools, park districts, and other youth agencies that would help guide and support these youth.

RECOMMENDATION:

There should be one staff member in schools, park districts, and other youth agencies designated to be the LGBT ally.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS:

- Designate at least one staff member to post a rainbow sticker that shows and promotes a safe and open environment where the youth can discuss their sexuality.
- LGBT alliance clubs should be developed in schools.
- LGBT tolerance assemblies should be held at the beginning of each school year.
- Workshops that focus on helping youth to deal with sexuality and identity issues should be developed and well promoted.
- Advertisements that promote LGBT tolerance and acceptance should be created by the City of Chicago and the Chicago Department of Public Health and they should be placed in schools, park districts, and other youth agencies.
- Those staff members designated to act as allies should attend a formal training or workshop.

PROBLEM:

Students face a growing number of pressures and stressors throughout their high school careers some of them include: homework, extracurricular activities, preparation for college, family obligations, peer pressure, and social environmental issues. Often students do not know how to manage their stress.

GOAL:

To provide workshops that will encourage and teach students to deal with their stress in a healthy and positive way.

RECOMMENDATION:

The City of Chicago should create stress management classes that meet in park districts and communities centers for youth.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS:

- Park Districts should hold bi-weekly meetings, classes, or activities to help students learn to manage their stress.
- Stress management workshops should include speakers, handouts, and mentors.
- There should be meditation activities and classes available throughout the City of Chicago, specifically designed for youth.
- Anger management classes should be offered for youth.

Access

PROBLEM:

Youth health issues are not widely promoted and discussed in the media, therefore many youth and their parents are unaware of the health issues affecting the youth and how to treat these health issues. Youth do not know where to go if they have questions about youth health issues and access to health care.

GOAL:

To promote the awareness of youth health issues to youth and their parents through the use of media. To establish a culture where youth and their parents are able to openly discuss youth health issues with each other and the community.

RECOMMENDATION:

At least once a month on his regularly scheduled radio broadcast on WVON radio Commissioner Terry Mason should address teen issues.

IMPLEMENTAION SUGGESTIONS:

- One segment per month should be designated to address youth health issues.
- Different youth, youth based health organizations, youth health advocacy groups, and health care workers should be invited to serve as guests on the radio show.
- There should be advertisements strategically placed in schools, park districts and other youth agencies that promote the youth health segment of the radio show.
- There should be raffles and sweepstakes of small gifts that act as incentives for youth to listen to the radio show.
- Online social networking sites commonly used by teens such as Myspace and Facebook should be used to promote the youth health segment of the radio show.

PROBLEM:

New forms of technology are constantly being developed and the youth are constantly changing their usage and redefining how technology is being used. Youth are constantly accessing the internet to look up the latest movies, music, and to search the statistics of their favorite athlete. However, there are not many youth friendly websites designed specifically for youth to gather information about their health. In addition, there are even fewer youth health websites created by youth for youth.

GOALS:

To create a youth friendly website that provides youth with access to information regarding their health and where they can have a safe environment to learn about and discuss youth health issues.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Chicago Department of Public Health should develop a youth friendly website that specifically addresses youth health issues.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTION

- The Mikva Youth Health Council should be used as consultants on the youth health website.
- The Mikva Youth Health Council should be allowed to give their input in the design, layout, content, etc... of the Youth Health Website.
- There should be a direct link to the Youth Health Website placed on the Chicago Department of Public Health's website.
- There should be a group of city youth selected to be a part of the administration of this website

Mikva Challenge Youth Health Council 2008 Summer Recommendations

- The website should contain a blog that follows up on youth issues that are discussed on Commissioner Mason's radio show
- The youth health website should be advertised and promoted on online social networking websites.
- The City of Chicago and the Chicago Department of Public Health should provide the domain for this website.
- This website should be designed and maintained by youth, with oversight from adults and health care workers.

PROBLEM:

Youth who reside in the City of Chicago do not know about the various health care services that are available to them by the city. Youth also do not know about the many issues that affect their health daily, and yearly. Many youth are not informed and therefore do not have knowledge to properly care for themselves throughout the year as the climate changes.

GOAL:

To create a central location where youth can learn about the various health care services available to them by the City of Chicago and the Chicago Department of Public Health. To educate youth about how to properly take care of their selves and to provide them with information that pertains to youth health.

RECOMMENDATION:

The City of Chicago through the Chicago Department of Public Health should host a citywide youth health expo. This expo should be held twice a year once during the summer and once during the winter season, preferably during school vacation.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS:

- Two days should be identified as the City Youth Health Expo Days. There should be one expo in the summer and one in the winter.
- Ensure that organizations, health care workers, and other advocates of improving youth health are present at the expo to provide the youth with information about physical activity, nutrition, obesity, mental health, teen pregnancy, STI's, access and any other youth health related issues.
- Adequate advertisement should be created for these expos including but not limited to: television, radio, posters, and internet.

Mikva Challenge Youth Health Council 2008 Summer Recommendations

- An official City of Chicago Youth Health Expo Planning Committee should be developed. City youth should be members of this committee.

PROBLEM:

Everyday people become sick through the transmission of germs and bacteria that are spread by touching unclean surfaces such as desks, door knobs, computers, and using public bathrooms. People become sick through the transmission of germs and bacteria via contact with other people such as shaking hands, coughing, and sneezing.

GOAL:

To provide students and youth with access to hand sanitizers as a way of reducing the spread of germs and bacteria.

RECOMMENDATION:

Hand sanitizer dispensers should be installed in schools, park districts and other youth agencies.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS:

- Hand sanitizer dispensers should be installed in high traffic areas such as lunch rooms, hallways of schools, park districts, and youth agencies.
- There should be a designated person to maintain and refill dispensers.
- Have signs that say students and youth are required to sanitize hands before eating or returning to work.
- Create signs and displays that explain how germs and bacteria are transmitted, and how effective hand sanitizers are in reducing the transmission of germs and bacteria.

PROBLEM:

The number of Chicago Public Schools that have health clinics and full time nurses are insufficient to handle the growing number of student health needs. Considering the fact that students spend much of their time at school, they should have the option of seeking advice and simple medical attention while on school premises. In addition students should be able to obtain information on medical services offered to them by the City of Chicago.

GOAL:

To provide students with access to a nurse and simple health care while they are on school premises. There should be a central location on school premises where students can access information about the services provided to them by the City of Chicago and to learn of any health issues that are particularly pertinent to them.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Chicago Department of Public Health and Chicago Public Schools should work together to increase the number of city sponsored school based health clinics. These clinics should be staffed by full time nurses.

IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS:

- More full time nurses should be hired to staff school health clinics.
- Nurses should be formally introduced to students, to ensure that students know who their nurse is and where their office is located.
- Brochures and pamphlets should be made available in school based health clinics to inform students about health care options and how to access them.
- There should be a designated room for school based health clinics, with resources such as first aid kits, ice packs, and other essential medical equipment needed.

Mikva Challenge Youth Health Council 2008 Summer Recommendations

- The office of Health Care Access should be invited to speak at a school assembly by the schools health clinic or nurse.

CONCLUSION:

The Mikva Challenge Youth Health Council is composed of ten youth from across the City of Chicago. The Youth Health Council spent eight weeks researching and learning about the various health issues that are facing youth not only in Chicago, but across the country. This was a challenging experience for the Youth Health Council because we were forced to think about our experiences as they relate to physical activity, nutrition, sex education, and access to health care. More importantly, the Youth Health Council had to continually remind our self to think outside of our own experience and to remember that Chicago is home to thousands of youth many of whom share their experiences, but also many of whom do not share their experiences. In our pilot summer the Youth Health Council has done a tremendous amount of work and has learned a lot about the subject area. The more we researched and the more we discussed the more we realized that there is so much work to be done. We did great work throughout this summer, and we look forward to continuing our efforts throughout the academic school year.

Javaris Pratt
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YOUTH HEALTH COUNCIL MEMBERS

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