

Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Grant Final Report

Media Smart Youth Class Summary

Generation Schools Network, in partnership with Rise Above Colorado, adapted the evidence-informed Media Smart Youth program as the core element of a prevention program that focused on over-the-counter and prescription drugs, marijuana, and alcohol. Program elements included:

- *Media Smart Youth Classes* - During the months of March and April 2015, LeAndrea Walters, a teacher at West Generation Academy, delivered the 15, 60-minute Media Smart Youth Classes to 4 6th-8th grade classes. 70 students were scheduled for these classes and Ms. Walters reported regular attendance of 60 students. Ms. Walters extended the final project for several additional class sessions because students were so engaged and committed to creating high quality products.
- *Family Engagement Meeting* - On Friday, March 10th, 40 family members attended a coffee with the principal event where Ms. Walters' Media Smart Youth students presented their own positive media including logos, posters, videos, raps, skits, and newspaper articles in order to educate youth about harmful effects of misusing prescription drugs. The founder of a local substance abuse recovery program also discussed the risks of addiction and the dangers of substances for developing youth brains.

These two elements of the program were very effective in achieving the goals of increasing student awareness of the harm of misusing prescription and other legal drugs and empowering youth with an understanding of the complex media environment that influences their health. See Outcomes section below for more details.

#IRiseAbove Project Summary

The second prong of the prevention program was a social media and artistic campaign where students were encouraged to share publicly how they rise above substance abuse. Program elements included:

- *#IRiseAbove Advocacy Classes* - Four Advocacy lessons related to the #IRiseAbove campaign were delivered to all WGA Advocacy teachers for implementation in the month of April. All 671 WGA students should have participated in these classes.
- *Mural* – Approximately 75 WGA students also worked to create a “Knowledge is Power” mural in the Santa Fe Arts district. See photo in the Artifacts section.

These two elements of the program were effective in expanding the work of the Media Smart Youth Class to the larger school community. The #IRiseAbove Project provided students with an avenue to advocate for empowered, healthy decision-making in their school environment. The mural creation allowed them to focus on the positive of what young people can do, rather than what they can't or shouldn't. Challenges and recommendations for redesign of these elements are discussed later in the report.

Outcomes

Students in the Media Smart Youth Classes participated in a pre- and post- survey that assessed their media literacy and perceptions of harm of prescription drug use. The following significant changes were observed:

| Question | Pre | Post |
|--|---|---|
| Would you give a friend a hard time if he or she were going to try prescription drugs for getting high? | 67.3% said yes | 80.8% said yes |
| How much risk, if any, do you think there is in trying a prescription pain reliever, like Vicodin or Oxycontin, without a doctor's prescription once or twice? | 48% said moderate or great risk | 61.5% said moderate or great risk |
| How much risk, if any, do you there is in trying prescription pain reliever, like Vicodin or Oxycontin, without a doctor's prescription regularly? | 52% said moderate or great risk | 64% said moderate or great risk |
| How much risk, if any, do you there is in trying prescription stimulants like Ritalin or Adderall that a doctor did not prescribe for you regularly? | 48% said moderate or great risk | 56% said moderate or great risk |
| What defines "appropriate use" for prescription drugs? | 78.3% said the prescription was written for you | 86% said the prescription was written for you |

Of particular note with these survey results, is the decrease in students who reported "not sure" on these questions. Results indicate that the students who came into the Media Smart Youth class unsure about the dangers of substance abuse developed increased awareness of the risks of abusing legal drugs.

We also saw an increase in number of students who disagreed with the following statements:

- Prescription pain relievers are not addictive.
- Mixing prescription drugs with other drugs, alcohol, or even other medicines increases the risks of misuse significantly.
- Using prescription stimulants, such as Adderall or Ritalin, without a prescription to help you study is OK.

And there was a significant increase in the number of students who agreed with the following statements:

- I know how to talk to my friend if I am concerned about them.
- I know how to help my friend get the concerned support they need if I am concerned about their drug use.

Overall, students' perception of the risk of prescription drugs was increased by the Media Smart Youth Classes. This is particularly important because research demonstrates that if teens understand the risks of using a particular drug, usage declines.ⁱ

Additionally, pre and post surveys showed an increase in student's abilities to understand the complex media environment that influences their health. After the Media Smart Youth Classes, more students could better identify the main message of ads and the mechanisms advertisers were using to get their attention.

Number of students ages 12-19 served: 70 in Media Smart Youth Classes, 671 through Advocacy classes

Challenges and Recommendations

The biggest challenges to our prevention program were related to implementation of the Advocacy classes. We did not measure how many teachers successfully utilized the materials that were distributed to them, and thus it is difficult to assess the impact that these classes had on the entire WGA student body. Additionally the social media campaign was not as broad as we had hoped, with posting coming primarily from teachers and program staff.

For future implementation of this program, we would want to host a school wide assembly that launched the #IRise Above campaign and survey teachers to find out how many of them successfully delivered the #IRiseAbove Advocacy lessons. We'd want to collect data from the entire student body about the impact this campaign had on them. Additionally, we'd want to engage youth more proactively in leading and driving the social media campaign to get more exposure.

Program Artifacts



Photo from Parent Meeting

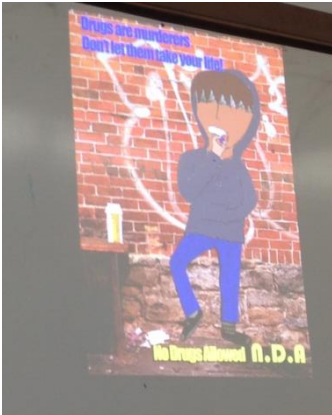


Photo from student presentation during parent meeting



Photo of Knowledge is Power mural

ⁱ Johnston, L. D., O'Malley, P. M., Miech, R. A., Bachman, J. G., & Schulenberg, J. E. (2014). Monitoring the Future national results on drug use: 1975-2013: Overview, Key Findings on Adolescent Drug Use. Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan.