



## Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) Evaluation

May 2017

### Wise Guys: Implementing a Boys-Only Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program in Davenport, Iowa

In recent years, there has been a growing policy focus on responsible fatherhood, with substantial federal funding provided for programs designed to help low-income fathers in their efforts to support their children. A related policy issue has received considerably less attention—how best to help adolescent males make responsible decisions about their sexual behavior and risk of early entry into fatherhood. Early fatherhood has been shown to have negative effects on young men's educational attainment, which can adversely affect their long-term economic well-being, as well as the economic well-being of their children.

Few rigorous evaluations have been conducted on programs designed specifically to reduce sexual risk behavior and early fatherhood among adolescent males. To address this research gap, the Administration for Children and Families funded Mathematica Policy Research to conduct a rigorous evaluation of the *Wise Guys* program in and near Davenport, Iowa, in collaboration with the Iowa Department of Public Health. This programming was delivered by a community-based organization, Bethany for Children and Families, in Davenport-area middle schools and funded through the state's Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) grant.

#### Wise Guys in Davenport

The *Wise Guys* curriculum aims to promote male responsibility and discourage early entry into fatherhood. By offering programming in male-only groups, *Wise Guys* aims to create an environment in which boys feel comfortable talking about masculinity, gender roles, and sexual health. The curriculum aims to meet the specific needs of adolescent males. For example, content on puberty focuses specifically on the developmental changes that boys experience. The curriculum also aims to strengthen communication between boys and their parents, increase knowledge related to sexual attitudes and the consequences of risky behavior, and enhance boys' ability to identify personal values and beliefs related to sexuality.

Bethany staff implemented the *Wise Guys* curriculum with 7th grade boys in seven middle schools in the Davenport area.



#### Evaluation of Wise Guys in Davenport, Iowa—A Snapshot

- All 7th grade boys in participating middle schools were invited to apply for *Wise Guys*. Applicants were randomly assigned to a treatment group or a control group.
  - The *Wise Guys* curriculum was delivered to the treatment group during the regular school day in pull-out sessions each semester from fall 2013 through spring 2016.
  - The control group did not receive the supplemental *Wise Guys* program. Both research groups received usual sex education in health class.
  - Follow-up surveys were administered in 8th and 9th grades to gather outcomes for impact analysis.
- *Wise Guys* covers a mix of topics including: values, masculinity, communication, puberty, abstinence, sex, contraceptive methods, sexually transmitted infections, parenthood, decision making, goal setting, and dating violence.
- *Wise Guys*, as implemented and tested in Davenport, consists of 13 to 14 sessions delivered once a week in sessions by a team of two facilitators—one male and one female—from Bethany for Children and Families.
- As intended by the curriculum developer, Bethany selected activities from the curriculum to be age appropriate and to fit in 40- to 50-minute class periods.

They offered *Wise Guys* as a voluntary program during the regular school day. The curriculum supplemented the standard sex education curriculum that students in study schools received through their health classes. *Wise Guys* is designed to be delivered in 10 sessions of 45 to 60 minutes each. Bethany supplemented these sessions with additional content that covered healthy relationships, social media, and mental health to address PREP grant requirements that programming cover adulthood preparation topics in addition to teen pregnancy prevention. In Davenport, *Wise Guys* programming was offered in 14 weekly sessions that were 47 minutes long on average across the seven study schools. Two co-facilitators, one male and one female, delivered the program. Bethany hoped that the male facilitator would serve as a role model for the boys in the program, while the female facilitator would help to provide the female perspective on the issues discussed.

## Meeting Implementation Challenges and Ensuring Program Success

The Bethany facilitators successfully implemented *Wise Guys* during the period covered by the study. They offered all planned sessions except when schools closed due to bad weather or school scheduling conflicts (such as school assemblies) arose. When this happened, they adjusted by combining sessions and streamlining planned activities. To help address the scheduling challenges, Bethany reduced the number of sessions from 14 to 13 by combining two sessions that covered similar content.

Participants received most of the program content that was offered. On average, the attendance rate at *Wise Guys* sessions was 77 percent. For most participating boys, absences from program sessions did not appear to reflect lack of motivation to attend. According to focus group participants, when boys missed sessions, most often it was because they were absent from school, had to take a test in the class that they would have missed, or had to attend a field trip or special event for another class.

According to the facilitators, school staff, evaluation site visitors, and the participants themselves, the boys who enrolled liked participating in *Wise Guys*. During classroom observations, participating boys were actively engaged in program activities and discussions. Participants indicated that they thought the program would help them make better decisions. Because the facilitators were not school staff, participating boys trusted them to keep information confidential.

Finding enough instructional time is often a challenge for supplemental programs implemented in school during the regular school day, and Bethany's implementation of *Wise Guys* was

no exception. The main challenge that the facilitators and participants identified was limited time for the program. Many boys expressed a desire for *Wise Guys* to meet for longer sessions or more often. The facilitators cited short class periods and limited time as their biggest challenge. Site visitors noted that the facilitators moved rapidly through the material in each session in order to fit it into the class period.

## Lessons Learned and Looking Ahead

*Wise Guys* provided an important supplement to the sex education programming offered in health classes at the study schools. In addition to covering strategies for reducing sexual risk behaviors, sessions covered topics designed to help boys become responsible men and make healthy decisions about romantic relationships and fatherhood. School officials and program participants indicated that facilitators succeeded in creating a safe, trusting environment for boys to discuss masculinity, gender roles, teen pregnancy prevention, and fatherhood. Program staff indicated that, in their view, having a male co-facilitator who could serve as a role model and share his own experiences was a crucial ingredient of this success.

This implementation study of *Wise Guys* was conducted in conjunction with a rigorous impact study based on a random assignment research design. Upcoming impact reports, scheduled for release in 2017 and 2018, will examine program effects on participating boys' attitudes, knowledge, and sexual activity one and two years after they completed the program. These reports will provide important new evidence on the effectiveness of an adolescent pregnancy prevention curriculum designed specifically for boys.

## The PREP Multi-Component Evaluation

The PREP evaluation, led by Mathematica Policy Research, has three main components: (1) documenting the implementation of funded programs in participating states, (2) analyzing performance management data provided by PREP grantees, and (3) assessing the impacts of PREP-funded programs in four sites using a random assignment design. This brief, and the accompanying full report, "Focusing on the Boys: Implementing *Wise Guys* in Davenport, Iowa," are part of a series of products from the evaluation. Learn more about the evaluation at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/personal-responsibility-education-program-prep-multi-component>. Learn more about the PREP initiative at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/programs/adolescent-pregnancy-prevention>.

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