



SPOTLIGHT: Project SUCCESS

Background

Project SUCCESS (Schools Using Coordinated Community Efforts to Strengthen Students) is a school-based model to prevent and reduce substance use and misuse among adolescents. The program places trained counselors in public and alternative high schools to provide a full range of services, including prevention education, awareness, individual assessments, and specialized counseling groups. Project SUCCESS is modeled after the Westchester Student Assistance Program (WSAP) that originated in Westchester County, New York, and the Residential Student Assistance Program (RSAP), two highly effective school-based prevention and early intervention models.

How it Works

Project SUCCESS works with high-risk students attending traditional secondary schools and alternative schools. The program begins with an eight-session Prevention Education Series during which students participate in sessions such as *Being an Adolescent; Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs; Relationships with Family and Friends; and Skills for Coping*. Over the course of the psycho-education program, students develop a relationship with the trained counselor. In public schools, the series is conducted in the 7th and 9th grade health education curricula. In alternative schools, the series is implemented in accordance with the unique structure of each institution.

Upon completing the education series, students who are identified by the Project SUCCESS counselor as being at high-risk for developing a substance use disorder are assessed and work with the counselor to devise a course of action that best suits their needs. Students who are identified as high-risk are often using substances, have parents, siblings, or friends who misuse substances, have experienced transitions, and/or have positive attitudes toward substance misuse. These students are assigned to a group focused on either prevention or intervention

“Project SUCCESS is one of a few programs that provides universal, selective, and indicated prevention strategies to secondary and alternative schools, thereby filling a gap identified by most school administrators and parents.”

– Ellen Morehouse, LCSW, CASAC, CPP,
Executive Director, Student Assistance
Services Corporation

based on their level of substance misuse, exposure, and overall motivation. Groups of four to eight high-risk students meet with their counselor once a week for a highly interactive session during regular school hours. Certain students also meet with the counselor one-on-one. When a higher level of care is needed, counselors work with teachers and staff at the school to ensure that the student is referred to the appropriate clinical services in the school or community.

Students are surveyed before and after having completed Project SUCCESS to help the program assess its efficacy.

How it is Innovative

There are three main approaches to prevention and treatment: universal, selective and indicated. While the universal approach applies to everyone, the selective approach focuses on subgroups that are at-risk for developing a substance use disorder, such as those with drug using friends and children of parents who misuse substances. Indicated approaches target people who are beginning to use substances but may not have developed a substance use disorder. Most treatment and prevention models use just one approach, but Project SUCCESS is a tiered model that incorporates universal, selective, and indicated approaches. By leveraging the

Spotlight Series: highlighting innovative programs across the nation enacting a comprehensive strategy to address substance use disorders and addiction.

most beneficial aspects of all three approaches, Project SUCCESS provides services that are inherently more holistic than most traditional models.

Project SUCCESS counselors begin building relationships with students during the Prevention Education Series, and by the time students are individually assessed, counselors already have a good sense of who they are as people and what their needs might be. This relationship-building results in higher levels of assessment accuracy, more honesty in group settings, and enables the program to focus efforts where their services are most needed. Project SUCCESS also engages with families by providing parental education programs and organizing prevention awareness events, both at school and within the communities where they operate.

Demonstrating Efficacy

A study conducted from 1995-1998 with a sample of 425 adolescents in Westchester County's alternative schools found that of those who reported using substances when they began Project SUCCESS, 23 percent had quit using substances upon program completion. Within the control group, 5 percent reported having quit after the same period of time. Students who continued to use substances reduced their use 17-26 percent. Participants were evaluated again two years later. The results showed that among the students who were using substances when they began Project SUCCESS, 33.3 percent were no longer using alcohol, 45 percent were no longer using cannabis, and 22.9 percent were no longer using tobacco. Results from the study also showed that students who attended alternative schools that held school-wide awareness programs were more involved in school-related extracurricular activities than students attending schools that did not hold such events. This confirmed the benefit of Project SUCCESS, even for students who only participated in the school-wide

events and did not complete the Prevention Education Series or participate in counseling.

A grant from the U.S. Department of Education from 2002-2006 studied the effectiveness of Project SUCCESS in public schools. A randomized, repeated measure design assessed the effectiveness of Project SUCCESS for 363 students in program and control conditions. All students participated in school-wide events; however, half of the students were offered the education series and counseling groups. Middle and high schoolers were followed for three years with results showing Project SUCCESS to be beneficial for males, females, and diverse ethnic groups and ages. In this study, students participated in the program, and then were given another post-test 21 months after completing the program. Students involved in the Project SUCCESS group were 4.3 times less likely than those in the control group to report use of alcohol, tobacco and cannabis and 5 times less likely to report illicit substance use. Students who used alcohol, tobacco and cannabis when given the pre-test were 4.14 times less likely to report continued use after 21 months and 7.33 less likely to report illicit substance use. Students who participated in Project SUCCESS reported an increase in the amount they cared for their families and an increase in the expectation that law enforcement would help them when needed. They also reported a decrease in the number of friends they had who used substances.

Stakeholders & Partners

Project SUCCESS works closely with the schools where the program is implemented, the parents of students participating in the program, and organizations with aligned purposes who are active in the larger community. Project SUCCESS has been implemented in 28 states, most of which are funded through state block grants.

Resources & References

- i. Morehouse, E. R., & Tobler, N. S. (2000). Project SUCCESS final report: Grant number 4 HD1 SP07240. Report submitted January 26, 2000, to the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- ii. Vaughan, R., & Johnson, P. (2007). The Effectiveness of Project SUCCESS (Schools Using Coordinated Community Efforts to Strengthen Students) in a Regular Secondary School Setting. Unpublished manuscript.

Project SUCCESS Website: <http://www.sascorp.org/success.html>