

Public Health Practice Stories from the Field



9%

of students in the Los Angeles Unified School District identify as LGBTQ and are at increased risk for HIV/AIDS

35,000

district staff and students, including all teachers hired since 2003, have received anti-bias training

62%

of schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District have a gay-straight alliance or similar club

An expanded network

of education, testing, and treatment services for LGBTQ students is now available through collaboration with community-based organizations

Los Angeles School District Uses Innovative Approaches to Combat HIV/AIDS among LGBTQ Students

The HIV epidemic in Los Angeles County, California, disproportionately affects young men who have sex with men (YMSM). Education agencies are important partners for health agencies in reducing risky behaviors among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students—a group that includes YMSM students. Education agencies can also help increase these students' access to prevention and testing services.

The Los Angeles Unified School District is the nation's second largest school district, with approximately 640,000 students; LGBTQ students make up about 9% of this student population. The school district's HIV/AIDS Prevention Unit has implemented several strategic policy changes and innovative practices through funding, in part, from CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health. The district has

- Developed resources to help school staff understand the concerns and needs of LGBTQ students
- Supported schools in establishing gay-straight alliances
- Linked schools to community health and other organizations to provide services for LGBTQ students
- Provided training for district and school staff to ensure that curricula are inclusive of LGBTQ students

Because of these efforts, the Los Angeles Unified School District has been able to take significant steps in reshaping the school environment for LGBTQ and YMSM students and expanding opportunities for all students to access HIV prevention and testing services.

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Office for State, Tribal, Local and Territorial Support



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What We Did

The school district implemented strategic policy changes and innovative practices, including activities that reshaped the school environment for LGBTQ and YMSM students. Examples included

- Developing a chapter about sexual orientation for inclusion in the *Sexuality and Society* textbook, which is used in required high school health education courses in the district (the first school district in the nation to provide such a chapter in its curricula)
- Promoting an LGBTQ Resource Toolkit for all students and faculty
- Requiring all district teachers to receive professional development in LGBTQ cultural sensitivity

The district also expanded opportunities within the Los Angeles community for all students (with an emphasis on LGBTQ and YMSM students) to get access to HIV prevention and testing services. This included

- Implementing Project U, which uses social media such as Twitter to increase the percentage of black and Latino LGBTQ students who receive HIV/AIDS and STD prevention education, and, if the students are sexually active, to increase the percentage who use condoms and get tested for HIV and other STDs
- Piloting AMP!, an arts-based, multiple intervention, peer-education program that brings community resources together to increase HIV testing among students at high risk

What We Accomplished

The school district was able to meet its goal of reshaping the school environment for LGBTQ students and increasing student access to HIV prevention and testing services.

- Approximately 35,000 district employees and students, including all teachers hired since 2003, have received the district's anti-bias training, including information on the district's policies on sexualized bullying.
- Sixty two percent of district schools have a gay-straight alliance or similar club, a much higher percentage than in many other large urban school districts nationwide.
- Sexually active students who participated in AMP! were nearly four times more likely to get tested for HIV than they were before participating in the program. In addition, there was a 21% increase in students who reported feeling compassion toward people living with HIV/AIDS and a 38% increase in students who knew where to get a local HIV test.
- Project U is now available in more than 200 schools across the district, and its website (projectula.org) receives about 800 to 2,600 hits daily. Evaluation results of Project U will be available in early 2013.

Additionally, the district's collaboration with community organizations, such as the county health department, universities, and children's health centers, has expanded the network of education, testing, and treatment services for LGBTQ and YMSM students in Los Angeles County.

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