

Rape Prevention and Education Program

Reducing Risk for Sexual Violence among Youth (2021-2022)

Background: [California Department of Public Health's \(CDPH\) Rape Prevention and Education \(RPE\) Program](#) is working to reduce risk for sexual violence (SV) among youth across California. The RPE Program is a part of a national sexual violence prevention program funded by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#). During the 2021-22 CDPH/RPE program funding year, CDPH funded 23 local school-based and community mobilization RPE projects across the state to conduct sexual violence prevention, as well as to participate in evaluation of these efforts. Most community mobilization RPE projects are currently participating in a rigorous research evaluation of the [Close to Home](#) model conducted by [University of California San Diego, Center on Gender Equity and Health](#) (n=9). Evaluation results are expected in Fall 2025 and are not included in this brief. School-based SV prevention projects used a comprehensive approach that included: implementation of a SV prevention curriculum that incorporated SV prevention content such as consent, active bystander behavior, healthy relationships, and gender equity; strategies and activities with the intent to increase youth leadership around SV prevention; addressing school policies and procedures related to SV; and school-wide activities to reach students and people within the larger community. Community mobilization SV prevention projects implemented Close to Home, an approach that engages whole communities to design and lead solutions to end SV. **This brief report highlights participant-level findings from pre-post surveys collected by 14 RPE projects from August 2021 to July 2022, providing SV prevention practitioners and partners a snapshot of the RPE Program's impact on risk factors for sexual and dating violence in California.**



Participation in School-Based RPE Projects



Across all school-based RPE projects, 1,770 ongoing RPE-funded project participants were reached with multiple sessions (i.e., meetings). Of these ongoing participants, 493 were youth leadership participants who joined what is typically at least a year-long club/group that meets multiple times per month to learn and implement prevention efforts. These estimated 1,770 ongoing participants were engaged in 1,021 RPE meetings and 1,023 program hours.

As part of RPE-funded efforts, project facilitators described large, campus-wide efforts to engage students in SV prevention. Awareness events such as Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month (TDVAM) and Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) served as catalysts for student leadership in RPE.

“ Youth planned and executed two awareness events in the Fall at each school site (six events). Student leaders created #that'slove/#that'snotlove poster to educate peers on relationships and did a chalk-the-walk campaign. In the Spring students executed a week-long TDVAM Spirit Week with unique educational events on Teen Dating Violence and Relationships all five days at three school site (15 events). Finally, in April for SAAM, student closed out the school year with 2 awareness events related to sexual violence at each site (six events), and one school did a supply drive for Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) Nurses. ”

- RPE FACILITATOR, SCHOOL-BASED RPE PROJECT

Student-led Community Organizing Efforts

Two RPE-funding projects described supporting student-led community organizing around the issues of racism, sexual harassment and assault, bullying of LGBTQ+ students, and school dress code policy. These were issues that students felt the administration was not adequately acknowledging or addressing on their campus. One of these student-led action lasted several days and included multiple speeches from students to engage other students in SV prevention. The RPE agency working with these students interviewed participating students and supported them to engage in dialogue with the school administrators.



RPE-funded projects are creating safe spaces for youth. By holding space for youth to come together consistently to discuss topics related to SV prevention, as well as events going on in the world around them. Multiple agencies highlighted evidence of the level of student comfort in the spaces when they shared personal experiences surrounding sexual violence and mental health.

“ Students expressed how difficult this past year has been on them and adjusting back to being in person. Students felt comfortable sharing with one another and exploring topics such as gender identity, how parents/guardians influence their views on dating and in life, and pressures they experience as one male identifying student expressed "as the only boy in my family, I know my parents want me to have a traditional wedding and children but I know I need to follow my heart". The students are bonding with one another and sharing their stories with one another. ”

- RPE FACILITATOR, SCHOOL-BASED RPE PROJECT



Intersectionality was also a common discussion topic, as many students were interested in exploring how other identities, especially race and LGBTQ+ identities, overlap with and contribute to SV. Conversations around topics like this are complex, and this is an example of how the CDPH RPE Program is helping to foster spaces that allow youth to critically examine their world in order to prevent SV.

RPE-funded project youth participants worked toward preventing SV in their own lives and in that of their peers through youth-led campus-wide engagement, community organizing around supporting structural and policy shifts at schools to support SV prevention, and personal growth and learning during RPE project meetings.

RPE-Funded Projects Pre/Post Participant Survey Results (2021-22)



RPE-funded project staff administered pre-surveys prior to implementing RPE prevention sessions and post-surveys after the last session was completed (at least once every year) to understand the impact of RPE projects on participants. A total of 1,493 participants completed a pre-project survey and 1,332 completed a post-project survey during the 2021-2022 project year. These surveys were from 14 school-based projects and one community mobilization RPE project.






Participants were an average age of 13.7 years old prior to the project and 14.0 years old at the post-project survey. The majority were either in middle school (47%) or in high school (52%) with only 1% of survey takers being young adults or in college. The participant group consisted of people who identified as the following: 47% females, 47% males, 5% identifying as non-binary, and 1% who preferred not to answer. In terms of race, 40% identified as White, 30% as Hispanic, 7% as Asian, 6% as Black/African American, 5% as Native American, 2% as Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 6% as another race not listed, and 4% preferred not to answer.

A sub-sample of 564 responses on pre-project surveys were able to be uniquely matched with responses to post-project data, using a combination of age, race, gender, and group information. Data from this subsample were analyzed to detect if significant changes occurred among participants from prior to participating in the RPE project to after participating in the project. This sub-sample includes all 14 of the school-based RPE projects and no community mobilization projects due to feasibility of matching pre- to post-data. On average, the length between pre- and post-survey was 94 days. The following significant changes from pre- to post-survey were detected among this matched sample from RPE participants between August 2021-July 2022:




Overall

-  Significant **increase** in reports of people at school viewing sexual harassment or assault as a problem.
-  Significant **increase** in reports of school staff responding in supportive and helpful ways to incidents of sexual harassment.

High School and College Youth

-  Significant **increase** in self-efficacy for bystander behaviors.
-  Significant **increase** in bystander intention to intervene.
-  Significant **increase** in reports of perceived safe school environment.

Middle School Youth

-  Significant **decrease** in self-efficacy for bystander behaviors.
-  Significant **decrease** in community connectedness.
-  Significant **increase** in reports of perceived safe school environment.

While some results indicated decreases in self-confidence to enact bystander behavior and feelings of safety and connection among middle school youth, positive improvements in self-confidence and intentions to enact positive bystander behavior among high school and college aged youth were also observed. Moreover, across both age groups, perceived improvements in school environments supportive of SV prevention were observed. While ideally these results could be directly attributed to the RPE projects, the lack of a control or reference group in the evaluation design limits the ability to know to what extent these observed changes were due to the RPE projects or external factors. For example, the decrease seen in middle school student's self-efficacy for bystander behaviors could have been driven by external factors like the developmental expansion in understanding social complexities that middle school aged youth experience, and the resulting dramatic increase in care about their peer's perceptions.

Continuing impact from social isolation during COVID-19 could have played a part in middle school youth's decreased feelings of connection to their communities. These results provide preliminary evidence of some of the possible ways the RPE projects are impacting participating youth and communities.

Conclusion

The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data provides powerful evidence of the strengths of RPE projects to prevent sexual violence in California communities. Qualitative data demonstrated the campus-wide engagement around SV prevention, student efforts to make structural and policy shifts at schools to create protective environments against SV, and the power of the discussions among RPE participants at regular RPE Project meetings. While not directly attributable only to the RPE projects, quantitative data suggests that school-based RPE projects improved RPE participant perspectives of the support and safety available within their school's regarding SV and that youth and young adult participants increased their self-efficacy and intentions to enact positive bystander behavior. **In sum, these pieces of evidence indicate that the RPE Program is contributing to reducing the risk for SV in California communities.**

