



# Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) Evaluation

February 2013

## PREP Evaluation of *Wise Guys*<sup>®</sup> in Iowa

**The issue:**  
*Effectiveness of PREP-funded programs on youth outcomes*

The Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP), funded under the Affordable Care Act of 2010, provides formula grants to states to support programs aimed at reducing teen pregnancies, sexual risk behaviors, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). To learn more about the design, implementation, and outcomes of these programs, Congress mandated a federal evaluation of PREP. The evaluation will document how states design and implement their PREP programs and will measure grantees' program performance. Additionally, four or five sites will participate in an in-depth implementation and impact evaluation. This evaluation will look in detail at how selected programs are implemented and how they affect key youth outcomes.

**Why is Iowa being considered for the evaluation?**

Iowa's *Wise Guys*<sup>®</sup> program has been identified as an especially promising site for the in-depth implementation and impact component of the national PREP evaluation. Few teen pregnancy prevention programs have been evaluated in Iowa or focus specifically on the needs of male youth. An evaluation of *Wise Guys* in Iowa can thus provide educators, program providers, and policymakers important information on the particular needs and outcomes of male youth in your community.

**What are the benefits of participating?**

Participating in the evaluation offers several benefits:

- 1. Understanding what works.** Participating schools will have a clear answer to the question, "How much of a difference is *Wise Guys* making in the lives of our students?" Having a definitive answer to this question will help schools know whether and how they make a difference.
- 2. Lessons for school programming.** As part of the evaluation, the study team will collect information on the successes and challenges schools face in implementing teen pregnancy prevention programs. This information may offer lessons to help improve future school programming decisions.
- 3. Contribute to federal policy decisions.** Congress mandated the national PREP evaluation to provide it and other federal agencies information on the success of PREP in improving youth outcomes. By participating in the in-depth component of the national PREP evaluation, your state will help provide information needed to inform the direction of future federal policy initiatives.

**What research questions will the study address?**

The study will address the following types of research questions:

- Is the *Wise Guys* program successful at reducing rates of sexual initiation or associated sexual risk behaviors?
- Does the program positively affect youths' relationship skills and attitudes?
- Is the program more effective for some youth than others?
- What are the key successes and challenges faced in implementing the program?
- Which aspects of program implementation are most related to program effectiveness?



### **What are the requirements for the study?**

To ensure the most rigorous evidence on the effects of the program, the evaluation will use a gold standard experimental design. In each participating school, the study team will work with staff from Bethany Children and Families to identify eligible middle school boys interested in the *Wise Guys* program. The study team will pick about half of these students at random to participate in *Wise Guys* starting the next school semester. The remaining half will receive their usual schedule of classes or perhaps an alternative program (unrelated to teen pregnancy or STI prevention). The study team will measure the effects of *Wise Guys* by comparing the outcomes of these two groups of students over time. The team will then repeat this process for subsequent classes of students until the combined number of students in both groups is approximately 800 across all participating schools (or roughly 100 to 150 per school).

Surveys will be administered to all study participants at three time points: **(1)** at baseline, before the start of the program; **(2)** approximately 6 months after the end of the program; and **(3)** approximately 18 months after the end of the program. Mathematica will have lead responsibility for administering all three surveys. For the baseline survey, Mathematica will work with Bethany Children and Families and school staff to identify a convenient time to administer the survey in school during the regular school day. For the follow-up surveys, Mathematica will administer the surveys either during or after school hours, depending on the timing of the survey and availability of students.

To document and understand how the program is implemented, members of the evaluation team will also conduct interviews with school staff and program facilitators, observe some *Wise Guys* classes, and conduct a small number of focus groups with study youth.

### **What permissions are needed to conduct the study?**

To answer the study's primary research questions, the student surveys will include some sensitive questions on sexual activity and associated risk behaviors. To help protect the rights and welfare of study participants, the evaluation team has received approval for the study from an independent institutional review board (IRB). In addition, the study team will seek active parental consent as a requirement for students' participation in the study. Only students who receive parental consent to participate will take part in the study and students can choose to discontinue the study at any time. Schools will not be asked to provide any personal information on students apart from directory information required to identify students eligible for the program and administer the study surveys. The evaluation team will work with school staff to determine whether any additional approvals are needed.

### **Who is conducting the study?**

Mathematica Policy Research conducts the national PREP evaluation under contract with the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Mathematica, a nonpartisan policy research firm, conducts research and surveys for federal and state governments, foundations, and private sector clients. See [www.mathematica-mpr.com](http://www.mathematica-mpr.com).

For the evaluation of *Wise Guys* in Iowa, Mathematica partners locally with the Iowa Department of Health and Bethany Children and Families, which oversees the implementation of *Wise Guys* under Iowa's state PREP funding.

### **To Find Out More**

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