

The San Marcos Story: Keys to Total Success

The San Marcos, California school district faced a serious teen pregnancy problem 147 high school girls known to be pregnant during the 1984-85 school year.

San Marcos put together a multi-faceted program called Decision Making: Keys to Total Success. It included:

- Daily 10-minute lessons for junior high school students on "how to be successful" (using materials from the Jefferson Center for Character Education)
- A 6-week course for 7th-graders on self-esteem and positive moral values
- A 6-week pro-abstinence course for 8th-graders, "Sexuality, Commitment, and the Family."

The "Sexuality, Commitment, and the Family" course, created by **Teen Aid, Inc.**, offers these messages to young people:

1. The only real, safe sex is having sex only with your marriage partner who is having sex only with you.
2. Abstinence offers freedom from guilt, doubt, worry; sexually transmitted disease; pregnancy; the trauma of abortion; loss of reputation; and pressure to marry early.
3. Abstinence offers freedom to become more creative in sharing feelings; develop skills and abilities; develop healthy self-appreciation; achieve financial stability before having a family; and develop greater trust in marriage.
4. After having been sexually active, it is possible to regain the advantages of abstinence. Decide to change; forgive yourself and others; change old habits; and develop new ways of sharing that do not include sexual activity.

These ideas are developed through discussions and videos such as **Why Wait?** (leading students to discover for themselves the advantages of avoiding premarital sexual activity) and **Window to the Womb** (ultrasound footage of fetal development, demonstrating to students the power of their sexuality to create new human life). Teen Aid's program also sends summaries of all lessons to parents and encourages them to participate in a workshop on how to talk to teens about responsible sexual behavior.

San Marcos reports that two years after implementing its Keys to Total Success program, known pregnancies in the school dropped dramatically and have continued to remain significantly lower than they were before the program. Drug referrals, grade point averages, standardized test scores, and attendance rates also showed marked improvement.

The San Marcos character-building program won a California state award for excellence in education and is included in the National School Boards Association's handbook of 100 outstanding school programs.

Teen Aid: <http://www.teen-aid.org/>