



May 12, 2015

Dear High School Superintendents:

Equitable access to rigorous, quality instruction and health services is at the core of our work in both the Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). That is why we are pleased to announce that high schools can provide health instruction that includes condom demonstrations in order to equip students with the medically accurate information they need to stay healthy and avoid high risk behaviors that threaten their lives and academic success.

Beginning in the 2015-16 school year, we encourage high schools to use the DOE recommended, evidence-based curriculum, *Reducing the Risk*, in its entirety, including the condom demonstration. This is in addition to the free condoms and demonstrations already available through high school Condom Availability Programs that are staffed by trained teachers. Both of these opportunities enhance a connection to health services that is necessary to curb rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted illnesses, including HIV, which create major hurdles for reaching high school graduation. In New York City, there are over 4,000 pregnancies each year in females under the age of 18 and high rates of chlamydia and gonorrhea in young adults both male and female. Data from the 2013 Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey show that 31.2% of our students have had intercourse, and nearly one third of those students did not use a condom the last time they had sex.

In 2011, a group of South Bronx schools that are part of a federally-funded DOHMH pregnancy prevention program were permitted to provide the *Reducing the Risk* condom demonstration lesson in health class. In keeping with our parent opt out policy for both sexual health education and the Condom Availability Program that has been operating in high schools since the 1990's, Bronx parents were able to opt their children out of the condom demonstration and other lessons about prevention. The lesson was well received in these school communities, and parent opt-out rates were low.

School and community outreach should continue to engage parents and caregivers from our diverse families as partners in their children's education, including their ability to opt out of pregnancy prevention lessons. Our school communities represent a range of cultural and religious beliefs, and principals should review the value of implementing comprehensive health education lessons with their School Leadership Team.

Free training for *Reducing the Risk*, the Condom Availability Program, and all facets of health education are available from the [Office of School Wellness Programs](#). If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Lindsey Harr, Executive Director, Office of School Wellness Programs, at lharr@schools.nyc.gov.

Thank you for all your efforts to teach our young people how to be and stay healthy,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Carmen Fariña'.

Carmen Fariña
Chancellor
NYC Department of Education

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Mary T. Bassett'.

Mary T. Bassett, MD, MPH
Commissioner
NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene