

Englewood students are taking active role in teaching peers about sexual health

Thursday, March 28, 2013

BY [STEPHANIE NODA](#)

STAFF WRITER

Northern Valley Suburbanite

[ENGLEWOOD](#) — Students are learning to teach their fellow classmates to make smart choices in regards to their sexual health, through a peer education program that recently began at Dwight Morrow High School called "Teen PEP."



DANIELLE PARHIZKARAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Joan Chica, a junior at Dwight Morrow High School, reads from a script while acting as a father talking to his teenage son about his relationship with girls at school. Students of Dwight Morrow High School participated in skits during the Teen PEP class on March 8.

The program, which is short for "Teen Prevention Education Program," came to the high school this year after The Zone, a youth service program run at the high school by Bergen Family Center, held a Teen Leadership Conference at the Kaplen JCC on the Palisades.

During the conference, [Tenafly](#) High School brought the program to the conference, which was a huge success with the teens, said Liz Corsini, director of The Zone.

"That was such a success that we really wanted to bring Teen PEP to this school," Corsini said.

Teen PEP is a five-day-a-week, four-credit elective course that helps students learn about pregnancy prevention, birth control, and sexually transmitted diseases, as well as teaching participants how to educate their peers, said Corsini.

The students in Teen PEP, who are mostly juniors, hold regular workshops with the freshmen class, performing skits of different scenarios they may encounter during their time in high school and the best ways to handle these situations.

"We have a lot of fun with it," said Emily Stein, a junior. "You can tell that when we're having fun with the skits, the freshmen are more engaged."

Before Teen PEP members take part in the workshops, the members go on a three day retreat to not only learn the material they will eventually teach to the freshmen, but to bond with each other. These bonds become important while acting in front of the freshmen, as the students have to rely on each other to make an entertaining skit, said Joan Chica, a junior.

"For the rest of the year, they become your family," said Chica.

The Teen PEP members have found that freshmen are more willing to discuss and ask questions about sexual health with their own peers than with adults.

After the skits are held, each junior has one-to-one time with small group of freshmen to go over the topics discussed in the skit and address any questions they may have.

While the freshmen were shy during the first workshop, the students began to open and actively participate in conversation by the time the third workshop had passed, said Chica.

"We are around that same age we know what they're going through," said Chica. "It makes it better for the freshmen to connect with us than to just go to an adult."

Not only has Teen PEP helped the freshmen learn about sexually health, but has also helped juniors themselves develop their leadership and public speaking skills.

"If you're more of a follower, you have to step out of your comfort zone and be more of a leader," said Stein.

For Chica, performing in front of the freshmen has made doing presentations in front of his own class easy by comparison.

"I was really scared [to do public presentations] but after I had to perform for the entire ninth grade class, it makes you more prepared," said Chica.