

Evaluating CVUSD Community Readiness for Implementing a New Form of Drug Prevention Known as PreVenture



Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine whether the Conejo Valley Unified School District (CVUSD) was in need of a new drug prevention program within the high schools. The program in question is PreVenture, a drug program that assess the student's susceptibility to substance abuse based on a student's character traits. It was necessary to determine the possibility of implementing the program while also assessing the existing measures in place. Additionally, it was also important to determine the parental, student and administrative interest in the prevention program. Surveys were administered to both students and parents in order to assess parent-student relationships in addition to interest. While interviews were conducted with the Assistant Principals of Instructions (API's) at the high schools. The data resulted in student and parent interest in the program as well as a lack of parental involvement in their child's decisions. Interviews with the API's determined that parental involvement played a crucial role in keeping students away from drugs and drug risk behaviors. The study concluded that there remains a demand for students who are in need of drug education and prevention, while also revealing a parental disconnect. Ultimately, this study contributes to the topic of substance abuse prevention within adolescents while focusing specifically on CVUSD.

Introduction

In the Conejo Valley Unified School District (CVUSD), measures have been taken to combat the accessibility and exposure to drugs and drug paraphernalia on school campuses through programs such as Project BreakThrough Student Assistance Program, Project Alert, Red Ribbon Week and Reality Parties. Despite the success of these programs, a deficiency remains for those students who are affected by substance abuse yet still fail to receive the aid they need.^{1,3,7,8}

PreVenture-Positive Choices, is a personality-based intervention drug program that targets students who display traits that put them at high risk of substance abuse: sensation-seeking, anxiety, depression and hopelessness. This program seeks to utilize said traits through encouraging students to channel their personality towards academic and long term success. Studies conducted in Australia and the UK revealed PreVenture produced significant reduction in risk behaviors such as binge drinking and smoking.^{1,4,5,6,9,10}

The goal is to discover the realistic possibility of program implementation; the challenges needed to overcome utilization as well as gauging the community's overall reaction to PreVenture's mission. Gauging information on communal opinion in regards to traditional prevention programs will also be gathered within the research. The end goal is to discover the restrictions and limitations of the program, and with possible positive feedback from the community, to ultimately begin the process of implementation within CVUSD.

Methods and Materials

Surveys focusing on the freshman (9th grade, class of 2021) student population within CVUSD high schools and their parents were collected from the three comprehensive high schools: Thousand Oaks High School, Westlake High School and Newbury Park High School. Freshman were the target age-range as this study assess the possible need for programs focusing on incoming high school students within CVUSD. Additionally, parent input was also a necessary aspect to determine student-parent relations as well as parent interest in a new drug intervention program. In conjunction with surveys, interviews were conducted with the Assistant Principles of Instruction (API) at the high schools in order to gauge the methods and actions of prevention being taken at each school. It was important to assess from an administrative point of view the specific procedures being taken and whether these procedures proved to be beneficial in combating substance abuse among students as well as the overall need within the high schools for a prevention program tailored for students with specific needs.

Results

Out of 45 parents surveyed with students attending freshman year in CVUSD, 34.9% of parents "strongly agreed" and 23.3% of parents responded "somewhat agree" to the statement: "Your child's exposure to substances such as alcohol and drugs has increased from middle school to 9th grade." When students were asked if they were interested in a "program designed to help you focus on positive goals rather than drug prevention/intervention," 30.6% of students responded "moderately interested," while 12.9% responded "extremely interested." In parallel, when parents asked if they were interested in a "program designed to help your child focus on positive goals rather than drug prevention/intervention," 33.3% of parents responded "moderately interested" while 24.4% of parents respond "extremely interested." Individual interviews were conducted with the Assistant Principals of Instruction (API) at the three high school within CVUSD, and asked the API's the same questions in regards to drug prevention, and the responses, though varying, produced generally the same conclusion. The API's determined that parental involvement plays a key role in determining their child's behavior. Additionally, they deemed the current programs in place provide as helpful community resources, however also cited that these programs focus more on reactionary and intervention methods, rather than prevention. As a result, they believed PreVenture, or a more prevention- based substance abuse program would be beneficial to the campus.

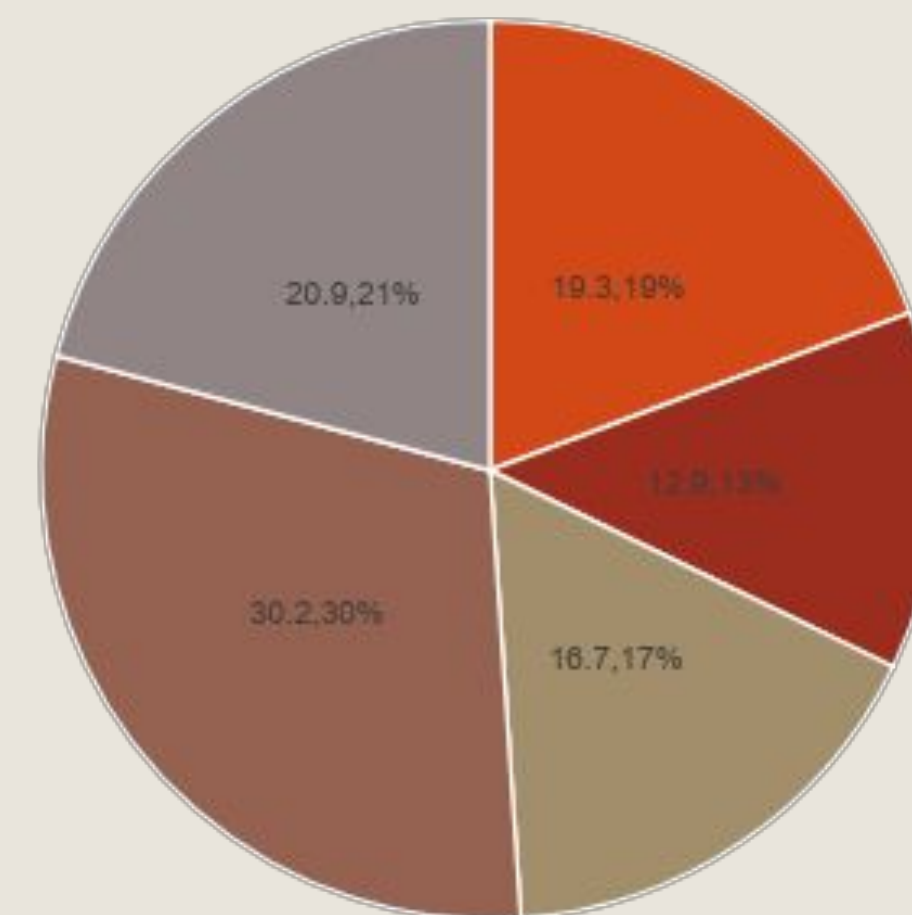
"There's definitely a need for it. And I think the needs going to get higher as more and more kids are going to be duped and there's going to be a higher need for preventive and informative intervention."

Bennett Wutkee, Assistant Principal of Instruction at Newbury Park High School

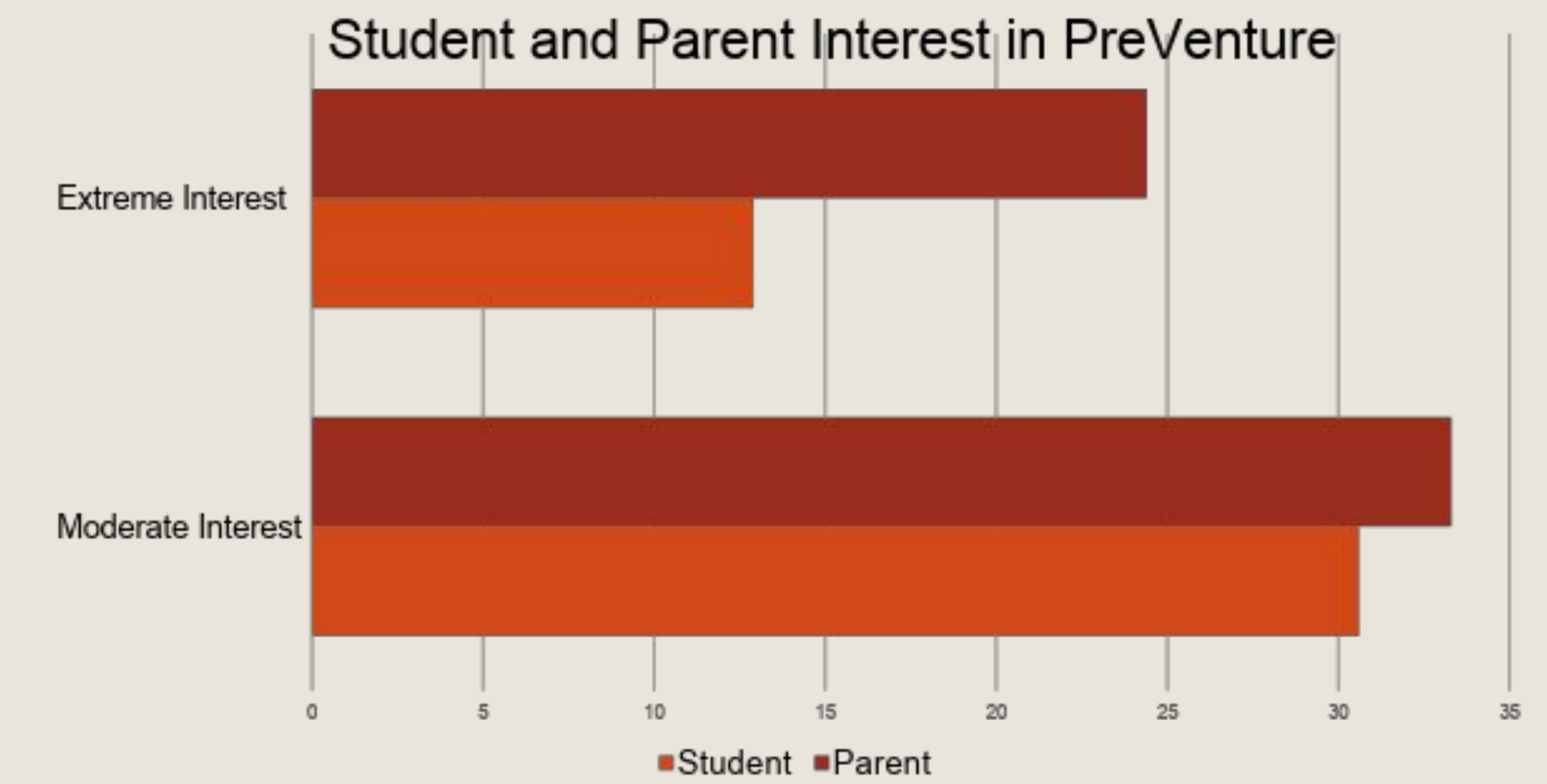
"Anytime we're looking at ways to make students healthier and safer, it's always worth exploring and taking a look at."

Nicole Judd, Assistant Principal of Instruction at Westlake High School

Student Increase to Substance Abuse



■ No increase ■ Slight increase ■ Moderate increase ■ Significant increase ■ Extreme increase



Discussion

The student survey revealed that the sudden increase of exposure to substances as students transition from middle school to high school is evident to both students and parents. However, the majority of parents responded they have little input on their child's social and academic decisions, leaving opportunity for students to fall into a pattern of substance abuse. Additionally, the data findings reveal the majority of students feel most comfortable about opening up to their friends, as opposed to their parents. Thus, parents may underestimate the impact their child's peers and friends have on their child's decisions in regards to drug use.

The API's were in agreement with the positive impact the police have on campus, however, the police involvement is designed as reactionary method to handle students who are already in possession of drugs, rather than keeping the substances out of the hands of students to begin with. The API's revealed Project BreakThrough as the program typically recommended to students who are suspended for drug paraphernalia on campus. Despite suspensions resulting in referral to BreakThrough, the program is not advertised to the student body. The API's were overall supportive of the possibility of an additional drug program to help reach a wider range of students, designed to keep students away from substance abuse rather than intervening after the abuse has already begun.

Conclusions

Overall, this study effectively evaluated the need for a new drug prevention program within CVUSD, adding additional research on the topic of substance abuse within the community. This study revealed a clear disconnect between student-parent relationships in regards to decision making, while also demonstrating the large impact student-peer relationships have in shaping the students behavioral patterns. Additionally, the methods utilized currently within CVUSD focus more on intervention through methods such as School Resource Officers, while Project BreakThrough is a program utilized after the fact a student has been suspended for substances on campus. Further research in the district level is necessary to establish the actual possibility of implementation, as well as assessing the current mental-health of students that would be participating in PreVenture. Parental and student interest in the possibility of implementing PreVenture was gauged, concluding that PreVenture would not only fill the need of a program designed to guide students towards long term goals and away from risk behaviors associated with substance abuse, but also elicited community interest.

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