

Project 4-H2O: High School Teens Conduct Research to Understand Why Students are Not Drinking Water

Marisa Neelon, MS, RD; Charles Go, PhD; and Eli Figueroa, BA

Background

- In Contra Costa County, only 26% of teens drank 8 or more glasses of water the previous day while 62% drank 2 or more sodas.
- Substituting water for sugar-sweetened beverages can help reduce weight gain and the risk of developing chronic diseases.
- Healthy hydration while at high school can be a challenge for teens when free, safe, and appealing water is not accessible throughout the school day.

Objective

- To engage youth in conducting research to better understand a teen hydration issue and create solutions to encourage students to meet daily water recommendations.

Methods

- An environmental scan revealed 8 water fountains throughout the school, most did not work properly and/or did not have sufficient water flow.
- We engaged a group of students using the Youth-Led Participatory Action Research (YPAR) framework. Teens developed survey questions and used the Qualtrics survey system, including the offline app.
- The survey assessed student beverage choices, habits, access to drinking water, and appeal of water. Surveys were collected from 320 students - a 57% response rate.
- The resulting quantitative data were analyzed using Qualtrics descriptive statistics options.

Results

- Teens discovered 97% of students were drinking water, but 60% were not drinking water provided at school.
- Instead, students brought water from home because of broken fountains and a perception that the school's water was not safe.
- Consequently, the average student daily water consumption was 4.92 cups, less than the 8-cup recommendation.
- Using the research-based information, the teens created infographics to share their findings schoolwide and presented to the school board to advocate for water refilling stations. **Board members approved funds to install six stations.**

Discussion

- The YPAR framework helped us better understand the high school hydration issue.
- Teens plan to continue with peer education and promote existing water fountains and upcoming stations – encouraging students to meet daily water recommendations.

Funding: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Education.

University of California
Agriculture and Natural Resources

