

Students helping others at root of new health course

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SALEM — A new health course at Salem High School will encourage students to share their knowledge through community service.

Salem High School already offers health classes and an after-school program that cover topics such as teen pregnancy, nutrition, decision making, healthy relationships, preventing sexually transmitted diseases and more. The new class will take that a step further.

"It's going to really provide students an opportunity," said Principal David Angeramo, "to demonstrate to the community the importance of healthy lifestyle choices, by creating service learning projects for the community or the school to bring attention to health-related issues."

The class, called "advanced health education," will be a half-year elective course offered to juniors and seniors, he said.

The service learning component of the course — ranging from making brochures to conducting presentations to other students — will be augmented by Health Quarters, a community health organization based in Beverly. Health Quarters already runs the after-school health program at Salem High, called the Teen Outreach Program.

TOP is a voluntary program that meets weekly after school, and typically enrolls freshmen, sophomores and juniors, said Sarah Kennedy, director of community education for Health Quarters. The new course will be offered during the school day, and students must earn an 80 or better in the regular high school health class to take the advanced class, according to Angeramo. The regular health education class is a requirement for all students.

"They have some great ideas and lessons we're going to incorporate into the regular and advanced health classes," Angeramo said of Health Quarters.

How it works

Health Quarters applied for a grant for Salem that it received in 2006 through the Department of Public Health, according to Kennedy.

"We received it for Salem because Salem's teen birth rates had fluctuated over the years," said Kennedy, "so that was a community the department was willing to fund."

In 2006, there were a total of 28 births to teenage girls between the ages of 15 to 19 in Salem, three more than in 2005, according to Kennedy.

Health Quarters began the after-school TOP class in the spring of 2006, and has offered it each semester since. It is a national program that has shown a decrease in teen pregnancy, dropout, suspension and course failure rates for students who have participated in the course. In Salem, 75 students in all have participated in TOP, according to TOP coordinator Ryan Heath.

"I like to think of this in the big picture of incorporating service learning at Salem High School," said Heath. "I think that it's really important for the future of the school."

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