

# El Camino

## Helping Teens Set Life Goals and Avoid Pregnancy

El Camino is a comprehensive, goal-setting teen pregnancy prevention program developed by Child Trends. El Camino's aim is to reduce teen childbearing and increase educational achievement among Latino youth. The program helps teens to personally identify their goals and develop their own *camino*, or road, to pursue them.

This brief describes El Camino, its structure and format, and preliminary results from a pilot testing of the program in seven schools and community-based organizations across six cities.

**El Camino** was field-tested in seven sites, and preliminary results suggest that the program's approach is effective because it is research-based, active, engaging, and youth-focused. The El Camino curriculum incorporates several unique features that distinguish it from other evidence-based/evidence-informed curricula designed to prevent teen pregnancy and STIs. In particular, El Camino's lessons and activities:

- ★ Connect increased educational attainment to avoidance of adolescent pregnancy
- ★ Incorporate a goal-setting and achievement model
- ★ Address the needs and cultural norms of Latino youth
- ★ Focus on the most effective forms of contraception, including long-acting reversible contraceptives
- ★ Work with youth to define healthy relationships and set limits with peers and partners

El Camino was developed for high school-age students. The curriculum contains eleven 45-minute lessons and is divided into three sections, or arcs. The three arcs focus on goal setting, sexual and reproductive health, and healthy relationships. Each lesson is briefly summarized in the table at the end of this brief.

**Arc 1, Goal Setting** (lessons 1–4), uses the imagery of a road (*el camino*) and STAR, our goal achievement model (STATE your goal; THINK about the steps; ASSERT your El Camino; REACH your goal), to connect adolescents’ long-term goals with specific steps they can take now. Students themselves—without input from adults in their lives—come to recognize, through their participation, the need to complete their education and delay pregnancy. Throughout the curriculum, students revisit, monitor, and revise their goals as they learn new information about limit setting, assertive communication, and pregnancy prevention.

**Arc 2, Sexual and Reproductive Health** (lessons 5–8), works to change young people’s knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy, and behaviors regarding reproductive biology, and teach them effective methods of contraception.

**Arc 3, Healthy Relationships** (lessons 9–11), aims to help youth develop assertive communication skills, accurately and effectively communicate their limits with partners, and enjoy healthy relationships.

## El Camino Activities

El Camino incorporates a variety of activities to engage students. These activities are not designed to tell students what to do or think; instead, they are designed to encourage students to think for themselves about important issues like relationships, school, and their futures. In El Camino, students engage in activities that include:

- ★ Reading stories/novelas for the duration of curriculum about teen characters with whom they share key characteristics
- ★ “Voting with your feet,” meaning physically walking around a room to show agreement or disagreement with a statement or idea
- ★ Role-playing with other students using scenarios about similar teenagers
- ★ Participating in group discussions with teachers to discuss their thoughts and get answers to their questions
- ★ Goal mapping by writing their personal goal—to achieve by age 25—on a map and thinking about the steps necessary to reach that goal
- ★ Practicing skills by implementing concepts learned (for example, practicing assertive communication with partners or proper condom use)



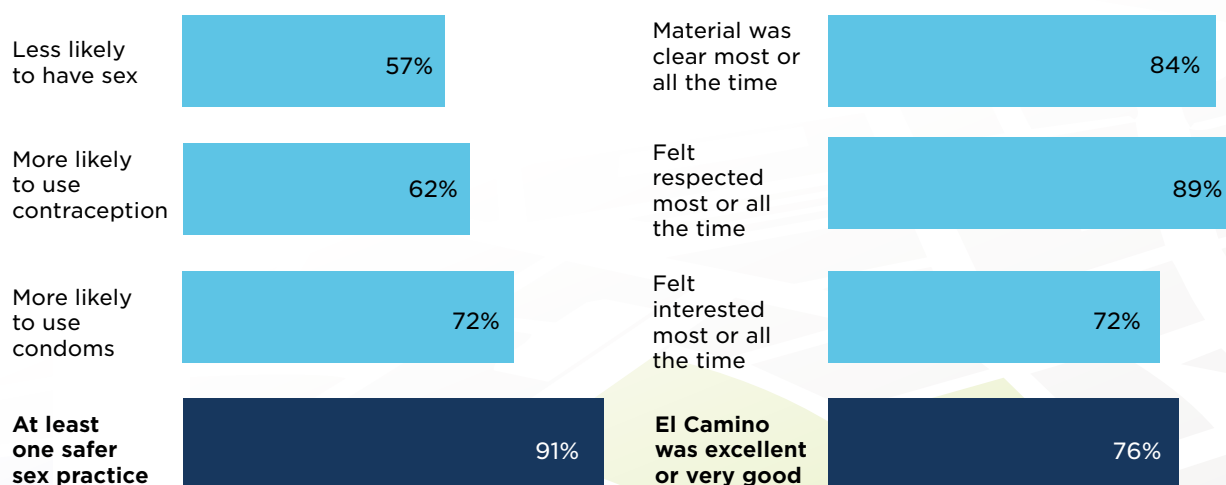
## Pilot Data and Findings

From 2015 to 2018, Child Trends developed and tested El Camino in Washington, DC; East Chicago, IN; Tacoma, WA; Baltimore, MD; Los Angeles, CA; and Philadelphia, PA. We worked with partner schools and organizations to implement El Camino with racially diverse groups of students in both English and Spanish; during and after school; and with classroom teachers, AmeriCorps volunteers, and Communities in Schools staff.<sup>1</sup> After each implementation, we revised the curriculum based on classroom observations, fidelity data, and debriefs with students and facilitators.

Reach	Demographics <sup>2</sup>
<p><b>7</b> sites</p> <p><b>16</b> classrooms</p> <p><b>319</b> students</p>	<p><b>Age:</b> Ages <b>14–20</b>; average 16 years</p> <p><b>Gender:</b> <b>60%</b> female, <b>39%</b> male</p> <p><b>Race/ethnicity:</b> <b>69%</b> Hispanic, <b>23%</b> black, <b>3%</b> multiracial, <b>5%</b> another race</p> <p><b>Sexual experience:</b> <b>44%</b> of students reported they had ever had sex at the time of pre-test</p>

### Preliminary outcomes<sup>3</sup>

Child Trends surveyed students before and after their participation in El Camino. At the post-test survey, we asked students if they thought El Camino had made them more or less likely to have sex; and whether, if they were to have sex, the program had made them more or less likely to use contraception or a condom. Results were very encouraging, with the vast majority of students—91 percent—reporting that El Camino had made them either less likely to have sex, more likely to use contraception, or more likely to use a condom. Students reported high satisfaction with the program, and about three-quarters said it was “excellent” or “very good.”



<sup>1</sup> Moore, J.A., Manlove, J., Faccio, B., Parekh, J., & Beckwith, S. (2018). El Camino, a goal-setting teen pregnancy program, finds promising results (blog). Bethesda, MD: Child Trends.

<sup>2</sup> Based on survey data from 136 students.

<sup>3</sup> Based on post-test survey data from 94 students. Number of surveys varies by outcome.

From pre-test to post-test, students who participated in El Camino also reported significant changes in important attitudes and knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

- ★ **Confidence about discussing sex and consent.** Students reported feeling more confident to talk about sex and consent with their partners at the end of the program.
- ★ **Contraceptive knowledge.** When given three questions about contraceptives, at the beginning and end of the program, students improved from getting 49 percent correct, on average, to getting 74 percent correct— a 25 percentage-point increase.<sup>5</sup>
- ★ **Setting goals.** Before El Camino, 64 percent of students agreed they had goals to accomplish before having a child. This increased to 80 percent of students at the end of El Camino.

For more information please contact [elcamino@childtrends.org](mailto:elcamino@childtrends.org).

El Camino is available online on the Child Trends website. Materials are available here: <https://www.childtrends.org/research/research-by-topic/el-camino-goal-setting-program>

*We would like to thank The JPB Foundation for their generous support.*

<sup>4</sup> Based on a sample of 55 matched student surveys.

<sup>5</sup> Questions ask about the effectiveness of the IUD relative to the condom, the effectiveness of the implant relative to the birth control pill, and about whether the IUD causes infertility.