Project SAM (Students Against Misuse): A Peer-Led Substance Use Prevention Initiative for Rural Texas Adolescents

The "Hit Different" Workshop Pilot with Huntsville ISD's Disciplinary Alternative Education Program

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HB-6 information

INTRODUCTION:

- Project SAM is a peer-led prevention initiative developed through a partnership between Sam Houston State University and Huntsville Independent School District.
- Focused on serving high school students ages 15 to 19 in order to reduce adolescent substance use risk, the program aims to increase refusal self-efficacy, strengthen peer support networks, and develop university-community pathways into the health professions for rural youth.
- Project SAM operates across two interconnected tiers. The first is an immersive workshop day on the SHSU campus designed to foster future orientation before prevention content is introduced. The second tier is a year-round student-led school chapter at Huntsville High School, with monthly peer sessions, structured check-ins, and twice-yearly campus gatherings.

BACKGROUND:

Project SAM launched as a targeted substance use prevention program for high school students in Huntsville ISD's Disciplinary Alternative Education Program, after concerns associated with new legislation (HB-6) and vape use rose. Almost none of the existing vaping research looks specifically at students placed in Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs, even though this group faces higher rates of substance use and less access to intervention.

RURAL DAILY VAPING, 2020 VS. 2024



68.8% of Huntsville ISD students are economically disadvantaged.

METHODS:

- The program is grounded in Positive Youth Development, Social Cognitive Theory, Motivational Interviewing, Inoculation Theory, and Stepped Care Theory.
- A faculty-mentored research evaluation using validated instruments will assess changes in future orientation, refusal self-efficacy, coping strategies, and vaping behaviors across multiple time points.
- Project SAM's research section utilizes Quasi-Experimental, Mixed-Methods, using a pre/post design with 30-day and 6-month follow up.
- All participants complete the identical set of baseline screeners:
  - Validated substance use screening items
  - ACEs-PEARLS Teen Self-Report tool
- We are also conducting qualitative interviews and focus groups before and after the workshop to assess shifts in student attitudes.
  - Qualitative interviews will be administered by trained faculty, students, and staff from SHSU.
  - Interviews will either be in focus group or individual interview formats.

1. Identify Students in HISD DEAP at Risk for Substance Use
2. Host 'Hit Different' Workshop
3. Review Post Workshop Information

PROGRAM INTERVENTION DESCRIPTION:

The Hit Different workshop is designed as a substance use prevention, school-based intervention rather than a treatment program exclusively for students at risk for substance use. The goal is to meet students wherever they are on the spectrum of substance use by providing education, coping skills, healthy decision-making strategies, and appropriate referrals when needed. Rather than separating students before participation, every participant receives the same workshop. Differences among students are recognized during the analysis stage instead of during recruitment. As a feasibility study, the pilot is not powered to detect a specific effect size; the goal is to establish feasibility and acceptability and refine the workshop and instruments before scaling up.

'Hit Different' the DEAP Project Sam Workshop Pilot:

- A peer-led, single-day workshop that pairs substance risk education with coping-skills training instead of relying on discipline alone to change behavior
- Work with HISD DEAP to identify 15 students at risk for recidivism.
- The screeners prior to the workshop will allow us to place students into three separate pathways to better serve their needs:
  - Prevention
  - Cessation
  - Coping and Emotional Wellbeing
- The pilot workshop will be delivered without change to all participants.
- Post Workshop screeners will be delivered to students, and the team will follow up with DEAP regarding recidivism among attendees throughout the remainder of the fall semester.

WORKSHOP BREAKDOWN:

Block 1 — "Welcome and discover"

- Arrival, name tags, playlist requests
- Pre-screener (Spanish available)
- Body outline + marketing tactics
- Myth busters (four corners)

break

Block 2 — "Feel it out"

- Stress and the body (HHS flyer)
- Anonymous question box
- Emotion check-in with feeling cards

break

Block 3 — "Your world"

- Support map: who's around me
- Peer groups and personal goals

break

Block 4 — "What now"

- What's behind the substance use
- Stress toolkit + guest speaker
- My plan: triggers, people, action
- Resource cards + vibe check

DISCUSSION

Expected Outcomes:

The DAEP pilot serves as the foundational feasibility study informing a larger school-wide implementation.

- Increased refusal self-efficacy
- Improved coping strategies
- Reduced peer pressure susceptibility

Significance and Public Health Implications:

- Project SAM intervenes at a critical developmental window, potentially shifting the trajectory of rural adolescent health outcomes.
- The project will work to bridge the gap in research and understanding of behaviors with DEAP students and substance use in rural Texas.
- In incorporating peer-support, Project SAM enhances community resilience through health education and social support systems.
- The program reduces structural inequities that contribute to rural substance use risk.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Findings from the Hit Different DAEP pilot will directly inform Phase 2: a full SHSU campus workshop day and year-round school chapter model launching with the general Huntsville High School population, evaluated with longitudinal follow-up at 30 days and 6 months using validated instruments (CFC-A, DURSE, Brief COPE, PSSM).

- **Fall 2026** — Hit Different DAEP pilot
- **2027** — Full campus workshop + HHS chapter launch
- **2027-28** — 30-day and 6-month follow-up evaluation
- **Beyond** — Expansion to additional rural districts

CONCLUSION

Project SAM represents an interprofessional, community-embedded model through which health professions students develop research, public health, and community engagement competencies while serving rural adolescents. Findings from the pilot, launching Fall 2026, are intended to inform expansion across rural Texas school districts and contribute to the evidence base for peer-led, future-orientation-centered prevention.

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