

El Camino

Helping Teens Set Life Goals and Promote Sexual Health

El Camino is a research-based goal-setting sexual health promotion program developed by Child Trends based on the principles of Positive Youth Development. El Camino promotes adolescent sexual health by encouraging youth to set goals, make informed sexual and reproductive health choices that align with those goals, and learn to communicate their sexual health limits. The program helps teens develop their own *camino*, or road, to pursue goals they identify for themselves.

This fact sheet describes the El Camino curriculum and pre- and post-test results from an evaluation of the program at 11 high schools in Montgomery County, MD from 2020 to 2023. El Camino serves high school-aged, English- or Spanish-speaking Latino adolescents who are male, female, or nonbinary—as well as other adolescents from historically excluded neighborhoods in the United States—and has been implemented with a wide range of students ages 13 to 20.

About the El Camino Curriculum

The El Camino curriculum is developmentally appropriate, active, engaging, and youth-focused. It 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:

- ★ Are anchored in sexual health promotion and goal setting
- ★ Incorporate a goal achievement model throughout the curriculum
- ★ Are designed with a focus on the needs of Latino youth
- ★ Focus on the most effective forms of contraception, including long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs)

The El Camino 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 fact sheet.

Arc 1, Goal Setting (lessons 1–4), uses the imagery of a road (*El Camino*) to connect adolescents’ long-term goals with specific steps they can take to achieve those goals. Students themselves—without input from adults in their lives—set their goals and determine the steps they need to take to achieve those goals. Participating students think through the benefits of completing their education.

Arc 2, Sexual and Reproductive Health (lessons 5–8), works to build young people’s knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy, and behaviors regarding reproductive biology, and to teach them effective methods of contraception—all necessary steps for youth to make informed decisions on ways to protect and reach their goals.

Arc 3, Healthy Relationships (lessons 9–11), aims to help youth develop assertive communication skills to protect their progress toward their goals, 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 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* throughout the curriculum that feature teen characters with whom they share key characteristics
- ★ “Voting with your feet”—the activity of physically moving 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—having participants write a personal goal they want 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)

Evaluation Findings

Child Trends received a grant from the HHS Office of Population Affairs in 2020 to implement and rigorously evaluate El Camino in high schools in Montgomery County, MD, with high Latino populations. Child Trends partnered with Identity to implement El Camino—during lunch periods, elective classes, or after school—at 11 high schools across the 2020–2023 school years. Researchers from the University of Maryland evaluated El Camino’s effectiveness: Classes at each school were randomly selected to receive either El Camino or an alternative life skills program.

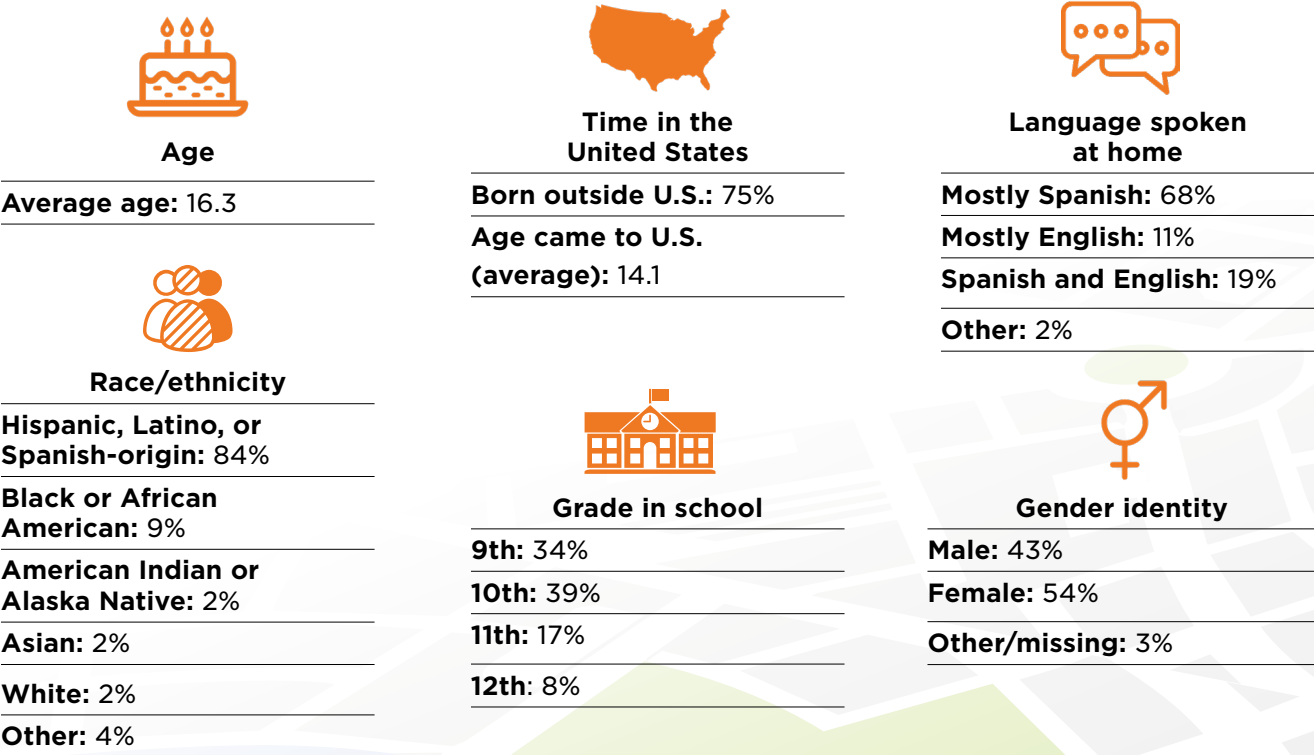
El Camino Program Reach

- ▶ **El Camino**—396 students across 34 classes:
 - 25 in Spanish
 - 9 in English
- ▶ **Alternative life skills program**—350 students across 34 classes:
 - 27 in Spanish
 - 7 in English

Demographics and reach

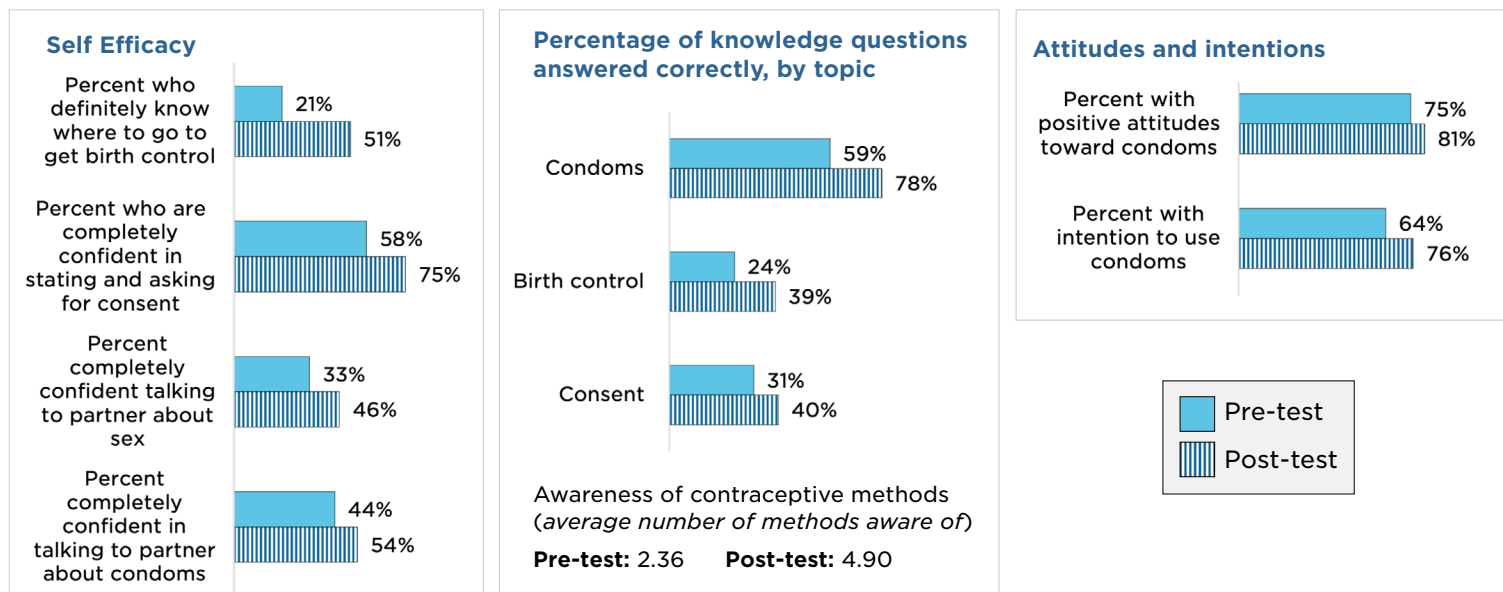
A total of 746 students participated in the El Camino evaluation (396 in El Camino and 350 in an alternative program). The majority of classes were taught in Spanish. The demographics and background of students participating in the evaluation are shown in the figure below.

Demographics and background of students participating in the evaluation



Evaluation outcomes

Students completed surveys before and after their participation in El Camino or an alternative life skills program. Compared to students in the alternative program, El Camino students had greater improvements in knowledge, self-efficacy, intentions, and attitudes from pre-test to post-test. The figures below show the average responses of El Camino students at pre-test and post-test.



Note: Findings based on 289 students who received El Camino and completed both the baseline and post-test surveys. For all findings shown here, improvements from pre-test to post-test were significantly higher for the El Camino group than the control group based on multivariate impact analyses.

For more information, please contact elcamino@childtrends.org.

The El Camino curriculum and training are available through Healthy Teen Network: <https://www.healthyteennetwork.org/resources/el-camino/>

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A Summary of El Camino Curriculum Lessons

Arc 1: Goal Setting	
<p>Lesson 1: State Your Goal: Intro to El Camino</p> <p>Students will (1) explain how El Camino can help them set and achieve their goals; (2) agree on a set of group agreements; (3) explain the four STAR steps in the El Camino Goal Map; (4) identify a goal for themselves at age 25; and (5) use STAR to identify Sofia’s and Santiago’s (characters in a story they will read) goals and the steps they will need to take to reach those goals.</p>	<p>Lesson 2: Think About the Steps: My Life at 25</p> <p>Students will (1) identify some of the steps they will need to take to achieve the goal they identified in Lesson 1; and (2) identify some of the tools and resources they have available to help in achieving their goal.</p>
<p>Lesson 3: Assert Your El Camino: Dating & Decisions about Sex</p> <p>Students will (1) discuss positive and negative road trips that can affect their camino; (2) recognize warning signs and how to use them to stay on their camino; (3) describe possible consequences from engaging in early sexual behaviors; and (4) describe how these consequences can affect school success and high school graduation.</p>	<p>Lesson 4: Reach Your Goal: Setting Limits to Stay on Track</p> <p>Students will (1) discuss warning signs and how road trips can affect their camino; (2) recognize pressures teens face to have unwanted and/or unprotected sex; (3) recognize external and situational factors that can lead to unwanted or unprotected sex; and (4) describe challenges associated with being a young parent.</p>
Arc 2: Sexual and Reproductive Health	
<p>Lesson 5: Teen Pregnancy and Understanding How a Pregnancy Occurs</p> <p>Students will (1) describe basic reproductive anatomy; (2) explain how a pregnancy occurs; (3) learn important facts about pregnancy; and (4) discuss the benefits of delaying pregnancy/parenthood until completing their education and obtaining a good job.</p>	<p>Lesson 6: Promoting Sexual Health: Contraception</p> <p>Students will (1) list six methods of safe and highly effective contraception; (2) explain how to use six methods of safe and highly effective contraception; (3) describe where teens can get accurate information and support to make healthy decisions around contraception; (4) discuss the benefits of delaying pregnancy/parenthood until completing their education and obtaining a good job; (5) describe how using contraception can help protect their camino; and (6) describe how a person can support their partners in using hormonal contraception.</p>

Arc 2: Sexual and Reproductive Health, cont.

Lesson 7: Promoting Sexual Health and Preventing STIs: Condoms

Students will (1) describe the benefits of correctly and consistently using condoms to prevent unintended pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted infections (STIs); (2) explain the steps to using an external condom correctly and consistently; (3) overcome obstacles to using contraception and condoms; (4) describe risks, signs, and treatments for STIs; (5) explain how using condoms and contraception, if sexually active, supports staying on their camino; and (5) describe the roles both partners can play in using condoms.

Lesson 8: Promoting Sexual Health and Staying on Your Camino

Students will (1) discuss how effective hormonal methods of contraception work; (2) discuss ways to feel more comfortable talking about contraception with a health care provider; (3) discuss how contraceptives can help them protect their camino; and (4) describe the role both partners can play in using condoms.

Arc 3: Healthy Relationships

Lesson 9: Assertive Communication: Setting and Protecting Our Personal Limits - Part 1

Students will (1) explain why limit setting is important in keeping on their camino so they can reach their goals; (2) define passive and assertive communication; (3) explain how to use “nonverbal communication” when “Asserting Your Camino”; (4) set, communicate, and protect limits regarding sex and protected sex with partners; and (5) describe how limit setting is part of a healthy relationship.

Lesson 10: Assertive Communication: Setting and Protecting Our Personal Limits - Part 2

Students will (1) identify healthy relationship characteristics; (2) explain the characteristics of consensual sex; (3) use assertive communication to set and maintain limits regarding sex and protected sex in skits with both heterosexual and homosexual couples; and (4) describe external factors that can lead some teens to have unwanted and/or unprotected sex.

Lesson 11: El Camino and Your Future

Students will (1) complete steps for using the El Camino Goal Map; (2) set, communicate, and maintain limits regarding sex and protected sex with partners; (3) use STAR to work toward their goals and delay having sex; (4) explain, if they are sexually active, how using condoms and contraception support the achievement of goals in El Camino maps; and (5) explain the role a person can play in supporting their partners in using hormonal contraception.