

Welcome to PrEP School: Utilizing Peer Educators to Improve Uptake of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis for HIV at an HBCU

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BACKGROUND

Students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) experience a disproportionate burden of HIV risk but remain underrepresented among individuals using pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).

Common barriers include:

- Limited awareness of PrEP
- HIV-related stigma
- Medical mistrust
- Lack of culturally relevant education

Peer-led health education has been shown to improve sexual health knowledge and reduce stigma among college students.

PrEP School was developed as a peer-educator training program designed to:

- Increase PrEP knowledge and awareness
- Normalize conversations about HIV prevention
- Support student-led HIV prevention across HBCU campuses in Atlanta, Georgia.

METHODS

Participants & Focus Groups

Nine focus groups were conducted across four Historically Black College and University (HBCU) campuses in Atlanta, Georgia (N = 80 students; ages 18–25). Focus groups explored students' knowledge of PrEP, perceptions of HIV risk, stigma, communication about sexual health, and prevention behaviors.

Qualitative Thematic Analysis

Focus group transcripts were analyzed using iterative thematic coding to identify themes related to PrEP awareness, stigma, and prevention behaviors. Themes were prioritized based on:

- Frequency of occurrence across transcripts
- Breadth of participant endorsement
- Consistency across multiple focus groups

Training Development

Findings informed development of the PrEP School peer-led curriculum and Train-the-Trainer guide, emphasizing risk reframing, prevention as a "toolkit," stigma reduction, and peer communication strategies.

Student Advisory Review

A peer advisory group conducted a 60-minute structured feedback session to review the training for clarity, cultural relevance, tone, and engagement.

RESULTS

Analysis of nine focus groups (N = 80) identified PrEP awareness and preventive behaviors as the most frequently endorsed themes influencing HIV prevention engagement. These findings highlight the importance of **peer-led, culturally relevant approaches** to reduce stigma and improve PrEP engagement among HBCU students

Highest Priority Themes

- Knowledge & Awareness of PrEP
- Preventive Behaviors
- Social Perceptions of PrEP
- Stigma and Risk Perception
- Communication about sexual health

Lower Priority Themes

- Provider–Patient Dynamics
- Health Information Seeking

Student advisory group feedback indicated the training was:

- Clear and culturally relevant
- Relevant to student experiences
- Effective in addressing stigma and communication barriers

Feedback informed refinements to:

- Language and examples
- Engagement activities
- Peer discussion strategies

Table 1. Participant Characteristics (N = 80)

Participant Characteristics (N = 80)	Age 18–20	Age 21–25	Undergraduate	Graduate
n (%)	49 (61.3%)	31 (39.7%)	62 (77.5%)	18 (22.5%)

Table 2. Focus group themes ranked using a Priority Index

Theme	Priority Index (%)
Knowledge & Awareness	46.1%
Preventive Behaviors	42.3%
Social Perceptions	14%
Stigma	14%
Communication	11%
PrEP Modality	10%
Provider–Patient Dynamics	3.2%
Health Information Seeking	0.7%

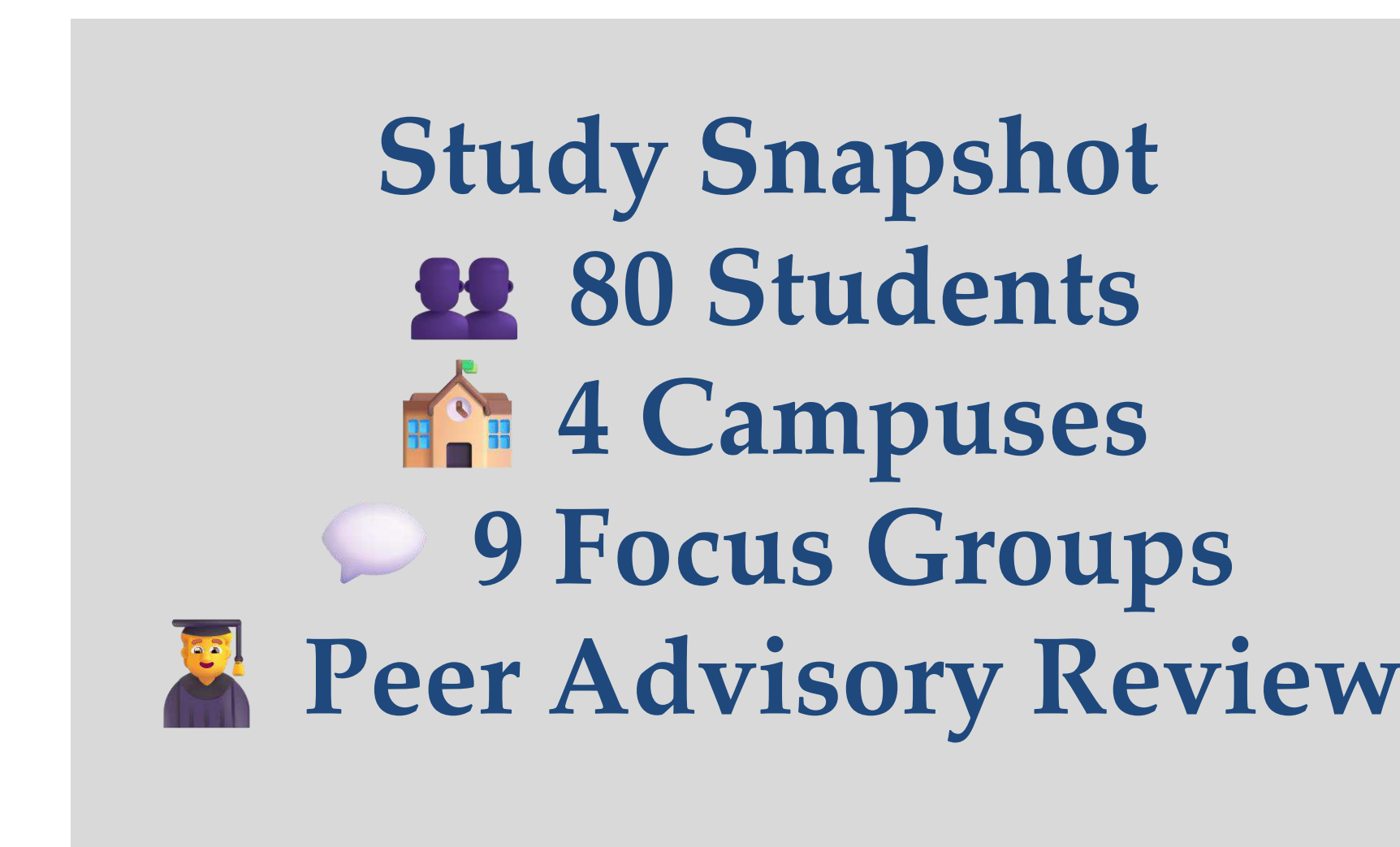
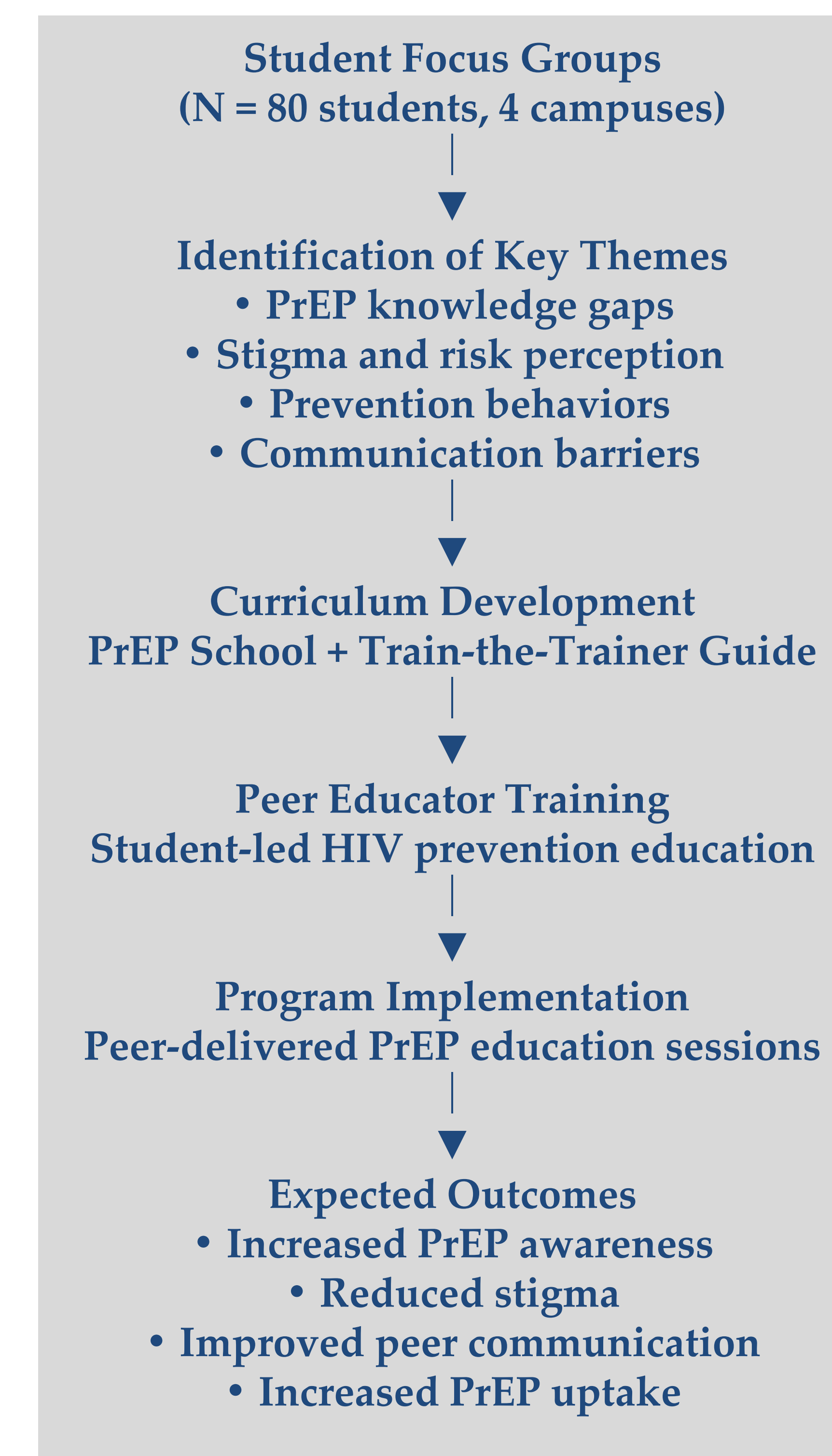


Figure 2. Development and Implementation Model for PrEP School.

Student focus groups informed development of the peer-led PrEP curriculum.



CONCLUSIONS

PrEP School translated student-identified priorities into a peer-led HIV prevention training curriculum.

Key strengths of the program include:

- Student-driven curriculum development
- Integration of peer educator feedback
- Focus on stigma reduction and communication

This student-centered approach produced a Train-the-Trainer model ready for pilot implementation. Peer-led education may be an effective strategy to increase PrEP awareness and support HIV prevention among HBCU students..

Take-Home Message
 Student focus groups identified PrEP awareness and prevention behaviors as the most important themes for HIV prevention education among HBCU students.

NEXT STEPS

The findings represent preliminary results from the PrEP School pilot. As the program continues:

Pilot Implementation

- Peer educators will deliver PrEP School sessions across HBCU campuses in Atlanta, Georgia.

Program Evaluation

- Pre- and post-session surveys will assess changes in PrEP knowledge, attitudes, willingness to use PrEP, and stigma.

Target Outcome

- Increase PrEP awareness among HBCU students from 52% to 80%.

Future Research

- Ongoing evaluation will assess program feasibility, acceptability, and effectiveness across multiple campuses

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