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Sex and more: Students put heads together

Port Richmond HS leaders in effective collaboration with their counterparts at Wagner College

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STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

Seventeen years ago, a teen mother struggled to finish her degree en route to bearing three children before age 22.

Now the woman's daughter, Ariana Roman, is a high school senior looking forward to college and a career as a pediatric nurse. For her, unplanned pregnancy is unthinkable.

Although she said she is Christian, and believes in the doctrine of her church, Miss Roman said the best way to avoid becoming a parent before becoming an adult is education, frank talk, and information, information, information.

"In our school, we only have sex ed senior year," said the earnest, brown-eyed student said as she showed off a poster she and classmates created with data about teen pregnancy and a Q & A about the mechanics of conception (a female can get pregnant on her period — true or false; having intercourse standing up is a good method of birth control — true or false). "We want to change that, every-



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At Wagner College, students from Port Richmond High School and the college examine a project on the "Consequences of Sex." Looking over the display are Tiffani Santiago, Resha Matasaran and Danny Tolentino, all seniors at Port Richmond, and Robyn Levy, a freshman at Wagner.

body should learn about it earlier."

Ms. Roman was among about 120 students from Port Richmond High School Institute of Civic Leadership who spent the past semester with Wagner College freshmen and faculty learning about

government, policymaking and how to effect change in the community.

They gathered at the Grymes Hill campus yesterday to share information about pregnancy, STDs,

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More on the web



For footage of the students, go to silive.com/video.

For additional photos, go to silive.com/photos.

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obesity, depression, bullying and other health issues so elemental in their young lives, and to celebrate the unique partnership with the college.

"This is all about giving them the opportunity to lead. They came up with the issue about health because they were passionate about it," said Port Richmond educator Lisa Pollari, who heads the Civic Leadership institute, as she strolled through the student union, where students enthusiastically shared videos they had made about HIV/AIDS, demonstrated homemade games to show how easy it is to contract a sexually transmitted disease, used a chart to discuss nutritional information in foods, and otherwise engaged passers-by in conversations about health.

"I hope that as a result of this project, they make better choices, and learn they can make a difference. Working with college kids just a year older than they are shows them they can do it, too."

As part of the program, the students created a survey and distributed it to 160 peers. More than 80 percent of responses stated health education should begin in freshman year, with the justification that by then, many teens are often already engaged in potentially risky activities, but blind to the consequences.

The students presented the results of the survey to a representative of Assemblyman Mathew Titone (D-North Shore) and plan to push for reform in health education in the public school system.

"These topics we're talking about can be seen as controversial, but they're not; they're life," said Wagner freshman, Patrick Dutton, who was among a group of



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Holding up the results of a survey that says sex education should begin in the first year of high school are Neysha Bosa, a junior at Port Richmond High School; Patrick Dutton, a freshman at Wagner College; and Ariana Roman, a senior at Port Richmond. The survey was the result of a collaborative effort between students at the two schools.

roughly two dozen students who visited Port Richmond High School once a week to help research topics, brainstorm presentation of the information and figure out how to take the newfound knowledge to the next step and make change.

High school and college students, universally, said that they all learned something new about health dur-

ing the course of their research — for example, a junior bacon cheeseburger at Wendy's is actually healthier than the Baja Salad, and the pull-out method does not work as contraception — and they also learned about the power of their own voices.

And high schoolers also took away another message from the collaboration with mentors just a year older than they: College is possi-

ble.

"It showed the high school kids they can function on this level," said Jason Fitzgerald, a Wagner education professor, who, with history chairwoman Lori Weintrob, oversaw the program from the college end. "It showed them Wagner cares about them and the community and wants to work together. We're not just a college up on a hill."