

Alleviating Oral Health Disparities Through Educational and Clinical Interventions

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Objective: To assess the oral health status of students at the Blackstone Elementary School, a bilingual school in Boston, and to provide the students with oral health educational and clinical interventions.

Methods: The Boston University School of Dental Medicine (BUSDM), in partnership with the South End Community Health Center, Boston Public Health Commission and Colgate Bright Smiles/Bright Futures Program implemented a school-based dental sealant program for second graders that included educational presentations, dental screenings, dental sealants, and referrals for follow-up dental treatment. Informed consent packets that included a medical history were sent home to parents/guardians. A faculty member and dental students from BUSDM provided classroom education and used portable equipment in the Blackstone School to place dental sealants. Students who were identified as having oral health problems and who did not have dental insurance were provided with free dental care at the South End Community Health Center.

Results: One hundred and fourteen second graders participated in interactive classroom dental education. 84 (70%) children received parental consent to participate in the sealant program. Of the 77 children that were screened, 39 (51%) were male, 44 (57%) did not speak English, 61 (79%) had some form of dental insurance, 47 (61%) had untreated decay and 54 (70%) were found to need at least one dental sealant. 150 sealants were placed on 47 students and 50 students were referred to South End Community Health Center to receive dental care.

Conclusions: Despite the fact that 79% of the participants had some form of dental insurance, a majority of the students had untreated caries. Partnerships such as this, which increase oral health awareness as well as remove barriers to care, can ensure that underserved populations have access to preventive and restorative services.

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