

# High school students respond to public health challenge

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***Prompted by FSPH professor Dr. Alex Ortega, participants in the Aspen Challenge offered their ideas on how to make their communities healthier.***

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Health Policy and Management Professor **alex ortega** (<http://ph.ucla.edu><http://ph.ucla.edu/faculty/ortega>) challenged several local high school students to change the way people in local communities think about public health issues as part of the 2014 Aspen Challenge.

In its second year, the aspen challenge (<http://ph.ucla.edu><http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/challenge>) provides a platform for young students to explore solutions for some of the most critical problems facing society through a partnership between LAUSD and the Aspen Institute. Challenge participants include 17 high school

teams of eight students ranging from grades nine through twelve, a teacher (the coach for the program) and the school's principal— a total of 170 participants from across LAUSD. challenges (<http://ph.ucla.edu><http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/challenge/losangeles/current/challenges-2014-los-angeles>) come from leaders pioneering change to some of the world's most pressing issues and touch on topics ranging from environmental education to alternative transportation. Teams then spent seven weeks designing a solution to their selected challenge. Several teams chose to work on Dr. Ortega's challenge, which called for the development of a healthy lifestyle campaign for Los Angeles communities.

On March 29, the high school teams presented their solutions to Dr. Ortega and a distinguished gathering of global leaders, policymakers and social entrepreneurs who are poised to activate on solutions. The winning team, from Valley Academy of Arts and Sciences, addressed Dr. Ortega's challenge to identify an important public health problem and to change people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviors about that problem to make their community healthier. The team, named Lifecycle, developed a comprehensive campaign to motivate the 1200 students at their school and families throughout their community through social media, public awareness efforts, community dinners, and more. The team is designing a mobile farmers' market in the form of a fresh produce food truck and has created a mobile app that informs and inspires its users with recipes, exercise and information on food markets.

"Each team did an amazing job," said Dr. Ortega. "All the students said it was a life-changing experience, and that they see the world and their community differently. It's important for the young people to realize that they too have the skill to make an impact on the health of their communities and to effect social change."

The Lifecycle team will advance to the aspen ideas festival (<http://ph.ucla.edu><http://www.aspenideas.org/content/2014-festival-overview>) in Aspen, CO this summer to present their innovative solution.

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**alex ortega**