

## Abstinence-Only vs. Comprehensive Sex Education

Texas receives more federal abstinence-only-until-marriage funding than any other state in the nation. In 2007, Texas received \$18,213,472 in federal funding, a full 27 percent more than the next highest state. Yet at the same time, Texas has among the highest rate of births<sup>1</sup> *and* repeat births<sup>2</sup> to teenage girls in the nation. In 2004, teen childbearing in Texas cost taxpayers at least \$1 billion.<sup>3</sup>

### What is abstinence-only-until-marriage education?

Abstinence-only-until-marriage education solely focuses on abstinence to avoid pregnancy and STIs, to the exclusion of any mention or discussion of forms of contraception, such as condoms and birth control. Under federal law, recipients of abstinence-only funding must also teach that sex outside of marriage—for people of any age—is likely to have harmful physical and psychological effects.

### Who determines the contents of the sexual health curriculum in Texas schools?

The Texas Legislature generates statutory requirements that determine minimum standards for the curriculum statewide. The State Board of Education also creates the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum and textbook standards, based in part on state law. Additionally, each school district is supposed to have a school health advisory council (SHAC) to provide community input on health education. While the legislature mandates that each school district create a SHAC, few in Texas actually do.

### Does Texas require schools to teach abstinence-only education?

In Texas, it is up to individual school districts to decide whether to teach sex education. If school districts choose to teach sex education, they are mandated by statute do each of the following in the curriculum:

- Emphasize that abstinence from sexual activity is the preferred choice of behavior in a relationship to all sexual activity for unmarried persons of school age;
- Devote more attention to abstinence from sexual activity than to any other behavior;
- Emphasize that abstinence from sexual activity, if used consistently and correctly, is the only method that is 100 percent effective in preventing pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, infection with HIV or AIDS, and the emotional trauma associated with adolescent sexual activity; and
- Instruct students that abstinence from sexual activity before marriage is the most effective way to prevent pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV or AIDS.

Additionally, while the TEKS requires discussion about “barrier protection” in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades, there is no similar requirement in state statute; consequently, not all schools follow the TEKS mandate. However, when a school district chooses to include information about contraception, the statute requires instruction to focus on contraceptive failure rates.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> National Vital Statistics Report, Volume 57, Number 7, January 2009

<sup>2</sup> Child Trends, 2007

<sup>3</sup> National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, “By the Numbers: The Public Costs of Teen Childbearing in Texas,” November 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Texas Education Code §28.004(e)(5).

Additionally, some Texas school districts receive federal funding for abstinence-only education or contract with outside organizations that receive abstinence-only federal funding to teach sex education in schools. These programs are required by federal law to focus on abstinence until marriage.

### **Where does federal abstinence-only funding come from?**

There are three federal funding sources: Title V, Community Based Abstinence Education (CBAE), and American Family Life Act (AFLA). Title V funds flow from the federal government to the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS). Individual contractors who wish to receive Title V funding must apply directly to DSHS. CBAE and AFLA are paid directly to individual contractors who apply for funding from the federal government.

### **Does abstinence-only education work?**

No. Study after study has shown that abstinence-only education is ineffective.

- A study commissioned by the federal government found that abstinence-only instruction has no effect on modifying sexual behavior or reducing teen pregnancy.<sup>5</sup>
- A separate, more recent study by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy found that there is little evidence that abstinence-only education delays the initiation of sex, increases the return to abstinence or decreases the number of sexual partners.<sup>6</sup>
- Likewise, a Texas A&M study commissioned by the Texas Department of State Health Services in 2005 found that abstinence-only programs have little impact on teen sexual behavior.

In short, in spite of billions of public dollars committed to abstinence-only education, all reliable research has shown that it does not work. While many Texas teens are not being taught about ways to avoid pregnancy and STIs other than through abstinence, they are still having sex. According to the Centers for Disease Control, in 2007, fifty-two percent of high-school aged teenagers reported having had sex.

### **What is comprehensive sex education? What would the Education Works Act do?**

Comprehensive sex education teaches students about abstinence, but also contraceptive methods. The Education Works Act would require schools that choose to teach sex education to provide medically accurate information that stresses the importance of abstinence as the only 100% effective method of avoiding sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy, while also teaching about contraceptive methods to avoid STIs and pregnancy.

### **Does comprehensive sex education work?**

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<sup>5</sup> Mathematica – Policy Research, Inc., “First-Year Impact of four Title V, Section 510 Abstinence Education Programs” (06/2005) For complete report: [Http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/05/abstinence/report.pdf](http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/05/abstinence/report.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Douglas Kirby, Ph.D, “Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy,” Nov. 2007.

Yes. Students in comprehensive sexuality education classes do not engage in sexual activity more often or earlier, but do use contraception and practice safer sex more consistently when they become sexually active.<sup>7</sup>

### **Do Texans support comprehensive sex education?**

Yes, overwhelmingly. A 2004 Scripps Howard Poll found that 90% of Texans surveyed favored teaching public school students age-appropriate, medically accurate sex education that includes information on abstinence, birth control and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV. A 2008 poll of Latina voters in Texas found that 83% favor teaching students in public schools about the role birth control and condoms play in preventing teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>8</sup>

**America's most prominent health institutions also support comprehensive sex education, including:** American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Psychological Association, American Public Health Association, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American Nurses Association, Society for Adolescent Medicine, National Institutes of Health, Institute of Medicine, CDC, Child Welfare League of America, National Association of County and City Health Officials, National Council on Family Relations, National School Boards Association, National Council of Churches, and YWCA of the U.S.A.

### **What do other states do?**

A rapidly increasing number of states are opting out of abstinence-only funding altogether. As of August 2008, 25 states no longer participate in the Title V abstinence-only funding program.<sup>9</sup> These states include Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Washington, DC, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

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<sup>7</sup> Alan Guttmacher Institute. *Facts In Brief: Teenagers' Sexual and Reproductive Health: Developed Countries*; Kirby, Douglas. (2000, July). "Effective Approaches to Reducing Adolescent Unprotected Sex, Pregnancy, and Childbearing."; Jemmott, John, et al. (1998). "Abstinence and Safer Sex HIV Risk-Reduction Interventions for African-American Adolescents, A Randomized Trial." *JAMA*, 279(19), 1529-36.

<sup>8</sup> Pineda Consulting, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> SIECUS, "We're Outta Here: 25 States Withdraw from Crumbling Title V Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Program." < <http://www.siecus.org/data/global/images/25%20States%20Out%20Final.pdf>> (last viewed September 10, 2008.)