

*A Look at
Sexuality
Education in
California Schools*



GET REAL!
ABOUT TEEN PREGNANCY

December 1999



"Nearly 90 percent of adults in California support teaching age-appropriate sexuality education in the schools. More than 84 percent believe specific instruction should be provided to young people about how to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases."

Field Institute Survey, May 1999

A LOOK AT SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA SCHOOLS

While California has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the nation (Alan Guttmacher Institute 1999) we do not have a consistent approach to educating our young people about sexuality, prevention of unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease. A sampling of just a few school districts in California by Communication Sciences Group in 1999 revealed that some schools use accurate and age-appropriate curricula, however many rely on a “piecemeal” approach that is often inconsistent or incomplete. Many teachers, principals and school board members reported conflicting understanding of their own local policies and procedures about sexuality education.

With California’s adolescent population expected to grow by over one million more teens in the next ten years, it is clearly time for us to take stock of how we provide our young people with vital health information.

This information document has been prepared by the “Get Real About Teen Pregnancy” public education campaign to stimulate dialogue among policy makers, educators and parents about the status of sexuality education in their schools so that they can lend their support to effective programs or help make improvements where needed.

CALIFORNIA’S POLICIES

California law requires that if public schools teach sexuality education, they must:

- 1) Stress abstinence and emphasize that it is the only method that is 100 percent effective in prevention of both pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.
- 2) Teach honor and respect for monogamous heterosexual marriage and discuss the possible emotional and psychological consequences of adolescent sexual intercourse outside of marriage.
- 3) Advise pupils of the laws pertaining to their financial responsibilities to children born in and out of wedlock.
- 4) Notify parents that their children will be participating in HIV/AIDS prevention education classes and/or sexuality education classes.
- 5) Discuss the success and failure rates of condoms and other contraceptives in preventing pregnancy and HIV/AIDS.

UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT SYSTEM

State level

- California State Legislature makes the laws and allocates public funding.
 - California does not mandate training for individuals who teach general sexuality education.
 - AB 246 (Cunneen-R) goes into effect January 1, 2000; mandating that schools that teach sexuality education must use curricula that are medically accurate and free of gender, racial and ethnic bias.
- California State Board of Education adopts state policies, guidelines and frameworks to assist local school districts and adopts state health curricula for grades K-8.

Listed below are the states that require sexuality education in their public schools:

Alabama
Arkansas
Delaware
Florida
Georgia
Illinois
Iowa
Kansas
Maryland
Minnesota
Nevada
New Jersey
New Mexico
North Carolina
Rhode Island
South Carolina
Tennessee
Texas
Utah
Vermont
Virginia
West Virginia
and
Washington, D.C.

- California State Department of Education develops materials to be adopted, communicates policies to local schools, provides some technical assistance and provides some funding to select grantees.

- California Department of Health Services currently funds 134 projects through its Community Challenge Grants (CCG) program which supports various approaches to teen pregnancy prevention. These include funding for youth development programs and sexuality education in schools and community organizations. Many community-based organizations use this grant money to offer sexuality education in local schools on a contractual basis.

- Currently there is no state-wide databank of what curricula are being used in which schools, who is teaching sexuality education, or follow-up research in all schools teaching sexuality education to assess the effectiveness of specific curricula used with specific age groups of students.

Local level

- Local school districts adopt policies, but do not have to use state-adopted curricula or use state-adopted guidelines in developing their programs.
- Parents must be notified by the school district about sexuality education. Parents must be allowed to review the materials, and may be invited to serve on a curriculum advisory committee.
- Eighty-seven percent of the school districts in California offer some sort of sexuality

education, according to the California Department of Education.

HIV/AIDS PREVENTION EDUCATION

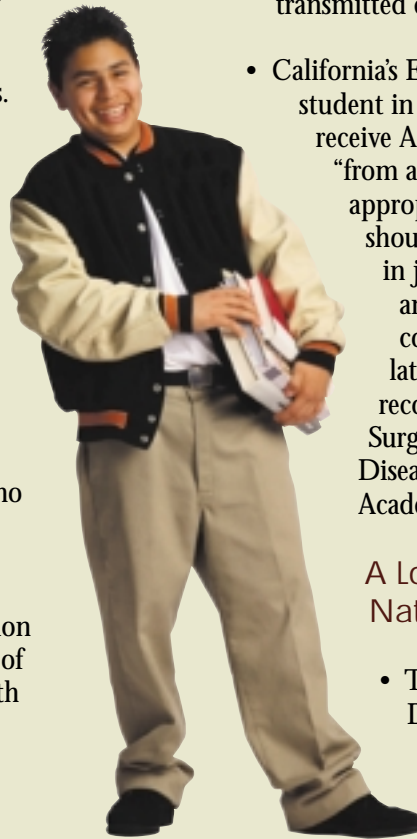
- Although California has required that schools teach HIV/AIDS prevention education since 1992, the state does not mandate sexuality education, which would include information about reproductive health and contraception to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.
- California's Education Code states that every student in grades 7 through 12 should receive AIDS prevention instruction "from adequately trained instructors in appropriate courses." Each student should receive this instruction once in junior high or middle school and once in high school. The course must accurately reflect the latest information and recommendations from the U.S. Surgeon General, Centers for Disease Control and the National Academy of Sciences.

A Look at the Rest of the Nation

- Twenty-two states and the District of Columbia require schools to provide both sexuality education and STD/HIV prevention education (Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California).

WHAT DOES COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION INCLUDE?

According to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), the primary goal of comprehensive sexuality education is the promotion of sexual



health. There are four primary goals for sexuality education:

- 1) Provide accurate information about human sexuality.
- 2) Provide an opportunity for young people to question, explore and assess their sexual attitudes in order to understand their family's values, develop their own values, increase self-esteem, develop insights concerning relationships with families and members of both genders, and understand their obligations and responsibilities to their families and others.
- 3) Help young people develop interpersonal skills and the ability to create satisfying relationships.
- 4) Help young people exercise responsibility regarding sexual relationships including addressing abstinence, learning how to resist pressures to becoming prematurely involved in sexual intercourse and encouraging the use of contraception and other sexual health measures.

Through a national task force of leading educators, health professionals and national organization representatives, SIECUS developed six key concepts that represent the most comprehensive knowledge about healthy human sexuality and healthy family living.

CURRICULA CONTENT

- Human development (reproductive anatomy/physiology, reproduction, puberty, body image)
- Relationships (families, dating, marriage, raising children)
- Sexual health (contraception, STDs, HIV/

AIDS, sexual abuse, reproductive health)

- Sexual behavior (abstinence, sexuality throughout life, human sexual response)
- Society and culture (gender roles, sexuality in the arts, media, religion)
- Skill development (decision-making, negotiation, values, where to go for help)

To be most effective, the courses and instructors should demonstrate:

- Cultural sensitivity (cultural values by ethnic groups)
- Diverse teaching strategies (unique, interesting ways to inform and engage students)

The curricula and course should be:

- Well-liked by students (students report positive support of courses)
- Appropriate for grade (should fit in with other topics being taught at that grade level)

WHAT IS GOING ON IN CALIFORNIA?

A "snapshot" of the status of sexuality education in California schools, and a call-to-action to parents and policy makers to check out the situation in their communities.

The "Get Real About Teen Pregnancy" public education campaign commissioned Communication Sciences Group (CSG) in June, 1999 to conduct a survey to assess the status of sexuality education policies, practices and curricula used in California's public schools.

There are 999 school districts in the state of California. Six percent of the school districts serve only the K-6 school population. Eight out of the remaining 942 school districts were surveyed. This research was designed to give a "snapshot" of California schools for the purpose of stimulating among educators,



"Balanced and accurate sexuality education programs have been found to be effective in delaying first intercourse, and in increasing the use of protection by sexually active teens. These programs do not contribute to increased levels of sexual activity, or earlier sexual activity."

— Jemmott & Fong: *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1998

policy makers and parents interest in, and action around, the status of sexuality education in their own schools. It looked at rural and urban school districts and at school districts with diverse student bodies in order to mirror the diversity of the state. This survey is a statewide sampling and is considered directional, not definitive.

In all, survey respondents included:

- Eight district-level officials
- Twenty-one school principals
- Twenty-two sexuality education instructors
- Eleven community agency representatives

KEY FINDINGS

- Each of the school districts sampled reported they have policies governing the teaching of sexuality education; however there was substantial disagreement among people at various levels within a school district about the nature and origin of the policies. Most teachers either did not know a policy existed or they thought a policy was in place that was not also reported by school officials.
- Sexuality education teachers reported that few or no parents withhold their children from sexuality education classes.
- If schools did have controversies over sexuality education, in most cases they were resolved through dialogues between parents and school officials.
- Most teachers reported that they develop their own curricula for sexuality education.

They reported using only portions of packaged curricula or combining programs.

- Some teachers reported they were subject to policies that prevented them from including information about contraception, intercourse, homosexuality and masturbation; yet, the principals and district officials who work with these teachers indicated that these policies do not exist.

CURRICULA REVIEW

“The Get Real About Teen Pregnancy” public education campaign also commissioned experts in the field of sexuality education to review the twelve most commonly used curricula and evaluate how “comprehensive” they were, as defined by inclusion of topics listed below.

These experts did not examine how the curricula are being used in California, or whether or not curricula are appropriately matched to a particular student age group.

The curricula were reviewed for inclusion of the following subject matter:

- Human development
- Relationships
- Sexual health
- Sexual behavior
- Society and culture
- Skill development (decision-making, negotiation, values, where to go for help)



Findings

- Only half of the curricula that were reviewed were rated as being average or better in terms of taking a comprehensive approach to sexuality education. These low scores are primarily the result of omissions of topics that should be included in comprehensive sexuality education curricula such as contraception and STDs.
- The curricula reviewed were stronger in the areas of skill development and relationships than in other topical areas such as human development, cultural sensitivity, society and culture, sexual health and sexual behavior.
- Only half of the curricula reviewed addressed issues of reproductive anatomy and physiology, body image, and sexual identity and orientation. Just over half had information about puberty.
- Only two of the curricula contained information about various types of contraception.
- Focus on sexuality education as an important HEALTH issue in California.
- Compare your school's sexuality education programs against the state law.
- Find out if your school district has a sexuality education task force or curriculum committee. If they do, follow the work of the task force and get involved.
- Attend school board meetings where curriculum is being discussed to lend support for comprehensive sexuality education.
- See where your school rates when it comes to the quality of Family Life and Sexuality Education courses. Use the "key concepts and topics in a comprehensive sexuality education program" to determine if important elements are missing from the curricula in your schools.
- Work to ensure that the sexuality education curricula being used in your schools are complete, accurate and age appropriate.

Curricular Materials Reviewed

- *Be Proud! Be Responsible.*
- *Becoming a Responsible Teen*
- *Families Today*
- *Making Choices*
- *Postponing Sexual Involvement*
- *Reducing the Risk*
- *Removing the Risk*
- *Sex Can Wait – High School*
- *Sex Can Wait – Middle School*
- *Sex Can Wait – Upper Elementary School*
- *Smart Moves*
- *Today's Teen*

The Get Real campaign recommends that Californians support a full-scale research effort to look at each of the 999 school districts in California to assess the current status of each school's sexuality education outreach and to compile a statewide databank of information regarding the curricula, policies and procedures used in our public schools.

This research would be a valuable tool in identifying where needs exist, identifying and promoting success models, and formulating an evaluation baseline.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Recognize that sexually active teens need sound, accurate information as well as access to contraceptives in order to prevent unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

The "Get Real About Teen Pregnancy" public education campaign is funded by a grant to Deen+Black from The California Wellness Foundation. For more information, check out our web site at www.letsgetreal.org



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