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Straight From The Source

What so-called "Comprehensive" Sex Education Teaches to America's Youth

Executive Summary

Background

Across America, so-called "comprehensive sex education" (CSE¹ — also referred to as "abstinence plus") is the dominant sex education message presented to teens in schools. Unfortunately, few Americans are familiar with the actual content of these classroom curricula. **This analysis serves to expose the real nature of comprehensive or "abstinence-plus" sex education and underscore why this approach is harmful to our nation's teens.** Direct quotes will be taken from some of the most widely recommended comprehensive sex education curricula, of which many are sourced from the recently released HHS report on this topic.² The students targeted by these curricula range from children as young as 10 to 12 years old (middle school students) through high school age youth.

Findings

In recent years, proponents of comprehensive sex education have attempted to "rebrand" their programs by renaming them "abstinence plus." Both terms, however, are significantly misleading. Regardless of what they are called, "comprehensive" or "abstinence plus" programs spend minimal time actually promoting the importance of abstinence. Instead, there is a presumption and often an encouragement of sexual activity, as well as a narrow focus on promoting contraceptive use, even though the majority of teens today are not having sex.³ Further, the content of CSE programs is decidedly at odds with what the majority of American parents want their children to be taught.⁴

Even more alarming, comprehensive sex education programs were also found to contain dangerous distortions of information centered on several harmful and disturbing themes, including:

1. Overstated, exaggerated claims of condom usage rates and effectiveness.
2. Understated benefits of abstinence, including inaccurate suggestions that "abstinence" and "safe sex" are equally safe and healthy choices.

3. Promotion of provocative alternatives to intercourse (i.e. "outercourse").
4. Ambiguous, inaccurate definitions of "abstinence."
5. Presentation of sexually explicit and inappropriate content.
6. Undermining the importance and involvement of parents.

Lastly, numerous studies confirm CSE programs do not work. Studies on eight top comprehensive programs reveal no delay or, at best, mixed results in delaying sexual onset.

Conclusions

Americans, particularly parents, need to closely examine what their children are receiving under the guise of "comprehensive" or "abstinence plus" sex education. Most will be appalled.

The content and advocacy contained within the pages of "comprehensive" or "abstinence plus" sex education put unsuspecting teens in harm's way. Given the seriousness of STDs and unplanned pregnancies, it is critical that teens receive a message grounded in primary prevention and risk avoidance. It is a public disservice to permit sexually explicit curricula to masquerade as a balanced approach to sex education.

Only true abstinence education discourages casual sex among teens and champions abstinence as a worthy and attainable goal. Abstinence programs are permitted to discuss contraception, but within the context of promoting abstinence as the healthiest choice. Fortunately, when given skills and encouragement, most teens today are choosing to be abstinent⁵ and many who are sexually experienced are choosing to discontinue sexual activity.⁶ Most teens want to receive a strong message about abstinence.⁷

Instead, many "comprehensive" programs are providing sex advocacy and explicit discussion of foreplay, condom demonstrations, and outercourse. It is not surprising then that these programs have been proven not to be effective at delaying sexual onset. The American taxpayer should not be expected to continue paying for this inappropriate, ineffective, and harmful instruction.

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