



RHODE ISLAND

Rhode Island received \$569,071 in federal funds for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs in Fiscal Year 2005.¹

Rhode Island Sexuality Education Law and Policy

Rhode Island schools are required to provide “accurate information and instruction” on sexuality, HIV, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Schools must also teach “the responsibilities of family membership and adulthood, including issues related to reproduction, abstinence, dating, marriage, and parenthood as well as information about sexually transmitted diseases, sexuality and lifestyles.” These classes must stress abstinence.

In addition, the state department of elementary and secondary education must “establish comprehensive AIDS instruction, which shall provide students with accurate information and instruction on AIDS transmission and prevention, and which course shall also address abstinence from sexual activity as the preferred means of prevention, as a basic education program requirement.”

The Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education must establish a state health education curriculum for grades K through 12. This curriculum, the *Rules and Regulations for School Health*, is based on the *Comprehensive Health Instructional* and the *Health Education Framework* and schools are mandated to use it.

Parents must be notified of sexuality education classes and may view the curriculum by submitting a written request. Students may be removed from instruction by written notification from the parent to the principal. This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.

See Rhode Island Statute 16-22-1, 16-22-17 and 16-22-18 as well as the *Rules and Regulations for School Health*, *Comprehensive Health Instructional* and the *Health Education Framework*.

Recent Legislation

Legislation Would Mandate Health, Sexuality Education

House Bill 5354 and Senate Bill 460, introduced in February 2005 and referred to the House Committee on Health, Education, and Welfare and the Senate Committee on Education, would require health education, including sexuality education in grades K through 12.

Events of Note

Rhode Island Department of Education Takes Stand Against Abstinence-Only Program March 2006; RI

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) has prohibited a federally funded abstinence-only-until-marriage program from operating in Rhode Island public schools until the program's materials are reviewed. On March 15, 2006, the Commissioner of RIDE, Peter McWalters, sent a letter to all public school superintendents notifying them that Heritage of Rhode Island has not been approved for in-school usage and, if used in public schools, could be violating state law.

Although many reports have suggested that this constitutes a ban of Heritage of Rhode Island from public schools that is not the case.² The letter explains that the program has not been approved by RIDE's review panel. In the letter, the Commissioner states, "RIDE is not working with Heritage of Rhode Island, nor does RIDE endorse its curriculum as meeting state standards. Heritage of Rhode Island has been marketing at least one sex-education curriculum despite the fact that this program is not approved by the HIV/AIDS Material Review Panel at RIDE." The letter further states that any school that participates in a survey from Heritage of Rhode Island is violating a state law regarding students' privacy.³

Heritage of Rhode Island currently receives a federal grant of over \$1.2 million from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The money comes from the Community-Based Abstinence Education program, the most restrictive of HHS' three federal funding streams for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.⁴

The Rhode Island ACLU brought attention to this program last year by raising concerns that Heritage's curricula reinforced gender stereotypes. "The curriculum had these incredible sexist viewpoints about men and women and boys and girls that seemed to come out of the nineteenth century," said Steven Brown, executive director of Rhode Island ACLU.⁵ School districts also raised concerns. Pawtucket Schools Superintendent Hans Dellith stated, "we really don't promulgate any religious opinion in this school system. I think basically that's what they were trying to do here."⁶

SIECUS reviewed Heritage's curriculum and found that it seeks to instill fear and shame in young people, leaves out critical sexual health information, and presents biases and stereotypes as fact. The materials fail to include information on sexuality-related topics such as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), condoms, contraception, sexual orientation, or options for responding to pregnancy. Instead, the materials rely on clearly biased questions such as, "How do you think you would feel watching someone you love get AIDS and die?" and, "Why is it likely that weak people would choose risky behaviors, like drugs, alcohol, sex outside of marriage, or violence?" to scare and shame young people into abstaining from sex.

In addition, the curriculum presents gender stereotypes as true and depicts non-traditional families as troubled. For example, it states, "for a girl [practicing abstinence] may mean moving a boy's hand. For a boy it may mean resisting a lonely girl's need for affection." The curriculum also cites statistics to support marriage such as "a divorced male is 3.4 times more likely to die from any cause than a married male, and a divorced female is twice as likely to die from any cause than her married counterpart."

Late last year, Heritage programs were banned from Maine public schools by that state's Commissioner of Education due to similar concerns. Still, Heritage of Rhode Island, like Heritage of Maine, will likely find avenues other than the public schools to disseminate its

program. Heritage materials also continue to be used in other states, including Georgia, South Carolina, and Kentucky.

Rhode Island's Youth: Statistical Information of Note⁷

- In 2005, 45% of female high school students and 48% of male high school students in Rhode Island reported ever having had sexual intercourse compared to 46% of female high school students and 48% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2005, 2% of female high school students and 9% of male high school students in Rhode Island reported having had sexual intercourse before age 13 compared to 4% of female high school students and 9% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2005, 9% of female high school students and 17% of male high school students in Rhode Island reported having had four or more lifetime sexual partners compared to 12% of female high school students and 17% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2005, 36% of female high school students and 37% of male high school students in Rhode Island reported being currently sexually active (defined as having had sexual intercourse in the three months prior to the survey) compared to 35% of female high school students and 33% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2005, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 59% of females and 73% of males in Rhode Island reported having used condoms the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 56% of females and 70% of males nationwide.
- In 2005, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 23% of females and 17% of males in Rhode Island reported having used birth control pills the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 21% of females and 15% of males nationwide.
- In 2005, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 16% of females and 28% of males in Rhode Island reported having used alcohol or drugs the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 19% of females and 28% of males nationwide.
- In 2005, 87% of high school students in Rhode Island reported having been taught about AIDS/HIV in school compared to 88% of high school students nationwide.
- In 2000, Rhode Island's abortion rate was 23 per 1,000 women ages 15–19 compared to a teen abortion rate of 24 per 1,000 nationwide.⁸
- In 2002, Rhode Island's birth rate was 36 per 1,000 women ages 15–19 compared to a teen birth rate of 43 per 1,000 nationwide.⁹

Title V Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Funding

Rhode Island received \$168,811 in Title V funding in Fiscal Year 2005. The Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage grant requires states to provide three state-raised dollars or the equivalent in services for every four federal dollars received. The state match may be provided in part or in full by local groups. In Rhode Island, the federal funding is matched with \$126,608 in state funding. The federal funding is divided among three sub-grantees and is used to target male role models through a program called *Men 2B*. The three sub-grantees are Dawn for Children, Diocese of Providence: Project Hope/*Proyecto Esperanza*, and Urban League of Rhode Island. The state funding supports a media campaign entitled *Be There For Teens* which supplements the work of *Men 2B*. All funding is controlled by the Rhode Island Department of Health, Division of Family Health.

Men 2B trains men in high-risk communities to be role models. Each of the programs involves a minimum of 40 men who attend at least 16 hours of training on topics such as adolescent development, communication skills, boundary setting, the role of men in society and the family, and resources for youth who need help with additional problems.

In addition, Title V funding is used to provide outreach to incarcerated men who will be released within six months to a year. These men are trained to be role models in the *Men 2B* program. Follow-up is done with the men four to six months after their release to measure the behavioral impact of the program with the men and the children in their lives.

The *Be There For Teens* media campaign targets men and women who are at least 20 years old. The goal is to portray a positive image of youth and stress the positive impact that adult-youth relationships can have.

Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE)¹⁰ and Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA) Grantees

Rhode Island has one CBAE grantee: Heritage of Rhode Island. There are no AFLA grantees in Rhode Island.

Heritage of Rhode Island is affiliated with Heritage Community Services of South Carolina and uses *Heritage Keepers*, a character-based curriculum that it designed. SIECUS' review of this program found that it relied on fear and shame and contained biased messages about gender and non-traditional family structures. For more information on Heritage of Rhode Island, see the Events of Note section.

Federal and State Funding for Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs in FY 2005

Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Grantee	Amount of Grant	Type of Grant (includes Title V, CBAE, and AFLA)
Length of Grant		
Rhode Island Department of Health www.health.state.ri.us	\$168,811 federal \$126,608 state	Title V
Dawn for Children	\$37,431	Title V sub-grantee

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Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Grantee	Amount of Grant	Type of Grant (includes Title V, CBAE, and AFLA)
Length of Grant		
Diocese of Providence: Project Hope/ <i>Proyecto Esperanza</i> www.dioceseofprovidence.org	\$37,431	Title V sub-grantee
Urban League of Rhode Island	\$37,431	Title V sub-grantee
Heritage of Rhode Island 2004–2007	\$400,260	CBAE

Title V Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Coordinator

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Rhode Island Organization that Support Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Rhode Island ACLU
128 Dorrance St, Suite 220
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 831-7171
www.riaclu.org

AIDS Project of RI
232 West Exchange St.
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 831-5522
www.aidsprojectri.org

AIDS Care Ocean State
18 Parkis Ave.
Providence, RI 02907
Phone: (401) 521-3603
www.aidscareos.org

PFLAG of Rhode Island
500 Angell St., Apt. 212
Providence, RI 02906
Phone: (401) 751-7571
www.pflagprovidence.org

Planned Parenthood of Rhode Island
PO Box 41059
Providence, RI 02940
Phone: (421) 421-7820
www.ppri.org

Rhode Island Alliance for Lesbian and Gay
Civil Rights
PO Box 5758, Weybosset Hill Station
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 521-GAYS
members.aol.com/RIAlliance

Rhode Island Gender Community
153 Ontario St.
Providence, RI 02907
Phone: (401) 273-0996
www.rigc.org

Rhode Island NOW
PO Box 8413
Warwick, RI 02888
www.rinow.org

Rhode Island Organizations that Oppose Comprehensive Sexuality Education

CareNet
744 Park Ave.
Cranston, RI 02910
Phone: (401) 941-4357
www.carenetri.org

Christian Coalition of RI
PO Box 6631
Central Falls, RI 02863
Phone: (401) 729-4677

RI Right to Life
266 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02928
Phone: (401) 521-1860
<http://www.rirtl.org/mambo/>

Newspapers in Rhode Island

The Call
Joseph Nadeau
Education Staff Writer
75 Main St.
Woonsocket, RI 02895
Phone: (401) 767-8599

The Call
Kathie Raleigh
Medical/Health Editor
75 Main St.
Woonsocket, RI 02895
Phone: (401) 767-8555

The Newport Daily News
Wendy Fontaine
Education Reporter
101 Malbone Rd.
Newport, RI 02840
Phone: (401) 849-3300

The Providence Journal
Felice Freyer
Health & Medicine Editor
75 Fountain St.
Providence, RI 02902
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The Providence Journal
Jennifer Jordan
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75 Fountain St.
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The Times
Joel Furfari
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23 Exchange St.
Pawtucket, RI 02860-2059
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S I E C U S P U B L I C P O L I C Y O F F I C E

¹ This refers to the fiscal year for the Federal Government, which begins on October 1 and ends on September 30. The fiscal year is designated by the calendar year in which it ends; for example, Fiscal Year 2005 begins on October 1, 2004 and ends on September 30, 2005.

² Conversation between RIDE staff and SIECUS staff, April 2006.

³ Rhode Island Department of Education, "Rhode Island Department of Education Oversight of Health Programs Pursuant to State and Regulation," Memo published on 15 March 2006.

⁴ *It Gets Worse: A Revamped Federal Abstinence-Only Program Goes Extreme* (Washington, DC: SIECUS, February 2006), accessed 21 April 2006 <http://www.siecus.org/policy/Revamped_Abstinence-Only_Goes_Extreme.pdf>.

⁵ John Catelucci, "State says no to sex-education program: Objections to the program had been raised by the American Civil Liberties Union, which said the program promoted sexist stereotypes," *The Providence Journal*, 23 March 2006, accessed 13 April 2006, <http://www.projo.com/education/content/projo_20060323_risexed23.daf84cc.html>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Unless otherwise cited, all statistical information comes from: Danice K. Eaton, et. al., "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2005," *Surveillance Summaries, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, vol. 55, no. SS-5 (9 June 2006): 1-108, accessed 8 June 2006, <<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm>>.

⁸ *U.S. Teenage Pregnancy Statistics: Overall Trends, Trends by Race and Ethnicity and State-by-State Information* (New York: Guttmacher Institute, February 2004), accessed 28 January 2005, <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/state_pregnancy_trends.pdf>.

⁹ *National Vital Statistics Reports 52.10* (Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, 2003), 48, accessed 4 February 2005, <<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/births.htm#stat%20tables>>.

¹⁰ In Fiscal Year 2004 SPRANS—CBAE was administered within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau. In Fiscal Year 2005 this funding stream was moved to HHS' Administration for Children and Families and is now referred to simply as Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE).