

VOLUME 31 NUMBER 6

SEXU- ALITY

R E P O R T

SPECIAL EDITION

SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES:
A DECADE OF CONTROVERSY

FALL 2003

SIECUS

R E P O R T

VOL. 31, NO. 6 • FALL 2003

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The *SIECUS Report* is published quarterly and distributed to SIECUS members, professionals, organizations, government officials, libraries, the media, and the general public. The *SIECUS Report* publishes work from a variety of disciplines and perspectives about sexuality, including medicine, law, philosophy, business, and the social sciences.

Annual *SIECUS Report* subscription is \$49, single issues \$9.20. Outside the United States, add \$10 to these fees (in Canada and Mexico, add \$5). The *SIECUS Report* is available on microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

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Opinions expressed in the articles appearing in the *SIECUS Report* may not reflect the official position of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States. Articles that express differing points of view are published as a contribution to responsible and meaningful dialogue regarding issues of significance in the field of sexuality.

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Editing by Shelly Masur, MPH

Design and layout by Alan Barnett, Inc.

Proofreading by Beej Johnson

Printing by Fulton Press

Library of Congress catalog card number 72-627361

ISSN: 0091-3995

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THE FRAMING OF A DEBATE: 10 YEARS OF THE
ABSTINENCE-ONLY-UNTIL-MARRIAGE MESSAGE

Tamara Kreinin, M.H.S.A.

When SIECUS began the Community Advocacy Project in 1992, I don't believe anyone could have predicted the changes the next decade would bring. At the time the federal government spent a small amount of money on "chastity" programs under the Adolescent and Family Life Education Act (AFLA) and communities were just starting to face challenges from those who demanded schools implement fear-based, abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.

Controversy over school-based sexuality education was by no means new when we began to track it during the 1993-94 school year. In 1968, just four years after SIECUS began, a booklet entitled *Is The Little Red School House the Place to Teach Raw Sex?* was published by the John Birch Society. In the years that followed, it became clear that conservative forces and far right organizations were strategically targeting sexuality education as an arena in which they could bring about social change.

CHANGING STRATEGY AND
SHAPING THE DEBATE

However, after the passage of AFLA, and into the early 1990s, the far right changed their strategy. Instead of arguing to remove sexuality education from the "little red school house," they simply asked to change the messages young people heard. In fact, they began to argue that sexuality education in school was very important, so long as it told young people, in no uncertain terms, to abstain from all sexual activity until marriage.

The real success of the abstinence-only-until-marriage movement has been the ability of its leaders to shape the debate and define the terms. They declared that supporters of abstinence-only-until-marriage and supporters of comprehensive sexuality education were polar opposites. They framed this as a debate between the god-fearing and the godless; between those who wanted to give children values and those who wanted to give them condoms; between those who valued families and those who valued freedom of sexual expression; between the moral and the immoral.

Despite the fact that abstinence-only-until-marriage programs have never been proven effective, such programs

became palatable to many communities because they provided messages that adults were eager to hear: If we tell our young people not to have sex, they won't.

With this new strategy and message echoed by national, state, and local organizations across the country, abstinence-only-until-marriage programs flourished. The federal government began to invest significant amounts of money in such programs; states added their own money and created state-wide media campaigns; and community-based organizations and schools implemented classroom lectures, assemblies, after school clubs, and chastity rallies. At the same time that existing national far right organizations made abstinence-until-marriage a primary part of their agenda, new organizations devoted to distributing abstinence-only materials and curricula emerged, and a national circuit of speakers gained popularity. Today, abstinence-only-until-marriage is a multi-million dollar business replete with trinkets of every kind from boxer shorts that say "Keep It" to mints that say "Sex is Mint for Marriage" to novelty ATM (Abstinence Till Marriage) cards that expire on the holder's wedding day.

A SOCIAL AGENDA

Hidden behind these cute toys, however, are much more serious issues. Abstinence-only-until-marriage programs are, in fact, an attempt at social change masquerading as a teen pregnancy prevention effort. Nowhere is this more evident than in the portrayal of gender roles and male/female relationships in many abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula.

These curricula present the stereotypical view that men desire casual sexual activity from any and all women, while women only agree to sexual activity to get love. For example, *Sex Respect* says that "a young man's natural desire for sex is already strong due to testosterone" and that, in contrast, "females are becoming culturally conditioned to fantasize about sex as well."¹ *WAIT Training* makes a similar point by saying: "A man is usually less discriminating about those to whom he is physically attracted."² Such comments not only disregard women's natural interest in sexual pleasure, they also place responsibility for setting limits almost exclusively on young women. In a poster, *Sex Respect* tells girls: "Watch

what you wear, if you don't aim to please, don't aim to tease."³

Instead of stereotypes and catchphrases, students need to learn that both men and women are sexual beings and are equally responsible for making decisions regarding sexual activity.

These curricula also present "traditional" gender roles as the norm within a marriage. *Reasonable Reasons to Wait* suggests that newly married couples ask: "Will the wife work after marriage or will the husband be the sole breadwinner?"⁴ *The Art of Loving Well*, a literary anthology used to promote abstinence-until-marriage, asks students to: "Think of the enormous wisdom contained in the fact that in the wedding ceremony the father 'gives away' his daughter."⁵ And *WAIT Training* explains: "It is not that men are more selfish than women. It is simply that at the outset of a marriage, a man is not as equipped to express unselfish love or as desirous of nurturing marriage into a loving and lasting relationship as a woman is."⁶

These examples represent a giant step backwards in the values of gender equality—both within relationships as well as within society—that so many generations have struggled for. By promoting these gender stereotypes, abstinence-only-until-marriage programs limit young people's options, influence their behaviors, and color their expectations for future relationships.

Such stereotypes are once again taking center stage. A recent edition of *Newsweek* was devoted to "The New Virginity." It discussed young women who have decided to remain virgins until they marry. Choosing to remain abstinent is a valid and often wise decision. What was disturbing about this article, however, was that the issue was once again framed as the godfearing versus the godless, the moral versus the immoral, and the pure versus the tainted. And this time, young women were the target.

I am very concerned that this concept of the "new virgin" is quickly becoming yet another mechanism to make young women feel ashamed of their sexuality.

THE LAST TEN YEARS

I feel that this special anniversary issue of the *SIECUS Report* provides valuable information, insight, and, in spite of all the bad news, some hope. In addition to our annual review of controversy, this issue provides analysis of the

changes we have seen over the last ten years in communities and schools, federal and state laws and policies, and relevant court decisions. As you will see from these articles, the federal government's increasing commitment to abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, including the 1996 passage of the Welfare Reform Act and the creation of the Special Projects of Regional and National Significance—Community Based Abstinence Education Program (SPRANS-CBAE), has had a profound impact on sexuality education in this country.

What I am most excited about, however, are the contributions to this issue by a number of educators and parents who have faced controversy first-hand. These dedicated individuals show us that although it is not easy, we can, in fact, make progress.

I hope that when the Community Advocacy Project marks another ten years of tracking controversy around sexuality education, SIECUS can simply report that comprehensive sexuality education has become so widely accepted that communities no longer debate the issue. After all, the ultimate goal of all good advocacy projects is to create a world where the project is no longer needed.

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- 4 M. Gallagher Duran, *Reasonable Reasons to Wait; The Keys to Character*, Student Workbook, (Chantilly, VA: A Choice in Education, 2002-03) pg. 185
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- 6 *WAIT (Why Am I Tempted) Training*, Workshop Manual, pg. 89

TRENDS 2002-03: A TUG-OF-WAR BETWEEN ABSTINENCE-ONLY AND COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Myra Batchelder

SIECUS, State and Community Advocacy Associate

The SIECUS Community Advocacy Project has monitored sexuality education controversies across the country for the last ten years in an effort to identify trends and assist advocates in states and communities. During the 2002-03 school year, SIECUS documented 100 controversies in 39 states. This was a significant increase over the number of controversies in each of the past two school years, but still less than was seen each year during the early and mid-1990s.

The controversies that occurred during the last year illustrate a tug-of-war between those who wish to restrict what young people learn about sexuality and those who want to offer information and skills on a broad range of topics. Individuals and organizations working to restrict sexuality education attempted to institute strict abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, remove “explicit” materials, ban books, and silence classroom discussions. In contrast, others worked to institute comprehensive sexuality education programs, remove abstinence-only-until-marriage programs and speakers, allow more freedom in classroom discussions, and permit condom demonstrations in schools.

This tug-of-war was particularly evident in controversies involving issues of sexual orientation. While many communities struggled with decisions about whether to allow in-school plays and lesson plans on this topic, others worked to establish gay straight alliances (GSAs) and add sexual orientation to the schools’ anti-discrimination policies.

This 10th annual review of controversies will provide examples and analysis of each of these trends.

ATTEMPTS TO RESTRICT PROGRAMS

This year, individuals and organizations worked to restrict school-based sexuality education in two primary ways. The first is simply to institute a strict abstinence-only-until-marriage program either as a replacement for an existing curriculum or as the first exposure to sexuality education in a school. The other is to restrict programs incrementally by preventing teachers from using certain terms in class discussions or banning materials deemed “too explicit” from classrooms and libraries.

Attempts to Institute Abstinence-Only Curriculum

The most drastic restriction of sexuality education is chang-

ing the entire curriculum to an abstinence-only-until-marriage approach. During the past school year, many parents and community members have attempted this.

A proposal by a school board member in **Waterbury, CT**, for example, recommended replacing instruction on birth control with discussion about the physical, social, and emotional damage that can result from teen sexual activity. “I feel like I’ve got dirt on my hands if I tell [teenagers] to use a condom and you’ll be safe. That’s a lie. That’s a flat-out lie. We need to be telling them the truth of what the consequences are if they make the choice to be sexually active,” the school board member said.¹

The current sexuality education curriculum consists of eight hours of classroom instruction in each grade, including 45 minutes focused on contraception. The school board is currently working with members of the Waterbury board of health, many of whom support a more comprehensive curriculum, to discuss possible changes. SIECUS will continue to monitor this controversy.

Santa Ana, CA has been mired in a similar controversy since 2001 when a group of young people from Camp Fire USA’s Speak Out! program approached the school board and asked that the district alter its curriculum to include more information about contraceptive use and relationship issues. The debate increased when another group proposed using *Game Plan*, a strict abstinence-only-until-marriage program as a supplemental curriculum.

Hundreds of members of the community and representatives from various organizations attended a school board meeting on this proposal. Ultimately the board voted 3 to 2 to reject *Game Plan* because they felt it did not meet state requirements.²

Efforts to Ban Books

Books often become the subject of controversy when attempts are made to ban them from classrooms, school libraries, and public libraries because they are deemed too sexually explicit or graphic.

In **Montgomery County, TX** controversy began when two children’s books, *It’s Perfectly Normal* and *It’s So Amazing* by Robie H. Harris, were removed from the county library after parents complained of their “pro-homosexual stance” and sexual content. Not everyone agreed with

their decision. Some members of the community formed a grassroots organization called Mainstream Montgomery County to fight “the imposition through public policy of one religious tradition over others.”³

Partly due to community response, the library review committee voted to restore both books to the library shelves. The panel felt strongly, a spokesperson said, that the library should provide a wide variety of books and that parents should determine what is appropriate for their children to read.⁴

In **Riverside, CA**, a fictional book about teen pregnancy entitled *Too Soon for Jeff* came under fire from two school trustees who opposed its use in ninth-grade psychology classes in alternative high schools. One trustee felt that a passage in which Jeff suggests that his son use a condom if he has intercourse may lead students to believe that condoms can prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) all of the time.

Despite opposition, the book was approved by the majority of the trustees. School administrators considered placing a label on the book about condom failure rates but later decided against it. Instead, according to the assistant superintendent, teachers will be asked to “emphasize that abstinence is the only effective way to prevent pregnancy and the spread of diseases.”⁵

A similar request to remove the book *Everything You Need to Know About Teen Motherhood* from the local middle school library was recently denied in **Panama City, FL**. The parent who made the proposal felt the material was inappropriate for young people because it contained, among other things, descriptions of child-bearing and a list of agencies that offer financial support for pregnant teens. The school board disagreed. One school board member said that he didn’t believe the book encouraged teens to have children and that it could benefit pregnant teens in the future.⁶

Efforts to ban books also occurred in **Fairfax, VA**⁷ and **Dyersville, IA**⁸.

Brochures Banned for Being Too Explicit

Like books, materials used in sexuality education courses, such as brochures, are often deemed “too explicit” and become targets for removal.

In **Bullitt County, KY**, a group of fifth-grade parents were upset when their children brought home a brochure that discussed topics such as masturbation and changes to genitalia during puberty. Although parents had signed permission slips for the program run by the local health department, some felt they had not been made aware of everything that would be covered. According to the health department, this program, which includes these pamphlets, has been in fifth-grade classes at schools’ requests for the past seven years.

This is the first complaint they have ever received. Nonetheless the pamphlets were pulled from the program while health department staff look for other resources.⁹

A brochure was also removed from an eighth-grade sexuality education class in **Kohala, HI** after the content was criticized by parents. The brochure “Discovering Your Sexuality,” is a four-page supplement to the *Weekly Reader Series, Current Health*. It describes “how children mature sexually, talks about crushes, and summarizes research on sexual orientation.”¹⁰ Some parents described the materials as “lewd,” “licentious,” and “pornographic.”¹¹ They also strongly objected to those organizations cited as resources, which included SIECUS and Planned Parenthood. The state school superintendent said the department will review the issue but also stated that existing parental notification policies regarding potentially objectionable materials should have been used to prevent such a controversy.

Condoms Cause Controversy

Condoms appear to be one of the most controversial items a teacher can bring into a classroom. Over the past ten years SIECUS has documented numerous condom controversies, this year is no exception.

In one incident, a high school health teacher in **Naples, FL** was fired after at least one student complained about a condom demonstration in which students used a banana to practice putting on a condom.¹²

Similarly, in **Stevensville, MD** a science teacher left his job after parents complained about his in-class lesson on how to put a condom on a banana. The school superintendent commented on the event saying: “This was a mistake by a teacher, plain and simple. He went beyond the curriculum and perhaps he used what he was taught in a class... All I can do is apologize.”¹³ It was unclear whether the teacher had been forced to leave or left voluntarily.

Student Surveys Not Allowed

Sometimes asking for information from students is as controversial as providing it. Although survey information is vital in planning appropriate curricula, it remains controversial. Surveys are often cancelled on the grounds that they are invasive.

Schools in **Fairfax County, VA** cancelled a much-publicized student survey that included, among other things, questions about students’ sexual behaviors. Although many criticized the survey as being too invasive, supporters argued it was needed to discover what sorts of risk students were taking and what, in turn, could be done to protect them. They pointed out that county officials often rely on survey results to focus on health curricula and apply for grants. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and only high

A TREND TO WATCH: STATE LEGISLATORS GET INVOLVED IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Colleges and universities are considered one of the last bastions of free speech: students are able to research and discuss many issues, even controversial issues, openly without fear of censorship. Over the past few years, however, some state legislators have become increasingly interested in what happens on college campuses and we have seen a number of attempts to restrict sexuality education and reproductive health services at the university level. One example of this took place in Kansas this year where a professor of human sexuality was the target of attempts by the state legislature to limit the scope and content of his class. (For a first hand account of this controversy see *"Facing Controversy After 25 Years"* on page 15.)

In one such incident, the adamantly anti-abortion **Virginia** state delegate Robert G. Marshall worked this year to prevent emergency contraception from being distributed on college campuses in Virginia. The state delegate sent letters to ten state-supported universities in March asking officials to explain why their schools were giving out emergency contraception, also known as the "morning-after pill," to students. In his letters, he said the pills are a form of abortion because they prevent implantation of a fertilized egg. He also wrote that the distribution of the drugs violates state law which requires that women seeking abortions receive information about the procedure and other alternatives and wait 24 hours before undergoing the procedure.

In response to these letters, the state attorney general sent a memo to the schools in question stating that they were not violating Virginia's informed consent law by dispensing "morning after" birth-control pills to students. The pills are taken within 72 hours of sexual intercourse, and thus do not constitute abortion.¹

As a result of Marshall's letters and accusations, a number of schools have reexamined their emergency contraception policies. It remains to be seen how much of a lasting impact the state delegate's actions will have.²

Marshall's disapproval of campus activities related to sexual health didn't stop with emergency contraception however. He also voiced opposition to James Madison University's recent "SexFest 2003." He was particularly upset by the demonstration of condom usage and how it can be impaired when under the influence of substances such as alcohol. The university president defended the event, saying that it was intended to teach students about safer sex.³

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2. L. Sessions Stepp, "Ban on Morning-After Pill Spurs Protest," *Chicago Tribune*, May 7, 2003.
3. J. Ward, "Lawmaker Tells Colleges to Curb Sex Education," *The Washington Times*, May 18, 2003.

school sophomores and seniors were going to be asked questions about sexual behavior.

The school board voted to continue with plans for the survey, but it was ultimately cancelled after the company hired to administer the survey backed out for fear of being sued.¹⁴

WORKING TO EXPAND SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Like attempts to restrict sexuality education, expanding these programs can be accomplished through a series of small steps or by entirely changing the curriculum. This year, communities established comprehensive sexuality education programs, overturned abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, cancelled abstinence-only speakers and presentations, helped teachers gain more freedom in classroom discussions, and supported condom demonstrations.

Establishing Comprehensive Sexuality Education Programs

This year, the school board in **Wake County, NC** decided to expand the sexuality education curriculum to include more information about contraception, STDs, and tolerance for people of all sexual orientations. This decision brought an end to a debate that has raged in the community since the existing comprehensive sexuality education curriculum was changed to an abstinence-only-until-marriage program in 1995.

Since then, North Carolina law has required schools to follow an abstinence-only-until-marriage focus unless the school board holds public hearings and the community consents to providing comprehensive sexuality education.

Community members in Wake County actively debated the expansion of the school system's sexuality education curriculum and over 600 people attended a public hearing in

October 2002. Much of the public debate centered on the issue of encouraging students to show tolerance for all people, including those of different sexual orientations.

The new curriculum ultimately passed and was sent to a medical review panel which removed the medical inaccuracies. In the process, however, they also removed most of the information about homosexuality, including suggested classroom activities to promote tolerance of people with different sexual orientations. In addition, they replaced the broad phrase “homosexual activities” with specific phrases such as “oral sex” and “anal sex” and added information explaining that these activities are felonies in North Carolina. The assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction denied accusations that the changes were made in response to those who said Wake County was promoting homosexuality.

Parents of students in seventh through ninth grade will receive letters inviting them to review the curriculum before the material is taught. They will have the option of removing their children from the class if they prefer.¹⁵

Harford County, MD serves as another example of a successful curriculum change this year when the board of education approved a number of improvements to the middle school sexuality education curriculum. The board voted to revise the curriculum—which had not been updated since 1983—to include information on HIV/AIDS, STDs, teen pregnancy, and sexuality; and to start the program in eighth grade rather than in high school.

This decision was based on the Family Life Committee’s findings in the fall that the school district lagged behind others in the area. One committee member said they discovered that “Harford County is the only county... that has not included information about STDs—except for HIV/AIDS—or teen pregnancy in the middle school curriculum.”¹⁶ Committee members also noted that instruction had suffered because of the district’s policy, which limited discussions on topics such as STDs and teen pregnancy and forced teachers to answer students’ questions in an “around-the-barn kind of manner.”¹⁷ The revised curriculum is being written and will be brought to the board for approval in 2004.

Rejecting Abstinence

While some communities have expanded their sexuality education program by implementing comprehensive sexuality education curricula, others are still working to end strict abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. Advocates are accomplishing this either by working to abolish a curriculum or cancel abstinence-only speakers and presentations.

A parent in **Mt. Diablo, CA** is working to end *CryBabies*, an eight-day abstinence-only program in the

area middle school. She felt that the program was biased, inaccurate, and did not include sufficient information on how to prevent pregnancy or STDs. She pointed to one activity in which her son was asked to list “advantages and disadvantages” of abortion. Her son had written “killing a child” as a “disadvantage.”

Two years ago, *CryBabies* faced similar criticism from a parent in the **Oakland (CA)** Unified School District. Although the program was initially pulled from the schools, it was reinstated in 2001 after the curriculum materials were reportedly revised and updated. The Mt. Diablo school district assembled a task force to review the health curriculum.¹⁸ SIECUS will continue to monitor this controversy. [See “*How Will We Teach Our Children*” on page 17]

Board members in **Allentown, PA** cancelled a presentation by national abstinence-only-until-marriage speaker Pam Stenzel after viewing her promotional video. Stenzel was scheduled to address students at Liberty and Freedom High School but board members and administrators said they found her messages offensive and felt she came across as too harsh. They were particularly upset with her suggestion that students “will pay” if they have sex before marriage. The school director said, “I found that offensive. That doesn’t sound very loving to me.”¹⁹

A group of parents asked the school board to reconsider. The superintendent clarified the district’s position and said that the school board did not disagree with the premise of Stenzel’s program but rather with certain parts of the presentation. He went on to say that: “Public schools are not in the business of morality.”²⁰

In another incident, the **New Jersey** Education Association (NJ-NEA) canceled three sexuality education speakers after discovering they had an abstinence-only-until-marriage focus. The three speakers were scheduled to make presentations to teachers at the organization’s annual conference in November 2002. The NJ-NEA replaced the scheduled workshops with alternate presentations by staff members from the Network for Family Life Education at Rutgers University, a comprehensive sexuality education group that trains teachers. The cancelled speakers and other conservative leaders criticized the decision.²¹

In the past, abstinence-only speakers were able to make one-time presentations without being subjected to the strict scrutiny that curricula and sexuality education resources often are. It is encouraging to see school administrators and other school personnel taking an increased interest in these presentations and what they are teaching young people.

Smaller Changes For The Better

Comprehensive sexuality education supporters often take

smaller steps to expand programs. Some of these changes have included allowing teachers to use previously banned phrases and allowing condom demonstrations in the classroom. Though these changes may not completely revamp a program they are a positive step toward providing students with important information.

The school board in **Leander, TX** recently voted to allow teachers, beginning in eighth grade, to discuss oral and anal sex with students when teaching about STDs and to use the specific phrases “oral sex” and “anal sex.” The changes were first proposed by teachers who became frustrated with their inability to address these topics with their students, despite what they perceived as students’ ignorance about the inherent risks of such acts.

District officials debated the issue for months. They were concerned about a belief among students that these acts do not pose health risks and do not constitute sex. At the same time, many parents and school board members feared that discussions of these acts would create graphic images in the minds of young people and introduce new ideas to the teens.

In December, the school board proposed finding a sensitive way to teach the subject that would not use the actual phrases. However, the health advisory committee stood by its decision that teachers need to use the words in order to fully inform students about the health risks. The school board eventually agreed.²²

Another vote to expand the sexuality education curriculum took place in **Montgomery County, MD** when school board members voted to allow condom demonstrations and discussions of homosexuality and nontraditional lifestyles for certain high school classes as part of a pilot program. Montgomery County is now one of four counties in Maryland to provide condom demonstrations to their students in the classroom.

The condom demonstration is likely to be brief segment (less than 10 minutes) of a school system-produced video shown in the tenth grade comprehensive health education courses at three to five high schools next year. In order to watch the video, students will be required to obtain permission from their parents or guardians.

In addition, the pilot program will allow more open discussions about homosexuality and nontraditional families. The school system’s coordinator of health education said students’ sexual orientation and sensitivity toward it is a daily issue in the schools. Before this ruling, discussion of sexual orientation was allowed in the classroom only if it was brought up specifically by a student. Lengthy discussions were discouraged. The new curriculum will remove that restriction, and replace it with specific instruction to help reduce verbal and physical attacks against gay, lesbian, and bisexual teens. Students will need

their parent’s or guardian’s permission to participate in the classroom discussions.²³

Students Fighting For Change Themselves

Students themselves continue to fight to expand sexuality education each year. Young people are directly affected by curricular decisions and have shown their desire for more information in school about STDs, HIV/AIDS, and other sexuality-related topics.

Students in **Lubbock, TX** have been working to make their schools’ sexuality education curriculum more comprehensive for a number of years. The Lubbock Youth Commission made a proposal to the school board in late January asking it to change the current abstinence-only curriculum to a more comprehensive approach to sexuality education that includes information on contraception and STDs.

In their presentation they pointed out that the teen birth rates in Texas are above the national average and that STD rates in Lubbock County are consistently one of the highest in the state. They made a number of suggestions including having health professionals speak in classes about HIV, forming a committee to review sexuality education curricula, and administering a youth risk survey. The proposal was not passed and so the efforts continue in Lubbock.²⁴

A high school junior in **Central Village, CT** was so inspired by her English class project on the need for improved sexuality education that she decided to take her report to the school board. She described her school’s current program by saying that “there’s nothing about abstinence—nothing about prevention. It’s just very basic. I think we should have, at least, some part of it on abstinence and prevention. We have thousands of girls getting pregnant each year [in the region].”²⁵

As a result of her presentation, the school board voted unanimously to have the curriculum reviewed by two subcommittees. They will also invite the student to provide input. The subcommittees will report to the entire school board with their findings by October 2003.

Finally, during the annual meeting of the **Hawaii** Secondary Student Conference, students from every public school district and private school in the state came up with a list of resolutions for the new year. Among others, the group resolved to advocate for better sexuality education in the schools, including access to condoms in school health offices and peer education programs to help stop teen pregnancy.²⁶

While abstinence-only-until-marriage continues to be prevalent, it is encouraging to see so many young people getting involved in their education and so many communities working together to change this trend and to implement comprehensive sexuality education.

INCREASE IN GAY, LESBIAN BISEXUAL TRANSGENDER CONTROVERSIES

A number of controversies during the 2002 school year revolved around the subject of sexual orientation as well as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) students, teachers and staff. In fact, this topic clearly illustrates the tug-of-war in communities as they fight to alternatively restrict and expand how sexual orientation is dealt with in schools.

Many communities dealt with intense criticism of lesson plans and plays that address sexual orientation and GLBT students and staff faced continuing harassment and controversy. In contrast, however, we saw a rise in the number of Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) in schools as well as an increase in the number of schools that worked to add sexual orientation to their anti-discrimination policies.

While a lot of progress has clearly been made, sexual orientation remains a divisive issue in communities.

Protesting School Plays That Address Sexual Orientation

This year, a number of plays that focused on sexual orientation came under fire from those who feel this topic should not be discussed in schools.

A play about a teenager coming to terms with his sexual orientation received mixed reactions when it ran in schools in **Ithaca, NY**. The play, entitled *Josh Keenan Comes Out to the World*, was staged by the Hangar Theater and funded by the Gill Foundation, a non-profit organization based in Colorado.

While most students supported the play, a group of a dozen parents and ministers asked the school board to cancel it. They felt that the play mocked Christianity, was filled with profanity, and falsely portrayed adolescent sexual activity. One student responded, "I hate to open their eyes, but those hormones, those actions are happening in high school. The play doesn't tell you how you should think or feel. You can feel for or against homosexuality. But the play just says what's going on."²⁷ Despite the protest, the play continued. Parents were, however, given the option of keeping their children from attending the performance.

Similarly, *On the Down Low*, a play that depicts true stories of "the crisis of bullying and anti-gay harassment in schools," received criticism when it was performed at a **Dubuque, IA** school. Thirty-five members of a local church presented the school board with a petition asking that the play not be performed during school hours. In addition, many members sent letters of complaint arguing that the play teaches acceptance of a homosexual lifestyle.

School officials disagreed. The Superintendent said that the play was in line with the district's nondiscrimination

and harassment policy, which includes sexual orientation. He went on to say: "We believe that understanding discrimination as it applies to the experience of someone who is homosexual is fully within the intent of the board's policy. As a school district, we teach about many things but do not endorse them."²⁸

In **Danville, KY** a few members of the community were also vocal about their opposition to a production of *The Laramie Project*, a play about the 1998 murder of University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard. The play was performed at an area high school. While the majority of the community appeared to support the play, a group of area ministers, calling themselves "Fellowship of One," claimed that by allowing the performance, the school would cross the line between informing about hate crimes and teaching about the gay lifestyle.²⁹ A small group of protestors picketed the play. In order to attend the play, students had to obtain parental permission. Three hundred students, approximately 60 percent of the student body, attended.

GLBT Teachers and Students Under Attack

In addition to classroom lessons and plays, members of a school community have found themselves at the center of controversy. Over the years, there have been numerous cases of teachers and students being harassed or treated differently because of their perceived sexual orientation and, unfortunately, this year was no exception.

A teacher in **Beaverton, OR** was ordered by school administrators to remove a sign advertising a county-run support group for gay teens after some parents complained. The teacher, who is openly gay himself and serves as the advisor to the school's GSA, accused the district of discrimination and refused to remove the sign.

School administrators claim to have based their request on a new school regulation forbidding teachers from displaying posters that do not directly relate to material taught in the classroom or school-sponsored clubs. The teacher and the Beaverton Teacher's Union, however, argued that administrators were showing a bias against gay teachers. They pointed out that the school allowed 30 other teachers, mostly heterosexual, to keep the same sign in their classrooms. The school later suspended the regulation and allowed the teacher to display the sign.³⁰

A controversy that began in 1997 when a teacher in **Spanish Fork, UT** revealed her sexual orientation was finally resolved this year by the Utah Supreme Court. Shortly after revealing that she was gay, the school ended the teacher's volleyball coaching position and instructed her not to discuss her sexuality with anyone in the school community, including students, parents, and staff. In response, the teacher filed a federal lawsuit against the Nebo school district for violating her First Amendment rights and won.

A group calling themselves “Citizens of the Nebo School District for Moral and Legal Values” filed a lawsuit to have the teacher’s credentials revoked. They argued that Utah state law requires teachers to be good role models for their students and that the teacher failed to fulfill that requirement because her private sexual activity conflicted with state laws prohibiting sodomy.

The state Supreme Court ruled in favor of the teacher, saying her opponents “lack a legally protectible interest in this controversy.”³¹ Any complaints against teachers, the court ruled, “must be taken before the only bodies authorized to act in this regard: the local school district, the commission, or the state board of education.”³² Despite the legal battles, the teacher continues to teach classes in the district; however, she has not been able to regain her coaching position.

Teachers are not alone in facing harassment based on sexual orientation. This year the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a lawsuit on behalf of an eighth-grade student in **Jacksonville, AR** who claimed he suffered repeated harassment from school officials during the past year. According to the student, the harassment began after a teacher overheard a conversation in which the student refused to deny that he was gay. The teacher sent him to the principal’s office where the assistant principal insisted he tell his parents that he was gay by the end of the day or she would. The student said: “I was too upset to sit through eighth period so I went to the guidance counselor, and she made the call. Later, the science teacher wrote me a four-page handwritten letter about the Bible’s teachings on homosexuality, telling me I would be condemned to hell. I threw it out.”³³

According to the student, harassment by school officials continued over the next year. Incidents included: a choir teacher telling him that homosexuality was “sick” and “unnatural”; an assistant principal making him read out loud passages from the Bible that condemned homosexuality and praying for him to be “saved”; and a two-day suspension from school when he voiced complaints about his treatment.

In April, the ACLU filed a lawsuit against the school on behalf of the student. A settlement was then reached under which he will receive \$25,000, an apology from school officials, and his disciplinary record will be cleared.

Forming Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs)

One way many school communities are working to put an end to harassment based on sexual orientation is through GSAs, alliances formed by a coalition of students who wish to fight homophobia and encourage tolerance for all sexual orientations at their school. Unfortunately, these groups are often met with a harsh response from classmates, school administrators, and parents. In many instances, school admin-

istrators have done everything in their power to prevent the clubs from meeting. As a result, national legal groups like the ACLU and LAMBDA Legal Defense Fund have become increasingly involved in helping students form GSAs.

In fact, a debate over a GSA in **Boyd County, KY** during this past school year ultimately resulted in a lawsuit filed by the ACLU.

School officials twice turned down proposals from students to start a GSA. They changed this decision in October 2002, however, after receiving a letter from the ACLU explaining that not allowing the club would be a violation of the Equal Access Act, a federal law that bars schools from discriminating against clubs based on the content of their speech.³⁴

The approval of the GSA caused an outcry, including protests, from parents, students, community organizations, and local churches. In response, the Boyd County Board of Education cancelled all clubs rather than allowing the GSA to be established on the high school campus.

The ACLU filed a lawsuit against the school in January on behalf of the club charging that school officials had permitted some clubs to continue to meet, despite the ban, which the lawsuit charged was a clear violation of the Equal Access Act and the Kentucky Education Reform Act.³⁵ In April, a U.S. District Judge issued a preliminary injunction, ordering the high school to allow the club to meet while the suit is pending. The judge also ordered the two sides to attempt to settle the lawsuit in mediation. As part of settlement negotiations, the judge asked the ACLU to draft a school club policy for the district. The ACLU gave their club policy proposal to high school administrators in June.

In mid-July, the Boyd County school board approved a new set of school club policies. Under the new policies, non-curricular clubs, including the GSA, will be allowed to meet after school. Access to school property during school hours will be limited to groups related to academics, including athletic and academic teams. The board must vote on the new policies a second time in order for them to be adopted.³⁶

In a similar case, the ACLU filed a lawsuit against the **Klein Independent School District (TX)** Superintendent and the high school principal for refusing to allow a GSA to form on campus.

Students charge that in response to their application to form a GSA, school officials changed the requirements for school clubs. The students resubmitted their application but had still not heard from school officials halfway through the year. The president of the ACLU’s Houston chapter and the student’s lawyer said that legal action was necessary because the school failed to act on the application and was thus, in effect, denying it. The lawsuit accused the district of violating the students’ First Amendment rights and the Equal Access Act.³⁷

ABSTINENCE SUPPORTERS IN LAS VEGAS

In June 2003, 750 people attended the Abstinence Clearinghouse's seventh annual convention held in Las Vegas. The conference made national headlines in part because of their surprising choice of venues—Las Vegas, often referred to as “Sin City.”

The theme was “Beyond the Neon: Creating a Culture of Character,” and included workshops on topics such as the history of abstinence, the consequences of pre-marital sex, and how to win federal and state grants for abstinence-only programs.

During the conference, participants passed out “good-girl cards” to people on the street. The cards were similar to the ads for strip clubs that people often pass out on the strip, but instead of scantily clad strippers the cards featured modestly dressed virgins with information on the back about remaining abstinent.

District officials said that they would have fought the lawsuit if they thought they had a chance of winning the case. Instead, they said that the decision to allow the club was out of their control, as it is governed by the federal Equal Access Act. In order to join any club at the school, including the GSA, each student must now obtain written parental permission.

Students have encountered similar barriers to running gay straight alliances all over the country in cities such as **Rockford, MI**³⁸, **University City, MO**³⁹, and **Lubbock, TX**⁴⁰.

Adding “Sexual Orientation” to School Policies

Communities have also worked to prevent harassment in schools by including “sexual orientation” in school districts’ anti-discrimination policies.

In March, the school board in **Palm Beach, FL** voted 5 to 2 to add “sexual orientation” to the anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies that cover students. This is the third time the proposal has come before the school board in the past 12 years. In the past, the school chose to maintain a general policy that didn’t specify gays and lesbians as a protected group.

In the weeks leading up to the meeting, a vocal group of opponents started a letter-writing campaign that warned that adding “sexual orientation” to the school policy would “promote the idea that homosexual and other bizarre sexual behaviors are acceptable, respectable, and healthy.”⁴¹ Supporters of the policy, however, argued that gay and lesbian students suffer bullying and intimidation in

The conference drew more than twice as many participants than the organization’s first annual event and garnered a great deal of media attention. It provides an important illustration of how the abstinence-only movement has grown in such a short time.¹

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school every day and that adding “sexual orientation” to the anti-harassment policy will give it more teeth.

Most board members agreed with this proposal. One board member commented: “I received numerous calls and e-mails about this, and those who called expressing opposition to it are the ones who made the case for me that it is necessary. It was frightening to me to hear their cold words.”⁴²

The school board in **Fairfax County, VA** considered a similar proposal to add the phrase “sexual orientation” to the district’s nondiscrimination code for students, employees, and job applicants. The proposal for this change had been brought to the attention of the Fairfax County School Board after several staff members complained that they were being harassed and felt their jobs were being threatened due to their sexual orientation.

The Culture and Family Institute, a subgroup of Concerned Women for America, a national conservative organization, helped establish an active community campaign against this proposal. They published a list of 15 reasons to oppose the change ranging from “homosexual activities are unhealthy” to the possibility that this would lead to “escalating homosexual activism in schools.”⁴³ They also helped orchestrate a rally before a recent school board meeting.

The school board postponed the decision in order to check with the attorney general’s office about the legal issues. The attorney general’s office responded that the county did not have the legal authority to adopt the policy. As a result, the policy has not been implemented.⁴⁴

GLBT students, teachers, and staff continue to face harassment and communities continue to debate how students should learn about this topic. However, recent successes in forming GSAs and adopting improved anti-discrimination policies can be seen as a promising trend.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT IN THE FUTURE

The tug-of-war between comprehensive sexuality education and abstinence-only-until-marriage programs shows no sign of abating. With the current administration's views on reproductive health and sexuality education, it is doubtful that federal mandates and national funding will support comprehensive sexuality education in the near future.

At the same time, on a local level many positive changes have occurred. In some communities sexuality education is being expanded and many communities are working towards a more comprehensive approach to sexuality education.

The struggle for improved sexuality education for our nation's young people continues. Comprehensive sexuality education advocates must continue to stand united and share resources. Supporters need to continue to get involved by fighting restrictions while at the same time proactively encouraging the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education curricula. By working together to challenge abstinence-only-until-marriage policies and fighting to implement comprehensive sexuality education, we can look forward to more successes like those that we have seen in the past year.

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UPCOMING ISSUES OF THE SIECUS REPORT

In order to continue to provide the SIECUS Report without having to raise the price of subscriptions, SIECUS will begin to produce the journal on a quarterly basis. Upcoming issues include:

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FACING CONTROVERSY AFTER 25 YEARS

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Clearly, no one enters the field of sexology, especially sexuality education, without the knowledge that some individuals and segments of society will take offense with both the subject matter and the educational process. I have been teaching both graduate and undergraduate human sexuality classes for the past 25 years and have received only occasional objections and complaints, usually from someone in the conservative religious community or from other social conservatives. I have had no formal complaints over my 34-year academic career. Still, nothing could have prepared me for the experience I had this past spring semester at the University of Kansas.

I teach an undergraduate course called *Human Sexuality in Everyday Life*, which usually enrolls about 500 students each semester. One student who took the class in the Spring 2003 semester was an intern for a state senator, who is a leader of the social conservatives in Kansas. That student was offended the first day of class by the explicit audiovisual materials, my occasional use of street language, and what she coded as sexual harassment. She complained to the senator that very day.

The course syllabus clearly states that explicit audiovisual material will be used, that students are not required to view them, and that students need to assess their readiness to take a sexuality education class. The student could have dropped the class but chose, instead, to stay and report her experience to the senator. Other students referred to her as a “mole.” In fact, she even taped class activities without permission.

LEGISLATION INTRODUCED

Ignoring all of the options available within the University structure to address student complaints—University Ombudsman, Equal Opportunity Office, or Dean of Students—the senator, instead, introduced a proviso to the state budget bill. The proviso would have withdrawn funding for the School of Social Welfare or any other department that purchased explicit audiovisual materials for classroom use in human sexuality classes. It was clear, however, that she was targeting my class because reference to the many other human sexuality classes in the Regents systems was never made. The bill passed with the proviso

intact, but was vetoed by the governor. An attempt to override the veto failed.

Next, a list of anonymous “charges” was distributed in the Senate and submitted to the University. After a month-long investigation, the University Provost found the “charges” to be “without merit.”¹ During this period, the senator and her intern took the issue to a national audience by making several appearances on the *O’Reilly Factor* and other conservative media outlets.

As a last ditch effort, the senator submitted a watered down version of her first amendment, which would require all state universities to draft policies on using explicit materials in undergraduate human sexuality classes, as well as policies on sexual harassment in human sexuality classes. This second attempt also passed in the Senate and the House despite the university’s report, and was eventually signed by the governor, giving the senator and her legislative colleagues a symbolic win.

The first question I was asked following these events was whether I was going to change the way I taught my class. My answer was “absolutely not.” To do so would be a fundamental betrayal of student expectations for the class and their learning and growth, and a betrayal of my commitment to comprehensive sexuality education.

THE PROCESS

What was most striking about this experience was not the objection taken to the class (that’s anticipated), but rather the McCarthyistic, witch-hunt nature of the process. Almost all of the complaints were anonymous and some, I am sure, were fraudulent. A person appeared silhouetted on the *O’Reilly Factor*, and many unidentified, unsigned letters were distributed to the Senate and forwarded to the university. I was struck by the chilling effect this had throughout the university, as it raised again the fundamental issues around academic freedom and the micro-management of curriculum by the government (not unique to Kansas).

The other striking thing was the overwhelming support I received from students, alumni, university administrators and faculty, and from colleagues nationally. I received hundreds and hundreds of emails and letters of support, which was both gratifying and critical.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Is it over? I suspect not. This issue clearly has become very personal on the part of the senator and is driven by moral indignation, meaning that facts will be largely irrelevant. Not once did the senator or her colleagues acknowledge the overwhelming objections to their efforts and the positive support I received. She called the university report a “whitewash.” I suspect her efforts are a part of a larger national movement that targets sexuality education, abortion, homosexuality, and other social conservative agenda items and uses all of the typical buzz words to fan the flames of their rhetoric, such as pedophilia (I was accused of being a pedophile), sexual harassment, and pornography.

Throughout this most frightening and hurtful experience I was largely silent and I believe my silence served me well. My operating stance was that one should never go swimming when the sharks are feeding. Only recently am I beginning to give voice to my experience and I am sure it will serve in part to energize the senator and her colleagues. But these are the risks we take if we care deeply for the sexual health and future of today’s young people—and I do.

1. For a copy of the report see www.ur.ky.edu/news/sw303/report.

FEDERAL DEFINITION OF ABSTINENCE-ONLY EDUCATION

In 1996, the federal government attached a provision to the popular welfare-reform law establishing a federal entitlement program for abstinence-only-until-marriage education. As part of this program, the government created the following definition of abstinence-only education.

Section 510(b) of Title V of the Social Security Act, P.L. 104-193

For the purposes of this section, the term "abstinence education" means an educational or motivational program which:

- A. has as its exclusive purpose teaching the social, psychological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity;
- B. teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside of marriage is the expected standard for all school-age children;
- C. teaches that abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other associated health problems;
- D. teaches that a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of sexual activity;
- E. teaches that sexual activity outside the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical side effects;
- F. teaches that bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child's parents, and society;
- G. teaches young people how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increase vulnerability to sexual advances, and
- H. teaches the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity.

Today, the federal government supports three separate funding streams for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs—the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA), Title V (welfare reform), and Special Projects of Regional and National Significance–Community Based Abstinence Education (SPRANS-CBAE). Programs that receive federal money under any of these funding streams must adhere to this definition. While AFLA and Title V require that programs *not be inconsistent with any* of the eight points, SPRANS-CBAE requires that funded programs *be responsive to each* of the eight points.

HOW WILL WE TEACH OUR CHILDREN?

Renee Walker
Parent
Concord, California

“My father taught in the wise way, which unfolds what lies in the child’s nature, as a flower blooms, rather than crammed it, like a Strasbourg goose, with more than it could digest.”

—Louisa May Alcott

When my eleven-year-old son, Alex, looked down at his plate and poked at something wet, I asked, “What is that?”

“It’s the paper from my straw but it reminds me of the seaweed inserted into a woman’s cervix before she has an abortion.”

My jawed dropped. My fifteen-year-old son distracted me from the shock by piping in, “Like he knows what a cervix is.”

Later on while Alex was studying at our dining room table, I thumbed through his Family Life Education notebook. It contained notes on abortion, including lists of advantages and disadvantages. His “disadvantages” column contained the words *“killing a child.”*

“Why did you write this?” I asked him.

“Because it tears the arms and legs off.”

“They taught you that in science class?” I inquired, as calmly as possible.

“Yes,” was his matter of fact reply.

AN INITIAL INQUIRY

My son participated in an education program at his middle school that encouraged students to abstain from sex until marriage. The school had assured me that the presenters were “specially trained” and the program would drive home the message of abstinence by using computerized dolls.

The discrepancies, between the information I received about the program and what my son had learned, alarmed me. I wrote a letter to the presenters expressing my discomfort with the abortion content. I also asked how the program integrated gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, and what information they provided about disease and pregnancy prevention.

In her reply, the presenter denied having provided anything graphic or inflammatory. In addition, she indicated that her group was not trained to teach on the subject of sexual orientation and that their eight-day program provided no information about contraceptives.

GATHERING MORE INFORMATION

Her response made me wonder, what was this “special training” that was incomplete and void of information about sexual

orientation? With some research, I discovered that this “sexuality education program” was actually an abstinence-only program created by a local crisis pregnancy center, First Resort. First Resort is a fundamentalist Christian organization whose founder has publicly declared that her personal mission is to rid the Bay Area of abortion. This information was withheld from parents, and I felt it violated our rights to informed consent.

I then obtained a copy of First Resort’s curriculum, *CryBabies*. Sure enough, it contained extremely graphic and inflammatory descriptions of abortion that were consistent with what my son had learned in class.

I cited the violations and outlined my concerns in a letter to the superintendent of our school district. His reply did not address the specifics of my letter and instead indicated he was pleased with the program and planned to retain it. Since that time, I have been working with parents and educators in my community and across the country in an effort to remove this program from my son’s school.

A MATTER OF CHOICE

While I am personally dissatisfied with what this program offered my son, I cannot ignore that its very existence, palatable or not, speaks to the fact that somebody feels it is best for our children.

Individual and societal needs vary greatly, but parents’ desires for their children come from the same heartfelt place—we want what is best for them. It is therefore important to come up with plans that empower and protect our children, while at the same time honoring and respecting our diverse ideas about what best meets their needs.

The most unfortunate aspect of my son’s experience was not so much that he received information contrary to what I felt was best, but that I had been lied to in order to make sure he received it. This needs to change first and foremost so that the choices made by “the people in charge” honestly reflect the desires of the communities they serve.

And ultimately we need to decide: Will we stuff our kids like a Strasbourg goose, with more than they can digest, or will we educate them wisely and watch them unfold?

WHAT TEACHERS WANT, NEED, AND DESERVE

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PORTRAIT OF A SEX EDUCATION TEACHER

I teach sexuality education because I am told to by my principal, or because I believe it is a very important subject. In either case, I am doing so with very little, if any, formal training in sexuality. My teaching background may be in health, physical education, science, or as a general K-8 classroom teacher or school nurse. I have read the dire statistics about unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections among adolescents. I am aware of the controversy pitting abstinence-only education against abstinence-plus education or comprehensive sexuality education, but I am not entirely sure of what any of these phrases mean in relation to what I am supposed to teach. There is no formal sexuality or family life curriculum in my school. I have a ten-year old outline with general objectives to guide me as I develop my lessons.

Although I have been assigned to teach this class (or I have volunteered) I have very little guidance or direction from my principal or superintendent about what I should teach, or, more importantly, what I should not teach. I believe this is an important topic if for no other reason than to keep adolescents safe from the consequences of unprotected intercourse, but I am worried about how some parents or other members of the community might react to what I teach. I am not sure what kind of support I will get if I do get attacked, and, in any case, I am not at all confident that I can do a good job.

WHAT TEACHERS WANT TO KNOW

The overwhelming majority of American adults support comprehensive sexuality education in the public schools for their children. A poll conducted by SIECUS and Advocates for Youth in 1999 found that 93% of Americans support sexuality education in high school and 84% in junior high.¹ Many states have mandates requiring some kind of education about sexuality in their public schools including information about contraception and sexually transmitted infection (STI) prevention. So, with all of the legal and public support for sexuality education why do teachers still tend to shy away from the topic? Why do so many still feel unprepared or uncomfortable teaching it?

As a human sexuality educator, I work with public school teachers, mostly in the Northeast, but also across the country, to help them feel more confident and competent teaching the young people with whom they work. Over the last 10 years, I have listened to the concerns, questions, and issues that teachers see as barriers to being successful sexuality educators. An informal survey of sexuality education professionals working with teachers found broad consensus about the questions and concerns most commonly expressed by teachers. They want to know:

- What can I say about _____ (condoms, contraception, abortion, sexual orientation) that won't get me in trouble?
- Can I demonstrate proper use of a condom? Can I use penis models?
- How do I discuss values with students who may have very different ideas and beliefs from me and from each other?
- What are the regulations about confidentiality and required reporting?

- What do I do about referring students for sexual health services?
- What happens if a student asks a question about a topic that I'm not supposed to talk about?
- Can I teach birth control in middle school?
- Should I support a Gay Straight Alliance at my school?
- How do I deal with the issue of oral sex in middle schools?
- How do I navigate around culturally sensitive issues?

The frequency and consistency with which these questions are asked by those responsible for teaching sexuality education across the country reflects fear and uncertainty, and suggests a disconnect between public opinion polls and the reality of the classroom. What I, and others who work with teachers, have found is that despite broad support for comprehensive sexuality education, there are a number of factors conspiring to limit the quantity and quality of sexuality education available across the nation.

CONTROVERSY TAKES ITS TOLL

Public national battles over sexuality education and the fear of controversy on the local level have had a chilling effect on teachers. In the face of public controversy, states and school districts are doing a poor job of establishing and publishing clear guidelines for teachers about what should (and should not) be taught. In the absence of these guidelines, they are leaving teachers to "go it alone"—to figure out what they can teach. Given the current "sex-negative" climate that exists in this country, it is not surprising that many educators are unwilling to

discover the boundaries of their community's standards on their own.

In addition, the heightened political discourse about abstinence-only education as compared to courses that teach abstinence plus contraception and safer sex, serves to define the concept of sexuality education only within the context of pregnancy and disease. Left out completely, both for the public at large and among sexuality education teachers, are all of the other critically important topics central to comprehensive sexuality education. Without other guidance or training, teachers focus all of their time and energies on disease and pregnancy prevention strategies, wrongly equating the absence of negative consequences with sexual health and well-being.

TEACHERS ARE INADEQUATELY PREPARED

Woefully inadequate training available to both pre-service and in-service educators has left teachers feeling unprepared to teach anything but the most basic and "safe" topics—anatomy, STIs, and pregnancy-prevention. In addition to the chilling effect brought on by fear of controversy, the lack of training available to sexuality educators results in teachers feeling incapable of addressing many of the more challenging but critical topics such as sexual orientation, sexual behavior, abortion, safer sex (particularly condom use), diversity, and gender roles.

It has also left them feeling inadequately prepared to respond to concerns or criticisms from the community. The teachers I work with want two basic things: hands-on activities to use, particularly on more difficult topics; and help answering questions appropriately or facilitating discussions on topics that are raised by students, including guidance on self-disclosure, and what they can and cannot say in their classrooms.

The hard truth is that there are exceedingly few commercially available curricula that are appropriate for the public school system and take a developmentally appropriate, sex-positive, comprehensive approach to sexuality education. There are a number of very good compilations of lessons that address various topics of sexuality education, however, most of these tend to focus on pregnancy and disease prevention strategies as well.

In contrast, there are many abstinence-only curricula available that, albeit ineffective, are user-friendly, relatively inexpensive, and easily accessible to teachers who are hungry for guidance.

SEXUALITY EDUCATION IS NOT A PRIORITY

Although many states mandate sexuality education, these regulations are often ineffective because they are not enforced.

In addition, with so many demands on a teacher's time, he or she, along with school and district administrators, have to set priorities for what gets done. Naturally, these priorities will be guided, in part, by the priorities of their state board of education or other agency with oversight authority. In this age of accountability in education, very few states include health education on their standardized tests and virtually none test for competency in sexuality education.

School administrators also often fail to provide the leadership and infrastructure—such as opportunities for professional development, community advisory boards, parent nights, and endorsement or development of comprehensive curricula—that signal to teachers that sexuality education is a priority.

With certain notable exceptions, sexuality education is not given the fiscal or professional recognition by school and district administrators, that other disciplines enjoy. Despite broad public support for sexuality education, at the local level there is little encouragement, guidance, coordination, clarity, or vision. Most teachers do not know what their district's policies are about sexuality education (which helps to explain their reluctance to address some topics). The majority of them are left to piece together their own curricula from scanty outlines that provide little more than broad educational objectives. Often, the teachers who are in need of professional development the most have the fewest opportunities for it.

In essence, sexuality education teachers often describe their work as teaching in a vacuum. They feel very much alone and responsible for what gets taught.

A NEW PORTRAIT

If we want the portrait I outlined at the beginning of this article to evolve into that of a competent, confident, effective educator, the broad public support for comprehensive sexuality education must be partnered with a strong and systemic fiscal, educational, and political commitment to it. State Boards of Education, school districts, building administrators, community members, schools of higher education (especially teacher education programs) and organizations that support sexuality education must work together with teachers to address each of the points I've laid out above.

The vast majority of teachers with whom I have worked are committed, even passionate, educators who want to make a difference but who are desperate for resources and guidance. The public support is clear but there is a lot of work still to be done.

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AN INFLUX OF FUNDING FOR ABSTINENCE-ONLY-UNTIL-MARRIAGE PROGRAMS LEADS TO A DECADE OF POLICY CHANGES

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A decade ago, the federal government had a small pot of money—roughly four million dollars each year—for abstinence-only programs. In 2003, abstinence-only-until-marriage programs are supported by over \$120 million in federal dollars and \$37.5 million in state-raised funds.¹ Since 1996, when the federal government quietly instituted a massive increase for abstinence-only-until-marriage funding, government support for these unproven programs has totaled more than \$700 million.

Due to ever-increasing federal funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, and effective support and advocacy from social conservatives, the last decade has seen more restrictive abstinence-only-until-marriage sexuality education laws on the state-level, and a proliferation of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs funded through federal block grants. While school districts and individual schools still have significant latitude in crafting their own policies for sexuality education, the federal incentives and guidance regarding abstinence-only-until-marriage have changed the landscape of sexuality education in the United States.

Despite this unprecedented support, proponents of comprehensive sexuality education have not been silent. The public remains unwaveringly supportive of comprehensive sexuality education. Some states and schools have found ingenious ways to resist the pressure to institute abstinence-only-until-marriage policies or to make them work without using fear- and shame-based curricula. And we are seeing positive trends both legislatively and locally that promise to grow stronger and become more widespread in the coming years.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

In 1912, the National Education Association called for teacher training programs in sexuality education and in 1919 the White House Conference on Child Welfare said that “sex instruction... is more properly a task of the school.” In 1940, the U.S. Public Health Service called sexuality education in schools an “urgent need” and in the 1950s the American School Health Association and the American Medical Association developed programs and pamphlets, respectively, in family life and sexuality education.

Then, starting in the 1960s, opposition to sexuality education began to gain momentum. In the 1970s, socially

conservative groups filed lawsuits in attempts to bar sexuality education in schools. The suits were based on alleged constitutional violations but failed because parental “opt-out” provisions allowed parents to take their children out of the classes. In addition, the courts found no violations of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, the clause which has been interpreted to guarantee separation of Church and State.²

When AIDS entered the picture in the 1980s, sexuality education was once again embraced by many. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began funding HIV education and state policies mandating HIV/AIDS education were established.

Still, in 1981, opponents of comprehensive sexuality education finally met with success. A federal abstinence-only funding stream was created with the quiet enactment of the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA). AFLA was touted by its proponents as an alternative to the Title X family planning program which was seen by conservatives as promoting teen sexual activity and undermining traditional values. AFLA established funding for programs that would “promote chastity and self-discipline.” Another goal of AFLA was to promote adoption over abortion as an option for young people. In other words, it was a “pro-family” approach to teen pregnancy prevention. However, in order to appease Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), the ranking member on the subcommittee under which AFLA was considered, a provision was included to provide support services to pregnant and parenting teens.³

AFLA opened the door for sexuality education policies in the U.S. that have increasingly emphasized abstinence. Those who continued to oppose teaching sexuality education in schools found abstinence-only programs to be more palatable and began advocating for them with renewed vigor and success. In the more than two decades since AFLA was signed into law, the federal government has not only increasingly stressed abstinence, but it has increasingly stressed *abstinence-only-until-marriage*.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INVESTS MORE MONEY

In a case of ideology triumphing over science during the last decade, the two largest federal funding streams for absti-

nence-only-until-marriage were created.⁴ In 1996, abstinence-only proponents successfully created a \$50 million per year entitlement program by slipping the provision into the popular Welfare Reform Law during the final drafting of the legislation, a process usually reserved for corrections and technical revisions.⁵ As was the case with AFLA, there was little public or legislative debate.

Through Section 510(b) of Title V of the Social Security Act (hereafter Title V), states are eligible to receive federal funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs that have teaching abstinence as their “exclusive purpose.” (See box on page 16 for the federal definition of “abstinence education.”) States must then match every four federal dollars with three state-raised dollars.⁶

The strictest abstinence-only-until-marriage funding stream to date—the Special Projects of Regional and National Significance-Community Based Abstinence Education (SPRANS-CBAE) program—was established in 2000. While programs funded by Title V dollars cannot be “inconsistent” with any of the eight points in the federal definition of abstinence education, SPRANS-CBAE programs must address each of the eight points. SPRANS-CBAE grants are made directly from the federal government to organizations rather than being disbursed by the state, as Title V grants are. In Fiscal Year 2003, funding for the SPRANS-CBAE program was \$55 million, a massive increase from its original \$20 million in Fiscal Year 2001.

STATES WEIGH IN

This decade has seen tremendous change in sexuality education policy on the federal level. Abstinence-only-until-marriage policy is widely accepted and promoted by the current President and leadership in Congress. This has heightened the attention paid to this topic and states have been given great incentives to follow the federal government’s lead.

State Policies. State policies on sexuality education range from broad, general mandates about what subjects must be taught, to specific mandates about topics and messages. While school districts have historically been free to make decisions about specific content, the last decade has seen a steady erosion of that freedom, particularly if federal or state dollars are used to fund sexuality education.

States often have mandates requiring sexuality and/or sexually transmitted disease (STD) education. In fact, 39 states and the District of Columbia require that students receive some instruction about sexuality education, or HIV/AIDS and STDs.⁷ Twenty-two of the those states and the District of Columbia require that students receive sexuality education *and* HIV/STD education, and 17 require only HIV/STD education.⁸

Ten years ago, the vast majority of states did not give much detail about what such courses must include. Today, however, many states also place content requirements on sexuality, HIV/AIDS, and STD education. Twenty-two states require that if sexuality education is taught, abstinence must be stressed and eight states require that it at least be covered.⁹ When STD education is taught, 26 states require that abstinence be stressed and seven require that it be covered.¹⁰ In comparison, contraception must be covered in 19 states when STD education is taught, and in 14 states when sexuality education is taught.¹¹ An additional four states, however, authorize localities to cover contraception, but require them to include failure rates or effectiveness and failure rates among adolescents.¹² Finally, Utah prohibits the “advocacy or encouragement of the use of contraceptive methods or devices” and prohibits teachers from answering students’ questions in a way that would contradict that requirement.¹³

States Adopt Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage. After passage of the 1996 Welfare Reform Law, states were in the unenviable position of having to decide whether to accept the Title V federal funds and subsequently find state-raised funds for programs that have abstinence-only-until-marriage as their “exclusive purpose.” Recognizing the predicament faced by states, a state health official said: “States don’t have that many programs that match this definition; the programs don’t exist.”¹⁴ Just a few years later, however, that statement is no longer true.

Every state in the country receives some federal funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.¹⁵ However, as SIECUS recommended when Title V was first enacted, some states choose to use their federal funds for programs that do not rely on fear- and shame-based messages. Instead, they choose to teach some of the more innocuous elements of the federal government’s eight-point definition.

Maine and Massachusetts, for example, direct their funds to media campaigns.¹⁶ The theme of Maine’s media campaign is parent-child communication about sexuality. Massachusetts’ media campaign is targeted at males and females 10-14 years of age, males 15-17 years of age, and parents of teenagers. Its message is simply, “You don’t have to do it.” The campaign aims to increase parent-child communication, encourage youth to delay the onset of sexual activity, and educate young men about the risks of early sexual activity.

Oregon uses its Title V money as part of a larger comprehensive sexuality education program in the context of STARS (Students Today Aren’t Ready for Sex), a program which focuses on 6th graders, and three other programs that focus on elementary-school-aged children.

THE ABSTINENCE-ONLY-UNTIL-MARRIAGE TREND IN SCHOOLS

State and local curriculum standards are not within the federal government's authority to legislate (four federal laws prohibit the federal government from dictating the content of community education programs¹⁷). Nonetheless, conservative federal legislators have found ways, by pulling the purse strings and restricting and defining the scope of state and local health policy, to effectively encourage strict abstinence-only-until-marriage courses over comprehensive approaches to sexuality education. Over the past decade, this federal support for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs has dramatically changed the landscape of sexuality education across the country.

A 1988 survey of public school teachers of sexuality education in grades seven through 12 conducted by the Alan Guttmacher Institute, found that one in 50 used an abstinence-only curriculum.¹⁸ In 1999, another survey of the same subset found that the percentage had increased to one in four.¹⁹

Another Alan Guttmacher Institute survey conducted in 1998 also illustrated the impact government directives have had on school policy. In that survey, 48 percent of school superintendents cited state directives as the most important factor in determining their sexuality education policy. In addition, 17 percent cited school boards, and 18 percent cited special committees.²⁰ In a 1999 Kaiser Family Foundation survey, 88 percent of public secondary school principals reported that school districts and local governments had at least "some influence" on their school's sexuality education curricula.²¹ More importantly, 70 percent indicated that state government had "some influence" or a "great deal of influence," and 31 percent indicated that the federal government's abstinence-only funds had some influence.²² Eighty-five percent of school principals said that the content of sex education was subject to local or state guidelines and 43 percent said that the guidelines were strict.²³

While about half of school principals said that subjects related to sexuality education had been a topic at a public debate or discussion, most of the time (58 percent) no change in curricula resulted.²⁴ Finally, only 31 percent of schools reported experiencing a discussion about whether to teach an abstinence-only curricula.²⁵ This is consistent with SIECUS' finding that strict abstinence-only-until-marriage programs are finding their way into schools with little or no debate, virtually unnoticed.²⁶

SOME POSITIVE TRENDS

On the Federal Level. The federal government's support and guidance for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs are effective because of the funding made available to states and organizations through AFLA, Title V, and SPRANS-CBAE.

Proponents of comprehensive sexuality education are trying to create similar federal funding streams for comprehensive sexuality education. In 2001, the Family Life Education Act was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives and had 89 bipartisan co-sponsors. The bill would have authorized \$100 million for comprehensive sexuality education. It will be re-introduced this year in both the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate.

In 2002, the Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage program was up for reauthorization. While more than one year later, reauthorization is still pending, the House of Representatives did pass a version of the bill in 2002 that would have continued the Title V program without changes. The good news is that for the first time the merits of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs were debated in a Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives. Advocates of comprehensive sexuality education helped draft three amendments to the bill, all of which unfortunately failed.

The first amendment, proposed by Jane Harman (D-CA), would have followed the Republican-inspired dictum that states should have some flexibility in crafting their own programs. The Harman amendment proposed that while leaving the strict eight-point definition in place, states would also be permitted to design other interventions to best meet the programmatic needs in their states. The second amendment was offered by Lois Capps (D-CA) and would have added language to Title V requiring funded programs to be medically accurate. Finally, Henry Waxman (D-CA) proposed an amendment that would have required funded programs to be proven effective as a condition of funding. These strategies will likely be revisited as Title V reauthorization is again considered this year.

Mirroring a positive trend in the states, a bill has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives that would require sexuality education to be medically accurate. Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-IL) introduced H.R. 802 in February 2003. The bill would prohibit any elementary or secondary school receiving federal funds from providing information that is not medically accurate in human development or sexuality education course material. The bill is in committee and no additional action has been taken.

On the State Level. In the last decade, many states have embraced the federal government's incentives to establish abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. In fact, many states have adopted laws which contain some or all of the federal government's strict eight-point definition of "abstinence education." Fortunately, some states have also resisted the strict guidance. A positive legislative trend in the last decade has been the introduction of medical accuracy and comprehensive sexuality education or family life education bills as a way of countering the abstinence-only-until-marriage watershed.

Because of the propensity of some abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula to use medically inaccurate information, many states have introduced legislation that would require that any sexuality education taught in the state be medically accurate. A decade ago, bills like this would have seemed preposterous. Now, however, they are needed as an effective way to at least ensure that young people are receiving truthful information about sexuality as well as disease and pregnancy prevention. Since the beginning of 2003, 15 bills that address medical accuracy requirements have been introduced in state legislatures.²⁷

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT IN THE FUTURE?

Since AFLA came into being in 1981 one of the biggest concerns about abstinence-only-until-marriage programs involves religious content. In 1985, a U.S. District Court found AFLA to be unconstitutional because of its violation of the Establishment Clause, which requires separation of church and state. In 1993, 12 years after filing suit, an agreement was reached which placed conditions on administration of the grants and the AFLA grantees for five years. Specifically, the settlement required AFLA grantees to submit curricula to the Department of Health and Human Services for review and “consideration of whether the curricula teach or promote religion and whether such materials are medically accurate.” A decade later, in a case in Louisiana, religion was again the subject of a lawsuit in which abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, this time funded through the Title V block grants to states, were found to be violating the Constitution. The last decade, which started with a judicial decision finding that abstinence-only programs were unconstitutionally promoting religion, ended with a similar decision. Apparently, the lesson has not been learned. The unconstitutional promotion of religion is one of the issues to watch in the coming decade.

Other strategies to watch for include continuing legislative efforts to require medical accuracy and comprehensive sexuality education. Legislative efforts on the other side—requiring abstinence-only-until-marriage—are also likely to increase.

As a poll by the Othmer Institute found, people are often appalled when they learn what abstinence-only-until-marriage programs are teaching our young people.²⁸ As mainstream America gets involved, the next decade could be one of great successes for advocates of adolescent sexual health.

References

1. Before 1996, when Title V was enacted, the federal government provided money for abstinence-only. With Title V, however, the definition of “abstinence-only education” included specific references to mar-

riage. Any federal funding for abstinence after 1996, therefore, is referred to as “abstinence-only-until-marriage” funding to recognize that significant switch in policy.

2. See *Citizens for Parental Rights v. San Mateo County Board of Education*, 124 Cal. Rptr. 68 (Cal. Ct. App. 1975), appeal dismissed, 425 U.S. 908 (1976); *Hobolth v. Greenway*, 218 N.W.2d 98 (Mich. Ct. App. 1974); *Hopkins v. Hamden Board of Education*, 289 A.2d 914 (Conn. C.P. 1971), appeal dismissed, 305 A.2d 536 (Conn. 1973); *Medeiros v. Kiyosaki*, 436, 478 P.2d 314 (Haw. 1970); and *Cornwall v. State Board of Education*, 428 F.2d 471 (4th Cir.), cert. denied, 400 U.S. 942 (1970).
3. See R. Saul, “Whatever Happened to the Adolescent Family Life Act?” *The Guttmacher Report*, Volume 1, No. 2. <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/gr010203.html> accessed on July 27, 2003.
4. It is important to note that there is no methodologically sound, peer-reviewed research demonstrating that abstinence-only-until-marriage programs are effective at reducing sexual activity and teen pregnancy among young people.
5. See “Exclusive Purpose: Abstinence-Only Proponents Create Federal Entitlement in Welfare Reform,” *SIECUS Report*, 24, No. 4 (1996).
6. All states but California currently accept Title V federal funding for abstinence-only programs.
7. *State Policies in Brief: Sexuality Education*, The Alan Guttmacher Institute, July 1, 2003.
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10. *Ibid.*
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13. *Ibid.*
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15. While California has rejected the Title V funds, organizations within the state are recipients of SPRANS-CBAE grants.
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18. See R. Benson Gold and E. Nash, “State Level Policies on Sexuality, STD Education,” *The Guttmacher Report*, Volume 4, Number 4, pp. 4-7.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Landry, et al., “School District Policies on Abstinence Promotion and on the Provision of Information about Contraception,” *Family Planning Perspectives*, Volume 31, Number 6, pp. 280-286.
21. National Survey of Public Secondary School Principals on Sex Education, (Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation, 1999).
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. See M. Kempner, “Trends 1999-2000 Sexuality Education is Debated as Restrictive Programs Gain Popularity,” *SIECUS Report*, Volume 28, Number 6.
27. Senate Bill 1142 in Arizona; Senate Bill 71 in California; House Bill 136, Senate Bill 876, and House Bill 872 in Hawaii; Senate Bill 99 in Illinois; House Bill 1862 in Indiana; House Bill 465 in Iowa; House Bill 323 in Massachusetts; House Bill 4646 in Michigan; House Bill 2772 in New Jersey; House Bill 554 in New Mexico; House Bill 8599 in New York; House Bill 873 and Senate Bill 618 in North Carolina; House Bill 6070 and Senate Bill 863 in Rhode Island; House Bill 1178 and Senate Bill 5314 in Washington State; and House Bill 2907 in West Virginia.
28. Othmer Institute 2002 poll of 800 adult voters nationwide. Conducted by Lake Snell Perry & Associates. See <http://www.othmerinstitute.org/press/press5.html>.

WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW CAN'T HURT YOU?

Tobe Goldberg

Member, Human Sexuality Advisory Committee
Maple Grove, Minnesota

My son and I were walking along the street downtown the other day. He was not paying attention to the street lights and began to cross the street against the light. Since I know that what he doesn't know can't hurt him I didn't say anything. I wish I could have him back now.

I couldn't figure out why they didn't teach us not to point our weapon at anyone in our handgun class. When I asked if they had missed a portion of the class, they told me that if they didn't mention that to us they were sure we wouldn't shoot anyone.

I went to the bank the other day to take out a loan. The loan officer asked why I needed to borrow money to pay my electric bill when I make \$200,000 annually. I said I bought some stock from a broker who neglected to tell me the stock could go down. How is it that you can lose your whole life savings just because you are a little uninformed?

TAKING AN ACTIVE ROLE

I am a parent and I have been a member of the Human Sexuality Curriculum Advisory Committee (HSCAC) in Minnesota School District 279 (Osseo) since its inception, approximately seven years ago. The committee was created to advise the School Board on the human sexuality curriculum. It has consisted of about 37 different volunteers over the years representing all schools in the district.

The committee created controversy from the start. Although parent-teacher organization meetings usually have about ten participants, on the evenings that the original members of the HSCAC were chosen, 30 to 40 parents showed up to vote on the members of the team. These participants were solicited by churches and other secular organizations in the community in a clear attempt to weight the committee in an overly conservative nature.

THE POLITICS OF THE COMMITTEE

During the early years of the committee 10 to 20 like-minded members were able to steamroll the decisions of the committee, in part because they had the support of four of the six school board members. It was during this period that the board voted to establish a two-track system for sexuality in the district in which parents can choose to enroll their children in an abstinence-based or an abstinence-only-until-marriage program. The night the vote was taken, one of the school board members proclaimed that he had waited eight years to make this vote.

Not surprisingly, one by one, the more liberal members of the HSCAC became increasingly frustrated and dropped off the committee. For about the last two years I

have been the lone supporter of comprehensive sexuality education on the committee. My role has essentially been to vote my conscience, precluding these one-sided decisions from being unanimous.

About a year after the inception of the two-track system, the balance of the school board shifted as the result of an election. The new board is made up of three conservative members and three neutral to liberal members. This shift has meant that the HSCAC could no longer get their recommendations rubber-stamped by the board. As a result, committee participation has dropped. Although the committee still meets, we can't hold any votes due to lack of attendance. I suspect participation on the committee as well as partisan agendas would resume if the conservatives could shift the board makeup back in their favor.

PARENTS HAVE A CHOICE

In the meantime, we have a choice in the district. As a parent in Osseo you have the freedom to choose to have your child informed about sexual orientation, safer sex, abortion, and abstinence or, to have them lectured about remaining abstinent until marriage.

I've made my choice to have my two children informed, and I am proud of the decisions they have made in their lives. Knowledge is power and we want our kids to be empowered to make intelligent decisions. Abstinence is the optimum choice but "safer sex" is imperative for those who are sexually active.

Some say that what we don't know can't hurt us? I say don't believe it.

ADVOCATING FOR A CONDOM AVAILABILITY PROGRAM

Gwen Sidley

Teacher, Woodside High School
Woodside, CA

In February 2000, four teenagers sat together in a corner of my video production classroom at Woodside High School in Woodside, CA brainstorming an idea for a documentary movie. When I suggested that they tackle a controversial social change issue such as making condoms available in high schools, all four of them smiled. That was the beginning of what would become the best movie in the class and a serious lesson in the democratic process for all of us. The students not only made a movie, they became strong advocates for making condoms available in our school.

WHO MAKES THE DECISIONS

The students first videotaped the principal who said that if it were up to her, we would have condoms, but it wasn't her decision. She referred the decision to the Woodside High School Shared Decision Making Council (SDMC) which is composed of parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community members.

The students put together a proposal for a condom availability program in the school. We then met with the SDMC twice in the spring of 2000 and believed our goals were accomplished when the group twice approved our proposal. Unfortunately, when we came back to school in September 2000, we learned the SDMC had not approved the condoms, but rather a timeline for possible implementation.

We were disappointed, but we moved on. The principal arranged meetings for us with the superintendent and the president of the school board.

The superintendent told us that the decision did not rest with the SDMC but with the school board and that they had more important issues to address. The school board president was more encouraging and supportive but not quite willing to become a proponent of our plan.

BUILDING COMMUNITY SUPPORT

We spent the next months building community support for our proposal. We held meetings with school staff, the PTA, and the Latino parent association. In addition, we held two evening meetings for the entire community to discuss condom availability and sexuality education, though only seventeen parents attended.

Finally, after a year of meetings, planning, and organizing, we presented our proposal at the school board meeting. The principal courageously proclaimed that she supported the proposal 100 percent. Students, the school nurse, and I all spoke at the meeting. The whole room stood in support—not one person spoke against the proposal.

And then, one by one, each school board member spoke in support of the proposal but said that ultimately the decision rested with the school. This meant that the principal, who had supported our proposal from the beginning, had the final say. We were shocked and thrilled.

CONDOMS IN OUR SCHOOL

After the school board meeting, we created a safer sex display in the nurse's office with packets of donated condoms that included information on abstinence, diseases, and hot lines. This year students received 4,000 condoms during September and October.

What started as a class project to make a movie became a mechanism to change the norms in our community. I often hear students telling other students who are holding hands or kissing in the halls to go to the nurse's office to get condoms. Whether they are joking or serious, the word is out that this community believes teens need to protect themselves. And, we've backed up our words with action.

NEW RESEARCH ON CONDOM AVAILABILITY

The *American Journal of Public Health* recently released a study that analyzed the effect of condom availability programs in public high schools in Massachusetts. The researchers found that sexually active participants in schools with condom availability programs were more likely to use contraception at last intercourse than sexually active participants in schools without condom availability programs.

For more information: Susan M. Blake, Ph.D. et al., "Condom Availability Programs in Massachusetts High Schools: Relationships with Condom Use and Sexual Behavior," *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 93, no. 6, pp. 955-961.

ABSTINENCE - ONLY EDUCATION IN THE COURTS

Lorraine Kenny and Julie Sternberg
ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project
New York, NY

In the past two decades, the federal government has funneled hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars into abstinence education, even though there is no credible evidence that this approach prevents teen pregnancy or the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. To the contrary, because these programs often present medically inaccurate or incomplete information about contraceptives and the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, they interfere with the ability of teens to make healthy and responsible decisions if engaging in sexual activity. Moreover, although federal law does not permit government-funded programs to convey religious messages or impose religious viewpoints or practices, many abstinence-only programs continue to do so.

Since 1981, when Congress passed the first federal measure to promote abstinence education, the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA), concerned parents and advocates alike have brought a number of legal challenges against government-funded abstinence programs. The lawsuits have focused on the use of public dollars to promote religion, to disseminate medically inaccurate information, and to perpetuate gender stereotypes in taxpayer-funded sexuality education. Many of these challenges have been successful: in some cases, the courts have required abstinence-only programs to remove the offending content; in other cases, school districts have agreed to stop using the curricula in question; and in still other instances, faced with a court challenge, schools have expanded their sexuality education curricula to include more comprehensive approaches.

Despite these legal successes, proponents of abstinence-only education persist in their efforts to increase government funding for and religious involvement in abstinence-only programs. As a result, it is likely that the courts will continue to play an important role in curtail- ing and monitoring abstinence-only education. Below is an overview of the legal challenges that have been brought to date. Together these cases offer guidelines for future legal actions.

BOWEN V. KENDRICK: LAYING THE LEGAL GROUNDWORK

In 1983, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a lawsuit on behalf of a group of clergy, taxpayers, and the American Jewish Congress challenging the constitutionality

of AFLA and the way that specific grantees were using AFLA funds. The case, *Bowen v. Kendrick*, proceeded to the United States Supreme Court, making it the first and only case the Court has decided, to date, addressing government-funded abstinence programs. As such, the decision provides guidance for what is and is not permissible in these programs.

Before the Supreme Court, the ACLU contended that AFLA violates the constitutionally mandated separation of church and state because it requires grant applicants to explain how they would involve religious organizations (among other groups) when providing services, it allows religious organizations to receive funds, and its program goals coincide with certain religious beliefs. The ACLU, therefore, argued that the statute should be struck in its entirety. The Supreme Court disagreed, holding instead that a statute may legitimately recognize “the important part that religion or religious organizations may play in resolving certain secular problems.”¹ The Court further concluded that the goals of AFLA are not “religious in character” even if they coincide with certain religious beliefs.² And, despite this overlap, the Court refused to assume that religious organizations would promote religion in AFLA-funded programs.

The ACLU also called into question particular grants made under AFLA to religious organizations. In response, the Court clarified when religious groups may receive funds and what they may do with them. On the one hand, the Court explained that the government cannot give public dollars directly to an “institution in which religion is so pervasive that a substantial portion of its functions are subsumed in the religion’s mission.”³ The Court reasoned that when public funds flow to such an institution—a church, a diocese, or a seminary, for example—there is a “substantial risk that [the] aid... would, knowingly or unknowingly, result in religious indoctrination.”⁴ On the other hand, the Court emphasized that public dollars can flow to other religiously affiliated groups so long as the dollars underwrite only secular content. For example, AFLA funds can go to a charity that is affiliated with a church, provided it does not use the money to promote religion. The Court, however, recognized that some AFLA grantees had been using federal funding to support religious activities. Consequently, it sent the case back to the lower court to determine whether specific AFLA grants constituted government-funded religion and to devise a remedy for addressing this problem. In 1993, the parties reached a settlement agreement.

Although *Bowen v. Kendrick* clarified that public money cannot be used to fund religious activities in a publicly funded sexuality education program, it did not stop the government from using taxpayer dollars to support fear-based, abstinence-only education. The federal government is free to fund abstinence-only education so long as programs do not use government dollars to promote religion. And advocates can challenge publicly funded abstinence-only programs on a case-by-case basis.

Since the conclusion of this case, Congress has instituted two additional abstinence-only programs: the abstinence-only-until-marriage initiative which Congress enacted in 1996 in the context of overhauling the nation's welfare system (Section 510 of Title V of the Social Security Act), and the Special Projects of Regional and National Significance abstinence program initiated in 2000.⁵

GOVERNMENT-FUNDED RELIGION AND ABSTINENCE-ONLY EDUCATION

Despite the outcome of *Bowen v. Kendrick*, some government-funded abstinence-only programs continue to promote religion. In 2002, in the first lawsuit filed against a program funded through Title V, the ACLU challenged the use of taxpayer dollars to fund religion in the Louisiana Governor's Program on Abstinence (GPA). Basing its claim on reams of public records, the ACLU demonstrated in this case, *ACLU of Louisiana v. Foster*, that the governor's program had made hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants to programs that used the funds to support religious activities and promote religious messages. Groups receiving GPA funds highlighted their misuse of the dollars in their monthly reporting forms to the governor's office. For example, one group noted:

December was an excellen[t] month for our program, we were able to focus on the virgin birth and make it apparent that God desire[s] sexual purity as a way of life. The virgin birth help[ed] many people to see and understand what Christmas is about. Abstinence only put things in the right perspective, this let us know that each individual must live to please God and not man.⁶

Groups also reported that they used GPA funds to operate a chastity program entitled "God's Gift of Life," to organize prayer vigils at abortion clinics, and to teach a curriculum that educated participants on the "spiritual need" for abstinence and addressed "[t]heir relationship with God."⁷ Despite these and numerous other reports indicating blatant use of GPA funds to promote religion, the GPA did nothing to address these violations until it was ordered to do so by the court.

In response to the ACLU's legal challenge, a federal district court ordered the GPA office "to cease and desist from disbursing GPA funds to organizations or individuals that convey religious messages or otherwise advance religion in any way in the course of any event supported in whole or in part by GPA funds."⁸ The parties eventually settled the case after the GPA agreed to stop funding religious activities and to monitor closely the activities of all funded programs. Under the agreement, programs discovered to be promoting or advocating religion in any way are subject to losing their funding if they do not remedy the problem within a specified timeframe.

MEDICAL INACCURACIES IN ABSTINENCE-ONLY EDUCATION

Another persistent problem with abstinence-only programs is the inclusion of medically inaccurate information. Challenges to medical inaccuracies in publicly adopted curricula have been filed in Florida, California, and Louisiana (in a case that preceded *ACLU v. Foster*).⁹ Each challenge relied on state statutes setting forth requirements for sexuality education programs in the state's public schools. Each was either a legal or political success.

In Florida, in *Planned Parenthood v. Duvall County School Board*, Planned Parenthood joined a group of parents in 1993 to challenge the district's adoption of a Teen-Aid abstinence curriculum for use in seventh grade classrooms, as well as the board's failure to adopt, as required by state law at the time, comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality education curricula for the remaining elementary and secondary school classes. Among other claims, Planned Parenthood argued that the Teen-Aid curriculum contained inaccurate information about human sexuality, pregnancy prevention, HIV transmission, abortion, and other related topics—all in violation of state law.¹⁰

The lawsuit challenged, for example, the Teen-Aid curriculum's assertion that, by the tenth to twelfth week of gestation, the fetus "learns and remembers things, hears, sees, and has a personality."¹¹ The lawsuit also objected to diagrams that confused external male and female reproductive or sex organs with internal organs,¹² as well as passages claiming that "no controlled scientific study supports the value of condoms in helping to protect against sexually transmitted diseases including HIV" and that "following abortion, women are prone to suicide."¹³

The lawsuit resulted in real change. After a four-year legal battle, the school board ultimately agreed to drop the offending program and adopt a comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality education curriculum for kindergarten through twelfth grade. The new curriculum included an optional abstinence pledge for students in seventh grade and above.

The California lawsuit, *Hall v. Hemet Unified School District Governing Board*, raised similar issues. In 1994, a group of parents challenged the Hemet school district's decision to use abstinence curricula published by Teen-Aid, Respect, and Choosing the Best, in the district's middle and high schools. Among other claims, the parents argued that the curricula violated California statutes requiring accuracy in instructional materials.¹⁴ The challenged curricula included misinformation designed to frighten students, such as, "Correct usage of condoms may not prevent HIV infection, but only delay it!"¹⁵ The curricula also labeled the following statement as false: "Although condoms do not provide 100% protection against transmitting or acquiring HIV, they are highly effective, if they are used properly."¹⁶ In response to the legal challenge, the Hemet school board dropped sexuality education from the district curriculum altogether and replaced it with HIV/AIDS prevention education.

The first Louisiana lawsuit, *Coleman v. Caddo Parish School Board*, brought by a group of parents in 1992, challenged the inclusion of medically inaccurate information in the abstinence-only curricula—*Sex Respect* and *Facing Reality*—taught in the local public schools. Among other arguments, the parents contended that inaccurate or misleading information in the curricula violated a state statute defining sexuality education as "the dissemination of factual biological or pathological information that is related to the human reproduction system" and mandating that sexuality education "shall not include... the subjective moral and ethical judgments of the instructor or other persons."¹⁷

As the lawsuit emphasized, the curricula included statements claiming that anyone who has an abortion will suffer numerous physical risks, including "damage to... reproductive organs, heavy loss of blood, infection... increased risk of miscarriage or birth complications with future pregnancies... [and possibly] infertility."¹⁸ The curricula also included statements that were not only factually incorrect, but amounted to subjective moral judgments, including, "Well, no one can deny that nature is making some kind of comment on sexual behavior through the AIDS and herpes epidemic," and "Saving sex until marriage, by contributing to our emotional growth, will help us become better parents when we are married."¹⁹ The court ruled that these and similar passages violated Louisiana law and had to be deleted before the challenged curricula could be used in the public schools.

GENDER BIAS IN ABSTINENCE-ONLY EDUCATION

In addition to medical inaccuracies, gender stereotypes were an issue in the curricula involved in the 1992 Louisiana lawsuit and in the California challenge. Again

relying on state law, both cases succeeded in bringing those stereotypes to light and ensuring their removal from the classroom.

In the California lawsuit, Planned Parenthood argued that the challenged curricula violated a state law prohibiting the use of instructional materials that "reflect adversely upon persons because of their...sex."²⁰ For example, the curriculum portrayed teenage boys as uncontrollable, even violent, sexual aggressors: "When they are over-stimulated by what they see and hear, young males are tempted to provide sexual release for themselves by dwelling on thoughts or even forcing another person to have sex with them."²¹ At the same time, the curriculum portrayed teenage girls as responsible for keeping boys' sexual proclivities in check:

Females are generally less impulsive, more level headed, about sex... Since females generally become aroused less quickly and less easily, they are better able to make a thoughtful choice of a partner they want to marry. They can also help young men learn to balance in a relationship by keeping physical intimacy from moving forward too quickly.²²

Again, in the face of the legal challenge, the school board removed the offending curricula from the schools.

The challenged curricula in Louisiana included similar gender stereotypes. The court considered whether the offending passages were inaccurate and therefore violated state law. One passage read, "A male can experience complete sexual release with a woman he doesn't particularly like, whereas a woman usually can't do so unless she loves her partner." This was but one example. The court ordered the removal of such passages.²³

A LOOK AHEAD: KEEPING WATCH

Given the Bush administration's commitment to increasing federal funding for abstinence-only programs and interest in involving religious organizations in the administration of social and educational services, it is essential that the advocacy community continue to monitor how abstinence-only dollars are spent and to challenge the misuse of these funds in the courts. While the results of legal challenges may be limited to remedying specific problems within specific programs (rather than bringing an end to all abstinence-only programs), individual lawsuits can serve as fair warning to all abstinence-only programs receiving public dollars. Legal challenges can also help ensure that teens are not subjected to forced religious indoctrination, misled by medically inaccurate materials that can put their health and lives at risk, or exposed to offensive and damaging gender stereotypes.

References

1. *Bowen v. Kendrick*, 487 U.S. 589, 607 (1988).
2. *Id.* at 605.
3. *Id.* at 610 (internal quotations omitted).
4. *Id.* at 612 (internal quotations omitted).
5. As originally conceived, AFLA was not an abstinence-only program; instead, it was more broadly designed to address the adverse effects of teenage sexual activity and childbearing. In 1997, the Maternal and Child Health Bureau issued guidelines requiring AFLA grantees to comply with the narrow eight-point definition of abstinence education that had been enacted in 1996, when Congress passed Section 510 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. § 710). Regarding Maternal and Child Health Bureau guidelines, see Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Department of Health and Human Services, MCHJ116, Focus on Abstinence Education (1997). As a result, AFLA is now an abstinence-only program as well. See H.R. CONF. REP. NO. 107-347, at 113 (2002). Likewise, in 2000, Congress authorized the Special Projects of National and Regional Significance (SPRANS), a third abstinence-only program. Regarding SPRANS, see Military Construction Appropriations Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 106-246, 114 Stat. 511 (2000).
6. Mem. of Law in Support of Mot. for Prelim. Inj. at 4, *American Civil Liberties Union v. Foster*, No. Civ.A. 02-1440, 2002 WL 1733651 (E.D. La. Jul. 24, 2002).
7. *Id.* at 9, 12.
8. *American Civil Liberties Union v. Foster*, No. Civ.A. 02-1440, 2002 WL 1733651, at (E.D. La. Jul. 24, 2002) (order granting preliminary injunction).
9. Throughout this article, any descriptions or quotations of the curricula involved in the Florida and California cases are drawn entirely from the documents filed in these cases, rather than from the curricula themselves.
10. Fl. Stat. §§ 230.2319 (repealed 1994), 233.067 (repealed 1997) & 233.0672 (repealed 2003). As noted, the statutes on which the case relied have since been repealed and replaced by other statutes mandating HIV/AIDS and abstinence-centered sex education as a requirement merely for high school graduation. See Fla. Stat. §§ 1002.20, 1003.42 & 1003.43.
11. Compl. for Decl. J. & Inj. Relief 62, *Planned Parenthood v. Duvall County Sch. Bd.*, No. 92-01638 (Fla. Cir. Ct. 1993).
12. *Id.* 60.
13. *Id.* 59, 64.
14. CA Educ. § 60045.
15. Compl. for Decl. J. & Inj. Relief 46, *Hall v. Hemet Unified Sch. Dist. Governing Bd.* (Cal. Super. Ct. 1994) [hereinafter Hall Compl.].
16. *Id.* 44.
17. LA Rev. Stat. Ann. § 17:281.
18. *Coleman v. Caddo Parish Sch. Bd.*, 635 So. 2d 1238, 1257 (La. Ct. App. 1994).
19. *Id.* at 1252, 1256.
20. Hall Compl., *supra* note 15, 50
21. *Id.* 45.
22. *Id.*
23. *Coleman*, 635 So. 2d at 1267-68.

NEW RESOURCE FROM AGI

The Alan Guttmacher Institute has recently released *Sex Education: Needs, Programs and Policies*, a PowerPoint slide set that looks at the role of sex education in helping teenagers make healthy and responsible decisions about sex, the current status of sexuality education in the United States, and the ongoing debate over abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.

The presentation includes slides on:

- sexual activity among American youth;
- sex education policy and practice in public schools;
- the effectiveness of programs designed to delay sexual activity and to prevent unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among teenagers;
- increased federal funding for abstinence-only education; and
- the disconnect between public opinion and public policy in this area.

The presentation can be downloaded at: http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/ed_slides.html

THE EVERYDAY CHALLENGES OF TEACHING SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Martha Roper

Public High School Health Teacher
Missouri

My first death threat came in 1982 after appearing on *CBS Sunday Morning* in a segment describing the human sexuality class I taught as non-controversial. More threats came in 1992 when I joined Peter Jennings on a panel of experts for a TV special called *Growing Up in the Age of AIDS*.

After one local newspaper interviewed me about sexuality education, I received a postcard at home addressed to “Lesbian Slut Sinner Martha Roper.” My then 13-year-old son sorted the mail and handed me the card: “Mom, I think this one is for you.” I called the police.

These and other events I had used to promote comprehensive sexuality education helped me realize that by virtue of my profession, I was no longer an ordinary citizen. The FBI taught me how to detect a letter bomb twenty years ago, and I became as careful then as most people are today.

BATTLE SCARS

This school year is my 30th as a public high school teacher, and I am still teaching health education as a required semester-long course to sophomores. My school district’s policies and programs support comprehensive health education. Yet a few years ago, after an 18-month battle with a citizen and her evangelical church pastor, the district was left with scars and bitter memories of winning the war but getting wounded in battle. My program was the subject of 45 letters to the editor focusing on me and the district.

The then-superintendent told me I was the scariest person south of Interstate 64, and my principal told me to stick to the textbook—i.e. no sexuality education. It took several years for my program to recover.

Today, I teach with a clear memory of the worst moments of the past and with a watchful eye to the future. While most people would never consider harming me or my family because I teach sexuality education, there are people who cross the line of propriety every day, either through ignorance or as a willful act of intimidation. And while there are no large battles looming, I continue to face smaller ones everyday.

EVERYDAY CONTROVERSIES

The controversies around sexuality education in my Midwest world involve my own students, their parents, my

colleagues, and a few citizens in my town. The few specific events I list here which have occurred in the last couple of school years are just a sampling of controversies that frequently pop up. Some of the events or comments are common, some are odd at all sorts of levels. Together, they give a good idea of the issues that arise and the deft touch they require.

STUDENTS

- I walked into a colleague’s classroom right before the bell rang, and a student blurted out: “Oh, you’re the sex pervert!”
- After explaining how sexual behavior can increase an adolescent’s risk of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, a girl asked why I was talking about sex.
- After finding out that I was a sponsor of our high school’s new Gay Straight Alliance, a student asked why I was promoting gay sex.

PARENTS

- At a parent conference, a couple sat before me—their first question was: “Do you promote homosexuality?”
- One parent called to say that her son didn’t need to know about homosexuality because he was going to West Point.

COLLEAGUES

- During a district-wide meeting of health teachers, a colleague accused me of being “over the edge” regarding sexuality education.
- While the Board of Education had hoped to include condom demonstrations as part of the unit on sexually transmitted disease prevention, health teachers generally agreed that they did not want to do so. They did agree to show a two minute district-created video on how to use a condom, but few teachers actually use it.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

- I was at the local public library earlier this year, and a woman came up to the table where I was sitting alone reading:

“Are you Martha Roper, the health teacher at the high school?”

“I am.”

“Have you read *Harmful to Minors* by that Jew from New York?”

“The author’s name is Judith Levine, and, yes, I have read it,” I replied.

“Well, she’s a child molester.”

“Judith Levine is NOT a child molester nor is she promoting adult-child sex.”

“Well, I just came over here to tell you that she called you a criminal in her book, and I agree with her about that.”

“Well, you’re right that she did call sexuality education teachers criminals, but...”

She cut me off. “You ARE a criminal for teaching what you teach!” And with that final remark she turned on her heels and stomped out of the building.

SUPPORT DOES EXIST

The right to medically accurate information about sexuality is mandated by Missouri law. This year our high school paper wrote a story about sexuality education and accused the other health teachers of not teaching about sexuality at all. With all the controversies I face daily, it’s no wonder most teachers don’t want to. Still, over the years I have received support from administrators.

To prepare for a sexuality course I was planning for teachers this spring, I asked the superintendent if I could survey the district-wide faculty about classroom situations that teachers need help managing. He said no to the

process. However, he did show his commitment to sexuality education by affirming that sex, sexuality, and diverse populations are important topics, that he has data to prove that many of our children do not feel safe at school because of other students and staff, and that our school district is addressing the issue.

In fact, I think that having to cope with controversies has helped to change his mind about sexuality education. Recently, he criticized the textbook that the majority of health teachers voted for. “Where’s the sex ed?” he asked the health coordinator. (I am sad to say that he has taken a new job on the East Coast.)

CHOOSING TO CONTINUE

In spite of these conflicts, I choose to continue teaching health and sexuality education from a sex-positive, life-affirming perspective. I choose to continue to give voice to researched-based effective sexuality education because I am committed to giving young people medically accurate information.

I also continue to claim victory as part of a nationwide coalition of health and sexuality educators for the generation of achievement we have seen in the lowering of the rates of sexual intercourse, pregnancy, birth, and abortion among adolescents in the United States.

Yes, there is still work to do, but I am heartened by our successes, and I am unwilling to back down from controversy just because it is uncomfortable. It’s too important to let our fears stand in our way.

NEW PUBLICATION FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS

This fall, SIECUS will release *On The Right Track*, a guide for youth serving organizations. It is designed to help youth development professionals recognize the need to address sexuality with young people, understand how sexuality education and youth development can complement each other, and determine ways in which youth development programs can begin to incorporate this important topic.

The publication is designed to accompany SIECUS’ *Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education, K-12*, a framework for creating sexuality education programs, curricula, and materials. It includes numerous ways in which the *Guidelines* can help youth development professionals choose topics, select lessons, and determine age-appropriate messages.

In addition, the publication includes examples of organizations across the country that are successfully weaving youth development and sexuality education into innovative programs and activities.

FORMING A GAY STRAIGHT ALLIANCE WITHOUT CONTROVERSY

David Hall

Teacher, North Penn High School
Lansdale, Pennsylvania

North Penn High School, a public school in suburban Philadelphia, consists of almost 3,300 students in grades 10 through 12. Eighty percent of the student body is white, 11 percent Asian-American, five percent African-American, three percent Latino, and two percent other. Though the median income makes North Penn an upper-middle class school district, 10 percent of students receive subsidized lunches.

During the 2002–03 school year, students at North Penn High School formed a Gay Straight Alliance without incident. I have had the honor of serving as the group’s faculty advisor.

WORKING WITH THE ADMINISTRATION

Although the North Penn School District has a socially conservative school board, it recognized the students’ legal right to form a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA). Moreover, our administrators have demonstrated unwavering support for creating a safer and more tolerant school environment for students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT).

Once the GSA was formed, I met regularly with my building principal and school psychologist. During these meetings, we were able to process the rationale for various activities and unique circumstances faced by our club. This ongoing dialogue helped increase administrative awareness and understanding of the objectives of the club.

Other members of the school community were supportive as well. In fact, almost 40 percent of the staff attended the trainings on handling the topic of sexual orientation in school that I facilitated, with the help of students.

THE DAY OF SILENCE

During April, the Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) sponsors a national Day of Silence, on which students throughout the country are silent in school, to bring attention to the plight of LGBT students.

Before the Day of Silence, a group of seven North Penn High School students created posters that told the stories of individuals who were murdered because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The students also

made red t-shirts that read “Day of Silence, 2003” across the front and proclaimed “End the Need for Silence” on the back.

On the Day of Silence, 99 students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or straight allies participated by handing out cards to teachers and students that told stories of hate crime murders and explained the rationale for silence. Students wore their red t-shirts in solidarity. For the first time in the history of North Penn High School, LGBT students could walk the halls and recognize numerous allies and friends.

When the school day ended, 40 participants met in my classroom to break their silence. While people were filtering in, some students danced to the music while others were engaged in *Chalk Talk*, a silent activity in which they wrote their reflections on the Day of Silence on the board. We then sat in a circle on the floor, surrounded by an outer circle of adult allies in our building. The adults who attended included our building principal, an assistant principal, school nurses, the school psychologist, a guidance counselor, the budget administrative professional, and a number of teachers.

We passed a rainbow ribbon approximately two meters in length around the circle. Once each student held the ribbon, they would drape it over themselves and state, “My name is _____, and I am breaking my silence.” Each individual then explained why the Day of Silence was personally meaningful. A number of students cried as they reflected on the day, and a number of adults cried as they listened to the powerful experiences of students who were courageously breaking down feelings of isolation.

VISIBLE RESULTS

During North Penn’s senior prom, two gay male students brought their boyfriends and other gay and lesbian students, who brought dates of the opposite sex, danced with same sex partners. Not a single gay or lesbian student experienced harassment at the prom. I don’t believe that our students are necessarily more liberated and accepting than others. I believe that harassment was non-existent at our prom because our GSA worked hard to create an extraordinary sense of safety and understanding within our school.

A CONTROVERSIAL DECADE: 10 YEARS OF TRACKING DEBATES AROUND SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Martha E. Kempner, M.A.
SIECUS Director of Public Information

In 1992 the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) began the Community Advocacy Project in an effort to help communities respond to an increase in controversies surrounding sexuality education. The goals of the project were two-fold: first, to provide technical assistance to communities experiencing controversy and second, to track controversies around the country in order to gain perspective on trends.

In that time, SIECUS has seen numerous communities struggle with controversies over sexuality education. The majority of controversies involve attempts to restrict what students learn by adopting strict abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, censoring books or materials, limiting discussions, or instituting administrative roadblocks.

After a decade of tracking controversy, SIECUS has amassed a great deal of information that can help advocates understand the landscape of sexuality education, gain historical perspective, and learn important lessons that can advance comprehensive sexuality education now and in the future.

THE RISE OF THE ABSTINENCE-ONLY-UNTIL-MARRIAGE MOVEMENT

Clearly, the most dramatic trend we have seen in this last decade is the rise of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. When SIECUS began the Community Advocacy Project in 1992, the federal government spent a very small amount of money each year on these experimental programs, a few home-grown organizations distributed fear- and shame-based curricula, a handful of communities across the country had adopted such programs, and chastity rallies were still the exclusive province of faith-based communities.

Today, the federal government spends over \$100 million dollars each year on these programs, abstinence-only-until-marriage organizations represent a multi-million dollar business worldwide, and students in numerous communities are exposed to fear- and shame-based curricula, abstinence-only assemblies and presentations, and chastity rallies on school grounds.

As a result of this dramatic shift in the last 10 years, SIECUS has tracked numerous debates focused on

whether students should receive an abstinence-only-until-marriage message.

Classic Controversies

The classic controversy usually begins when a small but vocal minority of parents approaches the school board asking them to adopt a strict, abstinence-only-until-marriage program. In some cases this program is meant to replace a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum that is already in place, while in other communities no sexuality program exists at the time.

Abstinence Finds Its Way into Communities. In 1993, the **Vista, CA** school board voted to replace *Values and Choices*, a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum, with the fear- and shame-based, abstinence-only-until-marriage curriculum *Sex Respect*.¹ A similar decision was made during the 1997–98 school year in **Hendersonville, NC** when the school board voted to replace the local curriculum with *Teen Aid*, also a fear-based, abstinence-only-until-marriage program. The board did allow teachers to use additional lessons from the old curriculum but said that they could only teach about the use of contraception within the context of marriage.²

In 1999, **Taunton, MA** became divided on how to approach sexuality education with their students. The Health Curriculum Advisory Board approved revisions to the curriculum that would change the focus of health classes from pregnancy and disease prevention to abstinence-only-until-marriage. At a heated community forum, a physician from the National Consortium of State Physician's Resource Councils, a national opponent of comprehensive sexuality education, told parents "HIV is an adult fear not a child fear. When you teach it to ninth graders, you are impinging on their latency period." The community voted on a curriculum that would put a priority on teaching abstinence while also clearly communicating the risks associated with both sexual activity and the use of contraceptives.³

Parents and educators in **Pinoconning, MI** have debated sexuality education many times over the last decade. In 1999 the school board voted to adopt *Safer Choices*, an abstinence-based curriculum. Some parents objected saying that references to vaginal, anal, and oral intercourse as well as condom use made the curriculum

too explicit. One parent said that it “read like a how-to manual on how to be perverse.”⁴ In response the board reexamined the issue. The following year they chose *No Apologies—The Truth about Life, Love, and Sex*, a fear-based, abstinence-only-until-marriage curriculum published by Focus on the Family. When parents criticized this choice for being too restrictive, the president of the board said simply that if parents disagree they can take their children out of class.⁵

States Mandate Abstinence. As abstinence-only-until-marriage programs gained popularity, a number of states began to weigh in on how schools should teach about sexuality. **Virginia, Ohio, Missouri, and New Jersey**, for example, passed laws requiring schools to stress abstinence. Missouri’s law states that sexuality education in public school must present abstinence as the preferred choice of sexual behavior for unmarried students, discuss the consequences of adolescent sexual activity, and inform students of the advantages of adoption.⁶ Ohio’s law adds that curricula must cover state laws on the financial responsibilities of parents and the restriction for people over the age of 17 from having sexual contact with those under age 17.⁷

A statewide controversy in **Nebraska** began, not with legislation, but with a new rule passed by the board of education in 1997. The policy stated that any program receiving state funds must teach abstinence from sexual activity as the only appropriate option for students.⁸ Initially, however, there was an understanding that the statewide HIV-prevention education program supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was exempt from this rule. Educators and health professionals agreed that it would be impossible to provide effective HIV-prevention education without mentioning prevention methods other than abstinence, such as condoms.

When this exemption was brought to the attention of some board of education members in 2000, they asked the coordinator of the program to draft and defend a policy officially exempting her program from the abstinence-only approach. Despite testimony from numerous experts, parents, and people living with HIV/AIDS, the board rejected the proposal and demanded that the program follow a strict abstinence-only-until-marriage approach. In response to this ruling, the Department of Education declared that they could not find any secular materials that followed the abstinence-only-until-marriage dictate without discussing condoms or other birth control options. The commissioner, therefore, decided that the department would make no attempt to renew the CDC grant when it expired. This decision meant that the department would no longer offer the HIV-prevention trainings and programs for teachers and school districts sponsored by the grant.⁹

Some Communities Abstain

Despite the clear rise in the popularity of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, not all states and communities have given in to the pressure to support this kind of message. As early as 1994, communities were resisting. That year a speaker from the Medical Institute for Sexual Health, a national abstinence-only-until-marriage organization, tried to persuade parents and school board members in **Colchester, VT** to adopt an abstinence-only-until-marriage program. A number of parents in the community, however, joined together to build support for comprehensive sexuality education and won with a 4-1 vote.¹⁰ In 1997, parents in **Pembroke, NH** became upset about a classroom discussion on safer sex and asked the school board to replace the existing program with the *Responsible Sexual Values Program*, a fear-based, abstinence-only-until-marriage curriculum. The board rejected this proposal on the grounds that it would violate New Hampshire law, which requires schools to teach about contraception.¹¹ That same year, a unanimous vote in **Middletown, WI** rejected the proposal of parents who had asked for a stricter program because they felt that abstinence was not receiving enough attention.¹²

In 1998, the **Idaho Springs, CO** school board rejected *WAIT (Why Am I Tempted) Training*, a fear- and shame-based curriculum. At a board meeting, a teacher demonstrated an exercise from the program in which a goldfish is removed from its bowl and left gasping for air on the table until a student steps forward to return it to water. The exercise is meant to show that just as fish belong in water, sex belongs in marriage. The teacher explained that the program also discusses male/female anatomy, birth control methods, and STDs, and shows pictures of aborted fetuses. The school board president was outraged by this program which she called “sexist, racist, and very judgmental.” She pointed to inaccurate statistics and explained that abstinence-only-until-marriage programs ignored gay students.¹³ In 2003, the school board in **Santa Ana, CA** made a similar decision when they voted to reject *A.C. Green’s Game Plan*, a fear-based curriculum produced by Project Reality, because it did not meet state requirements.¹⁴

Although abstinence-only-until-marriage programs continue to enter many communities without debate, it is heartening to find that when communities are forced to take a close look, many choose not to expose students to fear- and shame-based messages or deny youth the vital information found in comprehensive sexuality education curricula.

Dual-Track as a Compromise

Communities that are considering whether to provide

a comprehensive sexuality education curricula or an abstinence-only-until-marriage program often entertain proposals to create a dual track system. Under such a system, a school district provides at least two options for sexuality education—typically one option is abstinence-based and provides information on contraception and disease-prevention while the other is a strict abstinence-only-until-marriage program. Parents then choose the course in which to enroll their child.

As early as the 1993–94 school year, SIECUS began to see debates about dual track systems. These systems can be viewed as a compromise solution when a sharply divided community cannot agree on its approach to sexuality education, or as a last ditch attempt to bring abstinence-only-until-marriage programs to schools or students. Parents in **Little Falls, MN** began offering *Sex Respect*, a fear-based, abstinence-only-until-marriage program, privately in the evenings after an unsuccessful attempt to bring it to the schools in 1994.¹⁵ During the 2000–01 school year this private program was being advertised in the local paper and made available during school hours for those seventh grade students who had “opted-out” of the school-based sexuality education program.¹⁶ A similar system emerged in **Fenton, MI** during the 1996–97 school year. A group of parents were unsuccessful in their efforts to challenge the district’s comprehensive sexuality education curriculum. In response they set up an alternative abstinence-only-until-marriage program in a nearby church. Children were transported to the church during school hours for the program.¹⁷

A small group of parents in **Osseo, MN** worked for two years to replace the existing sexuality education curriculum with a strict abstinence-only-until-marriage program. When these attempts failed, they began to push the idea of a dual track system.

After the school board agreed to try this approach in 1998, many local and national organizations took an interest in the success of the abstinence-only-until-marriage track. Three area churches held Parents’ Nights designed to support the new program. The events featured presentations by national abstinence-only-until-marriage speaker Pam Stenzel and Focus on the Family employee Amy Stephens. Focus on the Family, a national organization that opposes comprehensive sexuality education, also provided materials. In addition, a Minnesota state representative sent a letter to all parents in his district highly recommending the abstinence-only-until-marriage program even though it had not yet been developed.¹⁸

In response to the situation in Osseo, Peter Brandt, then-director of the National Coalition for Abstinence Education said: “This has national significance... having two

tracks is a really exciting new idea. It’s unique and we think it’s magnificent.”¹⁹

At the time, SIECUS observed that proponents of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs seemed heavily vested in the success of Osseo’s program. We suggested that they might see this as a new approach and reasoned that we might see more attempts for dual track programs in the future. However, this has not happened. During the last few school years we have seen few debates over dual track systems and very few communities actually adopt them.

There are several explanations for this stagnation. Some communities have had problems with dual track systems over the years. During the 1994–95 school year, **Riverton, WY**, for example, noted that most students took the comprehensive sexuality education course and that more students enrolled in neither course than the abstinence-only-until-marriage program.²⁰ In addition, lack of resources and administrative issues make dual track systems more difficult to maintain.

Unfortunately, the real reason for the decline in dual track systems may be that proponents of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs have found simpler ways to bring their message to students such as school assemblies and chastity rallies. In many communities, these events don’t require school board approval and receive little publicity—therefore, they rarely lead to controversy.

Nonetheless, dual track systems remain an issue in sexuality education. This year, legislative language was introduced in **Minnesota** that would have required all school districts to offer dual tracks for sexuality education, one of which would have had to be limited to abstinence. The language was part of a larger omnibus bill and was later removed when it became clear that it would not pass in the Senate.²¹

Funding Controversies

Given the amount of money that is available for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs each year, it is not surprising that many debates around this topic focus, at least in part, on the funding. In 1996, the federal government substantially increased its investment in abstinence-only-until-marriage programs by establishing an entitlement program under Welfare Reform. When this money first became available, SIECUS saw a number of state- and community-based controversies about the funds. These controversies have died down in recent years and for the most part the money is distributed without issue.

States Battle Over Money. In 1999, lawmakers in **Oregon** cut \$151,000 from STARS (Students Today Are Not Ready for Sex), a program that uses peer educators to teach the benefits of abstinence to younger teenagers. Some decisionmakers in the state felt that the program did

not place enough emphasis on marriage because it tells students to abstain from sexual activity until they are ready but does not “define what ready means and doesn’t equate it to being married.”²²

Louisiana’s abstinence-only-until-marriage program has been controversial since it began in 1997. Almost immediately the governor took the responsibility away from the health department and set the program up in his own office.²³ The program then became the subject of a successful lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in which the court found it was wrongfully spending government money to promote religious messages.²⁴ (See “*Abstinence-Only Education in the Court*,” on page 26)

South Carolina’s program has also been controversial from the beginning, when in 1997, Governor David Beasley awarded all of the state’s 1.3 million dollars in abstinence funding to Heritage Community Services, a crisis pregnancy center.²⁵ This organization was also the subject of a local controversy in **Greenville, SC** when the County Council awarded it an abstinence-only-until-marriage grant without a competitive bidding process. After public outcry the grant was postponed, a competitive bidding process was conducted, and Heritage Community Services was once again awarded the grant.²⁶

Despite Funds, Communities Reject Programs. In **Charleston, SC** the district’s Academic Policies and Instruction Committee rejected the program offered by Heritage Community Services in 1998. They felt that students should also learn about birth control and disease prevention.²⁷ That same year, the **Colorado** Council of Black Nurses returned \$16,000 of an abstinence-only-until-marriage grant they had received because they felt the message was not working in their community. The president of the organization explained, “It was just too restrictive. It did not teach students responsible sexual behavior.”²⁸

A heated battle occurred in **McClellan County, TX** during the 1997–98 school year. The McClellan County Coalition for Abstinence Programs (MCCAP) was specifically formed to bring a fear-based abstinence-only-until-marriage curriculum produced by Teen Aid to the 17 independent school districts in the area. While 16 districts accepted the program, the Waco Independent School District, the largest in the area, refused. The health advisory committee instead chose a curriculum that focused on abstinence but included other information about sexuality, such as contraception. MCCAP tried to persuade the committee to change its mind but they held firm with a vote of 13-1. MCCAP then went to the assistant superintendent, the superintendent, and the school board and in the words of one parent “dangled a fully-funded curriculum in front of them like a carrot.” The district’s ultimate decision to

reject the program threatened to limit the funding of MCCAP who, without Waco students, could not reach the numbers of students promised in their grant.²⁹

Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage in Practice

Decisions to adopt a full-scale abstinence-only-until-marriage curriculum, regardless of funding, are just one of the ways that these programs make their way into schools and communities across the country. Proponents of abstinence-only-until-marriage have found that, while curricula decisions often prompt community-wide debate, few people question abstinence speakers, one-time assemblies, and chastity rallies.

The Speaking Circuit. As early as 1994, SIECUS noted the emergence of a national circuit of abstinence-only-until-marriage speakers, including Pam Stenzel, Molly Kelly, Mike Long, and Marilyn Morris. These speakers address auditoriums full of middle and high school students across the country. During the 1999–2000 school year Pam Stenzel presented “The Price Tag of Sex” to students in **Sarasota, FL, Cary, IL, Geneva, IL, Butler Township, OH, Rochester, MN, Paulsbo, WA**, and others.³⁰ She told students in **Whittier, CA**: “I did not come here today to make decisions for you. I don’t have time... I came here to tell you that if you have sex outside of a monogamous—and by monogamous I don’t mean one at a time—relationship you will pay the price.”³¹ In **Russellville, AR**, Marilyn Morris, President of Aim for Success, discussed the “freedom” that comes with sexual abstinence. She and other Aim for Success speakers explained to students “your dog can have sex. It takes a strong person with self-control, self-discipline, and self-respect to say no.”³²

Chastity Rallies. Events during which young people pledge to remain abstinent until marriage were once the exclusive province of faith communities. In recent years, however, schools and other secular organizations have begun to sponsor such rallies.

In 1998, 8,000 students attended a chastity rally in **Chicago, IL** held during the school day and sponsored by Project Reality, an abstinence-only-until-marriage organization. Students carried signs with slogans such as “Save Sex” and “Teen Sex Leads to Death.”³³ True Love Waits (TLW), a national organization run by LifeWay Christian Resources, which is owned and operated by the Southern Baptist Convention, sponsors rallies all over the country. In 1998, then-Governor George W. Bush attended a TLW rally on the steps of the **Texas** Capitol and commended the young people in attendance for their leadership.³⁴ In 2000, more than 600 people attended a weekend TLW rally at **Schuyler (NE)** Central High School. Miss America 1997, Kate Shindle, spoke to the crowd and outlined four steps

that young people (“especially girls”) need to follow to remain abstinent until Biblical marriage.³⁵

Communities Reject Programs. One-time presentations and chastity rallies are rarely controversial most likely because they do not require school board approval and often occur without much publicity. Some parents, however, become upset once they learn the content of these presentations. This was the case in **Bradenton, FL** when a mother learned of a presentation by Pam Stenzel at her daughter’s school that she felt featured inaccurate statistics about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), exaggerated estimates of condom failure rates, and exhibited biases against abortion. The mother approached the school board and pointed to a Florida statute that requires all health education, including guest speakers, to be medically accurate. The board agreed not to invite the speaker again.³⁶ Ms. Stenzel was also at the center of a controversy in 2003 when the school board in **Allentown, PA** cancelled her presentation after members viewed her promotional video and found it to be too harsh and offensive.³⁷

Advocates for comprehensive sexuality education need to pay close attention to speakers, assemblies, and rallies. Not only are they slipping quietly into schools across the country, but some communities view these one-time events as fulfilling their students’ sexuality education needs.

SEXUALITY EDUCATION DEEMED “TOO EXPLICIT”

The rise of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs is just one way that communities have restricted sexuality education in the last decade. While those controversies most often focus on the scope of the entire curricula, many communities spend time examining specific information and materials. These debates can center on the age of students; books and videos; controversial topics such as masturbation, abortion, oral sex, condoms, and sexual orientation; or classroom discussions and teachers.

Although the focus varies widely, they share the overall goal of restricting what students are allowed to learn about sexuality.

Elementary Education

When SIECUS began tracking controversy in the early 1990s, we saw a number of debates that centered on sexuality education in elementary school. Many misconceptions exist about what such courses teach young children and many parents fear that elementary-aged students are too young to learn about sexuality.

Proposed updates and revisions to the elementary school curriculum in **Westfield, NJ** were rejected during

the 1995–96 school year because community members feared that teaching fourth graders about HIV/AIDS would open the door for explicit discussions.³⁸ That same year, **Schenectady, NY** decided to wait until fifth grade to teach lessons on reproduction and puberty that had been previously taught in the third and fourth grade.³⁹ The following year, **Sheboygan, WY** voted to eliminate its K–3 sexuality education program against the advice of the Human Growth and Development Advisory Committee. The school board wanted proof that this type of education would prevent unplanned pregnancy and STDs later in life.⁴⁰

Questions about how to teach sexuality in elementary school were at the heart of a state-wide controversy which unfolded in **Connecticut** during the 1997–98 school year. That year, the Connecticut Department of Public Health revised its guidelines for teaching sexuality education in order to make them outcome-based. These curricula framework are brief outlines developed by the Department of Public Health and distributed to schools which are free to modify them.

Some parents and lawmakers became upset because the first draft of the guidelines suggested that second graders should understand animal reproduction and fourth graders should understand a simple definition of intercourse. Under political pressure, the guidelines were revised. The second draft upset health educators because all mention of HIV/AIDS had been removed and puberty education did not appear until eighth grade.

Health educators across the state formed a coalition and worked to build widespread support for a more comprehensive version of the guidelines. The final draft which was eventually adopted was widely considered by health educators to be even better than the first. It suggested that students learn about puberty in fourth grade and HIV/AIDS in fifth grade. In addition, the guidelines suggested that elementary school students receive lessons about biases based on sexual orientation.⁴¹

In recent years, however, we have seen far fewer controversies revolving around elementary school education. It is hard to say why this has occurred, but it seems that as opponents of comprehensive sexuality education focused less on removing courses from school and more on changing the focus to abstinence-until-marriage, they are spending most of their time working in middle schools and high schools. However, the focus on abstinence may soon trickle down to elementary schools as well. In 2002, the school board in **Rochester, MI** eliminated reproductive health and HIV/AIDS instruction from kindergarten through third grade and added “modesty” and “respect” as key concepts. In addition, they removed family planning and STD benchmarks (learning objectives) from the sixth grade curriculum and added abstinence.⁴²

Classroom Material

Regardless of the students' age, communities take a great deal of time and care picking the materials that will be used in sexuality education classes. Nonetheless, materials that have made it into classrooms and libraries often become the subject of controversy.

Communities Ban Books. Over the years, a number of communities have grappled with issues of censorship around textbooks, children's books, and young adult novels. In **Franklin County, NC** parent volunteers removed three chapters of a text book in 1997 before distributing it to students. The chapters discussed HIV/AIDS, STDs, marriage, parenting, sexual behavior, and contraception. The school board feared that this information violated North Carolina law, which mandates that schools teach abstinence-until-marriage unless the local school board holds public hearings and the community agrees to a more comprehensive approach. Not everyone agreed that physically removing the chapters was the right decision, the principal referred to the action as "Shades of 1936 Germany" and the health coordinator said "We believe knowledge is empowerment. It's ignorance that's a problem."⁴³ A similar decision was made in **Green County/Carmichaels, PA** in 1998 when school officials ripped pages out of a newly approved textbook because they felt the subject was inappropriate.⁴⁴

In 2000, parents in **Anchorage, AK** became upset about *It's Perfectly Normal*, an illustrated children's book by Robie Harris available in elementary and middle school libraries. One parent explained, "We do not believe a book with pictures of people having sex, naked bodies, people masturbating, people putting on condoms, a student having an erection in front of a school class, or gay people hugging is necessary at the [elementary] school level." The school board voted 6-1 to restrict access in elementary schools by requiring parental consent before a student could check out the book. A request for a similar rule in middle school was denied.⁴⁵

In fact, in recent years many requests to ban books have been denied. In 1999, a life science textbook in **St. Johnsbury, VT** was said to be explicit because two chapters dealt with body changes and reproduction. The principal suggested removing the problematic pages and binding them separately for older students. Although the board initially agreed, ultimately they voted not to remove the chapter for fear of setting a precedent for censorship.⁴⁶

In 2003, in **Riverside, CA**, the board voted to approve the young adult novel *Too Soon For Jeff*. This decision was opposed by two members who felt the book did not reflect the high failure rate of condoms because the main character, a teen father himself, tells his own son to use condoms if he becomes sexually active.⁴⁷ In a similar vote, the school

board in **Fairfax, VA** decided that the young adult novel *Witch Baby*, which deals with homosexuality, was indeed suitable for elementary and middle school students.⁴⁸ Finally, *It's Perfectly Normal* and *It's So Amazing*, two illustrated books by Robie Harris, were put back on the library shelf in **Montgomery County, TX**. After the Library Review Committee voted to remove the book, a coalition called Mainstream Montgomery County formed to fight such bans. The coalition felt that the library should provide a wide variety of books and parents should determine what is appropriate for their children to read.⁴⁹

Although attempts to restrict access to books about sexuality are likely to continue, the decisions against censorship made in recent years are very encouraging.

Videos Deemed Not Fit for Viewing. Audiovisual materials used in sexuality education courses are often as controversial as books. Over the years, many communities have voted to restrict the videos shown to students.

In 1993, controversy erupted in the **Lake Washington (WA)** School District over a video called *Considering Condoms*. The Concerned Parents Coalition felt the film was not focused on abstinence, sanctioned teen sex, and minimized condom failure. The group threatened litigation but the school board voted to keep the video.⁵⁰ The opposite decision was made in **Caribou, ME** during the 1994-95 school year when the school board voted to eliminate two films about puberty because they were "too graphic and made parents appear dumb and unaware of the changing times."⁵¹

Videos have been an issue a number of times in **Fairfax, VA** over the last few years. In 1997 parents objected to a puberty video that included animated segments depicting wet dreams, menstruation, and tampon insertion. The video was aired on local access cable to give the community a chance to form educated opinions. Based on community reaction, the board edited the video for viewing in gender-separated classes where children only see animation about their own gender.⁵² During the 1999-2000 school year, Fairfax voted to alter a second video by removing a segment that portrayed a father explaining nocturnal emissions to his son. Although the Family Life Education Curricula Advisory Committee felt the scene showed a positive example of parent/child communication and approved the video in its entirety, the superintendent suggested editing the video in order to be consistent with the earlier decision.⁵³

As technology becomes more advanced and schools are able to use more audiovisual material in classrooms including DVDs and CD-ROMs, it is likely that we will see more communities debate the appropriateness of such resources.

Words and Topics

Sometimes debates over the appropriateness of sexuality education focus not on materials, but on very specific words

or topics. In **Oshkosh, WI** elementary school teachers approached the school board during the 1994–95 school year because they didn't want to name certain body parts in front of students. A compromise was reached in which the words anus, penis, genitals, urethra, and vagina were removed from lessons.⁵⁴ In **Odessa TX**, parents became upset in 1998 because the new fifth-grade sexuality curriculum included definitions of vulva, clitoris, testes, penis, erection, orgasm, and ejaculation. Although the parents felt it was “sexually explicit” no changes were made.⁵⁵

A long-standing rule in **Queens, NY** has banned the words abortion, masturbation, birth control, and homosexuality in all classrooms since 1987. Attempts to lift the ban over the years have failed. In 1998 a school board member attempted to make the ban stricter by applying it to all of school property rather than just classrooms. This failed as well.⁵⁶ Legislators in **Virginia** attempted to impose a similar ban through a bill that would have prohibited any family life education from discussing topics considered crimes against nature in Virginia including oral and anal sex. The legislation failed.⁵⁷

Oral sex was also at issue in **Belton, MO** where a teacher was placed on involuntary leave in 1997 after she answered a question that a student had placed in an anonymous question box.⁵⁸ Parents felt she should have avoided the topic. Parents in **Bryant, AR** were upset when questions about oral sex and genitalia were answered by a former health teacher during a presentation in 1998.⁵⁹ The school board apologized and agreed to better screening for speakers. Finally, an anonymous question box was at the heart of another controversy in **Beech Grove, IN** where parents felt misled when a question paved the way for classroom discussion on masturbation during the 1997–98 school year.⁶⁰

In fact, some states and communities have restricted how teachers can answer questions. In 1994 the school board in **Merrimack, NH** voted to eliminate the anonymous question box after parents complained about students asking inappropriate questions.⁶¹ In 1997 **Franklin County, NC** teachers were specifically told that if students ask questions about birth control they can only be told about the failure rates of contraception and referred to their parents or guardians for more information.⁶² Finally, lawmakers in **Utah** attempted to legislate how teachers answer questions. A bill was passed in 2000 stating that when teachers are asked questions that “skirt the state approved curriculum,” such as questions about homosexuality, they must pull students aside to answer the question or refer students to a school counselor. The author of the legislation felt by allowing teachers to answer every question “the class would be driving the curriculum.”⁶³

Debates over student questions prove that anything, from controversial issues such as abortion to seemingly

innocuous topics like puberty, can lead to trouble. However, over the years, two topics—condoms/contraception and sexual orientation—have emerged as the most common subject of such controversies

Condoms and Contraception

When SIECUS first began tracking controversies in the early 1990s there were few controversies around teaching about condoms and contraception. The AIDS epidemic was still at the forefront of people's minds and many parents assumed that sexuality education would cover prevention methods. As the abstinence-only-until-marriage movement gained momentum however, opponents of comprehensive sexuality education began to frame the issue of sexuality education as “either/or.” Either your community decided to teach students to remain abstinent or to teach them about condoms. They suggested that teaching about condoms was tantamount to condoning teen sexual behavior and began to foster misinformation about condom efficacy. These tactics have been very successful; in recent years condoms have been at the center of numerous community controversies.

Teaching About Protection Methods. In 1997 the school board in **Hemet, CA** denied a request to include contraceptive information in the ninth grade curriculum.⁶⁴ In 1999, the **Fremont, CA** school board voted to cut a condom demonstration from a play that had been performed in the district for 14 years.⁶⁵ And in 2003, a teacher in **Naples, FL** was fired after he had students in his class demonstrate how to put a condom on a banana. The school board said the decision to fire the teacher was not necessarily based on his teaching practices but that they simply did not need his services anymore.⁶⁶

Making Methods Available. Perhaps more controversial than decisions about whether to let students learn about condoms or contraception are decisions about whether to make these birth control methods available to students on school grounds. A motion to make condoms available was defeated 9–4 in **Dalton, MA** during the 1997–98 school year.⁶⁷ The following year, the U.S. Third District Court of Appeals ruled that **Philadelphia** could continue to make condoms available to students, ending a five-year debate. The condom availability program there began in 1991 and became the subject of litigation when a group of parents argued that it violated their rights. The Court held that since parents had the option of not allowing their children to participate, the program did not violate their rights.⁶⁸

That same year, the school board in **St. Paul, MN** agreed to allow Health Start to begin distributing contraceptives, including condoms, on campus. Health Start runs school-based clinics in St. Paul. Prior to this ruling they

handed out vouchers for condoms and prescriptions for birth control methods. Health Start petitioned the school board to change this policy when they realized that many students were never filling their prescriptions or picking up the condoms.⁶⁹ A similar decision was made in **Hartford, CT** in 2000 when the school board voted that contraceptives could be made available in school clinics. Ten years earlier, a similar proposal had failed after causing a great deal of controversy. This time advocates worked to build widespread community support and there was virtually no opposition.⁷⁰

Students Advocate for Condom Availability. Many attempts to bring condoms into schools have been spearheaded by students themselves. In **Holliston, MA** a 1999 survey conducted by students revealed that only 13% of sexually active students used condoms the last time they had intercourse. Alarmed by this statistic, the student researchers proposed condom vending machines on campus. The board agreed to look into the issue.⁷¹ In 1999, the board in **Piedmont, CA** also agreed to discuss the issue of condoms further after a group of students in business class proposed selling condoms on campus as a class project and donating the profits to a local AIDS organization. The board did not want the students to act on their own but agreed to give the issue further consideration.⁷²

Student activists also caused administrators in **Eugene, OR** to reconsider the condom availability policy after they staged a Valentine's Day protest in 2001. The policy in place allowed school health personnel to distribute contraceptives only to those students who already had an STD.⁷³ Finally in 2001, teen activists in **Woodside, CA**, alarmed by high rates of pregnancy and STDs, asked the board to make condoms available in school and to extend sexuality education beyond the ninth and 10th grade to 11th and 12th grade as well. The board approved these changes.⁷⁴ (See "*Advocating for A Condom Availability Program*," on page 25)

Although condoms remain a "hot button" issue and a great deal of misinformation about this topic still exists, recent decisions regarding condom availability programs have been promising.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation remains perhaps the most controversial topic in sexuality education today. Controversies focusing on classroom information about homosexuality, anti-discrimination policies, student clubs, and even gay teachers have been common since SIECUS began our tracking efforts. While many other topics seem to be becoming less controversial as the years go on, sexual orientation remains a divisive issue.

Learning About Sexual Orientation. In 1995, school administrators in **Solon, IA** cancelled a presentation about sexual orientation when members of the community, including the director of the American Family Association in Iowa, voiced opposition. The presentation had been conducted in school the previous year and had resulted in students sending letters apologizing for having harassed a gay couple who lived across the street.⁷⁵ In 1997, teachers in **Franklin County, NC** were told that if students asked about HIV/AIDS they were to explain that it is a "virus transmitted primarily by contaminated needles and by a homosexual act that is illegal in North Carolina."⁷⁶

That same year, the school board in **Clayton County, GA** chose videos about AIDS and teen pregnancy with the understanding that they could not "represent homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle." Although this made fulfilling the state mandate for HIV/AIDS education difficult, community members feared reviving a controversy that had occurred years earlier.⁷⁷

"Promoting" Homosexuality. The idea of condoning or "promoting" homosexuality is at the center of many debates. In 1995 the **Merrimack, NH** school board passed "Prohibition of Alternative Lifestyle Instruction," a highly restrictive policy that prevented teachers from providing any instruction to support "homosexuality as a positive lifestyle." The policy went far beyond sexuality education. For example, it forced a teacher to stop showing a film about Walt Whitman because it mentioned that the poet was gay. Community outrage over this decision resulted in the election of a new school board that rescinded the policy and replaced it with language saying the school would have "no program or activity which is intended to promote sexual activity or any sexual orientation."⁷⁸

A similar situation occurred the following year in **Elizabethtown, PA** when the school board adopted a "pro-family resolution" stating that the "traditional family is under relentless attack by those who want to redefine family to include homosexual and lesbian couples and to indoctrinate children to pro-homosexual propaganda against their parents' wishes." The school board modified the policy after hearing objections from hundreds of community members.⁷⁹

Many states have struggled with debates about "promoting" homosexuality as well. In 2000, a measure on the ballot in **Oregon** would have prohibited public instruction from "encouraging, promoting, or sanctioning homosexual or bisexual behavior." The measure failed 53 percent-43 percent.⁸⁰ That same year, proposed legislation in **California** prohibiting the promotion of homosexuality was withdrawn by its author.⁸¹ Similar language was introduced this year in amendments to omnibus bills in Minnesota. The Senate amendment failed and the language was withdrawn in the House.⁸²

Teachers Revealing Their Sexual Orientation. Over the decade that SIECUS has been tracking controversy, society has become more open about homosexuality. Television shows like *Ellen*, *Will & Grace*, and the new *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* have made openly gay characters and personalities more common place. Most recently, gay rights were in the spotlight when the Supreme Court reversed earlier decisions and declared anti-sodomy laws unconstitutional. Nonetheless, throughout the years of tracking controversies we have seen individual teachers come under fire for revealing their own sexual orientation to students.

During the 1998-99 school year, 15 students in the **Rio Bravo-Greerly** Union School District (CA) were transferred out of an eighth-grade science class when parents complained about the teacher's perceived homosexuality. The teacher brought a discrimination suit against the school and won a ruling from the state industrial relations director who said the school had "wrongfully fostered different treatment" and ordered the students returned to class.⁸³

A similar controversy began in 1997 when a teacher in **Spanish Fork, UT** revealed that she was gay. Parents called for her termination because they feared she would tell students about her sexual practices. Although the school did not fire her, they removed her from her position as volleyball coach and instructed her not to discuss her sexuality with anyone in the school community including students, parents, and teachers.⁸⁴ She filed a federal lawsuit charging the school with violating her first amendment rights, and won.

The controversy did not end there, however. A group calling themselves Citizens of the Nebo School District for Moral and Legal Values filed a lawsuit to have her teaching credential revoked. They argued that Utah law requires teachers to be good role models and that her private activity conflicted with state laws that prohibited sodomy. The court dismissed the case ruling that the group lacked a legally protected interest in the case.⁸⁵

Not all incidents result in widespread controversy. During the 1999-2000 school year, a first-grade teacher in **Newton, MA** upset some parents when he told his class he was gay as part of a lesson on families. Although some parents felt that he overstepped his bounds, most were supportive. The superintendent said no action would be taken against him for exercising his "basic human rights."⁸⁶

Anti-Discrimination Policies. Perhaps in response to the discrimination faced by some teachers, many school districts have attempted to change their anti-discrimination policy to include sexual orientation. **Montgomery County, MD** took up this issue in 1995 after a survey showed that high school students felt gay and lesbian students faced the most discrimination in school. The anti-dis-

crimination policy was eventually approved after stipulating that the school system does not "advocate, encourage, promote, or endorse any particular sexual orientation."⁸⁷ In 2000, the school board in **Heuvelton, NY** unanimously voted to add sexual orientation to their discrimination policies, including complaints and grievances for students and employees.⁸⁸ A similar vote occurred this year in **Palm Beach, FL** where a proposal to add sexual orientation to their anti-harassment policies has been brought to the school board three times in the past 12 years. Although opponents started a letter writing campaign that warned that adding sexual orientation would "promote the idea that homosexual and other bizarre sexual behaviors are acceptable, respectable, and healthy," the policy passed in a vote of 5-2.⁸⁹

Gay Straight Alliances. In the past few years, we have seen a number of controversies involving Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs), after-school clubs that offer students a safe place to discuss issues of sexual orientation. Unfortunately, many school districts have taken measures to prevent these clubs from forming on campus. During the 1999-2000 school year students at El Modena High School in **Orange, CA** filed suit against their school when administrators prevented the GSA from meeting as a club. The students, with help from the ACLU, argued that the school was discriminating against them on the basis of perceived sexual orientation. After initial court decisions favored the students, an out-of-court settlement allowed the club to meet and keep its name. The school board also promised not to single out the club for any special regulations.⁹⁰ Since that time numerous GSA's throughout the country have won similar victories after filing suit or threatening to do so.

ADMINISTRATIVE ROADBLOCKS

While most debates over sexuality education revolve around the content of the curricula or something said in class, administrative issues regarding enrollment sometimes become controversial as well. These controversies focus on how students enroll in courses, whether courses are electives or requirements, and if males and females should learn together.

The Process of Enrollment

Almost all communities allow parents to remove their children from sexuality education classes if they do not wish for them to hear the information or messages that will be provided. These policies are referred to as "opt-out." Over the years, however, many parents have pushed for a stricter policy, known as "opt-in," in which students may not be enrolled in sexuality education courses until the school has received written permission from the parent. Opponents of

comprehensive sexuality education seem to push for opt-in policies on the theory that making the process for enrollment harder will further limit the number of students receiving this education.

During the 1994–95 school year parents successfully lobbied the **Conway, NH** school board for a strict opt-in requirement for sexuality education.⁹¹ In 1997, the school board in **Sheboygan, WI** agreed to an opt-in policy for students in fourth and fifth grades but not middle or high school.⁹² In 2001, however, when parents in the **Grossmont (CA)** Union High School District suggested an opt-in program because they were concerned that students “would learn about homosexuality, bisexuality, or transgender issues....,” their proposal was rejected.⁹³

Changes to the rules regarding enrollment in sexuality education have been proposed at the state level as well. In **Arkansas**, a bill requiring written permission to teach sexuality education to students in elementary or middle school was introduced in 2000.⁹⁴ That same year, a bill was introduced in **Tennessee** allowing students to be released from sexuality education courses specifically to attend religious instruction. Both bills failed.⁹⁵

In **Utah**, however, the rules were changed in 1999 to require schools to receive written consent before students could be taught any topic in human sexuality. Prior to that change, written permission was required only for lessons in contraception.⁹⁶ In response to the change in rules, the State Board of Education created a statewide parental consent form that included a checklist of topics that would be covered. In 2000, the **Nebo, UT** school district petitioned the state board to allow them to alter this form by removing contraception from the checklist. The board denied the request saying that while Nebo had the right to decide not to teach about contraception, parents had the right to know that the state feels this topic should be included.⁹⁷

Although opt-out/opt-in policy changes rarely lead to the most heated community debates, over the years some unusual debates have fallen into this category. In 1994 controversy erupted when a student at Council Rock High School in **Pennsylvania** forged her mother’s signature in order to take a course in sexuality. The school promised to take precautions to prevent this from happening again.⁹⁸ Controversy began in **North Olmstead, OH** when a parent, who had opted her own child out of sexuality education, asked to sit in on the class herself in 1997. The principal denied this request on the grounds that it might make other students uncomfortable.⁹⁹

Finally, a lawsuit was filed against the **Fairfield, CT** school district by a parent who took his seventh-grade son

out of the entire mandatory health course. The school had an opt-out policy for the sexuality education portion of the course but argued that students must attend the rest of the health course because it is mandated by the state. The court ruled in favor of the school.¹⁰⁰

It is unclear what effect opt-in policies have when they are adopted. In theory, such policies present numerous administrative challenges and can prevent some young people from receiving sexuality education simply because a permission slip got left in the bottom of a backpack or lost on the way home. In practice, however, this might not be the case. In **La Cygne, KS**, for example, although they changed to an opt-in policy in 1995, the same number of students enrolled in the program as had in previous years.¹⁰¹

Regardless of their ultimate impact, it seems clear that opponents of comprehensive sexuality education will see it as a promising tactic and continue to recommend strict opt-in policies.

Making Sexuality An Elective

While some communities turn to a dual track system when they can’t agree on the focus of sexuality education, others make different compromises. SIECUS has tracked numerous debates in **Northville, MI** over the last 10 years. During the 2000–01 school year, for example, the Northville board voted to make sexuality education an elective instead of a required course.¹⁰² This decision was made after some parents argued that abstinence is the only protection against STDs. Rather than switch to an abstinence-only-until-marriage program or adopt a dual track system, the board diffused the controversy by allowing parents to choose if their children attended sexuality education at all.

Unfortunately, enrollment was so low the following year that the district dropped the course. Northville has placed some of the material in other classes and administrators say they will conduct periodic assessments of whether this approach is working.¹⁰³

Debates over whether sexuality education should be a requirement or an elective have occurred sporadically throughout the last decade most often as part of larger curriculum decisions. Although this is not one of the more common tactics for restricting sexuality education, it is possible that we will see more of it in the future. In 2003, for example, legislation was introduced in **Massachusetts** that would require all sexuality programs to be non-mandatory electives. In order for their children to participate, parents would have to give written permission, or permission by a method similar to those used for other elective courses. This bill is currently in committee.¹⁰⁴

Separating the Sexes

Gender separation most often comes up because parents worry that their children will be uncomfortable learning about sexuality in a co-educational setting. However, these debates are sometimes an attempt to restrict what students learn. Although gender separation is rarely an issue in and of itself, communities in the process of choosing a curriculum or changing the focus of a sexuality education course will often entertain motions on this issue.

An example of a gender separation becoming an issue as part of a larger discussion occurred in **Fairfield, OH** during the 1995–96 school year. Controversy erupted over proposed revisions to the K–12 health curriculum. Those parents opposed to the curriculum began to push for a dual track system. This was unsuccessful; however, the school board did agree to separate boys and girls for elementary school and middle school health courses.¹⁰⁵

A proposal for gender separation in **Oaklawn, IL** failed in 2000. Parents asked the school to separate sixth, seventh, and eighth grade boys and girls for the entire duration of their abstinence-based program out of fear that students would be uncomfortable. (Students were already separated for a portion of the program.) The board rejected the proposal and voted to allow students to submit anonymous questions in writing as a way to address possible discomfort they might feel in a mixed-gender setting.¹⁰⁶

In **Monterey, CA** an unnamed puberty video that came complete with three versions—one for males, one for females, and one for both—caused controversy during the 1999–2000 school year when school officials decided to show the complete version in mixed gender settings. Parents complained that there was no reason for fifth-grade students to know that much about the “opposite sex.” School officials postponed the viewing indefinitely until they could decide how to handle the situation.¹⁰⁷

There is very little research on gender separation for sexuality education courses and it falls to individual communities to decide what is best for their students. Although these debates continue to occur, we have seen a dramatic drop in the number of communities discussing gender separation over the years. There have been only a handful of controversies of this kind since the 2000–01 school year.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

We cannot deny that proponents of a strict abstinence-only-until-marriage approach have had a very good decade. There has been a dramatic rise in the amount of money that both federal and state governments spend on abstinence-only-until-marriage programs; the current administration is committed to increasing funding; the media has seized on the concept of the “new virginity;” and communities have welcomed abstinence-only speakers,

fear-based curricula, and chastity rallies into their school with nary a second thought.

Opponents Have Called the Shots

These successes are not based on luck nor do they indicate that proponents of this approach have tapped into the will of the general public. In fact, when surveyed the majority of parents, educators, and voters repeatedly say they want a more comprehensive approach to sexuality education.¹⁰⁸

Opponents have been successful because they have been calling the shots and framing the debate from the beginning. Conservative far right organizations targeted sexuality education as an arena in which they could successfully affect social change. While they initially called for sexuality education to be removed from school on the grounds that only parents should teach young people about sex, they gradually began to shift tactics. Chastity education was born in the early 1980s and opponents of comprehensive sexuality education saw this as a way to change what young people learn. Instead of arguing for the removal of sexuality education, they began to argue for a shift in message—a tactic that was easier for many communities to accept.

The success of the abstinence-only-until-marriage movement is owed in large part to the ability of its proponents to shift tactics and try new messages. In fact, over the years they have responded to many of the criticisms against them. Early drafts of fear-based abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula were clearly religious in nature and made outrageous and dangerous suggestions like washing one’s genitals with Lysol after sexual activity.¹⁰⁹ In today’s drafts, overt religious statements have been replaced with subtle references to spirituality and morality while blatantly false information has been replaced with mild exaggerations based on legitimate sources.

Today, their message is savvy and unified. School boards and lawmakers across the country are presented with the same requests and hear the same arguments: “Comprehensive sexuality education encourages promiscuity;” “Condoms don’t work;” “Responsible adults know that teens should be abstinent;” and “The only morally acceptable approach is to tell teens to remain abstinent until they marry.” These unified messages are backed by national organizations like Concerned Women for America and Focus on the Family, which continue to get involved in local debates.

These tactics have not only led to an increase in the number of communities accepting abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, they are, at least in part, responsible for the rise in federal funding supporting these programs. Such successes build on each other, the federal funding is now seen in many communities as a stamp of approval and additional

schools are willing to adopt such programs with little or no thought. In addition, as the economy falters and school systems suffer from a lack of resources, fully funded programs become even more appealing. Overall, this has meant that abstinence-only-until-marriage programs are reaching more students than ever before, with much less debate.

Turning Back the Tides

There is some good news, however. In recent years, when sexuality education has become an issue, many communities have made encouraging decisions. We have seen communities block attempts to censor books and videos, decide to make contraception available to students, add sexual orientation to anti-discrimination policies, protect teachers, and resist administrative roadblocks such as strict opt-in regulations.

In fact, by working to build community support, advocates for comprehensive sexuality education on the state and local level have made important strides toward improving the sexuality education our children are receiving.

Some have made efforts to fight back against biased programming in their schools. A parent in **Mt. Diablo, CA**, for example, is working hard to make sure that *CryBabies*, an abstinence-only-until-marriage program sponsored by a local crisis pregnancy center is removed from her local schools. She became involved in this issue after reading disturbing and highly biased information about abortion in her son's notebook.¹¹⁰ (See "How Will We Teach Our Children," on page 17)

Parents and educators in **Wake County, NC** have worked very hard over the past few years to expand the sexuality education their students receive. As mentioned earlier, North Carolina law mandates that schools take an abstinence-only-until-marriage approach unless community members meet and agree to a more comprehensive curriculum. Advocates in Wake County created a comprehensive sexuality education program that will be used in their public schools.¹¹¹

Many efforts to expand sexuality education come from students themselves. We have seen students in **Ashland, KY** work to form a GSA despite initial protests from the school¹¹²; students in **Woodside, CA** persuade the school board to implement a condom availability program; and students in **Lubbock, TX** receive national attention for their efforts to get a comprehensive sexuality education program into their schools.¹¹³ These future leaders, often motivated by high rates of STDs, teen pregnancy, and unprotected sexual activity among their peers, understand that young people need information about sexuality in order to make responsible decisions.

Advocates for comprehensive sexuality education have made progress on the legislative level as well. Numerous

states, including **Arizona** and **Washington**, have introduced legislation that would require all sexuality education to be medically accurate.¹¹⁴ Although these laws cannot ensure students receive comprehensive sexuality education, they can insure that students do not receive false or biased information in the classroom. It is telling that proponents of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs see these laws as a direct attack on their efforts.

On a national level, advocates helped to introduce the Family Life Education Act. This legislation, which was introduced in 2001, would have authorized \$100 million for comprehensive sexuality education. It will be re-introduced this year in both the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. Recently, the states of **Maine** and **California**¹¹⁵ passed similar laws supporting comprehensive sexuality education and others have been introduced in **Illinois**, and **Rhode Island**.¹¹⁶

The Next Ten Years

These positive efforts provide hope and show what can be done when concerned parents, educators, and policymakers get involved and make their voices heard. Abstinence-only-until-marriage funding is unlikely to go away in the near future, and as such, many communities will be faced with difficult decisions regarding sexuality education.

In order to ensure that more students receive high-quality sexuality education, advocates will have to remain vigilant, create unified messages, and take proactive steps in states and communities. By initiating actions to support comprehensive sexuality education and responding strongly to attempts to restrict it, advocates can shape the issue, define the terms, tap into public support, and eventually declare victory.

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KEEP UP-TO-DATE ON CONTROVERSIES AND LEGISLATION

In an effort to help parents, educators, and policymakers stay informed, SIECUS prepares frequent reports on both ongoing controversies and proposed legislation.

Controversy Reports. SIECUS' Community Advocacy Project creates monthly reports throughout the school year to help individuals track controversies as they are unfolding in communities. These reports contain the most up-to-date news on those communities considering changes to sexuality education or facing debates regarding this important topic. Controversy reports are available online at: <http://www.siecus.org/controversy/cont0000.html>

Legislative Reports. SIECUS' Public Policy Department continually monitors legislation introduced in the states on topics such as abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, comprehensive sexuality education, contraception access, HIV/AIDS prevention, medical accuracy in sexuality education, parental consent requirements, teen pregnancy prevention, and safe surrender laws. Legislative reports are posted whenever there is relevant legislative activity and are available online at: <http://www.siecus.org/policy/legislative/legis0000.html>

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