



GEORGIA

*Georgia received \$7,909,705 in federal funds for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs in Fiscal Year 2005.*¹

Georgia Sexuality Education Law

Since 1989, schools in Georgia have been required to teach sexuality education and sexually transmitted disease (STD)/HIV-prevention education. Local school boards are largely responsible for deciding the specific subjects this education must cover and the grade level in which topics are introduced. However, discussions on certain subjects are mandated by state law, including: abstinence, community values, STDs, HIV/AIDS, conception, and the legal consequences of pregnancy. No discussion of condoms or other forms of contraception is required, but such discussions are allowed. The law explains that local boards of education should set standards and that “such standards shall include instruction relating to the handling of peer pressure, the promotion of high self-esteem, local community values, the legal consequences of parenthood, and abstinence from sexual activity as an effective method of prevention of pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and acquired immune deficiency syndrome.” Local school boards are also responsible for determining what is age appropriate.

If a local school board does not have sexuality and HIV-prevention education, state funds are withheld until a program is implemented. Georgia also recommends *Quality Core Curriculum Standards and Resource*, which provides HIV/AIDS education resources and curricula for grades 6–12.

Parents or guardians may remove their children from all or part of sexuality and/or STD/HIV education by sending written notice to the school. This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.

See *the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, 20-2-143*.

Recent Legislation

SIECUS is not aware of any proposed legislation regarding sexuality education in Georgia.

Events of Note

DeKalb County’s Abstinence-Only Program Stopped After Parents Protest February 2005; DeKalb County, GA

Largely as a result of protests from a group of Shamrock Middle School parents, the *Choosing the Best* abstinence-only program was at least temporarily shelved by the DeKalb County superintendent.

At a January 2005 meeting, parents challenged the federally funded abstinence-only program and called for the teaching of more comprehensive information. One Shamrock Middle School

parent said, “it should’ve been seen for what it is...I think it’s political. I think it’s religious. I don’t think it should have come into the school at all.”²

Officials from the school district admitted the curriculum was never officially approved by the school board, although state law requires its approval. In January 2002, the program was approved only by a sex/AIDS education advisory committee after Choosing the Best, Inc. approached the school system. *Choosing the Best* came free-of-charge to the schools from the publisher, which some felt may have been a factor in its easy approval. According to DeKalb County’s coordinator of health and physical education, although the curriculum was supposed to go to the school board for approval, it did not because, as the coordinator explained, “there was a major change in the county. I can’t remember what happened at that point.”³

The *Choosing the Best* program has been highly criticized due to the curriculum’s strict abstinence-only-until-marriage focus, reliance on fear and shame-based messages, inclusion of misinformation, and biased views of marriage and sexual orientation.⁴ One parent at the meeting, a biologist, exclaimed, “yes, we would all like our children to be abstinent, if not to marriage, at least darn close to it. But you can’t take this head-in-the-sand approach. You still provide them with the information to protect them.”⁵

Choosing the Best, Inc. is a well-connected organization headed by Bruce Cook, who was appointed by the Georgia governor to lead the Board of the Department of Human Resources, but stepped down in 2005. In 2001, Choosing the Best, Inc. received a three-year federal grant for close to \$1.5 million and in 2004, the organization won another three-year grant, for \$2.4 million, to serve eight Georgia districts, including DeKalb County.

In mid-February 2005, the superintendent of DeKalb County schools asked all middle schools in the district to stop teaching *Choosing the Best*. The superintendent said, “we are stopping this in the middle of the road until we take it to the board.”⁶

Bruce Cook Steps Down From Position as Chairman of the Georgia Department of Human Resources Board
March 2005; GA

Bruce Cook, founder and CEO of Choosing the Best, Inc., an abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula provider, stepped down from his position as Board Chairman of the Georgia Department of Human Resources after less than two years at the post.

Cook was appointed the new chairman of the Georgia Board of Human Resources in September 2003. The board oversees and sets policy for the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR). Some of the projects that the Board oversees include teen pregnancy prevention and family planning services.

Through his position, Cook worked to cut family planning and teen pregnancy prevention programs. Under his watch, the Board of Human Resources proposed cutting approximately \$4.7 million from the Fiscal Years 2004 and 2005 budgets for the Adolescent Health and Youth Development Program (AYHD), which included teen pregnancy prevention. The cuts would have closed 39 Teen Centers around the state, which provide a number of important services to young people, including distributing contraception and providing information on preventing pregnancy. Under the new plan, five of these centers would have been reopened as part of a pilot program to explore new methods of pregnancy prevention, which critics speculated would have had an abstinence-only focus. This proposed cut would have also led to a loss of \$1.2 million dedicated to family planning, meaning that approximately 64,000 women in Georgia have lost access to these services.⁷

According to the board, the cuts were proposed because the programs lacked “measurable results.”⁸ However, critics argued that the success of these programs was already evident.

According to the Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (G-CAPP), teen pregnancy rates in counties with an AYHD program have dropped more sharply than in others since 1997, and counties with a Teen Center have made the most progress.⁹

Critics speculated that these proposed cuts were partly due to Cook's strong abstinence-only philosophy. Choosing the Best, Inc. produces abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula, including *Choosing the Best LIFE*, *Choosing the Best PATH*, and *Choosing the Best WAY* for high school, upper middle school, and lower middle school students, respectively. Cook developed the original *Choosing the Best* program with his wife in 1993 for their son's class.¹⁰

SIECUS' review of these curricula found that they rely on fear and shame to influence young people's behavior, suggest that premarital sexual activity is inevitably harmful, and discourage the use of condoms and other contraceptives by providing misleading information about their failure rates. These curricula are also written exclusively for heterosexual students, rely on gender stereotypes, and include biased information about abortion.

Speaking against the cuts, Greg Bautista, director of El Puente, the Gainesville G-CAPP affiliate, remarked that, "the system apparently is working. Rates are going down....Cutting this money is a step in the wrong direction."¹¹

In March 2005, Cook stepped down amid allegations that he used his position at the DHR to promote his own company's programs in Georgia schools. Cook denied these allegations and defended his decision to step down, saying he believes he accomplished his mission of providing leadership during a transition in DHR.¹² He plans to lead a task force to develop recommendations for improving the management and oversight of the Georgia State Community Service Boards, which provide community-based services for the mentally challenged and the developmentally disabled.¹³

Georgia's Youth: Statistical Information of Note

- In 2005, 92% of high school students in Georgia reported having been taught about AIDS/HIV in school compared to 88% of high school students nationwide.¹⁴
- In 2000, Georgia's abortion rate was 18 per 1,000 women ages 15–19 compared to a teen abortion rate of 24 per 1,000 nationwide.¹⁵
- In 2002, Georgia's birth rate was 56 per 1,000 women ages 15–19 compared to a teen birth rate of 43 per 1,000 nationwide.¹⁶

*DeKalb County, Georgia*¹⁷

- In 2005, 44% of female high school students and 63% of male high school students in DeKalb County, Georgia reported ever having had sexual intercourse compared to 46% of female high school students and 48% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2005, 6% of female high school students and 25% of male high school students in DeKalb County, Georgia reported having had sexual intercourse before age 13 compared to 4% of female high school students and 9% of male high school students nationwide.

- In 2005, 11% of female high school students and 30% of male high school students in DeKalb County, Georgia reported having had four or more lifetime sexual partners compared to 12% of female high school students and 17% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2005, 30% of female high school students and 40% of male high school students in DeKalb County, Georgia reported being currently sexually active (defined as having had sexual intercourse in the three months prior to the survey) compared to 35% of female high school students and 33% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2005, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 64% of females and 82% of males in DeKalb County, Georgia reported having used condoms the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 56% of females and 70% of males nationwide.
- In 2005, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 10% of females and 8% of males in DeKalb County, Georgia reported having used birth control pills the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 21% of females and 15% of males nationwide.
- In 2005, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 9% of females and 19% of males in DeKalb County, Georgia reported having used alcohol or drugs the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 19% of females and 28% of males nationwide.
- In 2005, 90% of high school students in DeKalb County, Georgia reported having been taught about AIDS/HIV in school compared to 88% of high school students nationwide.

Title V Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Funding

Georgia received \$1,400,000 in federal funding for Title V programs in Fiscal Year 2005. The Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage grant requires states to provide three state-raised dollars, or the equivalent in services, for every four federal dollars received. The state match may be provided in part or in full by local groups. In Georgia, \$543,845 comes from state funds and the rest is provided by Title V sub-grantees.

Title V funds are received by the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health, Office of Adolescent Health and Youth Development (AHYD). AHYD is primarily responsible for running a public awareness initiative and evaluation as well as for providing technical assistance. The media campaigns, titled *Wait While You Date* and *You Are Worth the Wait*, began in 2000 and focus on young people ages 10 and older. AHYD gives the remainder of the funding to the Children and Youth Coordinating Council (CYCC), which distributes the money to community-based groups.

In Fiscal Year 2005, Georgia had 27 sub-grantees including chapters of the Boys and Girls Club, Housing Authorities, Girls Inc., and county boards of education. Grantees also include youth development organizations, county social service agencies, school districts and school boards, and crisis pregnancy centers.¹⁸ Sub-grantees run programs focused on at-risk males and

females ages 10–19 and use a variety of curricula including *Choosing the Best LIFE*, *Choosing the Best PATH*, and *WAIT Training*.

SIECUS has reviewed *Choosing the Best LIFE* and found that it names numerous physical and psychological consequences of premarital sexual activity, suggests that sexually active teens will never have happy futures, and implies that only teens with low self-esteem and poor judgment become sexually active. For example, *Choosing the Best LIFE* states, “relationships often lower the self-respect of both partners—one feeling used, the other feeling like the user. Emotional pain can cause a downward spiral leading to intense feelings of lack of worthlessness.”¹⁹

SIECUS reviewed *Choosing the Best PATH* and found that it provides endless information on the negative consequences of premarital sexual activity and utilizes a variety of tactics to suggest that teens should feel guilty, embarrassed, and ashamed of sexual behavior. For example, *Choosing the Best PATH* asks students: “How does being sexually active as a teen affect how a person feels about himself or herself?” The suggested answer is: “Can feel sad about losing virginity, loss of self-respect, blames self for getting pregnant or contracting an STD.” It goes on to say, “sexual activity also can lead to the trashing of a person’s reputation, resulting in the loss of friends.”²⁰

SIECUS reviewed *WAIT Training* and found that it contained little medical or biological information and almost no information about STDs, including HIV/AIDS. Instead, it contains information and statistics about marriage, many of which are outdated and not supported by scientific research. It also contains messages of fear and shame and biased views of gender, sexual orientation, and family type. For example, *WAIT Training* explains, “men sexually are like microwaves and women sexually are like crockpots.... A woman is stimulated more by touch and romantic words. She is far more attracted by a man’s personality while a man is stimulated by sight. A man is usually less discriminating about those to whom he is physically attracted.”²¹

Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE)²² and Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA) Grantees

There are ten CBAE grantees in Georgia: The Boys and Girls Club of Bulloch County, Carrollton Housing Authority, Choosing the Best, Inc., Communities in Schools Augusta-Richmond County, Inc., East Central Georgia Consortium, Friends of Cobb County Commission on Children and Youth, Medical College of Georgia, Metro Atlantic Youth for Christ, Inc., Rockdale Medical Center, and Wholistic Stress Control Institute.

There are four AFLA grantees in Georgia: Emory University, Heritage Community Services (receives two grants), Morehouse School of Medicine, and Wheeler County Board of Education.

Heritage Community Services’ website contains information about STDs but contains no information regarding prevention methods other than abstinence. In addition, many of its messages are fear-based. Heritage Community Services produces two 450-minute abstinence education curricula, *Abstinence Education (ABED) I & II*, and three character-based life-skills curricula, *Heritage Keepers I, II & III*. *ABED I* covers the definition of abstinence, setting values and goals, reproduction, sex, marriage, STDs (with slides), and how to refuse sex. *ABED II* discusses the social and psychological benefits of abstinence, the benefits of marriage, and the negative effects of the media. Heritage Keepers I, II, and III focus on character building and include topics such as peer independence, how to apologize, having pride in yourself and your family, affirmation of abstinence, how to deal with stress and emotions, and marriage fulfillment.

Heritage Community Services also has several community outreach components. The “Parent Component” consists of home visits to promote character-based life skills education

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within families. The “Faith Component” is designed to bridge gaps in communication and knowledge with faith agencies to better equip faith leaders to address issues of abstinence. In addition, Heritage Community Service also runs a media campaign which consists of several 30-minute “infomercials” with testimonials from young people who have chosen to abstain. The slogan of the media campaign is, “If you knew better, you’d do better!”

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

Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Grantee Length of Grant	Amount of Grant	Type of Grant (includes Title V, CBAE, and AFLA)
Georgia Department of Human Resources http://health.state.ga.us/programs/adolescent/index.shtml 1	\$1,400,000 federal \$543,845 state	Title V
Augusta-Richmond County Commission	\$33,361	Title V sub-grantee
Beacon of Hope, Inc. www.abeaconofhope.com	\$75,000	Title V sub-grantee
Boys and Girls Clubs of NE Georgia, Inc.	\$512,087	Title V sub-grantee
Boys and Girls Clubs of NW Georgia	\$56,250	Title V sub-grantee
Brantley County DFCS	\$56,250	Title V sub-grantee
Carrollton Housing Authority DUAL GRANTEE 2002–2005 http://carrolltonhousingath.tripod.com/housing/	\$74,207 \$345,308	Title V sub-grantee CBAE
Catoosa County Board of Education	\$40,088	Title V sub-grantee
Girls Inc. of Columbus and Phenix-Russell	\$69,990	Title V sub-grantee
GSU Research Foundation, Inc. DUAL GRANTEE	\$47,800 \$56,250	Title V sub-grantee Title V sub-grantee

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Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Grantee Length of Grant	Amount of Grant	Type of Grant (includes Title V, CBAE, and AFLA)
Hope House of Savannah www.hopehousesavannah.org	\$25,570	Title V sub-grantee
Housing Authority of Savannah www.savannahpha.com	\$24,454	Title V sub-grantee
Housing Authority of the City of Tifton	\$13,433	Title V sub-grantee
Johnson County Board of Education	\$48,686	Title V sub-grantee
McDuffie County Board of Education	\$52,374	Title V sub-grantee
Metro Atlantic Youth for Christ, Inc	\$56,250	Title V sub-grantee
DUAL GRANTEE 2003–2006	\$363,936	CBAE
Newton County Board of Education	\$54,227	Title V sub-grantee
Project Destiny, Inc.	\$56,154	Title V sub-grantee
Pulaski County Board of Education	\$24,350	Title V sub-grantee
Saint Joseph’s Mercy Care Services, Inc.	\$54,233	Title V sub-grantee
The Faith Center for Community Development	\$56,250	Title V sub-grantee
Thomaston-Upson School System	\$32,587	Title V sub-grantee
Toombs County Board of Commissioners	\$55,552	Title V sub-grantee
Union Mission, Inc	\$66,635	Title V sub-grantee
Wheeler County Board of Education DUAL GRANTEE 2005–2006	\$75,469 \$225,000	Title V sub-grantee AFLA

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Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Grantee Length of Grant	Amount of Grant	Type of Grant (includes Title V, CBAE, and AFLA)
Wholistic Stress Control Institute, Inc. DUAL GRANTEE 2002–2005 www.wholistic1.com	\$67,731 \$316,487	Title V sub-grantee CBAE
YMCA of Metropolitan Atlanta www.ymcaatlanta.org	\$67,731	Title V sub-grantee
The Boys and Girls Club of Bulloch County 2005–2008	\$796,232	CBAE
Choosing the Best, Inc. 2004–2007 www.choosingthebest.org	\$799,910	CBAE
Communities in Schools Augusta-Richmond County, Inc. 2005–2008 www.cisga.org	\$405,978	CBAE
East Central Georgia Consortium 2004–2007	\$799,814	CBAE
Friends of Cobb County Commission on Children and Youth 2005–2008	\$793,711	CBAE
Medical College of Georgia 2002–2005 www.mcg.edu	\$436,000	CBAE

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Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Grantee Length of Grant	Amount of Grant	Type of Grant (includes Title V, CBAE, and AFLA)
Rockdale Medical Center 2003–2006 www.rockdalemedicalcenter.org	\$177,809	CBAE
Emory University 2005–2006 www.emory.edu	\$299,520	AFLA
Heritage Community Services 2005–2006 DUAL GRANTEE 2005–2006 www.heritageservices.org	\$300,000 \$200,000	AFLA AFLA
Morehouse School of Medicine 2005–2006 www.msm.edu	\$250,000	AFLA

Title V Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Coordinator

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Georgia Organizations that Support Comprehensive Sexuality Education

ACLU of Georgia
70 Fairlie St, Suite 340
Atlanta, GA 30303
Phone: (404) 523-5398
www.acluga.org

Emory University School of Medicine
Regional Training Center
United Way Building
100 Edgewood Ave., NE, Suite 802
Atlanta, GA 30303
Phone: (404) 523-1996
www.med.emory.edu/rtc

Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy
Prevention (G-CAPP)
100 Auburn Ave., Suite 200
Atlanta, GA 30303
Phone: (404) 524-2277
www.gcapp.org

Georgia Parents for Responsible Health
Education
PO Box 2345
Decatur, GA 30031
www.gprhe.org

Planned Parenthood of Georgia
75 Piedmont Ave., NE, Suite 800
Atlanta, GA 30303
Phone: (404) 688-9305
www.ppga.org

Georgia Organizations that Oppose Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Christian Coalition of Georgia
8975 Roswell Rd.
Atlanta, GA 30350
Phone: (770) 998-3541
www.gachristiancoalition.org

Georgia Family Council
5550 Triangle Pkwy., Suite 160
Norcross, GA 30092
Phone: (770) 242-0001
www.georgiafamily.org

Georgia Right to Life
PO Box 927
Lawrenceville, GA 30046
Phone: (770) 339-6880
www.grtl.org

Teen Advisors – A Peer Counseling Group
that Works
PO Box 6468
Columbus, GA 31917
www.teenadvisors.org

Newspapers in Georgia

Atlanta Journal-Constitution
M.A.J. McKenna
Health & Medicine Staff Writer
PO Box 4689
Atlanta, GA 30302
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Atlanta Journal-Constitution
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Gwinnett Daily Post

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The Macon Telegraph

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Macon, GA 31208
Phone: (478) 744-4397

Savannah Morning News

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PO Box 1088
Savannah, GA 31402
Phone: (912) 652-0374

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

² Jen Sansbury, "Board didn't approve sex ed; Murky process: Controversial abstinence-based program got grant, but no evaluation," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (GA), 3 February 2005, 1JB.

³ Jen Sansbury, "DEKALB COUNTY: Board never OK'd sex ed curriculum," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (GA), 3 February 2005, 1JH.

⁴ For more information, see SIECUS' reviews of *Choosing the Best LIFE* and *Choosing the Best PATH* at <http://www.communityactionkit.org/curricula_reviews.html>.

⁵ Editorial, "OUR OPINION: Sex miseducation; DeKalb parents were smart to say it's a mistake to teach teens that abstinence is their only course," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (GA), 4 February 2005, 18A.

⁶ Jen Sansbury, "DeKalb schools halt sex ed curriculum," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (GA), 10 February 2005, 2C.

⁷ Planned Parenthood of Georgia Action Alert, "What's At Stake! Georgia Budget Cuts," accessed 20 November 2003 <<http://www.ppaction.org/campaign/gabudget2003/explanation>>; "Our Opinions: State Can't Afford to Cut Family Planning Programs," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* (GA), 23 October 2003.

⁸ "Our Opinions: State Can't Afford to Cut Family Planning Programs."

⁹ Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention, "Action Alert: Contact Governor Perdue and Youth State Legislators - Teen Centers Slated For Closure."

¹⁰ Choosing the Best, "About Us," accessed 17 May 2006 <http://www.choosingthebest.org/about_us/index.html>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Craig Schneider, "DHR leader to step down for new post; Cook to help service boards," *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution*, 26 March 2005.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Danice K. Eaton, et. al., "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2005," *Surveillance Summaries, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, vol. 55, no. SS-5 (9 June 2006): 1-108, accessed 8 June 2006, <<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm>>. Georgia did not participate in the complete 2005 YRBS, however, DeKalb County, which includes Atlanta did. Results for Dekalb County are listed separately.

¹⁵ *U.S. Teenage Pregnancy Statistics: Overall Trends, Trends by Race and Ethnicity and State-by-State Information* (New York: Guttmacher Institute, February 2004), accessed 28 January 2005, <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/state_pregnancy_trends.pdf>.

¹⁶ *National Vital Statistics Reports 52.10* (Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, 2003), 48, accessed 4 February 2005, <<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/births.htm#stat%20tables>>.

¹⁷ Danice K. Eaton, et. al., "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2005," *Surveillance Summaries, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, vol. 55, no. SS-5 (9 June 2006): 1-108, accessed 8 June 2006, <<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm>>.

¹⁸ Crisis pregnancy centers typically advertise as providing medical services and then use anti-choice propaganda, misinformation, and fear and shame tactics to dissuade women facing unintended pregnancy from exercising their right to choose.

¹⁹ Bruce Cook, *Choosing the Best LIFE-Student Workbook* (Marietta, GA: Choosing the Best, Inc., 2000), 9. For more information, see SIECUS' review of *Choosing the Best LIFE* at <http://www.communityactionkit.org/curricula_reviews.html>.

²⁰ Bruce Cook, *Choosing the Best PATH* (Marietta, GA: Choosing the Best Inc., 2000). For more information, see SIECUS' review of *Choosing the Best PATH* at <http://www.communityactionkit.org/curricula_reviews.html>.

²¹ *WAIT Training-Workshop Manual* (Longmont, CO: Friends First, 1996). For more information see, *Toward a Sexually Healthy America, Abstinence-only-until-marriage programs that Try to Keep Our Youth Scared Chaste* at <http://www.siecus.org/pubs/tsha_scaredchaste.pdf>.

²² In Fiscal Year 2004 SPRANS-CBAE was administered within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau. In Fiscal Year 2005 this funding stream was moved to HHS' Administration for Children and Families and is now referred to simply as Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE).