



Comprehensive Sexual Health Education: Effective and Widely Supported

Effectiveness

Research increasingly shows that comprehensive sexual health education, which teaches about both abstinence and contraception, is more effective than abstinence-only sex education in preventing unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. For example:

- A study published in the April 2008 *Journal of Adolescent Health* shows that students who received comprehensive sex education were half as likely to become pregnant as compared to students who received abstinence-only sex education and 40% as likely to become pregnant as those students who received no sex education.¹
- An exhaustive 2006 analysis of comprehensive sex education curricula found that 65% had a significant impact on one or more sexual behaviors, such as delaying the initiation of sex, increasing condom use, and reducing sexual risk-taking. Some of the curricula had positive impacts for several years.²
- The Congressionally mandated evaluation of the federal abstinence program, released in 2007, found that the abstinence-only education had no effect at all on students' behavior.³
- Richard Carmona, U.S. Surgeon General in the Bush Administration until 2006, testified before Congress in 2007 the Bush Administration “did not want to hear the science . . . but wanted to preach abstinence, which I felt was scientifically incorrect.” He confirmed that comprehensive sex education, which includes information about condoms and contraception, is what works.⁴

Support

Parents consistently voice overwhelming support for the teaching of comprehensive sex education in schools. For example:

- A 2007 survey of California parents conducted by the Public Health Institute found that 89% of California parents—including 86% of evangelical Christians, 90% of Latinos, and 71% of people who self-identify as “very conservative” —support sexuality education that includes

instruction about both abstinence and contraception, while 96% oppose abstinence-only sex education. This support is consistent across racial and ethnic groups, religious affiliations and California regions.⁵

- Other recent studies demonstrate Californians' support for comprehensive sexuality education, including statewide surveys conducted by the California Department of Health Services' Office of AIDS and The Public Policy Institute of California.⁶

¹ Kohler, Pamela K et al. Abstinence-Only and Comprehensive Sex Education and the Initiation of Sexual Activity and Teen Pregnancy. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 42 (2008) 344-351.

² Kirby, Douglas et al. *Sex and HIV Education Programs for Youth: Their Impact and Important Characteristics*, ETR Associates, 2006, p. 6.

³ *Impacts of Four Title V Section 510 Abstinence Education Programs*, Mathematica Policy Research Inc., April 2007. <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/impactabstinenceES.pdf>

⁴ "White House Is Accused of Putting Politics Over Science, *New York Times*, July 10, 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/10/washington/11cnd-surgeon.html?ex=1184904000&en=f0c6788cf6db17aa&ei=5070>

⁵ Constantine, N., Jerman, P., Huang, A., *Sex Education: The Parent's Perspective* Public Health Institute, May 2007. <http://teenbirths.phi.org/2007SummaryReport.pdf>

⁶ *Opinions About HIV/AIDS-Related Issues Among California Adults, 2005*. California Department of Health Services, Office of AIDS. June 2006. *PPIC Statewide Survey: Special Survey on Population*, Public Policy Institute of California, December 2005. <http://www.ppic.org/main/publication.asp?i=652>