



SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A Report from the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund

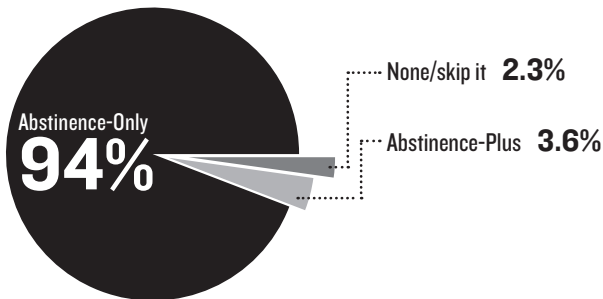
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TEXAS HAS LONG BEEN held up as the poster child for abstinence-only sexuality education. In fact, Texas consistently leads the nation by a wide margin in federal abstinence education dollars – more than \$18 million in 2007 alone. What has not been known until this study, however, is what public schools are actually teaching students about sexuality education in their classrooms. And the news is not good.

Just Say Don't Know: Sexuality Education in Texas Public Schools conclusively demonstrates that Texas is failing families and students when it comes to sexuality education. Classrooms are perpetuating a “conspiracy of silence” that robs young people of the reliable information they need to make responsible life decisions. Even worse, the information students do receive about sexuality and health is often grossly distorted or simply wrong.

FINDING 1:
Most Texas students receive no instruction about human sexuality apart from the promotion of sexual abstinence.

Materials returned for this study demonstrate that abstinence-only programs have a stranglehold over sexuality education in Texas. More than 96 percent of school districts – with more than 3.7 million students – fail to teach any medically accurate information on responsible pregnancy and disease prevention.



Too often students are left to discover this information from far less reliable sources, as a superintendent at a small Central Texas district made clear:

[We are] a small school with 301 students in grades PK to 12. Most of these kids live on a farm or have animals they feed and care for. They get a pretty good sex education from their animals.
 (page 6 of report)

FINDING 2:
Most school districts do not receive consistent or meaningful local input from their School Health Advisory Councils (SHACs) regarding sexuality education.

Data gathered for this report demonstrate the ideal of community input on sexuality education is largely a myth in Texas. Most districts fail to adhere to Texas law requiring local input on sexuality education from community-based School Health Advisory Councils (SHACs). 81 percent of school districts could not produce any formal SHAC recommendation on sexuality education instruction, regardless of date.

FINDING 3:
Sexuality education materials used in Texas schools regularly contain factual errors and perpetuate lies and distortions about condoms and STDs.

Regardless of one’s personal opinions about sexuality education, we should all be able to agree on this point: students should not be taught incorrect information in school. Unfortunately, the numerous examples of blatantly incorrect and misleading information in classroom materials make clear that many Texas public schools fail this most basic test.

TYPE OF FACTUAL ERROR	% of Texas School Districts
Errors of any type	41.0%
Errors related to...	
Condoms	40.1%
All STDs (including HIV and HPV)	38.9%
HIV (exclusively)	23.6%
HPV (exclusively)	20.9%

Condoms

Inaccurate information about condoms is the most common type of factual error in sexuality education materials used in Texas, occurring in 40.1 percent of school districts. Most examples share a common purpose and likely effect – discouraging young people from using condoms. While many districts utilize materials that exaggerate condom failure rates, some districts provide more extreme examples of condom-bashing. This student exercise used in one Central Texas school district provides an example:

Giving a condom to a teen is just like saying, “Well if you insist on killing yourself by jumping off the bridge, at least wear these elbow pads – they may protect you some.” (page 21 of report)

STDs

An astounding 38.9 percent of districts utilize curriculum materials or presentations that contain inaccurate information about sexually transmitted diseases. Instruction about HIV and human papillomavirus (HPV) is especially prone to error or misrepresentation in Texas classrooms, though no STD is exempt from distortion.

A number of abstinence-only curricula repeat the decades-old and widely discredited canard “HIV is so small it passes through a condom.” The *FACTS* curriculum (used in 20 districts) provides one common version of this argument:

Any imperfections in the contraceptive not visible to the eye could allow sperm, STD or HIV to pass through the latex...If a sperm cell can get through, how much more can the HIV virus only 1/450th the size of a sperm! (page 20 of report)

Numerous materials falsely teach students that condoms do not provide any protection from HPV. For instance, the *WAIT Training* program (used in 53 districts) dictates that students “be told that condoms do not appear to provide any protection from HPV, (which causes 99% of all cervical cancer).” (page 22 of report)

Other Errors

Some of the “facts” in Texas sexuality education materials simply defy description or categorization. One example is this strange statement from the *Wonderful Days* abstinence-only program (used in three districts): “If a woman is dry, the sperm will die. If a woman is wet, a baby she may get!” (page 24 of report)

FINDING 4:

Shaming and fear-based instruction are standard means of teaching students about sexuality.

Rising rates of teen births and STDs clearly highlight the potential health consequences of sexual activity among young people. Informing youth about these legitimate risks is a necessary component of any responsible sexuality education program. Unfortunately, our research shows that students enrolled in Texas secondary schools are likely to hear a variety of exaggerated, distorted and even outright false information about the consequences of sexual behavior. Such fear- and shame-based tactics seem to make up the primary – and in some cases the only – instructional strategies for most abstinence-only programs used in Texas secondary schools.

Consider the following short list of exaggerated consequences associated with sexual behavior that appear in Texas classrooms.

- Cervical Cancer (*FACTS*)
- Aggression Towards Women (Unattributed materials from Baird ISD)
- Suicide (*WAIT Training*)
- Divorce (*Scott & White Worth the Wait*)
- Infertility (*FACTS*)
- Poverty (Unattributed materials from Baird ISD)
- Radical Hysterectomy (Pam Stenzel)
- Low Self-Esteem (*Choosing the Best*)
- Disappointing God (Unattributed materials from Brady ISD)
- Death (Various)

Abstinence speaker Pam Stenzel (whose videos are used in three districts) provides an example of the distortions common to fear-based instruction about sex – in this case, HPV:

You've found this girl you love, I mean this is it, all those other girls, they were just messing around. This is the real thing. Pull out that diamond, look her in the eyes, if you're really cool guys you get on your knees, you say marry me, by the way I've got genital warts, you'll get it too, and we'll both be treated for the rest of our lives in fact you'll probably end up with a radical hysterectomy, cervical cancer, and possibly death but marry me. (page 28 of report)

FINDING 5:
Instruction on human sexuality in Texas often promotes stereotypes and biases based on gender and sexual orientation.

Abstinence-only materials regularly promote restrictive, even sexist gender roles and suggest girls are responsible for aggressive male sexual behavior. The *Just Say Yes* program (used in 12 districts) provides an example:

Girls, taking into consideration that guys are more easily sexually turned on by sight, you need to think long and hard about the way you dress and the way you come on to guys...If a guy is breathing, then he's probably turned on...How can you tell a girl is an easy target for a guy?...By the clothes she wears...A girl who shows a lot of skin and dresses seductively fits into one of three categories: 1) She's pretty ignorant when it comes to guys, and she has no clue what she's doing. 2) She's teasing her boyfriend which is extremely cruel to the poor guy! 3) She's giving her boyfriend an open invitation saying, "Here I am. Come take me."
(page 35 of report)

Like many programs used in Texas schools, the *No Apologies* curriculum (used in five districts) ignores the serious issues surrounding domestic abuse when it instructs students: "(T)he safest place for a woman to live is married to a man."
(page 34 of the report)

Materials returned for this study indicated that a few districts include discriminatory content toward gay and lesbian students: 41 districts in the state, or 4.1 percent. The policy at a South Texas district provides an example of content hostile to gays and lesbians:

Instruction shall not represent homosexuality as a normal or acceptable lifestyle...Students should be informed that homosexual acts are illegal in Texas and highly correlated with the transmission of AIDS.
(page 36 of report)

FINDING 6:
Some Texas classrooms mix religious instruction and Bible study into sexuality education programs.

Far too often in Texas, public schools betray the trust of families by forcing religious instruction with which they may not agree on students in their sexuality education. According to materials returned for this

report, 9.5 percent of Texas secondary school districts include inappropriate religious content in their sexuality education instruction. Consider a handout used by one district entitled: "Things to look for in a mate."

How they relate to God

- A. Is Jesus their first love?
- B. Trying to impress people or serve God?
(page 44 of report)

Another district turned over a series of what appear to be student handouts that lay out a scriptural case for abstinence from sexual activity.

Question: "What does the Bible say about sex before marriage / premarital sex?"

Answer: Along with all other kinds of sexual immorality, sex before marriage / premarital sex is repeatedly condemned in Scripture (Acts 15:20; Romans 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:13,18; 7:2; 10:8; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Jude 7).
(page 41-42 of report)

Scope of the Study

This report is based on the review and evaluation of tens of thousands of original documents returned from Texas districts: curricular materials, student handouts, speaker presentations, board policies, School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) minutes, and other relevant documents. Examples and statistics included are not speculative. They have been culled from actual documents turned over by school districts or directly from outside programs that districts indicated they utilize.

All information was collected through requests made under the Texas Public Information Act.

As of January 31, 2009, 990 Texas school districts had satisfied the information request in full by submitting complete information – a 96 percent return rate (based on 1,031 districts).

