

The Responsible Sex Education Bill – SB 405

The Responsible Sex Education Bill works to ensure that sex education taught in Wisconsin's schools is scientifically-based and comprehensive, including information about abstinence *and* the prevention of unintended pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) through the use of contraceptives. Factual and balanced information on sexuality will help prevent teen pregnancy and STIs among our youth by giving them the information and tools to make informed decisions.

The High Rate of Teen Pregnancy and Its Consequences

Although the rate of teenage pregnancy in the United States has been declining in recent years, it remains the highest in the developed world. In fact, the U.S. pregnancy rates are nearly twice as high as those in Canada and England. More than 750,000 American teenagers become pregnant each year, the vast majority of these pregnancies are unintended.

Wisconsin has the 18th highest rate of Chlamydia and the 19th highest rate of gonorrhea in the entire nation. Wisconsin also has the highest incidence of African-American teen births in the nation and Milwaukee has the highest high school drop-out rates for African-Americans in the country, which is directly connected to the high teen birth rate in our state.

The consequences of adolescent pregnancy and childbearing are serious and numerous. Teen mothers are not only less likely to graduate from high school, they are more likely than their peers, who delay childbearing, to live in poverty and to rely on public assistance. The children of teenage mothers are often born at low birth weight, experience health and developmental problems, and repeat the cycle of teenage pregnancy.

Responsible Sex Education Reduces Teen Pregnancy and STI Rates.

Research demonstrates that successful sex education programs employ a comprehensive approach. This means that teens are taught about abstinence, but also includes critical information about additional ways to prevent unintended pregnancy and disease.

- Eighty-six percent of the recent decline in U.S. teen pregnancy rates is the result of improved contraceptive use, while a small proportion of the decline (14%) can be attributed to teens waiting longer to start having sex. (AGI 2006)
- Research has been clear that comprehensive sexuality programs do not hasten the onset of sexual intercourse, do not increase the frequency of sexual intercourse, and do not increase the number of partners that teens have. (SIECUS Report, Aug/Sept 2001).
- Experts recommend public policies and programs should focus on the provision of medically accurate information on condoms and contraception, and support increased availability and accessibility of contraceptive services and supplies for teens, since these activities have the greatest impact on teen pregnancy declines. (AGI 2006)

Fact Sheet

Wisconsin's Current Policy on Sex Education Is Not Responsible

Wisconsin law encourages but does not require school boards to provide sex education curriculum. In 2007, The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI) reported there is currently no state mandates for Wisconsin schools to teach sex education. If sex education is taught, abstinence is stressed. Wisconsin is mandated to teach STI/HIV education. Wisconsin parents also have the choice to opt their child out of sex education if they desire.

If the board elects to provide sex ed, the law requires an "advisory committee" of parents, teachers, administrators, students, health care professionals, and clergy members to review the curriculum every three years.

Previously, Wisconsin received over one million dollars in federal-abstinence-only funding that the state was required to match. None of these funds, federal or the state match, could be used for responsible sex education that included instruction in unintended pregnancy and STI prevention through other methods besides abstinence. Wisconsin recently became one of eight states to refuse federal-abstinence-only funding.

The Responsible Sex Education Initiative requires schools that teach sex education to include instruction on abstinence, plus other ways to prevent unintended pregnancies and STIs and to provide accurate information about the effectiveness and safety of contraception. In addition, the bill requires a school district that elects not to provide sex education to send a written notice to all parents indicating that the pupils will not be getting sexuality education at school.

We need comprehensive sexuality education in Wisconsin's schools.

Teenagers are engaging in risky sexual behavior:

- The Kaiser Family Foundation found that 47% of teens aged 15-19 report having had sexual intercourse;
- Approximately one third of young women become pregnant at least once before they reach the age of 20;
- In the United States, there are approximately 750,000 teen pregnancies each year. 80% of these pregnancies are unintended;
- A sexually active teen who does not use contraception has a 90% chance of becoming pregnant in one year;
- In 2006, the Center for Disease Control estimated that approximately 19 million new sexually transmitted infections occur each year, almost half of them among young people ages 15 to 24.

Responsible Sex Education Works

- A 2007 report by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy has concluded that abstinence-only sex education programs have no overall impact on delay of initiation of sex, age of initiation of sex, return to abstinence, number of sexual partners, or use of condoms or other contraceptives. These abstinence-only programs are essentially ineffective.
- The report also found comprehensive programs have a significant positive impact on lowering the rates of pregnancy, HIV, and other sexually transmitted infections.

Strong Support for Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Most Americans support comprehensive sex education that both encourages young people to delay sexual activity and provides medically accurate information about contraception. For example, a study done by the Hart Research Center found 76% of Americans feel U.S. schools should teach comprehensive sex education that includes information about contraception, abstinence, and how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases.

An AP/Ipsos Poll from October 2007 found sixty-seven percent of U.S. adults are in favor of allowing public schools to provide contraceptives to students, including 37% who favor providing them only to children whose parents have consented and 30% who favor providing them to all students who ask.

Countless medical organizations, like the American Medical Association, the American Nurses Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Public Health Association, and the Society of Adolescent Medicine support responsible sexuality education that includes information on abstinence and contraception.