Conspiracy of Silence:
Sexuality Education in Texas Public Schools

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Contributors

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Basics of TFN

Texas Freedom Network is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization of more than 130,000 religious and community leaders who support religious freedom, individual liberties and public education.

Original research has become invaluable to policymakers on a wide range of church-state and education issues.
Texas Law

- Sexuality education not required to be taught
- TEKS does address “barrier methods of contraception”
- Sex education is only content area with state-level requirements/guidelines for instruction
Any course materials and instruction relating to human sexuality, sexually transmitted diseases, or human immunodeficiency virus or acquired immune deficiency syndrome shall be selected by the board of trustees with the advice of the local school health advisory council and must:

1. present abstinence from sexual activity as the preferred choice of behavior in relationship to all sexual activity for unmarried persons of school age;
2. devote more attention to abstinence from sexual activity than to any other behavior;
3. emphasize that abstinence from sexual activity, if used consistently and correctly, is the only method that is 100 percent effective in preventing pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, infection with human immunodeficiency virus or acquired immune deficiency syndrome, and the emotional trauma associated with adolescent sexual activity;
4. direct adolescents to a standard of behavior in which abstinence from sexual activity before marriage is the most effective way to prevent pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and infection with human immunodeficiency virus or acquired immune deficiency syndrome; and -
TEC 28.004

5) teach contraception and condom use in terms of human use reality rates instead of theoretical laboratory rates, if instruction on contraception and condoms is included in curriculum content.


Sampling Frame

- Dr. James Bethel (retired from Westat)
- 1,227 Texas school districts as population
- 10 largest districts selected with certainty
- 138 school districts selected (stratified by region and district enrollment)
- 148 districts (~15% of 976 non-charter districts w/ a high school)
Protocol

- Sent Open Records request
- Two-week follow-up
- Sent follow-up Open Records request
- E-mails and phone calls for a few months

What Was Requested?

- Textbooks & textbook supplemental materials
- Third-party curricula & programs
- Teacher-created materials
- Materials from crisis pregnancy centers
- Outside speakers and presentations
- Materials dealing with sexual orientation and abortion
- District policy
- Course schedules

Human Sexuality Education

- Sex education is the provision of information about bodily development, sex, sexuality, and relationships along with skills-building to help young people communicate about and make informed decisions regarding sex and their sexual health
Abstinence-Plus

Programs that include information about condoms and other forms of contraception and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the context of strong abstinence messages.

Abstinence-Only

Programs that teach abstinence as the only morally correct option of sexual expression for teenagers and that censor medically accurate information about contraception and condoms for the prevention of unintended pregnancy and STIs.

Evidence-Based

Evidence-based programs are those that have been proven through rigorous scientific evaluation to reduce risky sexual behavior.*

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* This report used the U.S. Health and Human Services Teen Pregnancy Prevention list of evidence-based programs to evaluate whether programs were evidence-based.
Evidence-Informed

Evidence-informed programs have not yet undergone rigorous scientific evaluation but are based on evidence from other research or best practices.

*Caveat

Report focuses on what districts reported using to teach sexuality education
Some attempts to determine what is actually taught in classrooms
Self-censorship by and personal opinions of teachers could be barriers
Sex Education in Texas Public Schools

Most Commonly Used Third-Party Curricula

Changes in Sex Education Since 2007-08
Health Classes & Sexuality Education

Differences by Enrollment Ethnicity

Sexuality Education by District Type
Sex Education by District Enrollment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Enrollment</th>
<th>Ab-Plus</th>
<th>Ab-Only</th>
<th>No Sex Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-499</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>99.2%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500-999</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>93.6%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
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<td>1,000-2,499</td>
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<td>34.1%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60,000+</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sex Education in Ten Largest Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Enrollment</th>
<th>Ab-Plus</th>
<th>Ab-Only</th>
<th>No Sex Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Houston Independent</td>
<td>Ab-Plus</td>
<td>Ab-Only</td>
<td>No Sex Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin ISD</td>
<td>Ab-Plus</td>
<td>Ab-Only</td>
<td>No Sex Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas ISD</td>
<td>Ab-Plus</td>
<td>Ab-Only</td>
<td>No Sex Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Antonio ISD</td>
<td>Ab-Plus</td>
<td>Ab-Only</td>
<td>No Sex Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Worth ISD</td>
<td>Ab-Plus</td>
<td>Ab-Only</td>
<td>No Sex Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round Rock ISD</td>
<td>Ab-Plus</td>
<td>Ab-Only</td>
<td>No Sex Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irving ISD</td>
<td>Ab-Plus</td>
<td>Ab-Only</td>
<td>No Sex Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Antonio ISD</td>
<td>Ab-Plus</td>
<td>Ab-Only</td>
<td>No Sex Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin ISD</td>
<td>Ab-Plus</td>
<td>Ab-Only</td>
<td>No Sex Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Worth ISD</td>
<td>Ab-Plus</td>
<td>Ab-Only</td>
<td>No Sex Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Findings...

- The percentage of Texas school districts providing abstinence-plus sex education is more than four times higher than in 2007-08.

- More than 8 in 10 Texas school districts teach abstinence-only or nothing at all about sex education.
Key Findings...

- The percentage of districts teaching nothing at all about sex education is nearly 11 times higher than it was in 2007-08.
- Removing the health education course as a state graduation requirement for high school appears to have helped make sex education in Texas public schools less common.

Key Findings...

- Districts with an enrollment that is majority white appear to be less likely to use abstinence-plus materials or teach any sex education at all than districts with majority non-white enrollment.
- Students in small and rural districts are much less likely to have medically accurate information about condoms/contraception or any sex education at all in school.

Recommendations for School Districts...

- Require health education classes as a local requirement for high school graduation and include human sexuality as part of instruction in that class.
- Train school board members and staff about the requirements of the Texas Education Code 28.004.
Recommendations for School Districts...

- Train members of the local School Health Advisory Councils (SHAC) to evaluate sexuality education curricula using
- Utilize qualified classroom teachers to teach sexuality education and ensure they receive
- Utilize only curricular materials from reputable sources that ensure medical accuracy and age-appropriate content.

Recommendations for School Districts

- Carefully vet all guest speakers and monitor all sexuality education presentations provided by outside individuals or groups, including so-called “crisis pregnancy centers.”
- Make human sexuality instruction relevant to LGBTQ+ students’ needs.
- Instruction must extend beyond the approved health education textbooks.

Recommendations for Policymakers...

- The Legislature should reverse its decision in 2009 to drop health education class as a requirement for graduation from a Texas public high school.
- The federal government should focus funding efforts on evidence-based human sexuality education programs.
- Texas should apply for all federal funding for evidence-based human sexuality education.
Recommendations for Policymakers...

- The Texas Legislature should require that information provided to students be free from factual errors and should prohibit programs that discourage the use of condoms and other methods of pregnancy and disease prevention.

Recommendations for Policymakers...

- The Texas State Board of Education should adopt curriculum standards (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS) and health education textbooks (student editions) that emphasize abstinence but also provide medically accurate information on responsible pregnancy and disease prevention, including condoms and other forms of contraception.

Recommendations for Policymakers...

- The Texas Legislature should amend the Texas Education Code (Section 28.004) to require local School Health Advisory Councils (SHACs) to review sexuality education policies and make evidence-based recommendations to local school boards at least every three years and require SHAC membership to include at least one certified health professional or health educator.
Questions