Sexuality Education in Texas Schools: Change is Possible!

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- Susanne Kerns, Informed Parents of Austin
- Dr. Lisa Platner, Texas Tech University Health Science Center, Odessa
- Melissa Munsell, North East ISD San Antonio
- Jennifer Biundo, Texas Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
Webinar Instructions

- All participants are ‘muted’.
- Use Q&A function at bottom of screen to ask questions.
- We will respond to audience questions at the end of the webinar.
- We will email the slide deck to all participants.
- Please participate in a brief evaluation after the webinar. This is required for those seeking Social Work or Licensed Professional Counselor CE credit.
Our Mission

The Texas Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, a statewide non-partisan organization, works to reduce teen pregnancy through research, advocacy, collaboration and training.
Panelists

Susanne Kerns
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Dr. Lisa Platner
Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, Odessa
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Melissa Munsell
North East ISD, San Antonio

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Texas Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
Outline

- Legalese
- Austin ISD
- Ector County ISD, Odessa
- North East ISD - San Antonio
- SBOE update
- Resources
- Questions
Why is it important?

- To “help children and adolescents make informed, positive, and safe choices about healthy relationships, responsible sexual activity, and their reproductive health.”
- For prevention of unintended pregnancy, HIV, and sexually transmitted infections.
- To teach youth about consent and sexual violence prevention.
- To reduce inequities.
- Because medically accurate knowledge about our bodies can be considered a basic human right.
- Abstinence-only policies may create harm by withholding critical information and using shame-based tactics.

Sex education does not make kids more likely to have sex.¹


2. Guttmacher Institute, “Promiscuity Propaganda: Access to Information and Services Does Not Lead to Increases in Sexual Activity.”
Policy Framework for Sex Ed in Texas

Chapter 28, Education Code:
- Health classes are not required for high school graduation.
- Districts must set up school health advisory councils, or SHACs, to ensure that local community values are reflected in health instruction.
- Any sex ed courses must be selected by district trustees with SHAC input.
- Any sex ed classes must present abstinence as the preferred choice of behavior for unmarried people of school age, devote more time to abstinence than any other activity, and stress the effectiveness of abstinence over other methods.
- However, schools CAN offer “abstinence-plus” curricula.
- Condom distribution is prohibited in connection with human sexuality instruction.
- Parents must receive written notice of whether the district will provide sex ed, and if so, a summary of the basic content and notice of a parent’s right to review the curriculum and opt their child out of any lessons.
- Curriculum standards, or TEKS, are set by the State Board of Education.
Austin ISD - A favorable audience

Primary AISD decision makers support comprehensive, inclusive sex-ed

- Health Department
- SHAC
- Board of Trustees
- Parents & Community (94%+ supportive on district-wide survey)

Opposition

- Mostly non-parents, non-AISD representatives from groups like Texas Values and Concerned Parents of Texas
- Vocal minority of parents
- Otherwise supportive parents who have received misinformation
The Austin ISD Story

- Last updated in 2010
- SHAC requested district begin update process in 2016
- District-wide survey on Scope & Sequence in Nov. 2018
- Austin ISD board unanimously approved S & S Feb. 2019
- Public viewing & survey of 3-5 & 6-8 lessons May 2019
- Public/online viewing & survey of revised 6-8 lessons Sept. 2019
- SHAC unanimously approved lessons Oct. 2019
- Austin ISD board unanimously approved lessons Oct. 28, 2019
- Lessons will be taught May 2020
Ector County ISD + Texas Tech University Health Science Center

- Medical students to Permian Basin campus in 2009
- Presented Straight Talk curriculum to school board
- TTUHSC representative to SHAC
- SHAC research for abstinence-plus curriculum
- Presentation of abbreviated Big Decisions curriculum
- Collaboration with faith-based organization
- Training for Big Decisions curriculum to staff and volunteers
- 2010 first year abstinence-plus offered in ECISD for 7th graders
North East ISD: History of Human Sexuality and Abstinence Education (HSAE)

- Prior to 2008 ~ Middle School & High School - “Worth the Wait”
- Fall 2008 ~ MS/”Choosing the Best” and HS/”Big Decisions”
- Fall 2016 ~ MS/”Draw the Line/Respect the Line” (DTL/RTL)
- Extras ~ Active Consent and Parent Previews
North East ISD: HSAE Adoption Process

• Around 2011-2012 ~ Began discussion of evidence-based programs

• 2013
  • Review of MS and HS programs
  • Observations and Trainings

• 2015-16
  • HS - Big Decisions
  • SHAC Subcommittee Work w/iCHAMPSS Model
  • MS - Draw the Line/Respect the Line
Challenges: Austin ISD

- Over-representation by “anti” groups
- Under-representation by supporters
  - Assume Austin is “safe”
  - Parents are busy
  - Parents of LGBTQIA+ students hesitant to be vocal
- Misinformation spread by “anti” groups
Challenges: Ector County ISD

- Conservative community
- Abstinence only curriculum
- Faith-based organization sole provider of services
- Time constraints due to standardized testing
- Abbreviated curriculum required
- Shortage of volunteers
- Increased demands from the school district
Challenges: North East ISD

- Small group of parents with concerns - their actions:
  - Attempted to join SHAC during the year
  - Attendance and demonstration at full SHAC approval meeting in March
  - Press conferences and speakers at board meetings during approval process
  - Press releases and media interviews with local stations
    - False and misleading claims about the curriculum and the district
  - Same group hosted a series of seminars
    - Misleading title “NEISD sex ed parent education seminar”
    - Inaccurate and misleading information was provided
      - Created confusion and needless controversy
Challenges: North East ISD

• Robocalls were delivered to NEISD households
• Webpage was established ~ neisdsexed.com
• Facebook page established ~ “flag on the play”
• Interview with Texas public radio
• 36 open records requests were filed for completion by the pe and health dept.
• Local grievance process utilized, board of trustees upheld district decision
• Appeal to the commissioner of education filed, but deadline was not met
• Formal appeal was filed with Texas education agency, who upheld NEISD position
Lessons Learned: Austin ISD

- Know and follow the process/bylaws
- Collect data & ensure surveys designed by neutral professionals
- Include more student voices / GSA participation
- Know local media contacts & know who in your group is open to interviews
- Guiding mission: Fight FOR something, not AGAINST someone.
Lessons Learned: Ector County ISD

• SHAC should be included in planning efforts and implementation
• Obtain funding/grants for services
• Partner with other organizations
• Be patient
Lessons Learned: North East ISD

- Allot plenty of time for the process ~ follow and know your process!
- Use data to identify district needs ~ know your community/community needs
- Use a structured, thorough, and evidence-based approach
- Use available tools and community experts, if possible
- Be completely and overly transparent ~ rapport with parents and community
- Ensure active engagement and support from senior leadership
- Be prepared with a strategic response to deal with resistance
- Directly counter misinformation and opposition
- Have parent, staff, and community support to back your decision
- Have targeted professional development ~ rapport with teachers
- “Protect” teachers from controversy
- Continue to gather data even after decision is approved
State Board of Education Update

- The State Board of Education is revising the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS, around health education.

- Hearings are anticipated next summer, with a vote expected next fall.

- Reach out to your SBOE member and let them know that you support evidence-based sex education that goes beyond just abstinence.

- Follow the Texas Campaign to receive action alerts.
Resources

- Advocates for Youth: www.advocatesforyouth.org
- Unhushed: www.unhushed.org
- Sex Positive Families: https://sexpositivefamilies.com/
- Future of Sex Education Initiative: https://futureofsexed.org/
Thank you! Questions?