

Support HB 1789: Medically Accurate Family Life Education Curriculum

HB 1789 requires that Family Life Education curriculum be medically accurate.

Providing young people with medically accurate information about their sexuality and health helps them become responsible and informed decision-makers. However, some school districts use abstinence-only curriculum in their Family Life Education programs, which has been shown to contain inaccurate information about contraception, abortion and disease prevention.

- 14% of Virginian school districts rely on abstinence-only curriculum for their Family Life Education program.
- Analysis of federally funded abstinence-only curricula found that over 80 percent of curricula supported by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services contained false, misleading, or distorted information about reproductive health. Specifically, they conveyed:
 - False information about the effectiveness of contraceptives;
 - False information about the risks of abortion;
 - Religious beliefs as scientific fact;
 - Stereotypes about boys and girls as scientific fact; and
 - Medical and scientific errors of fact.¹

Here are concrete examples of medically inaccurate information found in the abstinence only curriculum being taught in some Virginia public schools²:

Abstinence-Only Curriculum Claim:

Condoms have a 14% failure rate in preventing pregnancy, and the claim that condoms help prevent STIs is “not supported” by data.^{3,4}

The risk of death from abortion is higher than that for pregnancy and childbirth.⁷

HIV can be transmitted by French kissing.⁹

Abortion increases the chances of breast cancer.¹¹

Medically Accurate Information:

Latex condoms are “highly effective” in preventing HIV transmission, and have a failure rate of 2-3% when used correctly.^{5,6}

The risk of death associated with abortion is about one-tenth that associated with childbirth.⁸

Contact with saliva has never been shown to transmit HIV.¹⁰

Abortions have no overall effect on the risk of breast cancer.¹²

Medically inaccurate FLE curriculum can harm young people by putting them at risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

- Providing misinformation about contraception and STIs can lead some young people to forgo contraceptive use, jeopardizing their reproductive health.¹³

Comprehensive, medically accurate sex education is effective and does not promote sexual risks.

- Teenagers who receive sex education that includes accurate information about contraception and condoms are more likely than those who receive abstinence-only messages to delay sexual activity and to use contraceptives when they do become sexually active.¹⁴
- Research shows that comprehensive sex education programs do not encourage teens to start having sexual intercourse; do not increase the frequency with which teens have intercourse; and do not increase the number of a teen’s sexual partners.¹⁵

¹ Special Investigations Division, U. S. House of Representatives, Committee on Government Reform The Content of Federally Funded Abstinence-Only Education Programs. Washington, DC: Author, 2004.

² A list of curriculum being used in Virginia schools can be found in the “Report on Survey of Family Life Education Programs” published by the Virginia Board of Education in 2007. ³ Why kNOW? 8th Grade and High School Edition. (2002). Page 86. ⁴ AC Green’s Gameplan Coach’s Clipboard. (2004). Page 47. ⁵ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Male Latex Condoms and Sexually Transmitted Diseases. (2003). ⁶ Contraceptive Failure in the United States, World Health Organization. (2000). ⁷ Sex Respect Teacher’s Manual. (2001). Page 115. ⁸ Guttmacher, State Facts About Abortion, 1996-2008. <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/sfaa/virginia.html>. ⁹ Sex Respect Student Workbook. (2001). Page 63. ¹⁰ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Which Bodily Fluids Transmit HIV? (2003). ¹¹ Sex Respect Teacher’s Manual. (2001). Page 116. ¹² American Cancer Society, Detailed Guide: Breast Cancer: What Are the Risk Factors for Breast Cancer?¹³ Kempner, Martha, Toward a Sexually Healthy America: Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs That Try to Keep our Youth “Scared Chaste,” at 11, 32-36 (2001). ¹⁴ Alford S et al. Science and Success: Sex Education and Other Programs that Work to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, HIV & Sexually Transmitted Infections. Washington, DC: Advocates for Youth, 2003. ¹⁵ Ibid.

