

Support HB 1980

Parents' Right to Know

The Problem: Most parents (82%) want teens to receive medically-accurate, comprehensive sexuality education that includes information on abstinence, contraception and disease prevention,¹ but a 2006 survey conducted by the Virginia Department of Education found that 14% of local school districts' Family Life Education programs are abstinence-only.² In these localities, when information on pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is presented, abstinence is the only form of prevention discussed. Parents are not routinely informed about the content of their child's FLE program and may not know that their child is not receiving comprehensive information.

- Virginia's Family Life Education Guidelines were developed by the Board of Education with input from public school staff (including administrators and teachers), state agencies, parent groups, and not-for-profit organizations that provide family life services.
- The guidelines include learning objectives about abstinence, contraception and disease prevention.
- The guidelines are not mandated. School divisions are allowed to use the state-approved Standards of Learning objectives or develop their own objectives.
- The guidelines direct school divisions to establish an opt-out procedure to ensure communication with the parent or guardian and provide opportunity for students to be excused from all or part of the program.
- Section § 22.1-207.2 of the Code of Virginia directs each school division to develop a summary of the Family Life Education curriculum, but it is only distributed upon request of a parent or guardian.

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The Solution: Amend § 22.1-207.2 of the Code of Virginia to require school districts to distribute the summary of their Family Life Education program to parents before instruction begins to encourage parental guidance and involvement. Because research proves that abstinence-only curriculum is ineffective, it is important that parents be notified of what their child is learning so that they may decide to opt out of abstinence-only curriculum.

Parent-child communication can strengthen Family Life Education.

- Parents play a critical role in guiding students through Family Life Education and providing additional information and support.
- Teens whose parents talk with them about sex are more likely to wait longer before they have sex, and to use birth control or protection when they do.³
- A majority of women younger than 18 reported good relationships with their parents and said that they had talked with their parents about sex and birth control.⁴

Young people need responsible sources of medically-accurate information about their sexuality and health; abstinence-only curriculum denies them this information.

- Recent evaluations of 11 "abstinence-only" programs showed that the programs had no lasting, positive effect on young people's sexual behavior. What's worse, due to the programs' emphasis on contraceptive failure rates as opposed to proper and consistent use, the evaluations showed the programs had some negative effects on young people's willingness to use contraception.⁵

¹ NPR/Kaiser/ Harvard/ 2004 Poll Sex Education in America ² Virginia Board of Education. Report on Survey of Family Life Education Programs. Senate Document No. 7, 2007. ³ Guttmacher Institute. Facts on Sex Education. 2006. ⁴ Guttmacher Institute. New Release. December 2005. ⁵ Debra Hauser, Five Years of Abstinence-Only Until Marriage Education: Assessing the Impact, at 2, 4 (2004), Advocates for Youth, <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/stateevaluations.pdf>

