Sex Education Has Become X-Rated

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Abstinence education is spreading rapidly in public schools all over the country, but the pressures are great for schools to continue teaching the "comprehensive," explicit, condom/contraceptive curricula that have been used for the last 20 years with such unhappy results.
The 1996 Welfare Reform Act included a small appropriation known as "Title V" to fund some abstinence education programs. The law requires that any program funded under Title V have "abstaining from sexual activity" as "its exclusive purpose."

The law goes on to prescribe that these programs must teach (1) that abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage is "the expected standard for all school age children," (2) that abstinence is "the only certain way to avoid" pregnancy and disease, (3) that "a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard," (4) that extra-marital sex is "likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects," and (5) that bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child.

Rather than attack the popular abstinence education head-on, its opponents are trying to divert a significant portion of Title V funding to worthless "evaluations." An outfit called Mathematica Policy Research Inc. recently finagled a $4-$6 million federal contract from other federal funds to evaluate a mere half dozen abstinence programs involving about 500 to 1500 students each.

One of the problems with Mathematica's evaluation is that it plans to use its "Teen Activities and Attitudes Study," a nosy questionnaire that interrogates students about the number of sexual partners they have had, whether or not and how often they use contraceptives, and whether or not they have ever been pregnant. Parents who have seen the questionnaire believe it is not age appropriate, will grossly violate the privacy of students, and appears to be designed to undermine the wholesome abstinence message.

For example, the questionnaire asks, "How old were you when you had sexual intercourse for the first time?" and "When you got pregnant for the first time, were you or your partner using any kind of birth control methods?" The questionnaire is useless in evaluating an abstinence program and does not even measure the beneficial aspects of good abstinence programs.

The persistent advocates of contraceptive-style sex education have become ever more resourceful in accessing federal funds, but they are starting to get their comeuppance from outraged parents. The latest effort to force explicit sex ed on students comes from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

On March 29, the Ohio House Education Committee blocked the use of nearly $1 million in CDC sex education grants to implement the CDC- funded "Programs-That-Work" because they are "explicit" and do not meet the Ohio requirements for abstinence. Role-playing is an integral part of the curriculum, with girls required to role-play to convince boys to wear condoms, girls discussing AIDS concerns in a lesbian relationship, and a boy and girl discussing "safer sex with multiple partners."

Programs-That-Work encourages students to brainstorm ways to "eroticize condom use with a partner." They are told, "Do something positive and fun. Go to the store together. Buy lots of different brands and colors. Plan a special day when you can experiment."

The manual instructs teachers that no student should be excused from the activities. And the students are instructed to make agreements to maintain confidentiality about the sessions, i.e., not to tell their parents.

The same CDC-backed program that scandalized Ohio in March caused an uproar in Illinois in July. The CDC, through the Illinois Board of Education, contracted with Illinois State University to pay $120,000 to train 2,000 teachers to teach the curriculum called "Reducing the Risk," which is one of the CDC-funded Programs-That-Work.

This curriculum includes explicit sex instruction, field trips to family planning clinics, and visits to drugstores (preferably with a partner) to compare brands, textures and colors of condoms. One newspaper columnist wrote, "I don't even want to know what they have to do to get an A in that class."

All 50 states and at least 34 national organizations receive federal CDC funds for the purpose of developing and implementing "Comprehensive School Health [Sex] Education" programs. The time has come to redirect the millions of dollars Congress appropriates every year under Title X for so-called "family planning" and put it instead into abstinence education.

Recognizing this need, the 2000 Republican Party Platform calls for "replacing `family planning' programs for teens with increased funding for abstinence education, which teaches abstinence until marriage as the responsible and expected standard of behavior." Parents should investigate their local schools and find out whether they are teaching teens how to engage in sex or how to abstain from sex.