



Support for HB 88/SB 221

The Healthy Youth Act

WHAT DOES THE BILL DO? The proposed legislation sets up a two-track system for teaching sexuality education in North Carolina – one for abstinence until marriage and another for abstinence-based comprehensive sexuality education. It gives parents the option to have their children enrolled in abstinence until marriage programs or abstinence-based comprehensive sexuality education programs. Every school system would be required to offer both programs in grades 7-9 and parents would select the program in which they wish their child to enroll.

BACKGROUND OF THE ISSUE:

North Carolina law currently **mandates** the teaching of abstinence until marriage. The law **allows** the teaching of an expanded program or comprehensive sexuality education, but only after a process that has created confusion for many school officials and personnel.

There is an urgent need in North Carolina to address this public health concern in an aggressive and reasoned way.

- According to a 2006 report, North Carolina had the ninth highest teen pregnancy rate in the nation¹ and now has the 14th highest teen birth rate.²
- In 2007, over 20,000 pregnancies were reported in young women aged 10 to 19.³
- In 2006, North Carolina was rated 5th for number of reported cases of HIV infection⁴ and there were 89 cases reported in youth ages 0 to 19.⁵
- In 2006, North Carolina was ranked 10th for the number of reported Chlamydia and syphilis cases, and ranked 8th for the number of gonorrhea cases.⁶
- There were over 17,000 cases of Chlamydia, syphilis, and gonorrhea for young people ages 10 to 19 in North Carolina in 2006.⁷
- Effective health information is based on information that saves lives. North Carolina's youth deserve to receive life-saving information included in programs that emphasize abstinence, but also provide complete health education.

¹ *U.S. Teen Pregnancy Statistics: National and State Trends and Trends by Race and Ethnicity*, The Guttmacher Institute, p. 11, last updated September 2006.

² "Teen Birth Rates: Where Does Your State Rank?" *U.S. News and World Report*, Jan. 8, 2009, available at <http://health.usnews.com/articles/health/2009/01/08/teen-birthrates-where-does-your-state-rank.html>.

³ North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health, State Center for Health Statistics, available at <http://www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/data/pregnancies/2007/>.

⁴ State Health Facts, available at <http://www.statehealthfacts.org/comparemactable.jsp?ind=521&cat=11>

⁵ *North Carolina HIV/STD Quarterly Surveillance Report*, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health, Vol. 2006, No.4.

⁶ State Health Facts, available at <http://www.statehealthfacts.org/comparecat.jsp?cat=2>.

⁷ *North Carolina HIV/STD Quarterly Surveillance Report*, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health, Vol. 2006, No.4.

- Failing to effectively address teen pregnancy is costly (for society and for individuals), is associated with higher drop-out rates, perpetuates a growing poverty rate – especially children living in poverty, and is associated with many other difficult outcomes.

A two-track system is already offered in New Hanover County Schools and has been well received by parents.

- New Hanover County Schools have offered the two-track program for more than ten (10) years, leaving the decision regarding what type of sexuality education a child has up to the parent.
- According to teachers in the New Hanover County Schools, due to parent demand, the number of teachers hired and classes offered on abstinence-based comprehensive sexuality education outnumbers the abstinence only until marriage programs by a margin of three to one.
- Such an approach gives parents options so that health education can align with family values and gives health educators flexibility to use the best public health approaches for prevention.

REASONS TO SUPPORT THIS BILL:

Abstinence-based comprehensive sexuality education has widespread support in North Carolina.

- In a 2003 parent opinion survey conducted by the NC Departments of Instruction and Health and Human Services, 90% of parents of middle or high school students said they support sex education in school and 96% of respondents said that parents ought to decide how sex ed is taught in school.⁸
- Students want complete education – information on both abstinence and contraception.⁹ They *will* get information – the question is whether it is correct information.

Abstinence-based comprehensive sexuality education programs provide youth with life-saving information that will help them avoid risky behavior and prepare them to make good health decisions throughout a lifetime.

- Teen years are formative and connected to our whole lives – decision-making abilities and tendencies that will affect health practices and relationship practices for the life-span are formed early on.
- Education is the best tool we have to help youth make good decisions and to actually impact rates of teen pregnancy and HIV/STDs.
- We know what works to prevent teen pregnancy. Abstinence-based comprehensive sex education is supported by sound, exhaustive research on what works to change or reinforce behavior. Conversely, programs that focus only on abstinence have no such evidence of being effective and in some cases can be harmful.

THIS BILL IS SUPPORTED BY: Action for Children; The Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina; Alianza Latina Pro-educación en Salud; American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina; Durham Coalition on Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention; Equality NC; Guilford County Board of Health; March of Dimes; NARAL; National Association of Social

⁸ *North Carolina Parent Opinion Survey of Public School Sexuality Education*, N.C. Department of Health & Human Services and the N.C. Department of Public Instruction, October 2003.

⁹ *With One Voice; Parents and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy*, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, p. 19, 2007.

Workers – North Carolina Chapter; North Carolina Association of Educators; North Carolina Folic Acid Council; North Carolina National Organization for Women; North Carolina Nurses Association; North Carolina Pediatric Society; North Carolina School Community Health Alliance; North Carolina School Social Workers Association; Old North State Medical Society; Planned Parenthood of Central North Carolina; Planned Parenthood Health Systems; Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina; Project Safe – NCCU; Wake Teen Medical Services and Parents and Teens across North Carolina.

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