

Ten Ways to Work for Comprehensive Sexuality Education at Your School

- 1. Be familiar with current sexuality education laws** – The Healthy Youth Act was signed into Wisconsin law on February 24, 2010 by Governor Doyle. The new law states that if schools choose to offer human growth and development, classes must be age-appropriate, medically accurate, non-biased, promote self-esteem and healthy relationships, identify resources for counseling and help for abuse victims, and present information about abstinence and how to properly use contraceptives. The new law is not a mandate: schools are not required to offer human growth and development classes, but if they do, classes must meet state standards.
- 2. Be familiar with research about sexuality education** – The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction has a resource packet for schools and parents on sex ed which includes information about why comprehensive sexuality education is more effective at reducing teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection rates. Read or download the packet on-line at <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/sspw/hgd.html>
- 3. Ask to review the curriculum at your local school or district** – The law says that school districts will provide to each parent an outline of the curriculum used for sex ed and details on how the materials can be reviewed. It is the right of all parents to inspect the curriculum at any time including prior to their use in the classroom.
- 4. Ask to review local school district policy on sex education to ensure it is in compliance with the new law** – A written policy should exist about human growth and development instruction in district schools. If a district chooses not to offer sex ed or if their curricula or policy is not in compliance with the new state standards, parents can challenge the school policy. This could involve finding other parents who support comprehensive sex education, meeting with individual school board members or going to school board meetings to express the need for real sex ed in local schools, getting support from youth rights and public health organizations, or joining your school's community advisory committee on human growth and development instruction.
- 5. Look for allies** – Public health advocates, reproductive rights groups, youth service agencies and faith groups that teach their own comprehensive sex education are all good allies in support of comprehensive sex ed. In Wisconsin, you can Google "Healthy Youth Alliance" to find members of the statewide coalition of youth rights and public health advocates who support comprehensive sex ed.
- 6. Involve other parents** – Opinion polls in Wisconsin and across the nation show that the majority of parents want schools to teach students the facts about reproduction, contraception and sexually transmitted diseases. Parents in your community also want comprehensive sex ed – talk to other parents in your community to find other supporters.
- 7. Involve students** – Young people are experts on what is happening among their peers and they can be the best spokespeople for why students need all the facts in order to make healthy decisions. Students who feel passionately about improving sex ed in their schools should be included in efforts to talk to school board members, get their friends involved, write letters to the local paper and engage in other effective citizen advocacy work.

8. Talk to the media – Your local newspaper may have a reporter who works on school issues. Contacting the media to talk about your school’s need for comprehensive sex ed is a great way to bring attention to improving your child’s education. Letters to the editor are another public way of showing your support.

9. Be familiar with abstinence-only-until-marriage programming – Abstinence-only-until-marriage programming became common after an increase in federal funding in the mid-1990s. These programs teach that abstaining from sexual activity before marriage is the only way to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection.

New state standards for sex ed in Wisconsin include teaching about abstinence. However, a comprehensive approach which includes information about how sexually transmitted infections are spread, reproductive science, and how to properly use contraceptives is a critical part of decreasing teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection rates and helping young people know how their bodies work in order to make healthy decisions for their future.

Schools that use abstinence-only curricula, teach about sexuality in a way that is discriminatory against gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender students, that is biased against young people who are already sexually active or that does not provide resources for victims of non-consensual sexual activity such as sexual assault or sexual abuse is not in compliance with the new state law.

10. Be vigilant – Schools have until September 30, 2010 to send a notice to parents about what curriculum they will be teaching for human growth and development. Right now schools are gathering information about curricula options, hearing from the public at school board meetings and making decisions. Now is the perfect time to talk to school officials about their plans for implementing a comprehensive curriculum. Also watch for discussions in the media, on the Internet, and in the letters to the editor section and respond with your comments.

For more resources for parents who want to ensure that comprehensive sexuality education is available for all students at their school, or for help on working with a school that is not offering comprehensive sex education, contact the ACLU of Wisconsin at (608) 469-5540. The ACLU of Wisconsin is a member of the Healthy Youth Alliance, a coalition of youth rights and public health advocates who support the Healthy Youth Act, signed into law in February, 2010.

