

**Review of
Comprehensive Sex Education Curricula**

**The Administration for Children and Families (ACF)
Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)**

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Introduction

“Comprehensive Sex Education” curricula for adolescents have been endorsed by various governmental agencies, educational organizations, and teenage advocacy groups as the most effective educational method for reducing teenage pregnancy and helping prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among America’s youth. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) defines Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) as “teaching both abstinence and the use of protective methods for sexually active youth”; NIH states that CSE curricula have been “shown to delay sexual activity among teens.”¹ Non-governmental groups that support CSE have also made statements linking CSE curricula to abstinence as well as reduction of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).²

The Administration for Children and Families, within the Department of Health and Human Services undertook an examination of some of the most common CSE curricula currently in use. The purpose of this examination was to inform federal policymakers of the content, medical accuracy, and effectiveness of CSE curricula currently in use.

Background

In 2005, Senators Santorum and Coburn requested that the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) review and evaluate comprehensive sex education programs supported with federal dollars. The Senators wrote to the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families,

“In particular, we would appreciate a review that explores the effectiveness of these programs in reducing teen pregnancy rates and the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases. In addition, please assess the effectiveness of these programs in advancing the greater goal of encouraging teens to make the healthy decision to delay sexual activity. Please also include an evaluation of the scientific accuracy of the content of these programs. Finally, we would appreciate an assessment of how the actual content of these programs compares to their stated goals.”

In response, ACF contracted with the Sagamore Institute for Policy Research to review some of the most common CSE curricula currently in use. ACF also requested and received comments on these reviews from the Medical Institute for Sexual Health (MISH).

¹ Demographic and Behavioral Sciences Branch, NICHD: *Report to the NACHHD Council, 2003*, The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), The Demographic and Behavioral Sciences Branch (DBSB).

² The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) has stated that, “Numerous studies and evaluations published in peer-reviewed literature suggest that comprehensive sexuality education is an effective strategy to help young people delay their involvement in sexual intercourse.” [*Issues and Answers: Fact Sheet on Sexuality Education*, SIECUS Report, Volume 29, Number 6 - August/September 2001.] Also, with regard to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), the American Psychological Association has concluded that, “only comprehensive sex education is effective in protecting adolescents from pregnancy and sexually transmitted illnesses at first intercourse and during later sexual activity.” [APA Online, American Psychological Association, Press Release, *Based on the Research, Comprehensive Sex Education is more Effective at Stopping the Spread of HIV Infection, Says APA Committee*, <http://www.apa.org/releases/sexeducation.html>, February 23, 2005.]

