

Let's Get REAL

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Abstract

A health educator takes a position on sexuality education advocacy. The Content of Federally Funded Abstinence-Only Education Programs report and REAL (Responsible Education About Life) are discussed.

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Health educators generally take enormous pride in providing accurate and comprehensive information to the public. We have been disheartened by the government's support for abstinence-only-until marriage sex education programs. We have registered our dismay over a shift in standards regarding accuracy, accountability and imposition of values. Many of us have protested in the limited avenues available: by writing letters requesting hearings, marching, and grumbling in public and private. Recently it seems as though we were plodding along a man that reminded us of Sisyphus. Now, thanks to the tireless work of Representatives Waxman and Lee and Senator Lautenberg, we can prevent the proverbial rock from rolling to the bottom of the mountain again.

Representative Waxman has provided a catalyst for this discussion by publishing a crucial report, *The Content of Federally Funded Abstinence-Only Education Programs*. The report documents misinformation and distortions included in these federally funded programs. This program is projected to be funded at \$170 million next year and has the potential to misinform hundreds of thousands of youth 9-18 years old. This misinformation is not without consequences. "Columbia University researchers found that although teenagers who take 'virginity pledges' may wait longer to initiate sexual activity, 88 percent eventually have premarital sex (Connolly, 2004)." Many of those

misinformed young people have been given reason to doubt the effectiveness of the condom and are at increased risk for pregnancy and contracting HIV/STD. Ignorance can result in many unintended consequences.

Representative Waxman and 19 other members of Congress have requested that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) review Health and Human Services' (HHS) processes for identifying the accuracy and effectiveness of "abstinence-only" education programs. Let us help make sure that the review takes place.

The growing neglect of science-based information in the development of policy and the delivery of services are thoroughly documented by Representative Waxman. Explore the *Politics and Science (2005)* web site to see the ubiquitous impact that this trend has on a wide array of issues including abstinence only sex education, the environment, prescription drugs, and the quality of drinking water. Take the time to thank Representative Waxman for his valuable service (Representative Henry Waxman, 2005).

REAL (Responsible Education About Life) is the re-emergence of the Family Life Education Act. Representative Barbara Lee (D. CA.) and Senator Lautenberg (D. N.J.) have introduced this bill which requests \$206 million dollars for abstinence-plus education. These programs combine abstinence information with science-

based information about contraception and HIV/STDs. For those educators who work with and for youth, encourage youth to advocate for access to accurate information and support REAL. Please contact your representative

(<http://www.house.gov.htm>) to support this measure that will provide funds to inform the nation's youth about sexual health issues in order to empower their decision making skills.

References

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