

Adoptation
 Alliance of Community Assistance
 Ministries of Greater Houston (ACAM)
 Alliance Adolescent & Children's
 Services
 Arrow Child and Family Ministries
 Bering Omega Community Services
 Care for Elders
 Career and Recovery Resources, Inc.
 Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of
 Galveston-Houston
 ChildBuilders
 CHILDREN AT RISK
 Children's Defense Fund
 Coalition for Behavioral Health Services
 Coalition for the Homeless of
 Houston/Harris Co., Inc.
 Collaborative for Children
 Communities In Schools
 Community Family Centers
 Covenant House of Texas
 DePelchin Children's Center
 Family Services of Greater Houston
 Fort Bend Regional Council on
 Substance Abuse, Inc.
 Gateway to Care
 Good Neighbor Healthcare Center
 Gulf Coast CHIP Coalition
 Harris County Child Abuse Task Force
 Harris County Healthcare Alliance
 Healthcare for the Homeless-Houston
 Houston Area Association for the
 Education of Young Children
 Houston Area Women's Center
 Houston Food Bank
 Houston Area Immunization Registry
 IntraCare Hospitals
 Jewish Family Service
 Jewish Federation of Greater Houston
 Justice for Children
 League of Women Voters Houston
 Legacy Community Health
 Services, Inc.
 Memorial Hermann Healthcare System
 Mental Health America
 of Greater Houston
 NAMI Metropolitan Houston
 NAMI West Houston, Inc.
 Neighborhood Centers, Inc.
 Neuhaus Education Center
 Northwest Assistance Ministries
 Planned Parenthood of Houston
 and Southeast Texas, Inc.
 Prepared 4 Life
 San Jose Clinic
 SEARCH
 South County Community Clinic,
 DBA The Community Clinic
 Spaulding for Children
 St. Luke's Episcopal Health System
 Systems of Hope
 Texans Together Education Fund
 Texas Children's Hospital
 The Arc of Greater Houston
 The Methodist Hospital System
 The Network of Behavioral
 Health Providers
 United Way of Greater Houston
 Wesley Community Center
 YMCA of Greater Houston
 YWCA of Greater Houston



Public Education: Reducing Texas Teen Birth Rate & Drop Out Rate by Providing Comprehensive Sex Education & Family Life Education

Position Statement Approved by One Voice: November 14, 2008

Issue/Concern: Becoming a parent while still in school is a significant factor in dropping out for both male and female students. Teen parenthood is also associated with poverty, child maltreatment and welfare dependence. The CDC recently found that 1 in 4 teen girls age 14-19 have a sexually transmitted disease. Untreated STDs may lead to serious reproductive health problems such as infertility and cervical cancer.

Texas receives more federal funding for abstinence-only until marriage programs than any other state while ranking highest in the nation for teen births and repeat teen births. Studies show that abstinence-only programs do not reduce the number of teen pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections. Medically accurate, age appropriate programs, however, help young people delay sexual activity.¹ Currently, the Education Code appropriately requires schools to emphasize abstinence when teaching human sexuality curriculum. However, it is important to also equip young people with medically accurate, age appropriate information that will help them avoid unintended pregnancies, remain free of sexually transmitted diseases, and make responsible, informed decisions throughout their lives. Furthermore, young people need knowledge of healthy relationships, child development, and parenting skills that will help them make wise choices, as well as break the cycles of teen pregnancy and child abuse.

Specific Policy Recommendation(s):

- ★ While continuing to emphasize abstinence from sexual activity as the standard for behavior in §28.004 of the Education Code, expand the Code to require that human sexuality health information be provided including preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, in a format that is age appropriate and medically accurate.
- ★ Expand §28.002 of the Education Code to include professional, research-based curricula in healthy relationships, child development, and parenting skills for students, beginning in middle school.

How does this issue/recommendation relate to prevention and early intervention or maximizing federal funds for health and human services? Analysis from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unintended Pregnancy shows that teen childbearing cost Texas taxpayers at least \$1 billion in 2004. Most of these costs are associated with the negative consequences for the children of teen mothers including \$165 million of public health care; \$83 million for child welfare; \$161 million for incarcerations; and \$349 million in lost tax revenue, due to decreased earnings and spending.

Limited educational achievement combined with low basic skills and limited job experience means fewer employment opportunities and lower wages for teenage mothers. In addition, teenage mothers have more children on average and are less likely to be married than women who delay childbearing. Although a good start, the singular curriculum mandated by §28.002 of the Education Code focuses primarily on the legal responsibilities of fatherhood and marriage. By mandating only one curriculum be taught in high school health, no room is left for teaching alternative district-approved relationship and parenting programs that focus on how to prevent unhealthy teen relationships and premature parenting.

Similarly, teaching these skills at earlier grades is not covered by the Code. Between 2000 and 2003, 10- to 12-year-olds made up 5.65% of pregnant teenagers (17 and under) in Texas.² This means that over 5% of teen pregnancies occur before teenagers ever enter a high school health class. To truly reduce teen pregnancy and child abuse, these skills must be taught at younger ages, as more than one-third of Texas ninth graders have had sex, and a significant percentage of them before age 13.²

Emphasis and required outcomes of medically accurate, age appropriate sexual and family life health education should be on reducing the high incidence of teen birth rates and secondary teen birth rates thereby increasing the graduation rate for teens.

One Voice: A Collaborative for Health and Human Services is a network of diverse community organizations that advocates for public policy to meet the health and human service needs in Texas.

www.onevoicehouston.org

Supporting Facts/Research/Resources:

- ★ Texas ranks highest in teen birth rate and repeat birth rate in the country.
- ★ 68% of teen mothers fail to get a high school diploma.
- ★ From 1991-2004 there were 745,000 births to teens in Texas costing taxpayers \$15.1 billion.
- ★ 90% of Texans support age appropriate, medically accurate sex education that includes information on abstinence, birth control, and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV.³
- ★ America's leading medical and public health experts support medically accurate sex education.⁴

1 National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unintended Pregnancy

2 CDC YRBSS, 2007

3 2004 Scripps Howard Poll

4 American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Nurses Association, and the Society of Adolescent Medicine, and the American Public Health Association

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