

Put Prevention First

SUPPORT Parents Right to Know HB 283 Delegate Toscano

The Problem: Most parents (82%) want teens to receive medically-accurate, comprehensive sexuality education that includes abstinence, contraception and disease prevention, but a 2006 survey conducted by the Virginia Department of Education found that 14% of local school districts' Family Life Education programs are abstinence-only. In these localities, when pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections are presented, abstinence is the only form of prevention discussed.^{1, 2}

- Virginia's Family Life Education Guidelines were developed by the Board of Education with input from public school staff (including administrators and teachers), state agencies, parent groups, and not-for-profit organizations that provide family life services.
- The guidelines include learning objectives about abstinence, contraception and disease prevention.
- The guidelines are not mandated. School divisions are allowed to use the state-approved Standards of Learning objectives or develop their own learner objectives.
- The guidelines direct school divisions to establish an opt-out procedure to ensure communication with the parent or guardian and provide opportunity for students to be excused from all or part of the program.
- Section § 22.1-207.2 of the Code of Virginia directs each school division to develop a summary of the Family Life Education curriculum, but it is only distributed upon request of a parent or guardian.

The Solution: Amend § 22.1-207.2 of the Code of Virginia to require school districts to notify parents and distribute the summary of their Family Life Education program before instruction begins to encourage parental guidance and involvement.

Parent-teen communication can strengthen Family Life Education.

- Positive communication between parents and children helps young people make healthy decisions about sex, yet 77% of teens say they don't talk to their parents about sex because they don't know how to bring it up.³
- Research has proven that comprehensive sex education does not increase or encourage sexual activity and teens whose parents talk with them about sex are more likely to wait longer before they have sex, and to use birth control or protection when they do.⁴

Teens need responsible sources of medically-accurate information, not incorrect information from television and other teens.

- When kids enter the teen years, friends and television/movies become much more dominant influences in their lives.⁵
- Teens list parents as one of the sources they rely on most for information about pregnancy and birth control, as well as teachers, school nurses, and sex education classes.⁶
- Parents have a critical role in guiding students through Family Life Education and providing additional information and support.

¹ NPR/Kaiser/ Harvard/ 2004 Poll Sex Education in America

² Virginia Board of Education. *Report on Survey of Family Life Education Programs*. Senate Document No. 7, 2007.

³ Kaiser Family Foundation, Seventeen. *Teens and Sexual Health Communication*. Menlo Park, CA: The Foundation, 2002.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Kaiser Family Foundation, Children Now. *Talking with Kids about Tough Issues: A National Survey of Parents and Kids*. Menlo Park, CA: The Foundation, 1999.

⁶ Kaiser Family Foundation. *The Kaiser Family Foundation Survey on Teens and Sex: What They Say Teens Today Need to Know, And Who They Listen To*. Menlo Park, CA: The Foundation, 1996.