

TEACHING FEAR:

The Religious Right's Campaign Against Sexuality Education

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I. INTRODUCTION

Sexuality education has been one of the primary sources of controversy in the public schools for almost thirty years. The debate over this issue is particularly heated now, in a time when teen pregnancy rates are persistently high and the HIV/AIDS epidemic is having a devastating impact on young people. This debate centers on one crucial question: whether providing young people with full and accurate information makes them more or less likely to engage in sexual activity.

For decades, national Religious Right political groups have fanned the flames of this debate by urging opposition to comprehensive sexuality education. Thwarted in that approach, these groups have developed a new strategy: developing and marketing curricula that promote sectarian beliefs, censor information on contraception and disease prevention, and limit options to one: abstaining from all sexual activity until marriage.

Sexuality education controversies have torn communities apart, as activists working with Religious Right political organizations have pressured school boards to adopt these fear-based curricula, and have polarized parents, teachers, students and other community members. In some communities, the controversy has landed in the courts; in others it has continued for months and sometimes years, played out in angry, chaotic school board meetings in rooms filled with hundreds of people, and in letters-to-the-editor filled with angry invective. The victims in these battles are inevitably students caught in the crossfire, prevented from getting the information they need to save their lives.

Religious Right political groups have been remarkably successful at promoting a pernicious myth: that comprehensive sexuality education programs do not discuss abstinence, but simply disseminate information on how to have sex. The truth is that abstinence is taught -- is, in fact, **emphasized** -- in comprehensive sexuality education curricula. These programs stress abstinence and make clear to students that it is the only way to guarantee that they will not contract a sexually transmitted disease or become pregnant. However, the goal of comprehensive sexuality education is to prepare students to be sexually healthy adults, so the programs also include instruction on contraception and disease prevention, as well as material on decision-making, interpersonal skills, and responsible sexual behavior. The authors of comprehensive programs, as well as sexuality educators, know that it would be irresponsible to omit such instruction.

Studies of the effects of sexuality education curricula support that viewpoint. As outlined in detail in Section VI below, data show that comprehensive programs increase use of contraception and delay the age at which first intercourse occurs. Conversely, the data hailed by the Right to promote their fear-based programs are flawed by suspect methodology and do not support the claims made by proponents that they are effective in changing behavior. Many physicians and other authorities, including the Surgeon General, have been critical of the abstinence-only curricula and strongly supportive of comprehensive sexuality education.

So, the controversy continues. In response to political pressures, many communities have adopted fear-based, abstinence-only programs. Many more are now being subjected to such pressure tactics. To an alarming extent, opponents of comprehensive sexuality education have

succeeded in distorting the facts and playing on parents' fears and anxieties about their children's sexuality.

School boards, their sexuality education review committees, teachers, administrators and parents are all struggling to make the right decisions on this life-and-death education issue. This report tells the story of how scare tactics used by some Religious Right political organizations have made those important decisions much more difficult.

II. RELIGIOUS RIGHT OPPOSITION TO SEXUALITY EDUCATION

A. Early Opposition

Opposition to sexuality education goes back as far as the 1960s. And while the goal of censoring comprehensive sexuality education has remained constant, the approach and rhetoric have evolved over the years. From the late 1960s until the early 1980s, critics of sexuality education focused their efforts on attacking **all** such programs in the public schools, with the goal of removing them from the curriculum.

In the earliest challenges, political groups called the programs "smut," "immoral," and "destructive of religious belief." The Christian Crusade published a pamphlet titled "Is the Little Red School House the Place to Teach Raw Sex?" The John Birch Society went so far as to claim that sexuality education was a "filthy Communist plot." Other charges aimed at sexuality education: its purpose was to "undermine the morals of American youth"; it promoted pornography, should not be taught without also teaching religious morality, and such instruction should be left to the family.

These accusations resulted in some successes in the curtailment of sex education programs in the late 1960s. During that period, the National Education Association documented 13 states in which communities restricted their sex education programs in response to pressure, 20 state legislatures that considered bills investigating or restricting sex education programs, six states in which groups used the legal system to restrict sex education, and two state boards of education that opposed sex education materials.

In the late 1970s, groups opposed to sexuality education shifted to a more modulated opposition, led by Phyllis Schlafly and her Eagle Forum. Rather than citing it as a Communist plot to take over young American minds, Schlafly's more down-to-earth rhetoric charged that sexuality education encouraged sexual activity, promoted teenage pregnancy, advocated abortion, and lacked a moral base. For example, in 1981 she wrote in her monthly newsletter:

The major goal of nearly all sex education curricula being taught in the schools is to teach teenagers (and sometimes children) how to enjoy fornication without having a baby and without feeling guilty. This goal explains why the courses promote an acceptance of sexual behavior that does not produce a baby, such as homosexuality and masturbation. This goal explains why they encourage abortions and all varieties of contraception....This is why the courses shred [sic] the girls of their natural modesty....This is why they censor out from sex education courses both moral training and the truth about the physical and psychological penalties for sin.

In 1984, Schlafly took yet another tack, claiming erroneously that sexuality education programs violated the Hatch Amendment, which prohibits schools from doing psychological testing of students or using experimental materials in federally funded programs without parental consent. Schlafly stated that, "All across the country, classroom courses masquerading as sex education are in fact violating the letter and spirit of the law." (Ironically, that is the very charge now being levelled against the abstinence-only programs that Schlafly so strongly supports.)

In addition to Phyllis Schlafly and Eagle Forum, other groups pushing for the removal of sexuality education from public schools in the early 1980s were Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority and Beverly LaHaye's Concerned Women for America (CWA).

The Moral Majority pushed to ban sex education programs in public schools if the programs did not require parental consent. The group also opposed sex education programs "which reject Judeo-Christian rules" or which hint at "liberal sex education."

CWA's LaHaye wrote this of sex education: "Something must be done to stop it and now, before it's too late!" She went on to say, "My major concern about the teaching of sex education in the public schools is that it is taught humanistically, without traditional moral values and respect for social norms." In a direct mail letter, LaHaye wrote, "We just cannot go on allowing the values of millions of young people to be shaped and corrupted by the humanistic sex education programs now in the public schools."

B. Lack of Success

Despite their rhetoric, by the 1980s these new political groups were experiencing little success in achieving the outright removal of sexuality education programs from public schools. Indeed, throughout the early to mid-1980s, the number of public school students receiving some form of sexuality education rose. In 1983, *The Washington Post* reported, "The vociferous opposition to sex education spawned by fundamentalist and New Right groups in the 1970s and early 1980s...has been submerged by quiet, grassroots alliances of parents, educators, clergy and lay people who believe courses in human sexuality have a place in the schools."

A major factor in the proliferation of sexuality education programs was the overwhelming approval of such programs by the public, particularly parents. A national poll in 1981 showed 70 percent of parents favoring such programs in public schools. A 1985 poll showed 75 percent of adults approving of sexuality education in the public high schools, with 52 percent approving of such programs in grades 4 through 8. Indeed, the polling suggested that support for sexuality education was growing stronger. More respondents in the 1985 poll believed that programs should cover a broader range of topics than in the 1981 poll. Such topics include teaching about birth control, the biology of reproduction, the nature of sexual intercourse, and abortion.

But the most important factor in the Religious Right's failure was the proven effectiveness of sexuality education programs. A study conducted in the late 1970s and released in 1982, concluded: "Young women who have had sex education appear less likely than those who have not to become pregnant." The study, conducted by researchers at Johns Hopkins University and funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, also debunked the myth often repeated by sexuality education opponents that sexuality education leads to promiscuity. Investigators found no significant association between taking a course in sexuality education and being sexually active. A second, 1986 study also conducted by Johns Hopkins University researchers, revealed that sexuality education courses work to delay sexual activity among teenage girls and to decrease the rate of teenage pregnancies.

Around 1983, sexuality education underwent an important change that reflected the evolving needs of young people. Educators developed a comprehensive approach that includes such topics as family finances, parental roles, communication, contraception and prenatal care. These new courses, introduced first in city school systems, were not just purely informational "sex education" courses anymore, but Family Life Education, or Human Development programs. They emphasized the core values of self-esteem, self-awareness, responsibility, and aspirations. They also discussed such topics as gender differences and roles, love, morality, birth control, homosexuality, masturbation, and child abuse. The courses sought to bolster young people's "thinking," decision-making, and interpersonal skills.

C. The AIDS Epidemic and a Change in Tactics

In the mid-1980s, a new factor -- the AIDS epidemic -- irrevocably changed sexuality education and forced the Right once again to rethink its opposition strategies. The seriousness and potential magnitude of HIV/AIDS came to widespread public attention in October 1986 via a report by Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, titled the *Surgeon General's Report on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*. Among Religious Right political leaders, Koop had been a popular appointment to the post of Surgeon General primarily because of his strong anti-choice position. His opinions on sexuality education were not as popular among that constituency. His AIDS report, however, resulted in a broad political consensus that sexuality education has a place in the public schools, though disagreement persists on exactly what **type** of sexuality education is appropriate.

Koop's report radically shifted the terms of the sexuality education debate by advocating AIDS education beginning as early as the third grade. In the report, Koop became the first federal health official to advocate comprehensive AIDS and sexuality education in public schools. Said Koop, "There is now no doubt that we need sex education in schools and that it [should] include information on heterosexual and homosexual relationships. The need is critical and the price of neglect is high. The lives of our young people depend on our fulfilling our responsibility." Koop further states that, "The best protection against infection right now - barring abstinence - is use of a condom."

The release of Koop's report provided a significant boost for sexuality education. In November 1986, a *Time* magazine poll showed 86 percent of respondents agreeing that sexuality education should be taught in school. *Time* reported that this was "perhaps the highest number ever." The poll also showed that 89 percent of respondents approved of sexuality education courses that include birth control information for 12-year-old children. Also in November of 1986, the federal Centers for Disease Control sponsored a program to award \$10 million in that fiscal year to state education agencies to help them develop and introduce comprehensive HIV/AIDS, sex, and drug education courses -- the first government financing for HIV/AIDS education in public schools.

But the political consensus around HIV/AIDS education proved fragile. At the time of the report's release, Koop had forecast that "the appearance of AIDS could bring together diverse groups of parents and educators with opposing views on inclusion of sex education in the curricula." *The Washington Post* also editorialized, "It isn't often that Planned Parenthood and the Reagan administration see eye to eye, but a national crisis has brought them together on at least one subject: AIDS." Such optimism proved overblown, however, since there still was no true "common ground" on the issue of the content to be taught. In fact, two diametrically opposing "camps" emerged: those in favor of comprehensive sexuality education, and those favoring abstinence-only programs. One journalist wrote in 1986 after reading Koop's report, "The next controversies will break out between those who want to deliver a moralistic message and those who want a medical message - between no sex and 'safe' sex."

As a result of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and, to a lesser extent, increasing rates of teen pregnancy, opponents could no longer ignore the need for sexuality education and continue to oppose it outright. Yet the Right's only response was to increase its efforts to substitute abstinence-only curricula for comprehensive sexuality education.

III. THE ABSTINENCE-ONLY PROGRAMS

Abstinence is an important part of all sexuality education curricula, which teach that it provides the only 100 percent guarantee against pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Comprehensive programs, however, are designed to help young people become sexually healthy adults, and the curricula, therefore, include information on contraception and methods for preventing sexually transmitted diseases. Abstinence-only programs provide only the abstinence message, and censor out other vital, even life-saving information.

These fear-based curricula simply say to students "Say no or die." They condition students to associate sex with fear and death -- an association likely to color their feelings about sex into adulthood. Sexuality education was developed to aid students in developing healthy, mature, responsible attitudes about sex and all of its implications, including reproduction and disease prevention. The fear-based curricula promoted by Religious Right political leaders do exactly the opposite, by censoring many of the aspects of sex education curricula that are designed to promote those healthy and responsible attitudes, and by promulgating misleading and inaccurate information.

In addition to their shortcomings, these programs pose a potential constitutional issue for schools. Many of them use religious doctrine to promote the abstinence message -- a form of proselytizing that threatens to breach the separation of church and state.

The major abstinence-only programs are *Sex Respect*, *Facing Reality* and the Teen Aid programs. The story of their development, and the support they received from the Reagan administration, provides an excellent example of how determined the Religious Right can be when it is committed to a goal, and how influential it can be in shaping public education policy.

A. Sex Respect

The fear-based curriculum, *Sex Respect*, was developed by a Glenview, Illinois organization called the Committee on the Status of Women. This conservative, anti-choice organization was originally founded in 1975 by anti-Equal Rights Amendment activist Phyllis Schlafly, initially to "advocate for women's rights." Kathleen Sullivan, executive director of the Committee since shortly after its conception, is a vocal anti-choice activist. In 1992 and 1994, she made federal funding of abstinence education the centerpiece of her unsuccessful challenges to U.S. Representative John Porter for the Republican nomination in Illinois' 10th congressional district.

The curriculum *Sex Respect*, for use in grades 7-9, was written by Coleen Kelly Mast in 1983. In 1990, Mast developed *Facing Reality*, the counterpart curriculum for use in high school. Mast is also the author of *Love and Life: A Christian Sexual Morality Guide for Teens*, and features prominently in *The Chastity Challenge*, a Bible-based film for teens. She and her husband operate the for-profit organization Respect, Inc. to promote and distribute *Sex Respect*.

Sex Respect and *Facing Reality* send very hostile and critical messages to young people. The programs teach students that pre-marital sexual behavior of any kind will have extremely negative consequences ranging from selfish behavior to death. They use scare tactics, promote the message that birth control does not work, offer no information on sexual orientation (except common stereotypes of lesbians and gay men), and reflect a sexist, racist and classist bias. For example, out of thirty-nine illustrations of people in *Sex Respect*, only eight include people of color; in *Facing Reality*, only three illustrations show men and women of different races interacting. Ironically, *Sex Respect* has been implemented in school systems across the country that have a high percentage of economically disadvantaged and minority students. Reflecting the organization's racial insensitivity, Executive Director Sullivan has made such statements as "[T]he black community...[is] not going to learn to punch the time clock and to be there on time and produce a day's work if they can't even control their own emotions in the important area of sexuality."

Finally, the programs are filled with medical misinformation. For example, in a film, "No Second Chance," produced for use in the *Sex Respect* program, the following dialogue takes place in a sex education classroom:

Student (to nurse-instructor in class discussion): What if I want to have sex before I get married?
Teacher: Well, I guess you'll just have to be prepared to die. And you'll probably take with you your spouse and one or more of your children.

The curriculum also relies on religious doctrine to promote the abstinence message, inappropriately defining religion for a diverse student population. For example, these excerpts from *Sex Respect*:

Spiritual values are an important aspect of human sexuality.

[N]o one can deny that nature is making some kind of a comment on sexual behavior through the AIDS and herpes epidemics.

Spiritually: Attend worship services regularly, seek out friends who have strong moral values, develop a love for other people and a hunger for truth.

In spite of their obvious flaws, however, these programs have been proposed and adopted in a growing number of communities.

B. Teen Aid

The other leading abstinence-only curricula are produced by Teen Aid, Inc., founded in 1981 on the belief that avoidance of sexual activity and strong family ties provide teens with necessary stability and with increased opportunities for the future. LeAnna Benn is the executive director of Teen Aid, Inc., a Spokane, Washington-based organization that developed and now promotes *Me, My World, My Future*, a fear-based sex education program for students in grades 7-9. Benn developed and wrote this Teen Aid curriculum in 1981 with teacher, Nancy Roach. Benn operates Teen Aid, Inc. under the assumption that "all the kids can succeed at abstinence and [we will] deal with individual cases if they can't," ignoring the fact that in an age of HIV/AIDS, an individual case of "failed abstinence" can prove fatal. Benn believes contraceptives should not be discussed because, "you undo the abstinence message if you talk about contraception in the classroom."

The Teen Aid curriculum for students in high school, *Sexuality, Commitment and Family*, was written by Nancy Roach and Steve Potter. In a Teen Aid report, Potter and Roach wrote, "Many of the programs offered for adolescents suggest that sex is simply a feeling and that the sex act in no way has any moral implications; i.e., to be free of all feelings of guilt is to be sexually normal."

The Teen Aid programs take a heavy-handed approach, using scare tactics and providing students with information on only the negative consequences of sexual behavior. For example, they cite the following as results of sexual activity: loss of reputation, limitations in dating/marriage choices, difficulty in sexual adjustment and confusion regarding personal value. Like *Sex Respect* and *Facing Reality*, the curricula are filled with sexist bias, religious bias and racist and classist comments. For example, the text editorializes against marriages across "class" boundaries:

Sociologists have found that when similar economic backgrounds ('social class') and educational levels are disregarded by couples, marriage adjustment is very difficult. Different cultural backgrounds are also hurdles too high for some couples to negotiate.

The curricula provide no information on sexual orientation, and depict non-traditional families in a negative light.

C. Abstinence-only Curricula and State Law

The issue of accuracy and thoroughness also poses a legal problem for abstinence-only programs. Statutes in several states require that sex education and HIV/AIDS education programs provide full and accurate information about sexuality, reproduction, contraception and disease prevention. For example, Oregon law includes the following:

[A]bstinence shall not be taught to the exclusion of other material and instruction on contraceptive and disease reduction measures.

Or. Rev. Stat. § 336.455(1)(c)

Florida has a similar provision:

In order that children make informed and constructive decisions about their lives, complete and accurate comprehensive health education shall be made available to all young people.

Fla. Stat. § 233.067(c)(9)

The abstinence-only programs, by definition, censor out the very types of information required in these statutes. Their authors have censored information about the various methods of birth control, the ways to lower the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and all discussion of how teens who are sexually active can practice responsible sexual behavior. Even in those states that do not explicitly require certain information to be included in sexuality education, students (and approximately 55 percent of students between 15-19 are sexually active according to current data) are being deprived of vital, life-saving information when sexuality education is censored by the use of an abstinence-only program.

D. Government Funding

Due in large part to the conservative policies of the Reagan Administration, the developers of *Sex Respect*, *Facing Reality*, the Teen Aid programs and several other abstinence-only programs were aided by large federal grants. During the Reagan years, the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs in the Department of Health and Human Services administered hundreds of thousands of dollars in grant funds to the developers of abstinence-only programs. The funds were authorized by the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA) and represented unprecedented government support for what many regarded as the development of religious materials.

The Committee on the Status of Women was aided in its development of *Sex Respect* by a number of grants. Among them, an initial grant of \$391,000 was awarded in 1985, designated as support for development of a pilot project for middle school students in Illinois and five other midwestern states. That same year the committee obtained a five-year grant to study the effectiveness of *Sex Respect*. In 1990, the Committee was awarded a three-year grant of over \$350,000 to develop *Facing Reality*. In addition, in 1988, the U.S. Department of Education replaced a Red Cross video with a *Sex Respect* video on its list of recommended HIV/AIDS education resources, potentially increasing the Committee's sales of the video.

The Committee on the Status of Women was also the recipient of major funding from the State of Illinois, though not without surrounding controversy. The Committee has been accused of using its political muscle to make financial gains. According to the *Chicago Reporter*, the Committee lobbied the governor of Illinois to avoid state scrutiny of its program and to get funding from the governor-appointed program "Parents Too Soon." Illinois state representative Penny Pullen (R-Park Ridge), a past Committee Vice President and current board member, cosponsored legislation in 1989 that would require abstinence to be part of a school's sex education curriculum. After the law's enactment, *Sex Respect* received at least 13 state contracts worth more than \$700,000. Pullen received over \$8,000 in campaign contributions from Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum between 1982-1991.

The state and federal money received by the Committee was integral to the existence of *Sex Respect*. A writer for the *Conservative Digest* said:

...the Adolescent Family Life Act was written expressly for the purpose of diverting [federal] money that would otherwise go to Planned Parenthood into groups with traditional values. That noble purpose has certainly been fulfilled here. And, if it hadn't been for the seed money provided by the government, *Sex Respect* might still be just an idea sitting in a graduate student's thesis.

The writer also called *Sex Respect* "a genuine success story for conservatives, for the American people, and for the Reagan Administration."

The Teen Aid programs were also developed with the assistance of federal funding under the Adolescent Family Life Act, and Teen Aid, Inc. has donated profits from sales of its materials to a Spokane, Washington anti-abortion crisis pregnancy center for pregnant teens.

The government funding of abstinence-only programs was controversial almost from the beginning. It was challenged in court in a case brought in 1983. A federal district court ruled that the funding of abstinence-only programs constituted support for religious activity and was unconstitutional on its face. That decision was overturned by the Supreme Court, but even that Court reluctantly admitted that the program administering AFLA funds had provided support for religious activity. The case was sent back to the lower court for trial. As the lawyers representing plaintiffs in the case conducted depositions in preparation for trial, they discovered more evidence of religious activity in the development and promotion of federally funded abstinence-only programs. Often, when presented with such evidence, the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs would defund the program in question. The case was settled in 1993 and among the terms of the settlement were requirements that programs funded by OAPP must be medically accurate and must contain no religious references.

The Clinton budget proposal now pending before Congress would eliminate funding for Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs. The administration chose instead to channel that funding into an Office of Adolescent Health, which would cover not only sexuality programs, but other teen health concerns such as drug use and smoking. It is likely that this move will be the subject of intense debate in the Congress, with proponents of federal funding for abstinence-only programs enlisting their friends in the House and Senate to fight for restored funding.

IV. LOCAL SEXUALITY EDUCATION CONTROVERSIES

There are no complete and reliable data available on the extent to which abstinence-only programs are in use across the nation. The distributors of the Teen Aid programs and *Sex Respect* decline to provide information on how many districts are using their programs. Various press reports have cited unattributed estimates of their use in from 1,500 to 2,400 schools. It is apparent, however, that when there is strong Religious Right political influence on a school board or in a community, the use of a fear-based sexuality education curriculum will almost always be proposed, and often will be adopted. The following are some profiles of communities where these programs have been proposed and/or adopted.

VISTA, CALIFORNIA

The growing political strength of the Religious Right on the local school board has led to a vigorous debate about sexuality education in this community. In November 1992, John Tyndall and Joyce Lee were elected to the Vista Unified School District governing board, joining 1990-elected board member, Deidre Holliday, to form a Religious Right-backed majority on the five-member board. Both Tyndall and Lee were elected with the help of the Christian Voters League and were endorsed by the California Pro-Life Council and the *Southern California Christian Times*. Tyndall works for the Institute for Creation Research, a conservative "think tank" that advocates the teaching of Creationism as science.

In March of this year, the board voted 3-2 to adopt *Sex Respect* for 7th grade students. *Sex Respect* will replace *Values and Choices*, a comprehensive sexuality education course that has been in use in Vista since 1988. Before deciding to adopt *Sex Respect*, the board appointed a group of parents to an *ad hoc* committee, the Family Life Parent Advisory Committee, with the charge of reviewing *Values and Choices* and *Sex Respect*. According to Linda Rhoades, a moderate school board member, the parents' committee was "stacked," with conservative Christians comprising a 9-6 majority. As anticipated, the committee wrote in its majority report, "We don't believe *Values and Choices* stresses abstinence enough..." Vice chair of the parents' committee, Mark Ziminsky, said children are not "the ones to make decisions about their sex lives."

Prior to the board's adoption of *Sex Respect*, the district's attorney, William Wood Merrill, warned in a memorandum to Vista's Associate Superintendent of potential legal problems with using the abstinence-only curriculum. His legal analysis of *Sex Respect* raised serious questions about whether it complies with state requirements. Merrill planned to do a more detailed analysis of the problems with *Sex Respect*, but the board disregarded his opinion, adopted the curriculum, and voted to hire a new attorney, David Llewellyn, the director of the Western Center for Law and Religious Freedom (WCLRF), which has a long track record of right-wing activism. The board directed Llewellyn to spend a maximum of ten hours to bring *Sex Respect* into compliance with the California Education Code.

In late April, Llewellyn provided an analysis of *Sex Respect* in which he concluded that "**with** the use of appropriate supplementary materials. . . **with** some modifications of the texts. . . and **with** proper assurances and confirmation of the accuracy of the questioned aspects of the curriculum," *Sex Respect* "appears to comply" with California law. (emphasis added) In May, the board accepted Llewellyn's recommendations for modifications.

HEMET, CALIFORNIA

In this California community, a parent has persisted in her challenge to an abstinence-only curriculum, in spite of an unsympathetic school board. *Sex Respect* was introduced in Hemet in 1989 by Bonnie Park, a teacher in the Acacia Middle School, who has been a member of the school board since 1990. No formal procedure was followed, nor did the school board adopt the curriculum. A Hemet parent, Maureen Bryan, filed a complaint with the Hemet Unified School District in March 1993, requesting that *Sex Respect* be removed. Bryan had taken her son out of the program in 1992, saying the curriculum is "utterly inappropriate because of its religious bias, its overt counseling against abortion and its perpetuation of stereotypes that don't belong in a public environment." She identified a number of the provisions of the California Education Code she believed *Sex Respect* violated. She also cited a Shreveport, Louisiana court decision against *Sex Respect* (see discussion of this lawsuit below). Bonnie Park countered with the assertion that opponents of the curriculum were "on a mission to get rid of *Sex Respect* because it isn't politically correct. It doesn't promote the safe-sex agenda...the homosexual agenda."

While the school district's attorney, Karen Gilyard, has conceded that *Sex Respect* violates California's Education Code and may encroach on the separation of church and state, she has also cited a Code provision allowing a school district to continue to use instructional materials acquired "in good faith" that are subsequently found to be in violation of the Code. This provision is to apply only when alternative material cannot be found immediately, and only has effect for the duration of that school year. "Accordingly," wrote Gilyard, "the 1990 edition of the *Sex Respect* curriculum should only be used for the 1993-94 academic year." In December 1993, the board voted to continue teaching *Sex Respect* for the remainder of the 1993-94 school year.

In January 1994, Bryan filed a written appeal with the school board, asking that *Sex Respect* be removed from the schools immediately, arguing that an alternative curriculum from the Riverside County Health Department was available and had been approved by Hemet in 1990. In February,

by a vote of 4-3, the board adopted a new sex education policy, requiring an advisory committee to develop a curriculum for the next school year. To date, the board has not taken action on the curriculum proposed by the committee. Bonnie Park has continued to advocate on behalf of *Sex Respect*. The board has refused to state officially (as Maureen Bryan has requested) that *Sex Respect* will not be used after this year.

LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA

In the Lake County school district in Tavares, Florida, where those affiliated with the Religious Right have held a majority on the school board since 1992, there is an attempt to replace the current sexuality education curriculum for grades 9-12 with either Teen Aid's *Sexuality, Commitment and Family* or *Facing Reality*, the high school counterpart to *Sex Respect*.

The board's links with national Religious Right organizations are overt: two of the board members belong to Citizens for Excellence in Education; the board's chairwoman works for Concerned Women for America of Florida; and Christian Coalition voter guides helped elect some of the current office-holders. Since the 1992 election, the board has pursued an active political agenda, voting to replace the school's attorney with a conservative state senator, cutting back the district's Head Start program, voting to teach that American culture is superior to all others, and eliminating a sexuality education program for mentally handicapped students.

According to a district employee, in October 1993, the board voted to disband the district's advisory committee on sex education in order to appoint a new committee with "similar views to the Board's." The 15-member committee, a group of parents and teachers that work to develop sexuality education curricula, had been in existence since a 1980 referendum when Lake County citizens mandated that sexuality education be taught in the public schools. Not surprisingly, the new advisory committee "has problems" with the school's current 9-12 curriculum, *Sexuality: A Responsible Approach*, and a supplemental HIV/AIDS education pamphlet.

The new advisory committee is now in the process of looking at *Facing Reality* and the Teen Aid program, *Sexuality, Commitment and Family*. Focus on the Family, a large national Religious Right organization, sent the committee articles and other materials that recommended the Teen Aid program. If the committee approves one of the curricula, it will then go to the board for a vote, which likely will result in adoption of an abstinence-only program. In the meantime, one board member suggested that the current 9-12 program be "put on the backburner" for the rest of the semester until they adopt a new curriculum. This proposal to remove sexuality education altogether was not acted on, since Florida state law mandates that HIV/AIDS education be taught in high schools.

In two communities, the sexuality education debate has landed in the courts:

SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA

A group of citizens in Shreveport have mounted a successful court challenge to abstinence-only programs. The controversy began in September of 1992, when the Caddo Parish school board in Shreveport voted 7-5 to adopt the fear-based abstinence-only curricula, *Sex Respect* and *Facing Reality*. Prior to that vote, the district was using a curriculum developed by a local university that included information about HIV/AIDS and contraception.

The use of *Sex Respect* and *Facing Reality* was challenged by a group of Caddo Parish residents, self described as "young, old, white, black, Jewish, Christian, agnostic, divorced, married, single, rich, poor, straight, gay, Republican, Democrat and independent citizens of

Caddo Parish," who filed suit in November 1992. The plaintiffs made several charges: first, that the curricula are filled with inaccurate medical statements and omissions regarding condoms, pregnancy, contraception and sexually transmitted diseases; second, that they violate Louisiana state law by including religious references; third, that they promote stereotypes; and finally, that they discriminate on the basis of race, culture and economic status.

The distributors of the curricula, Kathleen Sullivan's Committee on the Status of Women, intervened in the lawsuit. Sullivan said, "It's censorship, clear and simple...They will go into court and defend all the very vulgar trash material...and spend so much time and effort trying to get rid of a simple good health message." A similar opinion was heard from Phyllis Schlafly, whose Eagle Forum has long encouraged its members to press for removal from schools of materials deemed "unsuitable." But in this case, Schlafly said, "Censorship is alive and kicking in America. It has reared its ugly head in a courtroom in Shreveport, Louisiana..." She accused those who oppose the curricula of having "a financial interest in a promiscuous lifestyle..."

In March 1993, *Sex Respect* and *Facing Reality* were found by the court to violate Louisiana law in that they taught specific religious beliefs and contained medically inaccurate information. After the judge allowed the district to continue using the curricula with the offending passages blacked out, he learned that not all passages had been deleted, and that students were able to read the ones that had been, because the school district had not effectively blacked them out. The judge subsequently held the school district in contempt of court. The school board appealed both the judgment against the curricula and the contempt ruling. In late March of this year, an appellate court reversed the contempt ruling, but affirmed the substance of the judgment against *Sex Respect*.

JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

The Duval County school board's decision to adopt an abstinence-only curriculum has led to a legal clash involving national organizations. In 1990, the school board voted 4-3 to adopt the Teen Aid curriculum, *Me, My World, My Future*, a course for the 7th grade, rather than a comprehensive sexuality education program. By mid-1992, the Duval County school board had spent \$92,000 on the curriculum, even though many in the community argued that it does not comply with Florida state law because it promotes a sectarian viewpoint and contains inadequate and inaccurate information.

In May 1992, Planned Parenthood and six Jacksonville families filed suit against the Duval County school board, challenging its use of the Teen Aid curriculum. Linda Lanier, Executive Director of Planned Parenthood of Northeast Florida, argued that, "Teen Aid is factually and medically inaccurate, incomplete, gender-biased, racially biased and presents one sectarian viewpoint." Nonetheless, the district has continued to use the Teen Aid curriculum while the lawsuit is pending.

Teen Aid, Inc. was allowed to intervene and become a party in the lawsuit. A number of Religious Right groups also came to the defense of the school board and the Teen Aid program. Jay Sekulow, primary attorney with the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), the legal arm of televangelist Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, has been involved in the lawsuit, advising the school board and Teen Aid, Inc. at the ACLJ's expense. Pat Robertson also went to Jacksonville to help the Christian Coalition of Duval County raise money for defense of the lawsuit.

In preparation for trial, lawyers are now conducting depositions of potential witnesses. Upcoming school board elections in Duval County could change the make-up of the board, which might in turn result in a change in the sexuality education policy.

V. NATIONAL GROUPS LEADING THE CHARGE AGAINST SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Religious Right political attacks on comprehensive sexuality education represent only one element of the movement's challenge to public schools. This larger anti-public education agenda includes opposition to such widespread programs as multicultural curricula, standardized testing, self esteem programs, and educational reforms. In addition, national Religious Right political groups have their own pro-active goals for the schools, including organized school prayer, and vouchers that allow parents to get public funding to send their children to private schools. These organizations are frequently involved in attempts to censor school books and materials for religious or ideological reasons. And, most significantly, they are gaining control of local school boards around the country, often using "stealth" campaigns to hide their candidates' true affiliation or views.

While it is only one piece of the puzzle, the assault on sexuality education has grown to constitute a central and requisite component of the Right's overall attack on public schools. These groups have devoted considerable time, energy and resources to defeating comprehensive programs. They have been somewhat successful in getting programs such as *Sex Respect* and the Teen Aid programs adopted in schools around the country, particularly, as noted above, in schools where they hold a majority on the school board.

Pat Robertson, founder of the Chesapeake, Virginia-based Christian Coalition, sums up the Right's larger vision of a liberal transformation of society:

The school authorities are putting the entire weight of the government in favor of more premarital sex...That is the absolute game plan of the ultra-liberal radical left. They have a game plan to desensitize children to this entire thing...They say, do everything you can do, everything you can possibly get away with, boys with boys, boys with girls, girls with girls, girls with boys, whatever, as much as you can, and if you have a baby, kill it. I mean, that's the whole concept of the radical left. It is the most bizarre thing. But the goal is to undermine society.

Among the many political groups that are working to undermine sexuality education, four national organizations stand out. These groups, Eagle Forum, Focus on the Family, Concerned Women for America and Citizens for Excellence in Education, are making an aggressive effort to publicize, market, and implement abstinence-only programs around the country.

EAGLE FORUM

Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum continues to be one of the most vocal opponents of comprehensive sexuality education and one of the strongest advocates for abstinence-only programs. Founded in 1972 in Alton, Illinois, Eagle Forum has opposed the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion rights, funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, federal support for daycare and family leave, HIV/AIDS education, and self-esteem programs in public schools.

Eagle Forum characterizes opponents of abstinence-only curricula as "ACLU-type[s]." It further alleges that groups like Planned Parenthood know that abstinence courses are successful, but ignore this proof because it is a threat to their livelihood, a reference to that organization's abortion-related services.

After lending her support to the development of programs such as *Sex Respect* and the Teen Aid curricula, Schlafly worked to implement these fear-based programs in schools around the country. In the June 1986 issue of *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, she introduced her support for a "new course," *Sex Respect*, that teaches teens to "say 'no' to sex before marriage." Since then, almost every issue of Eagle Forum's monthly magazine, *Education Reporter*, has had an article that extols these programs' success and their support among teachers and students. Other

issues of the *Reporter* have attempted to debunk comprehensive curricula, asserting that condoms do not protect against HIV/AIDS, and that "studies" have proven that information provided on contraception promotes pre-marital sex.

In 1987, Eagle Forum took on a leadership role in the abstinence-only movement with the formation of the Coalition for Teen Health. The Coalition was established to battle what Eagle Forum discerned as a "large-scale propaganda campaign to teach schoolchildren -- even in grade school! -- how to use condoms for 'casual' heterosexual and homosexual sex." Led by Schlafly, the Coalition challenged then-Surgeon General C. Everett Koop to revise his earlier remarks about safe sex and condom use and to advise all teens to remain abstinent until marriage. Other members of the Coalition included the Conservative Caucus, Coalition for America, American Life League, and Kathleen Sullivan's Committee on the Status of Women.

Using its grassroots muscle, Eagle Forum launched a large-scale lobbying campaign called "Operation Teenage Health," that sought to push through state legislation. The sweeping goals included: mandatory teaching of abstinence in public schools; prohibition of public school medical facilities that could dispense contraceptives and make abortion referrals; the requirement that a copy of all public school textbooks be placed in local public libraries; mandatory blood tests for HIV before marriage licenses are issued; and mandatory regular testing for HIV/AIDS and for all illegal drugs for persons in "sensitive" jobs. The coalition has had little success in achieving these goals.

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY

Focus on the Family, a national anti-gay, anti-choice organization based in Colorado Springs, Colorado, has been another powerful force in promoting fear-based curricula. Focus on the Family was founded in 1977 by Dr. James C. Dobson, a psychologist who has called sex the "hydrogen bomb that permits the destruction of things as they are and a simultaneous reconstruction of the new order."

Focus on the Family has been an outspoken and direct opponent of comprehensive sex education, primarily through paid advertisements and videos. In April 1992, Focus On the Family began placing "In Defense of a Little Virginity," a full-page print advertisement calling safe sex a myth and urging abstinence. By June 1993, Focus on the Family was claiming that the ad had run in 1,000 papers in North America. The ad claims that "pro-abstinence messages are drowned out in a sea of toxic teen-sex-is-inevitable-use-a-condom propaganda from 'safe-sex' professionals." The ad attacks sexuality educators, calling them "'safe-sex' gurus and condom promoters" whose "ideas have failed," and declares that "it is time to rethink their bankrupt policies." The ad also attacks the federal government, contending without documentation that it has spent billions of dollars since 1970 to promote the ideas of contraception and safe sex, sending "your tax dollars down...that drain."

In early 1993, Focus on the Family released a video called "Sex, Lies...and the Truth." Dobson, who is featured in the video, claims that condoms fail 15 percent of the time when preventing pregnancy, and states (erroneously) that failure rates in HIV/AIDS prevention would be even higher, since women can only get pregnant on one day a month and diseases can be contracted 31 days per month. His allegations are directly refuted by studies issued by the Centers for Disease Control, which show that when used consistently and correctly, intact condoms can protect against HIV with a failure rate of only one percent. In addition to misrepresenting the facts, the video uses a mixture of images based on fear and seduction, presenting sex as a ride through the House of Horrors in an amusement park followed by gruesome scenes and discussions of AIDS deaths.

CONCERNED WOMEN FOR AMERICA

Concerned Women for America was founded in 1979 by Beverly LaHaye. The group is virulently opposed to gay rights, abortion rights, National Endowment for the Arts funding, and self-esteem programs in school. CWA, based in Washington, D.C., is strongly opposed to comprehensive sexuality education, condom distribution in schools, and any discussion of homosexuality as acceptable or normal.

Since the late 1980s, CWA has published its own abstinence-only curriculum *Families, Decision-Making and Human Development*, written by Terrance Olson and Christopher Wallace, which has a bias against contraception, abortion and lesbians and gay men. Like the Teen Aid programs and *Sex Respect*, it links sexuality to fear and shame. The curriculum states that "Sexual irresponsibility always produces negative consequences for relationships," and defines "irresponsible" sexuality as sexual behavior outside of marriage. In discussing the methods of transmitting HIV/AIDS, the curriculum breaks transmission into two categories "voluntary," defined as IV drug use and sexual intercourse, and "involuntary," defined as blood transfusion, medical exposure, and perinatal infection. In addition, the curriculum states that "[T]he male and female sexual organs are obviously designed to accept each other. Thus, heterosexual relationships are normal and homosexual ones are not."

CWA led the effort to defeat Dr. Joycelyn Elders' nomination for U.S. Surgeon General, portraying her as having "extremist views," "sex-crazed policies," and a "pro-promiscuity agenda." Because President Clinton nominated Elders, he too was characterized as pushing for "mandatory 'valueless' sex education and pro-promiscuity programs in public schools." Besides attacking Clinton's nominee for Surgeon General, CWA also fought to "aggressively expos[e] the pro-promiscuity policies" of Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala and Education Secretary Richard Riley. According to LaHaye, "They want dangerous new 'medical services' programs in our public schools, including abortion counseling, mandatory sex education, and condom distribution."

To counteract this perceived threat, CWA created a video entitled "Wait For Me," which stresses the importance of abstinence and "the sanctity of marriage." Beverly LaHaye and her husband, Tim LaHaye, also wrote a book, *Against the Tide*, to serve as a "practical parenting blueprint to help parents and grandparents raise children who are responsible morally and pure sexually." LaHaye writes, "Our goal is to show parents and grandparents how to give children the facts about sex before the world gives them fiction..." Tim LaHaye also works to promote the use of a "virtue ring" that parents would give to their child after asking them to pledge abstinence until marriage.

CITIZENS FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

Founded in 1983 and led by Dr. Robert L. Simonds, the Costa Mesa, California-based Citizens for Excellence in Education advocates the "Christianizing" of public education. Simonds' strategies include challenging books, educational materials and curricula in the public schools. He declares that if we do not reform the public schools, "children's faith in God will be subtly destroyed" and "children will be subjected to the negative messages of current sex activities."

Local CEE chapters around the country work to get abstinence-only programs in schools. In the CEE Chapter Manual, "How to Help Your School Be A Winner!," author Eric Buehrer suggests two "good" sex education programs, Teen Aid and *Sex Respect*, which chapters should try to get adopted in their local school districts.

CEE argues that comprehensive sexuality education is part of an effort to recruit children into homosexuality. Simonds writes, "an overemphasis on AIDS teaching opens the door to

homosexual/lesbian recruitment of children in the classroom." Simonds dramatically warns of the threat of homosexual recruitment in an impassioned plea for money from his supporters:

[T]he gay rights movement is sweeping our nation's schools...Students are told it is a normal acceptable life-style and that they can't criticize it because they don't know until they try it...Children have been lied to and then RECRUITED into the homosexual/lesbian life-style...Public school programs like `Project 10,' `Children of the Rainbow' and `Project 21' are some of the many programs of homosexual/lesbianism promotion and recruitment...It's Sodom and Gomorrah all over again. Will we wait until our society is engulfed in homosexuality/lesbianism and AIDS, or stop it now?

CEE also argues that the idea of "safe sex" is an oxymoron. Vice President of CEE (and Simonds' daughter), Kathi Hudson, calls Joycelyn Elders the "leading advocate of school-based clinics and condomania." She cites a recent study by researchers at the University of Texas that she says found that condoms are not effective in preventing transmission of the HIV virus, claiming that condoms leave teens an 18-50% chance of contracting HIV/AIDS. As noted above, Centers for Disease Control studies discredit this assertion.

Citing from a 1992 study to elaborate on this theory, Simonds reports:

Children are taught that condoms will prevent sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS infection -- allowing safe sex. Yet the condom manufacturers themselves claim a high failure rate of 12-40 percent. Even worse, scientists tell us that the best condoms have microscopic holes of five microns in diameter, while the AIDS virus is only .1 of one micron in diameter. That makes the condom hole 50 times larger than the AIDS virus. Such `safe sex' teaching is condemning our children to death by AIDS.

In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control, laboratory studies have shown that latex condoms provide a continuous barrier to micro-organisms as well as sperm. The study relied on by Simonds to argue that the "holes" in condoms are larger than the HIV virus is one that was conducted using not condoms but latex surgical gloves which are made differently than condoms. In addition, glove standards have now been changed. This particular misconception, however, continues to turn up in school board debates across the country.

Simonds goes further than many even on the Right, invoking frightening scenarios of societal transformation. He writes:

[S]exologists and psycho-heresy mind manipulators (so-called experts) are not experts at all....The enemies of faith and God's church are many. They promote immorality instead of what could otherwise be good sex-education programs.....They (ACLU) believe in teaching homosexuality/lesbianism in place of man/woman marriage. Not only would they like to destroy families, but the entire human race, with such ideas -- irrational, sick ideas that our schools often go along with...Remember, it strongly appears we are dealing with hard-line atheists, incapable of reason or morality.

Simonds argues that comprehensive sexuality education programs are detrimental to the health of teens. He alleges, "It has always been known that corrupt sex-education programs that promote early childhood sex, abortions, homosexuality and lesbianism as a normal, desirable life-style, will destroy our children's happiness, innocence, health and their futures." Claiming to speak for all of us, he writes, "All moral Americans have consistently said, `it is wrong to teach children that immoral sexual behaviors are all right.'"

VI. EFFECTIVENESS OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION

For good reason, the battle over sexuality education often focuses on the issue of effectiveness, as measured by changes in behavior of students. Research evaluating program effectiveness has shown that the best way to motivate students to delay the onset of sexual activity is to provide them with full and accurate information. In 1994, researchers at the World Health Organization

released a report analyzing the evaluative research that has been done worldwide on sexuality education. After a detailed analysis of each of the 35 studies done on this subject, the authors concluded that there is no support for the contention that sexuality education encourages sexual experimentation or increased activity. To the degree that an effect of comprehensive sexuality education was identifiable, it was **postponed** initiation of sexual intercourse and/or effective use of contraceptives.

The major data used to defend abstinence-only programs -- based on government evaluations -- has been seriously discredited. Researchers at the American Psychological Association have examined these evaluations, which reported the effect of such programs was to change students' behavior, increasing abstinence and decreasing sexual activity. The APA study found that the government's evaluators had obtained suspect findings and failed to interpret those results with adequate caution. Moreover, according to the APA, they made unsupported claims about the relationship between sexual attitudes and sexual behavior.

Some examples identified by the APA of the flaws in the positive evaluations of the fear-based, abstinence-only programs:

- Citing no evidence to support the assumption, evaluators claimed that sexual activity in adolescence interferes with educational achievement and the quality of future relationships.
- Evaluators failed to provide information on how participants were selected to participate in their studies, nor did they provide information about the characteristics of the sample populations, such as age, gender, ethnic background, family composition. In addition they failed to provide information about the schools, such as geographic location or whether they were public or private.
- Of perhaps greatest significance, evaluators did pre- and post-tests of students' attitudes and beliefs about sexuality, and made the unsupported assumption that a change in reported attitude automatically determined a change in behavior.
- Evaluators failed to collect any long-term follow-up data, thus making it impossible to determine the extent to which any changes in students' attitudes and behaviors endured over time.

The APA researchers concluded:

Evaluators of these programs have concluded that [abstinence-only] curricula . . . are effective in promoting attitudes of sexual abstinence and in decreasing sexual activity among teens. However, because of the universally poor quality of the program evaluations that we have reviewed, we conclude that such claims are completely unwarranted. To date, **we are aware of no methodologically sound studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of curricula that teach abstinence as the only effective means of preventing teen pregnancy.** Although credible evidence is lacking to show the effectiveness of abstinence-only sex education programs, methodologically sound studies have shown that more comprehensive sexual education approaches, which provide students with behavioral strategies for avoiding sexual intercourse, can be successful in delaying the onset of sexual activity and in reducing rates of unprotected intercourse among teens. (emphasis added)

Those studies referred to as showing the effectiveness of comprehensive programs are summarized by Douglas Kirby in a paper titled "School Based Programs to Reduce Sexual Risk-Taking Behaviors: Sexuality and HIV/AIDS Education, Health Clinics and Condom Availability Programs" (March 21, 1994). Among Kirby's findings:

- About 93 percent of all high schools offer sexuality or HIV education; about 85 percent of American adults support sexuality education in the schools and about 94 percent support HIV education.

- Studies demonstrated that comprehensive programs do not hasten the onset of intercourse -- they either delay it or have no effect -- and evidence of this is particularly compelling for older students.
- Sexuality education and HIV education do not increase either the frequency of intercourse or the number of partners. One study found that adolescent males who had received AIDS instruction with resistance skills engaged in fewer acts of intercourse and had fewer sexual partners than did students who had not previously received such instruction.
- Two comprehensive curricula, *Postponing Sexual Involvement* and *Reducing the Risk*, significantly delayed the onset of sexual intercourse.
- The weight of evidence from national surveys indicates that sexuality education programs somewhat increase the use of contraceptives, and HIV education programs somewhat increase the use of condoms.

Kirby also found no evidence showing that abstinence-only programs have any effect on the onset or frequency of intercourse. None of the published studies focusing on these programs showed a significant impact on the initiation of intercourse. Further, Kirby notes, as did the APA researchers, that the studies were limited methodologically.

Proponents of abstinence-only programs refer to what they call the "San Marcos Miracle" to support their claims of effectiveness. In promotional materials from Teen Aid, Inc. the claim is made that in San Marcos, California, after two years of using Teen Aid programs in the schools, the number of teen pregnancies went from 147 to 20. A former counselor in the San Marcos schools has disputed that claim, saying that "it simply didn't happen, there were no statistics to support that, there never have been." In addition, other San Marcos school officials have stated that the figures were falsified and came from a school counselor who did not use a scientific method to generate them. An assistant superintendent from San Marcos has said that the statistics are misleading and probably being used by people for their own objectives.

The Alan Guttmacher Institute has recently released a report, *Sex and America's Teenagers*, compiling data on teen sexual activity and pregnancy rates. In addition to concluding that teenagers have become more successful at preventing pregnancy, the study suggests that the most effective method of preventing teen pregnancy is comprehensive sexuality education that includes skills training in decision-making and communicating with partners, and access to information about contraception. The study concludes that such programs do not encourage sexual activity.

Finally, the Surgeon General of the United States has also weighed in on the issue of sexuality education. Dr. Joycelyn Elders:

AIDS is a tremendous threat to the future of our society. It is destroying the most valuable resource we'll ever have, our children. Our children must develop healthy attitudes about their sexuality. **Education is the only vaccine we have against the AIDS virus...Abstinence-only education really does not address the full range of issues related to sexuality.** We try and use various scare tactics, and we do not give our children the information they need to make decisions. And they have a lot of misinformation in them. I think we have to have a comprehensive health education program, that includes all the information that young people need to know. . . I think that we have to be very concerned about this very vocal minority that is targeting our children. First of all, it's a certain religious bias that's a part of what they're about. And, secondly... they're... using, if you will, our children and we must stand up and begin to fight. (emphasis added)

VII. CONCLUSION

This is not an issue that will soon go away. As more young people contract the HIV/AIDS virus, as more teenagers give birth, the accusations, the misleading statistics, the inflammatory rhetoric is likely to rise to an even higher pitch. The national Religious Right political groups will continue to rely on their "traditional values" arguments to censor vital life-saving information out of the public school curriculum.

It is important that parents, educators and others who are concerned about students not allow the issue of sexuality education to be engulfed in politics. They must focus on the facts, on the data on effectiveness, and on the needs of young people. If students are to have the opportunity to grow into sexually healthy adults, they must have the tools.

Those who care about young people and their futures must continue to fight for full, accurate information on sexuality.