

The Future of Sex Education

A Strategic Framework Executive Summary

Background

In July 2007, staff from Advocates for Youth, Answer and SIECUS met to discuss the future of sex education. The three partners were looking forward to the elimination of federal abstinence-only-until-marriage funding. Ten years of research and advocacy that questioned the effectiveness of the abstinence-only-until-marriage approach inspired the three organizations to begin envisioning a time when schools were willing and able to implement comprehensive sex education for the students they serve.

In May of 2008, Advocates, Answer and SIECUS formalized their discussions with funding from the Ford Foundation, George Gund Foundation and Grove Foundation; the Future of Sex Education (FoSE) Project was launched. The purpose of the project is to create a national dialogue about the future of sex education and to promote the institutionalization of comprehensive sexuality education in public schools in the United States.

The three partners conducted research, interviewed 75 stakeholders in the fields of sexuality, sex education, education, public health, and policy/advocacy and convened a summit of 40 experts to assess the current state of sex education in the U.S. and to identify gaps and barriers to meeting FoSE's vision.

As a result of this work, Advocates, Answer and SIECUS drafted a strategic framework for advancing sex education in public schools. The framework is intended for national organizations in support of state and local efforts to advance sex education in public schools within the context of comprehensive school health education and includes the goal of advancing federal, state and local policies that enable and support comprehensive sex education as well as the goal of advancing the implementation of comprehensive sex education by building the capacity of schools to incorporate and sustain comprehensive sex education for the youth they teach.

Below is an abridged version of the strategic framework, including goals and objectives. For the full strategic plan, including a list of short-, mid- and long-term strategies to meet

these goals and objectives, please contact one of the FoSE organizing partners.

While FoSE's vision addresses Pre-K through Grade 12, the organizing partners acknowledge that the framework presented here is geared toward grades 5–12.

Strategic Framework for Advancing Comprehensive Sex Education in Public Schools

Vision

Every young person enrolled in a public school receives developmentally, culturally and age-appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education in Pre-K through Grade 12.

Goal I

To champion policies at the national, state and local levels which support the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education in public schools.

Objective 1. At the national level, create an enabling environment that includes federal policies, regulations and funding to support and sustain comprehensive sexuality education at the local level.

Select short-term strategies under this objective include: continued advocacy against federal abstinence-only-until-marriage funding; working with the Obama administration, including the new Office of Adolescent Health, the CDC, and the Surgeon General's Office to advance comprehensive sexuality education; creating a white paper on sexual health that recognizes young people's rights to honest sex education; advocating for improvements within the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that support comprehensive sex education; and, advocating for a dedicated long-term funding stream for comprehensive sex education.

Objective 2. At the state and local levels, improve policies and standards and advocate for state funding to enable implementation and sustainability of comprehensive sexuality education in local districts.

Select short-term strategies under this objective include: assisting state and local organizations to advocate effectively for improved state and local policies; coordinating networking opportunities between and among state and local organizations to share lessons learned; and, collecting/tracking and sharing model state and local legislation, regulations and standards across states.

Objective 3. Mobilize community stakeholders in support of comprehensive sexuality education in public schools.

Select short-term strategies under this objective include documenting best practices and drafting case studies on how communities have successfully mobilized parents, youth, professionals and religious leaders to support sex education implementation; assisting communities and states in compiling and mobilizing databases of supporters; and engaging school health advisory committees to advance sex education wherever possible.

Goal II

To ensure that public schools have the capacity to implement and sustain quality comprehensive sexuality education.

Objective 1. Improve the capacity of health and education professionals working in schools to select, implement and evaluate quality comprehensive sexuality education.

Select short-term strategies that focus on improving pre-service and in-service training include: convening a small group of teacher preparation faculty to discuss and document best practices in teacher preparation; advocating that universities improve pre-service training and professional development for undergraduate health teachers regarding both the content and pedagogy of sex education; convening a group of professors within higher education who also provide professional development; and, exploring and widely disseminating state, regional and district level models to improve in-service training for school personnel on sex education.

Objective 2. Improve the quality of comprehensive sexuality education taught in schools by making available standards, curricula, programs and classroom resources that are developmentally, culturally, and age-appropriate and based on best practices.

Select short-term strategies under this objective include: creating National Sexual Health Standards; piloting the standards in select communities; disseminating examples of existing state and/or local sexuality education standards through existing networks, workshop and presentations; providing technical assistance and training on program selection and adaptation; and, advocating within the research community for additional curricula, lesson plans and classroom resources that are developmentally, culturally and age-appropriate.

Objective 3. Nurture school and community systems to ensure implementation and sustainability of quality comprehensive sexuality education.

Select short-term strategies under this objective include: building understanding of public school systems among sexuality education advocates so they are able to effectively communicate with school administrators; preparing and disseminating an issue brief that makes connections between sex education and academic achievement; documenting and highlighting best practices/case studies on how communities have successfully mobilized parents, youth, professionals and religious leaders to support sex education implementation to bring districts into compliance; assist communities and states in compiling databases of supporters and strategies/tactics to use this information for mobilization at the community level.

Note: For a copy of the full strategic framework please contact one of the FoSE organizing partners:

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