



ABSTINENCE UNTIL MARRIAGE: DOES IT WORK?

A public policy dilemma: The cost of contraceptives v. abstinence education

Sometimes common sense has to rule over public policy. The "policy wonks" in D.C. like to spend their time coining cute phrases and morphing non-issues into crises. Nothing in the world of policy is more common-sense friendly than abstinence until marriage education programs. Think about it; if you were weighing options, which makes more sense to choose? A plan that keeps your precious child completely safe from unplanned pregnancy and dreaded sexually-transmitted diseases, leaves her whole and healthy, and full of coping skills for life, or a plan that assumes your daughter or son cannot control their animalistic desires, that "protection" is necessary because of their lack of control and that they cannot reason through a safe and healthy outcome to pressures from peers? If you said that you wanted to keep your child safe through teaching them the skills needed to maintain that option you would be in agreement with 90 percent of other parents according to a recent Zogby poll. Yet, in clear defiance of parental wishes and concerns, Congress is prepared to possibly cut off funding for abstinence until marriage programs. To date, comprehensive sex education programs (condoms and "safe sex" messages) have received 12 times the funding that abstinence until marriage programs have received. In fact it has only been in the last few years that funding has been available through Title V for abstinence programs. However, at the end of September, the extended funding for abstinence education is due to expire. Title V was extended by the House for two more years, but in the extension it was made a part of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) bill. In doing that, certain changes were also made to Title V. It expands funding to include comprehensive sex education programs (condom-based); it includes "medically accuracy" requirements that are hostile to abstinence education programs, and it permits funding only to programs that have measurable success in reducing teen pregnancy and sexually-transmitted diseases. Abstinence education programs have not been in existence long enough to produce long-term success rates even though many studies are showing positive results. (*Studies Validating the Efficacy of Abstinence Education Programs, National Abstinence Education Association, 4/12/07*; http://www.abstinenceassociation.org/docs/NAEA_Abstinence_Works_0412_07.pdf.) The Senate passed its version as well but did not include the Title V language. Community Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) funding was passed by the House with a \$28 million dollar increase, but the Senate still needs to vote on it as a part of the Senate Appropriations Labor HHS Bill that came out of a committee with a proposed decrease of \$28 million in funding.

The religious right is threatening our children's "sexual health"

According to Planned Parenthood, leading purveyor of condoms and the condom's "safety-net" abortion, "abstinence-only education is one of the religious right's greatest challenges

to the nation's sexual health", promoting "alarmist misinformation" and "force-feeding students religious ideology." They believe abstinence is endangering student health. Again, one must look at common sense; when comprehensive sex education began to be taught, out-of-wedlock pregnancies skyrocketed to 33 percent; recognized sexually-transmitted diseases proliferated from three to over 25. Who has not seen the sanitized, dreamy commercials of couples who are dealing with a lifetime of herpes who incidentally have to take expensive medicines the rest of their lives to avoid infecting their partner? This is the legacy of ignoring common sense and relying on a thin layer of latex to protect our precious kids.

Common sense?

Yet, defying common sense seems to be a post-modern symptom of the depraved mind that comes from doing whatever you want to do, defying the consequences or relying on science to give us cures or solutions to the consequences.

Flawed studies

To bolster their premise that abstinence education does not deserve any federal dollars, several studies and reports have been released that "discredit" abstinence programs. One of these, the report released by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. that cost the taxpayers more than six million dollars, reported that little or no significant results on students participating in four small abstinence programs were found. Many have questioned the methodology of this report claiming its validity was questionable. The questions raised were:

- It studied children as young as 3rd grade---not the usual age for sexual activity. The children were not evaluated until five years later, leaving the question of whether children this young can even absorb the abstinence message without follow-up, let alone remember it five years later.
- The study only researched four programs---a very small sample in over 900 federally-funded programs.
- Control groups were chosen from the same schools as the program intervention students. Those who disclaim this study state there is a high risk of contamination between groups.
- There were only a small number of students studied---1209 in the program and 848 in the control group.

Making sense out of it all

Abstinence until marriage makes sense. In the long run, it will save the government millions of dollars; it will give coping skills to our children rather than relying on latex; it will save our children the agonies of lifelong sexually-transmitted diseases and infections, and it will promote long-lasting relationships in future years. It makes sense to me, how about you?

Action: Ask your Congressman to fully authorize and preserve Title V in its current form. Ask your senators to oppose any decrease to CBAE funding. Capitol Switchboard: 202-224-3121 or toll free: 888- 534-6226 or 877-762-8762