

# Con-dumb?

## The government and abstinence-only sex education

By SARAH SIDLOW

**It's an awkward** subject, sex. Especially when you're talking to a 9-year-old. Or their parents. Where do you begin? What tone do you use? What do you leave out?

Luckily, the government is here to help. Since 1981, the federal government has had an influence on sex education, particularly of the abstinence-only-until-marriage variety. And by "influence" we mean they provided funding. Three separate funding streams: the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA), the Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage program, and Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE). While the intensity of such funding has varied with each presidential administration, its three-decade existence has been more than enough to raise eyebrows when it comes to public opinion on sex education.

Should the government have a say in how children are educated about sex? And if so, are they on the right side of the argument?

It seems even our federal agencies can't agree on the best course for sexual education. The CDC recommends in-school programs that focus on the prevention of STDs and pregnancy, including condom use. But only about half of high schools and one-fifth of middle schools reportedly provide such education. Most of the others focus on abstinence.

For many, federally funded abstinence-only education is a big, fat "no."

The thing is, research indicates that the message might not be all that effective in reducing adolescent STDs and pregnancies. One study

that looked at young women who made abstinence pledges found that 88 percent of pledgers ended up breaking the promise to not have sex before marriage. Moreover, researchers found that women who break an abstinence pledge may be more at risk for unwanted pregnancies and STDs than peers who never took the pledge in the first place.

Others have a problem with the idea of the government sponsoring any type of sex education, regardless of the message. They argue that sex education is ultimately the parent's responsibility, not the school's, and therefore not the government's.

But for others, it's abstinence-ed all the way. The reason? It's got a 100 percent success rate. Pretty simple math. If you don't have sex, you won't get pregnant, and you can't get a sexually transmitted disease or infection. Supporters of this method argue that more comprehensive sex education for young kids only makes them more curious. They argue teaching condom use is more may make students more interested in engaging in sexual activity they would have otherwise avoided altogether.

Plus, if you want to expand on your child's sex ed at home, no one's stopping you. But, abstinence-ed proponents argue, not every child is getting that additional one-on-one clarification. For those kids, some education is better than no education, and abstinence-

only is better than incomplete explanations of contraception use.

Federal funding for abstinence education has declined in recent years. Funding for the CBAE and the abstinence-only-until-marriage portion of the AFLA were both eliminated as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2010. The Title V program had been allowed to expire, but was resurrected through recently passed health care reform legislation, as the only abstinence dedicated federal funding source at present.

Recently too, teen birth and pregnancy rates have taken a natural decline—some say owing to increased use of the morning-after pill and long-acting reversible contraceptives, or to the economy.



Reach Dayton City Paper forum moderator Sarah Sidlow at SarahSidlow@DaytonCityPaper.com

**COMMENTARY FORUM QUESTION OF THE WEEK:**

*Should the government continue to help fund abstinence-only sex education?*

See our commentary on this topic on the next page

www.BobRossFiat.com www.BobRossFiat.com www.BobRossFiat.com www.BobRossFiat.com www.BobRossFiat.com www.BobRossFiat.com

**ALFA ROMEO 4C Spider**

The **Alfa Romeo 4C Spider** is here. Progressive technology. Race-bred performance. Seductive Italian styling. Handcrafted in Italy to supercar standards. A mid-mounted, 237 HP turbocharged inline 4 engine with race-inspired dual-clutch transmission married to an ultra-light carbon-fiber monocoque chassis. The result? 0-60 mph in 4.1 seconds.\*

**Bob Ross**  

91 LOOP ROAD CENTERVILLE, OH 45459 937.433.0990 WWW.BOBROSSFIAT.COM

\*Based on manufacturer's testing. Actual results may vary.

www.BobRossFiat.com www.BobRossFiat.com www.BobRossFiat.com www.BobRossFiat.com www.BobRossFiat.com www.BobRossFiat.com

Should the government continue to help fund abstinence-only sex education?

# Let's map this out

By JENNIFER HANAUER LUMPKIN

**I like maps.** Maps are an appealing combination of data and art, both revealing in a way that spreadsheets could only ever hope to be and objective in a way that art almost never is. They're my preferred method for taking in statistics. Have you ever looked at map of the U.S. that shows teen birth rates? Yeah, definitely some data that just pops right out at you with those graduated color schemes. Would you happen to have also looked at a map that shows where abstinence-only sex education is taught? Any of those deep colors matching up between the two maps?

In the National Association of County and City Health Officials statement of policy on comprehensive sexual health education, it states, "Increasing the number of schools that provide comprehensive sexual health education that addresses HIV, other STIs, and pregnancy is a critical objective for improving our nation's health and our youth's educational outcomes. Research indicates that HIV and STI prevention programs, including comprehensive sexual health education, are effective in reducing sexual risk behaviors among youth, including delaying first sexual intercourse; reducing the number of sex partners; decreasing the number of times students have unprotected sex; and increasing condom use."

The statement goes on to refute the claims of abstinence-only education's effectiveness: "In contrast, there is no evidence to support the claim that focusing exclusively on abstinence as a method of prevention increases abstinence

among program participants. In addition to being scientifically flawed, abstinence-only education can be viewed as being ethically negligent, and it deprives youth of the human right to access complete and accurate sexual health information. Lastly, comprehensive sexual health education in schools has been shown to be cost effective. An economic analysis of a school-based sexual risk reduction program found that with every dollar invested in the program, \$2.65 is saved in medical costs and lost productivity."

Kristin Freeman, health educator at Planned Parenthood Southwest Ohio, explains that Comprehensive Sexuality Education is unbiased, medically-accurate, scientifically-backed, age-appropriate education that encourages conversation with trusted adults.

"I like to say abstinence-based education is about a person's holes and comprehensive sex ed is about the whole person," Freeman says.

Freeman cites a 2007 study in which abstinence-only-until-marriage programs were found to be ineffective in changing any of the behaviors that were examined, including the rate of vaginal sex, number of sexual partners, and condom use. The study also found that the abstinence programs failed to reduce rates of pregnancy and STDs among participants. In contrast, a study on Get Real, a Planned Parenthood-designed curriculum, was completed in 2014 and found that, when measured against other schools' programs, the comprehensive program resulted in 16 percent fewer boys and 15 percent fewer girls reporting having vaginal intercourse by the end of 8th grade.

"They also found that completing the family involvement activities had the most effect in delaying age of first sexual intercourse for boys," Freeman says.

Let's say everyone in your school was given a car. Some might have no interest in driving it, some might have parents who said absolutely NOT until they're older and more responsible, while still others might just be absolutely busting at the seams to get their hands on the wheel. What do you say, just for safety's sake, we go over the rules of driving with everyone, make sure everyone knows the ins and outs of driving and are made aware through no minced words that driving is a responsibility to be taken seriously (in addition, of course, to being totally awesome). We want to make sure all the drivers know the rules of the road, so you're not out there with a bunch of asshats when and if you decide to get behind the wheel. Of course, the only way to 100 percent ensure you won't get in a car accident is to not get on the road at all. But that sounds at best impractical, considering our innate need to, uh...drive. How about we show you how to put on that safety belt and go ahead and live life to the fullest?

So what's the argument over there on the other side of the debate? If we talk to kids about sex, they'll get ideas in their head and then go out and have sex? Where was that logic when I was having battle dates for the Franco-Prussian War pounded into my supple young mind? So far as I can tell from the most recent class of 2000 newsletter, not a single one of us has gone marching into France demanding wiener schnitzel and a unified empire.

But you know what? If kids ARE that susceptible to ideas, what a great opportunity to talk to them about consent! Hook 'em while they're young! The Brock Turner rape case has showed us that not only did a drunk teenager from our

area code not understand consent, but, judging by character references written on his behalf, neither did his dad nor his childhood friend. Sounds like an issue of public f--king safety to me, that many citizens running around thinking that sexually penetrating unconscious people is a-OK. Think any of them got anything resembling comprehensive sex education during their formative years? (As an aside, the two grad students who stopped Turner's attack and held him until authorities arrived are from Sweden, where sex education has been compulsory in schools since 1956 and includes cross-over topics such as alcohol and mental health. Jus' sayin'.)

You know where lack of comprehensive sex education leads you? I'll draw you a map: it's a dark, harrowing path from childhood to adulthood with stops at Confusion Junction, Vulnerability Gorge, and Unintended Pregnancyopolis. Oh, and pretty much the only mode of transport is the STD Train, which some people can never get off of. So help kids navigate a healthier life path, OK? Send them on down to Knowledge Town. It'll increase your property value.

For more information about Comprehensive Sexuality Education, please contact Kristin Freeman at 937.528.4684 or kfreeman@ppswswo.org.



Jennifer Hanauer Lumpkin is a writer and cartographer living in Dayton, Ohio. She has been a member of PUSH (Professionals United for Sexual Health) since 2012 and served as the 2015 Chair. She can be reached at JenniferHanauerLumpkin@DaytonCityPaper.com or through her website at jenniferlumpkin.com.

# The sex-ed scapegoat

By DR. DAVE WESTBROCK

**For most of** Western Judeo-Christian civilization, that which provided the basis for our Declaration and Constitution, education has been the purview of the family. This is particularly true when it involves the most personal and private aspects of life, namely reproductive issues. As noted, in 1981, the federal government took on the role of the family to decide what the nature of sex education should entail. Currently, the rule is abstinence-only education should be taught. While it seems appropriate to establish guidelines for the younger generation, which will one day determine cultural and policy direction of our country, again, do we leave this task to the feds?

Federal grants for TPPI (Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative), DASH (Division of Adolescent and School Health), and PREP (Personal Responsibility Education Program) totaled more than \$130 million for 2016. With regard to our debt and continued high deficits, is this expenditure of tax dollars just another example of too much nanny state spending us into oblivion? More than \$100 million just to tell teenagers not to have sex? I think not. I have personally taught from a medical point of view and on a limited basis, sex education

to a group of parochial school students about the biological factors involved. However, this did not involve, as in many public schools, practice in placing condoms on bananas or cucumbers. As in most instances, the federal agencies involved are being hoodwinked and gamed by their own system. This hardly represents abstinence-only education, but encouragement for kids to go out and try this or that for themselves with the blessing of Uncle Sam. The difference here is that states are free to do as they choose: abstinence or the banana scheme.

The feds give larder to states that choose to accept. Who is fooling whom? Almost half, 23 states have rejected federal abstinence-only funds. Included are high population states Ohio, New York, California, and Massachusetts. If, indeed, abstinence-only is a failure, statistics thereto are flawed by sampling error.

Returning to the idea that teen pregnancy is somehow related to sex education methods, it is illustrative to point out that since 1991, the birth rates for all demographic ethnic populations have declined, accord-

ing to the CDC. For over 23 years, rates on average have declined by more than 50 percent. Further, highest rates (107-117/1000 women) are found in African-American and Hispanic women. Eighty percent of unmarried pregnant teens end up on welfare and by age 30 only 1.5 percent of women who have been pregnant as teens have a college degree. Thus, this is a blueprint for failure and poverty. Although the reasons that this is more than double the rates for Caucasian and Asian women are controversial, let us look at other statistics that may clarify. In 1996, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was reformed with the growing numbers and failure to decrease numbers of new applicants and costs. This was in recognition of the fact that these funds

**"More than \$100 million just to tell teenagers not to have sex? I think not."**

were encouraging government funds for women to have more children, in or out of wedlock. Reforms include a time limit on payments to encourage work and block grants to states to develop their own programs. The effects of these programs, notwithstanding reforms, in general, have encouraged fragmentation of families, especially in minority communities - with a surge in single pregnancies becoming a cultural norm. As a result, federal costs have stabilized at approximately \$20 billion annually. Federal funding for Planned Parenthood (PP) stands at \$528 million. Thus, PP stands to gain quite a bit by encouraging family planning mostly consisting of abortion services. Together with federal funding for getting pregnant does this not encour-

age "unwanted" or single parent pregnancy? The average cost of an abortion is \$470 at a hospital and at PP \$415.

Sexual norms and cultural attitudes have changed drastically in the past 50 years, particularly since the Age of Aquarius and our obsession with self. There was a time in the not too distant past when individuals were expected to be responsible for their own actions and for their own maintenance. But now, I have the government to give me money if I do not work and to support my child and myself if I just happen to get pregnant. I get an abortion at PP? I can just use my welfare check. In 2016, many Americans have little self-sufficiency and work ethic (you can get insurance coverage up to age 26 and may live at home with your parents for as long as you want). We are now on the verge of bringing a "sustainable wage" to current leftist thinking policy issues without an expectation to work - the Obama culture. Such attitudes and current moral decay have led to the current status, which has little to do with teen sex education. It is merely an excuse.



Dr. Westbrook has been in private medical practice for 35 years. He was the Republican candidate for the U.S House of Representatives in 1994 and 1996. He has written and lectured extensively on the subject of health care reform and health care policy. He can be reached at Dave.Westbrock@DaytonCityPaper.com.