

## Abstinence Only Education in Florida

By: Lisa Goodman

And Merlie Fleurizard

Researched by Hitham Eldaher

Sexual education is not the same thing as teaching sex. Giving people the tools to know about their body, informing them of what could happen if they are sexually active, and providing them with information about how to prevent an unintended result is not the same as encouraging someone to become sexually active.

Currently, the United States has one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the developed world.

- People ages 15 to 24 are acquiring half of all new sexually transmitted infections.
- One in four girls will become pregnant at least once before her 20th birthday.<sup>1</sup>
- 9.8 million adolescents acquire a sexually transmitted infection each year from risky sexual behavior despite the fact that half of U.S. states require that abstinence-only education be stressed.<sup>2</sup>

The statistics are undeniable and something needs change with the way children are taught about sexual education. The staggering numbers in the US indicate that abstinence only education has been ineffective in preventing unintended teenage pregnancy and the transmission of sexually transmitted infections among adolescents.

Some of us were lucky enough to have our parent's awkwardly try to teach us about sexual education but for many of us sexual education was left to our schools and teachers. In Florida, in order to receive a high-school diploma a student must complete one credit of physical education.<sup>3</sup> Health education is a component of physical education. Health education is where students are "taught" sexual education.<sup>4</sup> Florida law requires schools to teach the benefits of sexual abstinence as the expected standard.<sup>5</sup> Students are not required under the law to learn about ways to avoid sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy other than to remain abstinent. There is no statewide sexual education curriculum and each district is responsible for developing its own curriculum in accordance with Florida Law. Given the lack of uniformity in the sexual education curriculum, most schools do not teach sexual education.

In Florida, students with disabilities are not required to meet all of the requirements of a standard diploma.<sup>6</sup> Each district develops their own specific curriculum for what is required for a special diploma.

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<sup>1</sup> Futterman, L. (2016, January 19). Sex Education More Than a Necessity. *Miami Herald*, p. 17SE.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Fla. Stat. 1003.4282(3)(f)

[http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&Search\\_String=&URL=1000-1099/1003/Sections/1003.4282.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=1000-1099/1003/Sections/1003.4282.html)

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> Fla. Stat. 1003.42(2)(n) [http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&URL=1000-1099/1003/Sections/1003.42.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=1000-1099/1003/Sections/1003.42.html)

<sup>6</sup> Fla. Stat. 1003.438

[http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&Search\\_String=&URL=1000-1099/1003/Sections/1003.438.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=1000-1099/1003/Sections/1003.438.html)

Students with disabilities are very much like any other adolescent student faced with making life changing decisions regarding sex. As with all students, students with disabilities are vulnerable due to their immaturity, similar to their standard diploma earning counterparts, and require tailored sexual education in order to prevent unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

Its time to start teaching our youth about sexual education!