

Topic: Sex education

# Abstinence info needed

As a legislator, the well-being and health of Colorado's youth is my top concern. In one important area, we are failing our children — in giving them the facts regarding their sexual activity, and the knowledge of the options they have to make wise choices for themselves. Our culture and media are leading the way in lying to our children — that premarital sex is the cool way to go, without consequences, and everybody is doing it.

The facts tell a different story: Every day in the United States, 8,000 teen-agers contract a sexually transmitted disease. Almost a million teens become pregnant every year, resulting in 765,000 out-of-wedlock births and 300,000 abortions. And 70 percent of teen mothers fail to finish high school. In short, the twin epidemics of sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancies are enormous problems for both individual teens and our society as a whole. It is something most people don't want to talk about, but we must.

Fortunately, there is an option that provides youth a 100 percent assurance of avoiding these problems — abstinence education. Most sexuality education programs of the past decade focused instead on "safe sex" through the use of condoms.

While condom use does dramatically reduce the risk of some STDs, it offers little protection against Human Papilloma Virus (an infection present in 93 percent of cervical cancers that kill 5,000 women annually), chlamydia and herpes infections.



**Steve Johnson**  
Soapbox

Abstinence education is not an old-fashioned idea without relevance to today's young people. In a survey conducted by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 93 percent of youth aged 12-17 said that they want a stronger abstinence message from our society. A study of the Best Friends abstinence program in Washington, D.C. showed that only 22 percent of girls in the program were sexually active, compared to 76 percent of girls overall in D.C. public schools.

Most constituents I talk with want their children to receive this message in Poudre School District schools. Surprisingly, abstinence education has received a mixed review by Poudre officials. In Fort Collins, we are fortunate to have the work of the Alpha Center, providing the choice of abstinence in a loving and supportive manner to our children. I was shocked to learn this fall from the high school students I teach that the district essentially eliminated Alpha Center abstinence presentations this past November.

In a startling e-mail to health teachers from PSD Science Coordinator Brian Oliver, he states "the programs do not provide factual information" despite extensive Centers for Disease Control documentation, that "the curriculum does very little to build an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect" and, most shocking, was his statement that "the presenters promote/teach controversial moral values," despite almost universal agreement among the scientific and medical community that abstinence programs can save the health, future and lives of our young people.

I do want to compliment Oliver's supervisor, Nancy Sebring, who met with Alpha Center presenters and has reinstated their Heart Choices presentations for now, at least.

And what do students think? Student evaluations, conducted at every presentation, are overwhelmingly positive. Students appreciate having the facts to make informed choices from presenters whom they can see have a genuine love for them. Children want to be shown a better way than what they are getting from the popular culture.

What can you do? First, encourage Poudre School District to continue a real abstinence education program, such as Heart Choices. Second, support our youth who choose abstinence and personal purity. Families, especially parents, are a strong influence on the choices our kids make. Don't delegate this role to the media, culture or even the schools. More youth are pledging to abstain from sex until marriage. It is a very difficult task when our society and culture constantly bombard them with the myth of carefree premarital sex. They deserve our loving support.

Rep. Steve Johnson, R-Fort Collins, represents House District 49 in the Colorado Legislature.

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