
An importance of sex education in school

The topic of sex education in schools has been a hotly debated subject since as early as the 1960s. It has, however, become an increasingly relevant and important matter within the United States as the years' progress. As each generation succeeds the last, the nation as a whole has become less conservative, and as a result, so are views on how sex education should be taught. Some believe that schools should only instruct on matters relating to abstinence only until marriage, whereas others believe it more realistic to understand that not all students will follow that path, and instruct and encourage the use of safe sex methods. To more effectively achieve the primary goals of sex education in schools (to prevent and lower the rates of unplanned pregnancy and the spread of STD's the nation as a whole needs to require all schools to provide medically and factually accurate sex education that is inclusive of and to all sexualities, gender identities, and students who may not choose to remain abstinent.

Like many controversial topics, stances on the issue lie on a spectrum of sorts. One end of said spectrum is known as the Abstinence Only Until Marriage Education (AOUME) movement. The designation is fairly self-explanatory, and is often associated with religious and more conservative organizations. This form of education focuses primarily on encouraging and enforcing abstinence until the person in question has married--no exceptions. It also tends to shy away from extensive education on birth control methods, the LGBTQA+ community, or any other subtopics that could possibly suggest another option other than abstinence. Counter to that is the Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) movement. This method of education typically encourages abstinence, but acknowledges the possibility of a percentage of students choosing not to remain abstinent. Recognizing this, there is also education on a broad range of subjects and other options for the students such as different types of birth control, STD/STI education and prevention, and the possible risks of sex if not practiced safely; it also typically associates sex with a less negative connotation than AOUME does.

AOUME advocates are a group of highly organized, motivated and passionate citizens who have determined to utilize their rights given by the Constitution to effect change within their country through social, political, and economic means such as rallies, protests, voting, funding and supporting organizations and people who encourage the same ideals and morals. These morals and ideals tend to come from interpretations of the Christian Bible, hence the reason the AOUME movement has a number of ties to many churches, religious organizations, and Christianity itself. According to Nancy Kendall--who spent a number of years observing, researching, and interviewing teachers, students, parents, and other representatives to write her book *The Sex Education Debates*-- states a few of the most widespread beliefs among AOUME supporters, such as "...sex is a sacred act that should be kept private and within marriage, that

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sex that occurs outside of marriage is socially destructive, and that when sinful behavior is widespread, the sinner, society, and nation all suffer. AOUME proponents believe that teaching students these values will help restore the country's morality and cure "social ills" including homosexuality, single-parent families, and the STI epidemic." For this reason, AOUME advocates believe CSE to be a threat to the wellbeing of the nation, and as a result "Schools were increasingly concerned about community backlash to sex education because of legal threats from AOUME advocacy groups and legal rulings that had penalized schools and teachers for providing CSE." (Kendall) Said supporters also tend to be less open to scrutiny, skepticism, and investigations into the operations of AOUME, which proves to be extremely detrimental to any research of sex education within schools and its efficacy. While the standards required for a method of sex education to be considered AOUME are more clearly defined, the definitions and requirements for something to be considered CSE are somewhat more nebulous. Kendall explains in her book: "CSE definitions come into being for various reasons: for example, some are developed in response to AOUME approaches and claim to positively address topics (such as contraception, abortion, and sexual identity) that AOUME programs do not. Others, often crafted by individuals and organizations that have been involved in CSE for decades, reflect institutional mandates..." Along with the range of various reasons for the formation of these methods there are several different ways to go about teaching CSE as well. This is also explained by Kendall as she states that "CSE programs range from those that strongly emphasize the benefits of abstinence but provide extensive facts about contraceptive devices to programs designed to support adolescents' positive exploration of their own sexuality." CSE is also associated with programs such as Planned Parenthood, the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), and the Advocates for Youth organization.

Currently there are no federal laws requiring sex education of any type nationwide, leaving the choice of whether or not sex education should be required in school curriculum to the states; only roughly half of the aforementioned states have actually taken the initiative to make sex education within schools legally mandatory, and only 22 of those require education essential to preventing the spread of HIV. Furthermore, if students are in fact provided sex education within their school environment, only 18 states require that information on contraception also be provided, and even then only 13 states require that the provided information on said contraceptives and other subtopics of sex education be medically accurate.

This inconsistency is inherently discordant in nature, and only divides the public while misinformation is spread. Such a situation can not only lead to an increase in unsafe sex practices, it could and does potentially put lives in danger due to those affected not having been educated in STD prevention, as well as increasing the likelihood of pregnancy, which can raise a myriad of medical issues. Without government mandating on one of the most essential topics to be taught, that field of education in particular has become a hodgepodge of wildly varying

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claims and approaches which is turning out mixed results at best, and causing even more controversy. While the lack of uniformity across the nation concerning sex education is concerning, so too, is the messages and censorship enforced within the AOUME movement. Correlating with many of the ideals of the Christian religious ties that AOUME stems from, the vast majority of the proponents of AOUME believe and teach that "...the nuclear family is the basic unit of identity, community, and nation, that the male is the head of the family and ... that these hierarchies are biblically ordained and necessary to the social order..." (Sex Ed Debates - Kendall) They also believe in addition that sex is sinful and to be regarded with negative connotation unless performed within a lawful marriage, and that by enforcing these morals AOUME can resolve and render myriads of socio-economic issues--such as homosexuality, unwanted pregnancy, the concerning high rates of STDs among Americans, as well as the rates of single parents within the nation--practically nonexistent. The messages and lessons taught with this approach are not only homophobic, but extremely sexist as well, and such curriculum can be and is detrimental to the morals, ethics, physical health, and mental health of the students subjected to it. This education promotes fear-mongering, homophobia, sexism, rape culture, and ignorance amongst the upcoming generations being raised, while also blurring the lines between the separation of church and state.

One of the biggest issues with AOUME is that many of the messages and teachings are inherently sexist, and only aid in encouraging the culture of issues such as today's patriarchy, toxic masculinity, slut-shaming, rape culture, the denial of rights such as birth control and abortions to those who possess a uterus, and the common ignorance/confusion what is and is not consent to sexual activity. These all promote even more bigotry, and lead to issues outside of school, such as the systematic shutdown of abortion clinics and implementation of laws to restrict the ability of a pregnant person to safely get an abortion, despite the fact that it's legal and lawful for such a decision to be made. Furthermore, misunderstanding of the definitions and indicators of what is and is not proper consent lead to horrifying incidents of rape and sexual assault across the nation. These are all issues that can be and are worsened by the continuation of propagandic and heavily censored education standards such as AOUME. Though it will not completely (or even immediately) solve all of the aforementioned issues, improving the lessons instructors teach the children of today will only help to counteract them, given enough time, thought, and careful planning.

"One in four women and one in six men will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime". Today, most women are afraid to walk home at night, or go anywhere alone. Female rape survivors are told that they "deserved it" or "Asked for it" because of the way she was dressed or acted; Male rape survivors are told that they're "lucky" and are berated because they didn't enjoy it. Rape culture in America is very alive and real, and only becoming more prominent as more and more stories emerge on the news about sexual assault accusations and allegations, from Harvey Weinstein to the current president, Donald Trump himself. (Time & The Atlantic & The

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Guardian) Taking the time, effort, and thought, and utilizing the proper resources early enough to intervene and educate kids about responsible sexual decision making and how to properly identify consent will not only teach children how to avoid sexual assault, but to not sexually assault others in the first place. Instead, public schools enforce inherently sexist dress codes that heavily favor male students over female, promoting the concept of slut-shaming and the idea that a woman should be respected less or more depending on the way they choose to dress.

Furthermore, it teaches boys that the negative consequences of their behaviors and actions relating to sexual advances on girls are not their fault, which only gives them even more leeway to act on whatever they choose to. Often, when students do receive sex education, the option and responsibility is placed heavily on only gender, rather than emphasizing that both parties can and should say no if they don't feel comfortable with sexual activity and that both parties should also learn how to hear and accept no as an answer. (Sex Smart for Teens & Sex Ed: No Screwin' Around) This leads to instances of blaming the victim, lack of understanding and a concerning ambiguity about the concept of consent (Washington Post), and horrifying chants such as "No means yes, yes means anal!" in places such as Yale (Big Think), Texas Tech (Huffington), and Louisiana State University.

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