

# Tempest in a Tea Party: A Summary Report on Sexuality Education Controversies School Year 2010-2011



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### **Introduction: Progress Steeped in Pragmatism**

The 2010-2011 school year unfolded against the backdrop of a seismic political shift in which Tea Party-affiliated conservative Republican candidates swept into national, state and local offices and delivered the Democratic Party its biggest congressional setback since 1928. Although many Tea Party-backed candidates professed no interest in social issues or ‘culture wars’, some of their most outspoken leaders quickly took on reproductive choice and sexual freedoms as a legislative priority.<sup>1</sup>

Given this ominous political context, it took the continued support and advocacy of students, parents, and progressive policy makers to ensure that many local school districts preserved earlier gains favoring comprehensive sexuality education. Many of these gains were preserved thanks to public school stakeholders’ concern about local rates of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among youth. SIECUS has observed that this rationale for more comprehensive sexuality education presents unique challenges: while applauding local efforts to broaden and deepen school sexuality education content, SIECUS is concerned that rationales built solely upon alarm over risk behavior data may have the effect of limiting instruction to “sexual health disaster prevention.”

Community action in 2010-11 took place in an unusually challenging political atmosphere, and advocates found themselves moving cautiously when called upon to advance new sexuality education initiatives. Others found themselves treading water to defend existing programs and resources against conservative charges that comprehensive approaches wasted taxpayer money at a time when austerity was required. Perhaps this has been the main legacy of the Tea Party's rise to power; under the guise of fiscal prudence and respect for 'the Taxpayer', publicly-funded sexuality education is targeted for cuts whether it takes place in schools, health centers, community-based organizations, or on the internet. Facing such ideologically-driven charges, local champions of comprehensive sexuality education often chose the most pragmatic approaches to protect recent policy gains.

For nearly two decades, SIECUS has tracked and analyzed thousands of controversies regarding sex education. By highlighting select examples from numerous states across the nation, our annual special report aims to illustrate and explain trends in sex education that SIECUS has monitored during the 2010-2011 school year.

### **Opposition Boils Over**

With the ascendance of Tea Party-backed legislators and their conservative allies, states and localities across the nation witnessed reinvigorated opposition to sexuality education - especially when related to public services. Whether it was a statewide professional conference for public school teachers, a behavioral survey conducted in tandem with a local public school curriculum, or a condom availability program linked to public health services, the target of opposition was invariably public-sector rather than private.

In November 2010 Planned Parenthood of Greater Northern **New Jersey's** annual Sex Education Conference was disrupted by a contingent of state Tea Party demonstrators, whose main complaint about the conference was presence of public school teachers at an event hosted by a Planned Parenthood affiliate. Conference registration is open to anyone, and participants have long included public school health teachers whose responsibility is to provide the state-mandated instruction on sexual health.

The demonstrators confined themselves to the conference center entrance, but for weeks before and after the conference they circulated rumors and exaggerations to alarm state residents about the conference proceedings. Typical of the opposition's misinformation was this anonymously-written entry from a conservative blog: "Despite its stated purpose, NJ Planned Parenthood's conference was not focused on long-term health goals for teens. Topics such as protecting from sexual diseases and avoiding teen pregnancy by exercising self-control and delaying gratification were not on the agenda...workshops for middle school and high school educators were disturbingly inappropriate."<sup>2</sup>

New Jersey is unique in having a 30-year-old state law requiring public schools to provide K-12 sexuality education. Many states in the U.S. mandate only HIV education in middle and high schools, and provide little guidance or incentive to provide instruction in other sexuality topics.

Until recently, in states that did provide guidance or additional mandates, abstinence-only-until-marriage was often the approach.

Approximately a dozen Tea Party activists amassed at the conference site entrance in Somerset, waving placards to the effect that ‘Sex Education Belongs at Home’ and urging Governor Chris Christie to ‘De-fund Planned Parenthood’ (Title X family planning funds are federal, not state, a point lost on the protesters). The Tea Party presence had its intended effect of distracting participants and forcing the conference organizers to incur the added expense of providing additional security, but it did not prevent the conference from achieving its objective to increase educators’ knowledge of sexuality education resources and research.

Opposition forced the **North Dakota** Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to cancel a multi-state adolescent sexual health conference planned for May 2011. The state’s public school Health Education Coordinator reached out to state and regional partners in Minnesota and South Dakota to convene a 2-day conference in Fargo titled “Adolescent Sexual Health: Looking Ahead with 2020 Vision.”<sup>3</sup> One of the co-sponsors was the regional Planned Parenthood affiliate for all three states.

Local opponents denounced the objectives of the conference in addition to the slate of presenters. Objectives targeted by opponents included, “Identify components of safe, supportive, school environments inclusive of Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Questioning students and family members.” The conference was to include presenters from Answer (Rutgers University), SIECUS, and the Minnesota Department of Education.

The state public school Health Education Coordinator defended the conference’s content and speakers by noting that North Dakota’s adolescent pregnancy and HIV prevention program is funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to conduct these activities. Nonetheless, conference planners were silenced by a conservative grass-roots effort to shut the event down before it started.

Faced with vociferous opposition, the North Dakota DPI and other partners canceled the conference with an intent to reschedule it when the educational and political climate became more supportive of CDC-supported public health approaches to adolescent sexual health.

In October 2010, administrators at Hardy Middle School in the **District of Columbia Public Schools** (DCPS) system were attacked in a Georgetown community blog for their handling of a sexual risk-behavior survey intended to gather data about the Grade 7 student population. The survey was administered as part of the routine implementation of the DCPS-approved HIV-prevention curriculum *Making Proud Choices*. DCPS community partner Metro Teen AIDS managed the administration of the survey and related materials supporting the curriculum. *The Georgetown Dish* blog reported that “parents heard about the ‘sex test’ from their kids. ‘The school is making us take a sex survey,’ one child told his mother... One child was so upset by the test, a parent told *The Georgetown Dish*, he hyperventilated.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite the blog’s charges that Hardy Middle School was sexually exploiting its students and undermining parents, DCPS rebutted the wilder allegations and issued an apology for the

mishandling of one specific aspect of the survey: an opt-out letter to be delivered to parents was sent out the same day the assessment was delivered. In addition, Metro Teen AIDS Executive Director Adam Tenner posted the following comments directly on the blog site:

“We regret that the opt-out forms did not go out before the first day of class. We strongly believe that parents have a role to play in providing HIV/AIDS and reproductive health education. In fact MTA offers an Adult Peer-to-Peer Education that provides parents with communication skills and techniques for engaging their children in effective conversations about reproductive health and disease/pregnancy prevention.”<sup>5</sup>

While Metro Teen AIDS, DCPS, and Hardy administrators acknowledged poor handling of the parental notification process, they stood firm against demands that fact-finding efforts about youth sexual risk behaviors be discontinued.<sup>6</sup>

In an effort to curb rising rates of unintended pregnancy, HIV, and other STIs, teen advocates from the non-profit organization Hyde Square Task Force embarked on a mission to get city officials to expand sexuality education programs and access to condoms to all **Boston, Massachusetts**-area schools. At-Large Boston City Councilor Ayanna Pressley requested a formal hearing for the teens, who urged the district to expand condom availability and increase instructional time for sexual health topics.

Boston’s contraception access policy states that condom availability is strictly limited to eight of the city’s 35 high schools. Those eight were chosen because they contain city-run health centers. Each requires parental consent from students before they can obtain condoms or other contraception. This mandate, which has been in place since 1994 and has yet to be updated, is on the students’ target list.<sup>7</sup>

Students point out that the content of the existing sexuality education programs is also in need of major revision, given its lack of consistency and its basis in abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula. They report that the programs have been inconsistent in both instruction and implementation: some schools provide sexuality education over several weeks, while others limit instruction to just a few days.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to providing a more consistent and comprehensive sexuality education program for all students, the proposed sexual health plan would designate one male and one female staff member in each school to respond to student condom requests. The appointed staff members would supplement condom availability already provided by authorized staff in each school-based health center. Yadelyn Acevedo, a Brook Farm and Business & Service Career Academy senior, argued in favor of the proposal: “Youth will do what they want. It’s better to give them options and ways to be safe.”<sup>9</sup>

Driving the teens’ urgency for a scale-up of comprehensive programs and resources are Boston’s rates of STIs and unintended pregnancy. In 2007 over 1,300 Boston-area youth ages 15–19 were diagnosed with Chlamydia - a 70 percent jump from a decade earlier.<sup>10</sup> Samantha Brea, a seventeen year-old senior at Muriel S. Snowden International High School expressed her concern about sexuality education’s rank among the priorities of Boston schools. “It’s sad,” said Brea.

“The schools would rather focus on things like books and tests than things that are affecting us now and could affect our tomorrow.”<sup>11</sup>

Barbara Huscher, Boston Public Schools health education program director, agreed with the teens on the importance of their health. “We are going to have to listen to the community,” Huscher stated. “Boston Public Schools is in the business of teaching, and that’s what we focus on first. But we also want to keep students healthy.” Officials are already taking steps towards improving health programs, reviewing all of the current programs and brainstorming new program ideas for the school district through its newly created Health and Wellness Department.<sup>12</sup>

The teens’ proposal has drawn criticism from those opposed to teaching comprehensive sexuality education in schools. A local opposition group, Pure in Heart, chastised the student advocates for not demanding abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula. Pure in Heart member Chris Pham stated that he believes that the teens’ proposal for greater access to condoms could make things worse. “The fact is, condoms are not the answer,” Pham said. “What they need to do is get better educated. They need to know the alternative is to wait until you are married.”<sup>13</sup>

In response to such criticism, teen advocates proposed that Boston public schools also offer an abstinence-only course in concurrence with comprehensive sexuality education curricula. They also produced a short video to make the case for their proposals. First shown in December 2010 at the Connolly Branch Library in Jamaica Plain, it highlighted youth risk behavior data in the context of interviews with local students, educators, and city officials who favor expanding comprehensive sexuality education and condom availability to all public schools in Boston.<sup>14</sup>

In Spring 2011 the **Philadelphia** Health Department’s expanded condom availability initiative was targeted for opposition from conservative Christian advocates. The initiative, called Take Control Philly, was also criticized by an LGBTQ advocate who used a public school informational forum to call attention to the program’s failure to be more inclusive.

The program web site, <http://www.takecontrolphilly.org/> encourages visitors to use a condom “every time you have oral, anal, and vaginal sex” in order to avoid HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. For those living with HIV, the site reminds them that “it is important to have protected (safer) sex with your partner(s).” The site also provides video tutorials of how to use both male and female condoms. In addition to listing several locations where teens can obtain contraceptives, it offers free condoms via mail to anyone “between the ages of 11 and 19” living in the city. The age of anticipated clients, as well as the mailing service, has fed a groundswell of complaint from the opposition.<sup>15</sup>

A column by *Philadelphia Daily News* columnist Ronnie Polaneczky published the response of a parent upset by the Take Control Philly program. “I am personally outraged,” wrote the woman, who identified herself as a mother of a 14-year-old. “What is it telling our youth? I get the sex-education thing for kids in schools, but mail-order condoms for 11-year-olds??? It’s shocking to me.”<sup>16</sup>

In contrast, LGBTQ advocate Celeste Lavin expressed concern about the program in the *Philadelphia Public School Notebook*, a local source of information on school policies, programs, and related youth issues. “While this is a great effort to educate and protect our city’s youth, the Take Control initiative ignores the needs of gay youth...[it] does *not once* mention sexual contact among same-sex partners. The videos demonstrating proper condom usage refer only to coitus, not offering any explanation for youth who are having sex in other ways.”<sup>17</sup>

Although Take Control Philly is independent of condom-availability services which exist in some Philadelphia public high schools, advocates for such services worry that opposition to the new health department initiative will undermine what progress has been made so far to increase access to condoms in school for sexually-active students.

The **Albuquerque Public Schools** (APS) board was consumed by a debate over the efficacy of condoms in preventing sexually transmitted diseases. Board member David Robbins denied the effectiveness of condoms during a policy discussion of the district’s school-based health clinics. Robbins argued that pores in latex condoms are larger than HIV and that “The public has been misled to believe by too many public health officials that condoms equal safe sex. They do not.”<sup>18</sup> Robbins said he had found references to studies on an abstinence web site to prove that pores in latex are large enough to allow viruses to pass; despite this mention of studies, he declined to specify the authors, titles, or publication sources of the information.

State and local public health officials reacted with dismay to this effort by a school board member in a major metropolitan district to disseminate misinformation about condoms and to link it to school health practices. “Every major medical and public health organization in the world supports condom use as the main protection against HIV” and other sexually transmitted diseases, said Dr. Bruce Trigg, medical director of the New Mexico Department of Health’s STD program.

Health clinics operate at nine Albuquerque public schools: three high schools, five middle schools and one elementary school. The University of New Mexico jointly operates the clinics with APS, although the school district does not provide direct funding to the clinics. Moreover, a number of the clinics are run by providers who are not employed by APS.<sup>19</sup> Clinic staff currently cannot provide condoms or birth control on site but they can write prescriptions for birth control or provide referrals to other doctors.<sup>20</sup>

An APS policy committee voted to revise the district’s policy prohibiting those clinics from providing contraceptives to student patients. Under the proposed revision, non-APS employees would be authorized to provide condoms and contraception at the clinics. While the policy’s current language states that “birth control devices and medication will not be dispensed at school sites,” the proposed language states that “birth control and medication shall not be dispensed by Albuquerque Public Schools.”<sup>21</sup> The policy committee voted in favor of the proposed change in November 2010, along with nine other policy revisions.<sup>22</sup>

School board members favoring the policy argued that the revision is necessary for compliance under the *New Mexico Family Planning Act* and the federal *Title X* family planning law. According to the state’s *Family Planning Act*, no health facility can include in its policies or

bylaws “a statement that . . . interferes with the physician-client relationship in connection with the provision of any family planning service.”<sup>23</sup> APS school clinics also receive *Title X* federal funding and therefore under federal law the school district cannot prohibit the distribution of birth control by federally funded programs without passing a policy to ban the practice.<sup>24</sup>

“[I]f we’re going to have school-based health clinics in our schools, then we have to accept the fact that there is a doctor-patient relationship that we can’t interfere with,” commented APS Superintendent Winston Brooks. “[The revised policy] clarifies that APS employees cannot distribute condoms but that we’re not going to interfere in the doctor-patient relationship.”<sup>25</sup>

Despite the charge by federal and state mandates to update APS policy, some board members and parents disagreed with the proposed revision. The issue to revise the rule was first introduced in September 2010 but was tabled and reintroduced in November when it passed out of the policy committee.<sup>26</sup> Board member David Robbins opposed the proposed changes, stating that the updated language would violate a parent’s religious rights.<sup>27</sup> Robbins also argued that the proposed revision would conflict with the school district’s purpose: “I do not think [the proposed policy] meets the education mission of APS. We’re in the mission of education, not the mission of enabling any form of behaviors.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Straining Out Impurities?**

Conservative religious organizations, particularly ‘crisis pregnancy’ centers, moved aggressively in several states to influence the content of sexuality education in public schools. In some districts these organizations worked to impose their own curricula and instructors upon local schools, while in others they sought to provide extracurricular events and resources to promote divisive and discriminatory ideas of ‘purity’ through sexual abstinence.

**Richmond County School District** (Augusta, GA and suburbs) was the scene of contention over a proposed teen pregnancy prevention initiative to be offered at Butler High and Segoo Middle schools by the Augusta Care Pregnancy Center. In June 2010, the school district announced a partnership with Susan Swanson, the agency’s director, to pilot a character-building program in the two public schools, with a focus on abstinence promotion. By September the agreement had soured amid charges of miscommunication by both sides.

Driven by the desire to address the high rates of teenage pregnancy in the district (over 100 teen pregnancies were reported among district students in the 2009-10 school year) the Instruction Committee of the Richmond County school board expressed interest in Augusta Care’s program. Swanson intended to recruit instructors from the Abstinence & Marriage Education Partnership to teach its program in the designated schools.

According to its web site, Augusta Care Pregnancy Center “is a non-profit Christian ministry created for sharing the good news about Jesus Christ with all we come in contact. We also strive to raise a standard showing God’s concern for mothers and their unborn babies.”<sup>29</sup>

The Abstinence & Marriage Education Partnership, a longtime recipient of federal Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) funding, says its vision is to reach “every teenager in the

country with the abstinence and marriage message.”<sup>30</sup> Scott Phelps, who has a long history in the abstinence-only-until-marriage and anti-choice movement, founded the organization. His career began at the crisis pregnancy center Caris Prevention Services, also a CBAE grantee. Mr. Phelps also helped to co-author two of the most popular fear-based abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula, *A.C. Green’s Game Plan* and *Navigator*, both of which were distributed by Project Reality, a Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage and CBAE grantee in Illinois for many years. Mr. Phelps then went on to found the Abstinence & Marriage Education Partnership and create a new curriculum, *ASPIRE: Live your life. Be free*. The Abstinence & Marriage Education Partnership also produces the *Quest* and *Excel* abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula. Mr. Phelps also helped found the National Abstinence Education Association (NAEA) and currently serves on its Board of Directors.<sup>31</sup>

The Richmond County School Board’s Family Dynamics committee, which reviews “anything dealing with sex education or other sensitive items,” determined that the Augusta Care program “did not meet all of the Georgia Performance Standards, and the pregnancy center instructors who would teach the program do not meet the federal definition of ‘highly qualified’ teachers.”<sup>32</sup> As such, the School Board decided that the program must be taught by instructors in the district. In response, Swanson informed the school district that her organization would not present its program unless it was allowed to use the instructors from the Abstinence & Marriage Education Partnership.

The School Board held a meeting to discuss Swanson’s objection to using district instructors. Several attendees reported that they received emails alleging that the meeting would address a proposed takeover of the district’s sex education program by Planned Parenthood. In response, Board member Helen Minchew said, “I just don’t understand how this got tied into a possible takeover [of the school system’s sex education curriculum] by Planned Parenthood.... It has morphed into something completely out of the range of the initial issue we have been dealing with since June.”<sup>33</sup>

Richmond County School Superintendent Dr. Frank Roberson denied any involvement by the Planned Parenthood Augusta Center, and tried to assure opponents of comprehensive sexuality education that the district would remain true to abstinence-only-until-marriage messages, although he rationalized this decision in terms of a need to conserve instructional time for other academic subjects: “We have to be protective of instructional time...we just don’t have the luxury or liberty to take away those state mandated standards.”<sup>34</sup>

Swanson denied that her program failed to meet state standards, noting that it is taught in nine Georgia counties. “These people on that [school] board are holding those kids hostage,” Swanson said. “I offered them a good service. I’m not finished. I don’t know how, but I’m going to continue to work to see how we can get this into the Richmond County schools.”<sup>35</sup>

In Texas’s **Bushland Independent School District**, Superintendent Don Wood posted a newsletter for parents on the district’s web site in October 2010, arguing that the younger a student starts to date, the younger s/he will become sexually active. “Our youth...have been misled into believing the lie that having sex before marriage is OK,” Wood warned readers.<sup>36</sup>

CareNet, an anti-abortion-rights network of approximately 1,100 crisis pregnancy centers, has partnered with Bushland ISD in this effort. CareNet was founded in 1975 as the Christian Action Council, with a mission to mobilize evangelical Christians against abortion rights. CareNet Executive Director Candy Gibbs explains her organization's rationale for intervening in public school health promotion practices. "I think you have to talk to your kids at every opportunity. When you watch a commercial that's inappropriate and something is said about it that's an opportunity for you to communicate to your kids...The statistics is (sic) if a girl begins to date in the 6th grade and by that we mean meeting at the movies, doing group things, she has a 91% chance of becoming sexually active before she graduates from high school."<sup>37</sup>

Neither Gibbs nor Superintendent Wood identified an actual CDC publication as the source of this figure when bringing it to the attention of parents.

The **Godwin Heights public school district** (Wyoming, Michigan) was the locale for some low-profile conflict centered on an abstinence-promotion event at Godwin Heights High School. The March 2011 event, "Pure Passion for Fashion," was sponsored by Wedgwood Christian Services.<sup>38</sup> Wedgwood operates charter schools and residential facilities that serve youth in western Michigan and has been a prior recipient of federal money to promote abstinence until marriage. The school had been the site of earlier controversies related to abstinence-only assemblies and speakers, although a search for community perspectives on the 2011 event suggests that the most impassioned voices have died down somewhat.

At the time of the March 2011 event, at least one local parent expressed continued concern about Godwin Heights' partnership with Wedgwood, writing to the editorial page of the electronic news forum *MLive.com*: "It's too bad that Wedgwood Christian Services and Godwin High School are wasting time and money on a fashion event that promotes abstinence-only sex education for teens...That's why I sent my teenager to the Safer Choices classes offered by Planned Parenthood. There, she learned all she needs to know as far as protecting herself from unplanned pregnancy and STDs as well as practical tools such as how to avoid compromising situations and how to say no."<sup>39</sup>

## **Lemon and Sugar**

The bitter and the sweet in sexuality education made headlines during the 2010-11 school year. In states with recently-enacted Healthy Youth Acts, local communities adjusted to the new policies with difficulty in some cases and ease in others. In some states, political division at the top resulted in conflicting agendas to advance both abstinence-only-until-marriage programs and more comprehensive approaches.

Governor Bill Ritter of **Colorado**, who in 2007 signed into law a bill to ensure medical accuracy in public school sexual health education, declined to apply for \$3.2 million in federal Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage funding available to his state in 2010-11. Ritter opted instead to apply for more comprehensive federal funding for under the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP). Colorado was awarded approximately \$793,000 in PREP funds each year from 2010 through 2014.

Despite the clear intention of the Ritter administration to support more comprehensive approaches, a member of the Colorado State Board of Education, Peggy Littleton, lobbied state education commissioner Dwight Jones to defy Governor Ritter and submit an application for Title V funds. Littleton has been an ally of Colorado-based WAIT Training (renamed the Center for Relationship Education), whose founder Joneen Mackenzie has already obtained more than \$8 million in federal funding since 2005 to promote her programs around the U.S. and beyond. *WAIT Training*, created for middle and high school students, was designed to comply with the federal government's 8 point definition of "abstinence education" which means that it must teach "that a mutually faithful, monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of sexual activity," and that "sexual activity outside the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects," among other messages.<sup>40</sup>

After Commissioner Jones informed Littleton that the Colorado Department of Education planned to follow Governor Ritter's directive, she sent Jones a message urging him not to be "beholden to a governor who is gone by the end of the year when this [Title V] will have an impact for years to come."<sup>41</sup>

Littleton went on to independently lobby the state attorney general for an opinion supporting the right of the state board of education to apply for funds regardless of the wishes of the governor and commissioner of education. As a result, in September 2010 the Colorado Board of Education voted to seek Title V funding — circumventing the governor and enabled by a letter from the Colorado Attorney General's Office. Funding was soon secured, and the Colorado Department of Education issued a request for proposals in early 2011. The main beneficiary of the funds was Mackenzie's Center for Relationship Education. Controversy arose when it was discovered that several, but not all, of the low-scoring applicants — organizations firmly in the abstinence-only camp — were given an opportunity to rewrite and re-submit their proposals for reconsideration. The Center for Relationship Education was among those given a second chance and ultimately successful in securing funding.

With the departures of both Commissioner Jones and Governor Ritter, there has been little subsequent accountability for the questionable processes by which a single, ideology-driven state board of education member secured the resources necessary to promote a failed abstinence-only-until-marriage approach, all for the benefit of a single Colorado-based organization.

In September 2010, North Carolina's **Beaufort County** School Board voted 6-3 to approve a new sexuality education curriculum in response to state-level changes in content requirements. The main point of contention among board members was whether lessons would be taught to mixed-gender groups. Proponents of separating girls from boys ultimately carried the day.<sup>42</sup>

North Carolina's 2009 Healthy Youth Act took effect at the start of the 2010-11 school year, and adds new requirements for teaching sexual topics in public school health education courses for grades 7-9. The new law directs public schools to provide more information on STIs, the effectiveness and safety of FDA-approved contraceptive devices in preventing pregnancy and disease, and awareness of sexual assault, sexual abuse and risk reduction. It also gives parents

and guardians the choice to opt their children out of sexual health education classes, and it permits them to review all the instructional materials in advance.

Beaufort's revised curriculum will include more sexual health information overall, but still devotes most of its time and resources to teaching the benefits of abstinence. Content will be taught by Beaufort County health and physical education teachers or by county nurses.

Beaufort's revised lesson plans provide instruction in grades 7, 8, and 9, and are based on materials developed by the North Carolina Comprehensive Health Education Training Center at Appalachian State University. These materials were preferred by a local task force of educators, health care providers, parents and community members charged with recommending sexual health education materials to comply with state requirements.<sup>43</sup>

Also in September 2010, school board members in **Cleveland County, NC**, approved a more comprehensive sex education curriculum, meeting the terms of the Healthy Youth Act with no significant dissent. All nine board members approved the new curriculum for grades 7-9, forestalling controversy by emphasizing that the curriculum would not include demonstrations or actual provision of contraceptive methods.

"We've had very few inquiries," said John Goforth, director of secondary education. "Any time during the 60-day period or after it begins, parents can opt their child out."<sup>44</sup>

Schools Superintendent Dr. Bruce Boyles framed the curriculum revisions in terms of compliance with state law: "This is not an option... This is not something that you as a board asked for, this is a state law."<sup>45</sup>

In 2010, **Wisconsin** also passed a new law impacting how public schools approach teaching sexuality topics. Its Healthy Youth Act requires any public school that teaches sexuality education to provide students with medically accurate and age-appropriate information about both the benefits of abstinence and the benefits and proper use of birth control and barrier methods. If a school teaches any sexuality content beyond basic HIV awareness, it must also teach about the life and relationship skills needed in order to negotiate sexual encounters, to say no to sex, to insist on the use of contraception, and to communicate with parents and other trusted adults about these issues. The law also requires that students be informed about Wisconsin's sexual assault reporting laws.<sup>46</sup> Despite these "if...then..." provisions, the law also gives schools the option of teaching no sexuality content at all beyond basic HIV awareness.

Much time and effort was invested in **Merrill, Wisconsin**, to update the curriculum for the local school district's human growth and development courses. The Merrill School District convened a human growth and development advisory committee of administrators, parents, teachers, and clergy to guide the district's curriculum update in accordance with the new state law.<sup>47</sup>

At a committee meeting in August 2010, community members expressed their views on proposed changes to the district's longstanding abstinence-only-until-marriage lessons. Former Merrill School Board member Joe Fink stated his opposition to revising the curriculum to meet the standards of the new law: "I don't like the law; I think the law is wrong. I think parents know

best . . . this is about parents' rights." Fink asked the advisory committee to discontinue the human growth and development classes altogether for a year if it "can't stick with its abstinence-only lessons."<sup>48</sup>

Parent Dorly Dahlke expressed her concerns: "There are lots of things in the curriculum depending on who teaches it, who the person coming into teach it, there are other entities coming in from the outside who are wanting to come in here and I don't feel as if those entities should be our authorities on sex education."<sup>49</sup>

Dr. Lisa Snyder, Superintendent of Merrill schools, summed up the conflict in this way: "There are people that feel very strongly that parents should have the obligation and the right to educate their children in the manner that they wish and then of course there are people who feel very strongly on the other end that all students deserve accurate, factual information on this topic."<sup>50</sup>

Committee members found consensus impossible in light of the wide range of community viewpoints. Consequently, the district school board made the decision to disband this committee and appoint new members to continue the process of determining how to comply with state law. While the specific content of the curriculum was by no means settled, the school board voted 5-4 to make whatever changes would be necessary for compliance. Among those supporting the board's vote was former nurse practitioner Maureen Merrier: "Just because a male and a female consummate a marriage," she argued, "does not make them a (sic) expert on sex education 16 years later."<sup>51</sup>

The executive director of Wisconsin's Family Planning Health Services (FPHS), Lon Newman, expressed appreciation for Merrill school stakeholders' patience in allowing the full process to unfold as the board reformed its committee and authorized a curriculum to comply with Wisconsin law. "It is important to let each person speak and be heard, and to not let decision-makers get pulled off track and lose focus by having political or moral discussions," Newman explained. "By keeping discussions under the scope of the standards that the law requires—medical accuracy and age appropriateness, the decision made by a school board is simple." The FPHS and Mr. Newman anticipate that this is not the only sexuality education curriculum that may be updated in the state, but that we "can expect to use what has happened in Merrill as an excellent example of what will be repeated in districts throughout Wisconsin."<sup>52</sup>

Wisconsin's **Cedarburg School District** made news for requiring parents to opt their children *in* to sexuality education classes, differing from Merrill in attempting to accommodate opponents of the new state law.

Milwaukee-based state representative Tamara Grigsby (D-Milwaukee), one of the bill's co-authors, said the Cedarburg policy was a "creative dodge" around the intent of the state law. "The intent... was to make sure that any school district that taught human growth and development included a curriculum that was comprehensive."<sup>53</sup>

Ellen Wilde, the only Cedarburg School Board member to oppose the new opt-in policy, criticized her board colleagues for ignoring an advisory committee's recommendations after a two-year review of the curriculum, calling the board majority "irresponsible and disrespectful."<sup>54</sup>

The local advisory committee was made up of 22 teachers, social workers, community members, clergy, and physicians, and made its recommendations to the school board in the summer 2009. Changing to an opt-in policy was not among the advisory committee's suggestions.

Matt Sande, director of legislative affairs for Pro-Life Wisconsin, argued that the Healthy Youth Act "prevents a local public school district from adopting an abstinence-only program...It even prohibits school districts [from having dual-track] programs -- they have an abstinence-only program and then they have one that includes both abstinence and contraception education. So this would prohibit all of that."<sup>55</sup>

The new opt-in policy in Cedarburg requires parents of ninth-graders to return a signed form authorizing their child to attend sexuality education lessons. Failure to return the signed form is to be treated as an opt-out. Until now, Cedarburg maintained an opt-out policy under which parents who objected to their children's attendance in such classes would be required to submit a written request to withdraw the child from attending sexual health lessons.

In **Wausau**, Wisconsin, by contrast, the local school board convened a committee to review the district's sexuality education curriculum for compliance with the Healthy Youth Act, with little of the debate over opt-in/opt-out and other provisions that led to conflict in Cedarburg and Merrill. Wausau School District curriculum coordinator Thom Hahn noted that the review process is supposed to happen every three years regardless of changes in state requirements: "We're trying to find out just what changes, if any, we have to make to comply with the new state statutes."<sup>56</sup>

Mississippi's **Jackson Public Schools (JPS)** were the focus of a joint legislative hearing on teen pregnancy at the state capitol building at the start of 2011, where lawmakers debated statewide requirements for sexuality education in public schools.

Nancy Sylvester, a veteran JPS educator who once promoted abstinence-only-until-marriage programs for the school district, testified that effective sexuality education nowadays requires a comprehensive approach that includes contraceptive information as well as youth-development components that promote mental and social health.<sup>57</sup>

As recently as the start of the 2010-2011 school year, Mississippi public school districts were not required to provide sexuality education. Most followed the Mississippi Department of Education's Framework guidelines, which teach only abstinence-until-marriage along with basic information about STIs. Although state law permitted local districts the freedom to adopt more progressive policies, only five districts in the entire state (out of 152 total districts) specified *any* policy on sexuality education according to the testimony of Shane McNeill, director of the state education department's Healthy Schools program.<sup>58</sup>

Abstinence-only-until-marriage advocates also attended the hearings in Jackson, citing freshly-published data on the 'Jemmott abstinence program' as justification for an intensification of Mississippi's failed policies; the respected adolescent sexual health researchers Loretta and John Jemmott had recently published a study with promising behavioral change results among Philadelphia teens in an abstinence-focused intervention.<sup>59</sup> However, the Jemmott program was

not designed to meet the restrictive criteria (known as the A-H definition) for programs funded with federal abstinence-only-until-marriage dollars – for example, the program does not teach that sexual activity outside the context of heterosexual marriage is likely to cause emotional damage. Larry McAdoo of Redemption Outreach Ministries and Dr. Freda Bush, a local ob/gyn and board member of the Medical Institute for Sexual Health, urged state lawmakers to craft legislation requiring all districts to implement abstinence-only-until-marriage programs in public schools.

The ultimate outcome following the hearing was the passage of a law in March 2011 requiring that districts to adopt a policy related to sexuality education, but leaving the decision about the details of the policy and type of approach to the local school board. This lack of guidance from the state is a missed opportunity to ensure that Mississippi students receive sexuality education programs based on sound science rather than political ideology.

### **A Better Blend**

Several states and local school districts debated measures to recognize, include, and affirm lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students. Advocates made gains in several instances this past school year, holding school districts accountable for providing information about LGBT resources, supporting LGBT youth through extracurricular events, and changing state-level policies to raise the visibility of LGBT history.

A **California** bill signed into law in July 2011, requires that all social studies curricula in the state include lessons on the role and contributions of LGBT individuals to the history of California and the United States. The legislation, known as the *Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act*, is intended to address the de facto exclusion of LGBT history from social studies curricula and textbooks, combat negative stereotypes of LGBT people, and reduce bullying and violence against LGBT students. The act also requires curricula to include the role and contributions of Americans with disabilities.

Current California law already requires that social studies instruction include the historical contributions of African Americans, women, Native Americans, and other marginalized groups;<sup>60</sup> the *FAIR Education Act* will add LGBT people to this list. Schools will also be prohibited from using any educational materials that promote discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>61</sup> Supporters name Harvey Milk, once a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and the first openly gay man to be elected to public office, and Bayard Rustin, a gay civil rights activist and advisor to Martin Luther King Jr., as examples of Americans whose contributions may be taught under the new legislation.<sup>62</sup> The act goes into effect in January 2012, though state budget restrictions will delay new textbooks until 2015.<sup>63</sup>

After signing the bill, Governor Jerry Brown stated, “History should be honest. This bill revises existing laws that prohibit discrimination in education and ensures that the important contributions of Americans from all backgrounds and walks of life are included in our history books.”<sup>64</sup> Supporters also hope that the inclusion of LGBT individuals in public schools will promote respect and eliminate violence toward LGBT students. Mario Guerrero of Equality

California commented, “Studies have shown that LGBT inclusion in curriculum is linked to greater student safety and lower rates of bullying.”<sup>65</sup> Anti-LGBT bullying has a significant impact not only in California, but across the U.S.; a 2009 survey of over 7,000 LGBT middle and high school nationwide students found that 8 in 10 were verbally harassed, 4 in 10 were physically harassed, and nearly 1 in 5 were physically assaulted at school in the past year.<sup>66</sup> Students in schools with inclusive curricula were more likely to report that their classmates were somewhat or very accepting of LGBT people than students in schools without such curricula (61.2% vs. 37.3%). Furthermore, students in schools with inclusive curricula heard fewer homophobic remarks and more likely to feel safe and actually attend classes.<sup>67</sup>

The bill has provoked intense criticism from political conservatives and religious groups, some of which went so far as to claim that teaching LGBT history would constitute “sexual brainwashing.”<sup>68</sup> The Rev. Louis Sheldon, chairman and founder of the Traditional Values Coalition, says the act will allow “homosexual activists to indoctrinate the minds of California’s youth . . . [and] textbooks and instructional materials will all become pro-homosexual promotion tools.”<sup>69</sup> The California Family Council says the act’s purpose is to impose “blatant pro-homosexual history curricula on innocent young children.”<sup>70</sup> Some parents claim they will start homeschooling their children because of this new curriculum standard. Efforts to repeal the new law followed, with the opposition group Stop SB48 attempting to collect the 504,760 signatures needed by October 12, to place the law’s fate on the ballot as part of an election-day referendum. This attempt fell short of the required number of signatures.<sup>71</sup>

Much of the criticism has relied on misinformation about the law. Larry E. Schweikart, an American historian and professor of history at the University of Dayton, argued that the law will require “that you have a certain number of lines, literally, certain number of words, dedicated to gays and lesbians at all points in history.”<sup>72</sup> However, the law makes no such requirement. Conservative talk show host Bill O’Reilly claimed as early as 2006, when the measure was first proposed, that “if you are a teacher . . . you’re not going to be able to say bad things about [convicted murderer] Jeffrey Dahmer,” because Dahmer was “a gay cannibal.”<sup>73</sup> This fantasy is also unsupported by the actual text of the law. One organization, the Protect Kids Foundation, even warned that, “In language lessons, children would be required to act as homosexuals when they are role-playing to practice vocabulary.”<sup>74</sup> The new law, however, does not apply to language instruction. Its provisions apply only to social studies and history lessons, and local school boards are charged with determining how much time to spend on LGBT history, which individuals and events should be covered, and at what grade level to begin teaching these topics.

While the news in California was encouraging at the state level, local districts were still embroiled in controversy related to anti-bullying initiatives. In December 2010, after hearing two hours of public testimony, the board of education in the **Vallejo Unified School District** voted 4–1 to retain the district’s “Respect for All” anti-bullying program, which among other topics teaches tolerance and non-discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation.<sup>75</sup> The school district first implemented the program during the 2009–2010 school year as part of the legal settlement between the district and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). The district lost in a suit filed by the ALCU in defense of a former district high school student who suffered anti-gay harassment from teachers and staff. The settlement also required the district to

provide mandatory training to all faculty members on preventing discrimination against sexual minorities.<sup>76</sup>

Controversy over the anti-harassment program first arose in Vallejo during the Fall 2010 school term meeting when a local parent brought her concerns to the attention of the school board. The parent objected to the anti-bullying content in the curriculum and argued that as a mandatory part of the district's academic program, the content violated her rights as a parent.<sup>77</sup>

The Vallejo program includes three educational videos developed by the media organization, GroundSpark, which address social stereotypes, bias, and prejudice to prevent bullying and promote equality and respect in school environments. The three videos are shown to students in grades K–12 based on education level, including *That's a Family!* for elementary school students, *Let's Get Real* for middle schoolers, and *Straightlaced* for high school students. The videos address homophobia among other types of social biases.<sup>78</sup>

During the Vallejo school board meeting of December 2010, parents, district staff, community members, and students engaged in heated debate. Among those attending, Cheri Hamilton, mother of the lesbian student represented in the lawsuit, expressed support for the program based on her daughter's experience. "I saw how [the harassment] affected her," recalled Hamilton. "She fell into a deep depression. She didn't laugh anymore. She fell behind in school."<sup>79</sup> Opponents criticized the district for not instituting an opt-out provision, which would allow parents and guardians to remove their child from the instruction. "Basically my right as a parent is being taken away. You're going to force this on my kids," protested parent Coz Rennicky.<sup>80</sup>

Given the school board's 4-1 vote in support of "Respect for All," the program will remain mandatory for all Vallejo public school students. California law requires school districts to "protect students from harassment and discrimination, including on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity."<sup>81</sup> Elizabeth Gill, staff attorney for the ACLU of Northern California, issued a press statement at the time of Vallejo's original settlement with the family of the harassed student, reminding school stakeholders of their legal obligations: "If a school district ignores anti-gay bias in schools, it is plainly violating both state and federal law. These laws are designed, in part, to ensure that all students are able to learn and thrive free from bias."<sup>82</sup>

In addition to upholding the program, the Vallejo school board adopted a series of recommendations issued by the Superintendent to increase its acceptance by parents and school personnel. These included communicating more often with parents and guardians about bullying-prevention policies, and involving parents more often in periodic reviews of program materials.<sup>83</sup>

Missouri's **Camdenton School District** received a letter in May 2011 from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Eastern Missouri, informing superintendent Tim Hadfield that the district's web filters unconstitutionally block access to hundreds of LGBT web sites while allowing access to sites with anti-LGBT messages.<sup>84</sup> The school district did not respond to the allegations, prompting the national ACLU and its local affiliate to file a federal lawsuit in Jefferson City. ACLU was joined in filing the suit by several LGBT organizations whose web sites had been blocked by the filter: Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbian and Gays (PFLAG),

the Matthew Shepard Foundation, Campus Pride, and DignityUSA, a Catholic LGBT organization.

News of the controversy was kept under wraps by school district officials for most of the spring and early summer, finally reaching local media outlets near the very end of the 2011 summer break.<sup>85</sup> The district is comparatively small, with approximately 4,200 students on three school campuses.

After being alerted that its filtering system blocked student access to four websites with anti-bullying information and other resources for student gay-straight alliances, the district unblocked those four specific websites. It proved unwilling to address the larger issue and reconfigure its filtering for general access to other LGBT sites.

In Minnesota's **Anoka-Hennepin School District**, student Desiree Shelton was elected by her peers in January 2011 to walk in "royalty court," as part of Champlin Park High School's annual Snow Days dance. After disclosing that she would be walking with her girlfriend, school administrators moved to change the event, telling student they couldn't walk into the celebration in pairs; for two people of the same gender to do so might "offend" some students.<sup>86</sup> Shelton and her allies found support at the National Center for Lesbian Rights, which joined the Southern Poverty Law Center and a private law firm to inform the school district it might face legal action. Under the threat of a lawsuit, the district changed its stance and affirmed the right of any member of the royalty court to bring any significant person in their life to walk with them during the procession. The district also agreed to include Gay-Straight Alliance club students in the planning of future Snow Days dances.<sup>87</sup>

### **Positive Changes Brewing**

In a school year dominated by news of Tea Party triumphs and public service budget cuts, many school districts still managed to find the time and resources to advance more comprehensive sexuality education. While some districts measured success simply by resisting efforts to narrow the scope of their curricula, others rewrote their educational standards to prepare youth for sexually healthy lives in a 21<sup>st</sup> century global society.

In January 2011, the **Downingtown Area School District** (Pennsylvania) formalized its decision to decline an abstinence-only-until-marriage program offered by [Amnion](#), an organization that operates two crisis pregnancy centers in eastern Pennsylvania. At a school board meeting in December 2010, several parents spoke against the Amnion program, expressing concern about Amnion's religious mission. The organization's own web site states its belief that, "for the salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential, and that this salvation is received through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and not as a result of good works."<sup>88</sup> Additionally, the organization notes its partnership with the RealEd Relationship Education Program: "RealEd reaches area youth with a strong message of premarital sexual abstinence and purity."<sup>89</sup>

According to Marcy Hessinger, the Chief Academic Officer for the school district, the system's Grade 8 physical education teachers were polled about their professional preferences in how to teach about sexuality and healthy relationships. More than two-thirds voted to teach the content with existing textbooks and materials, while under one-third voted for the Amnion program.<sup>90</sup> The Amnion program is used in several other Pennsylvania school districts, including Kennett Consolidated, Coatesville Area, Great Valley and Phoenixville.

Governor Rick Perry and the conservative majority on the **Texas** State Board of Education are adamant that the sexuality education of Texas public school students should be limited to abstinence-only-until-marriage, despite Texas' rank in the top five states for unintended teen pregnancies.

In defiance of state-level political pressures, **Bexar County** (San Antonio and suburbs) is evolving towards a more comprehensive approach to sexuality education in its 27 public school districts. Since 2003, the University of Texas (UT) Health Science Center at San Antonio has offered its "Sex Education Program" in upper elementary and middle grades, and so far has reached 105,000 public school students from fifth through ninth grade.

UT San Antonio's program incorporates the Search Institute's '40 developmental assets' to frame sexuality education in a youth-development context. "The program teaches more than just abstinence and contraception, according to director Dr. Kristen Plastino, associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology: "We promote giving teens medically accurate information so they can make healthy decisions."<sup>91</sup>

With the announcement in October 2010 of two new federal grants for UT, the Sex Education Program will be expanded into the 10th through 12th grades in six school districts primarily on San Antonio's South Side and Southwest Side neighborhoods. The funding for expansion comes from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (\$1.2 million annually) and the Department of Health and Human Services (\$850,000 annually). The additional federal funding will pay for hiring additional teachers to implement the program in the senior high school grades.

In December 2010, Massachusetts' **Needham Public School District** began to engage parents in considering proposed changes to the local sexuality education curriculum.<sup>92</sup> Dr. Kathy Pinkham, Director of Health and Physical Education, notes that the biggest concern among parents seems to be that current students may not benefit from changes to be implemented in the future.

Needham schools teach puberty in grade 5, then wait until Grade 11 to revisit sexual health instruction. Pinkham hopes to add classroom discussions on new media technologies, cyber bullying, texting, and on-line social norms. The district also envisions infusing sexuality education into the science curriculum at most grade levels, and stressing the benefits of delaying sexual activity as opposed to just "saying no."

Increased parental involvement is also proposed: "We're looking at giving homework which could involve students asking parents what going through puberty was like for them," Pinkham said. "Research has shown that this open dialog helps students learn how to communicate about sex in a healthy way."<sup>93</sup>

Under the new plan, parents will be sent letters informing them of the lessons and giving them the choice of opting their children out of some or all of the in-depth lessons which will take place in fifth, sixth, ninth and eleventh grades. At other grade levels sexuality topics would be covered within the science curriculum.

According to the on-line community news source *Needham Wicked Local*, “One parent who didn’t want to be named was concerned that vaginal intercourse and oral sex would be discussed in sixth grade and wondered if maybe seventh grade was more appropriate. ‘It’s a maturity thing,’ the parent said. ‘If I told my daughter what oral sex was in sixth grade she’d either be horrified or laugh in my face. I’m not saying it shouldn’t be discussed, but I wonder if they’re ready.’”<sup>94</sup>

By Spring 2011, a local opposition group had formed called SENSE (Sensible Needham Sex Education). The group’s main objection was that the revised curriculum did not teach enough about values and ‘community standards’.<sup>95</sup> Pinkham was firm in responding that values and standards would be sufficiently addressed in the revised curriculum, which was piloted in April 2011 with fifth and ninth graders.

Nearly two and a half years since the process began to update and revise the school district’s health education standards, the **Helena, Montana**, public school Board of Trustees finally approved the revised *Health Enhancement K–12 Critical Competencies* in October 2010 by a vote of 6–3. The education guidelines cover a broad range of health topics. Passage of the revisions was stalled by controversy over a small portion of the 60-plus page document. Faced with vocal opposition over content related to sexual health, the district was forced to abandon some of the material in the final draft.

The Helena *Critical Competencies* include medically accurate and age-appropriate guidelines for teaching health topics at all grade levels, including sexuality topics such as human growth and development, reproductive health, sexual harassment and bullying prevention, gender diversity, and sexual orientation. Some sexuality education language was removed from the original draft, however. In particular, guidelines to introduce correct terminology in kindergarten for reproductive organs - such as ‘penis’, ‘vagina’, ‘breast’, ‘nipples’, ‘testicles’, and ‘scrotum’ - were taken out of the final version. The final version also removed a first-grade guideline to teach that ‘human beings can love people of the same gender or another gender,’ and a second-grade guideline teaching that making fun of people by calling them “gay” is disrespectful and hurtful. A fifth-grade guideline explaining that ‘sexual intercourse includes but is not limited to vaginal, oral, or anal penetration’ was also deleted from the final version. Superintendent of Schools Bruce Messinger was responsible for making the changes to the final draft of the curriculum, saying that despite the revisions, the intent of the instruction—to provide factual information about sex, reproduction, and tolerance—remains unchanged.<sup>96, 97, 98</sup>

While the Board of Trustees intended to approve the updated *Critical Competencies* before the start of the 2010–2011 school year, local opposition forced further public hearings. When the original draft was released to the public in June 2010, it ignited a community firestorm that grew as the summer wore on. The board received over 7,000 comments related to the standards.<sup>99</sup> In

early September the board presented a revised plan omitting the most controversial language from the guidelines, and a placing greater emphasis on teaching abstinence. A September 2010 public hearing lasted longer than six hours, with testimony from both proponents and opponents of the new guidelines. Two weeks later the board approved the revised document despite continued dissent by a small number of community members. The final product “reflects the values and expectations of the Helena community and will provide quality, comprehensive health education for all students,” Superintendent Messinger stated at the conclusion of the public hearing process.<sup>100</sup>

The school district will next develop an implementation plan, to take effect in the 2011–2012 school year. According to Messinger, this plan will include curriculum development for each grade, professional development for district staff, community outreach to identify local sexual health resources, and parental engagement using sexuality information to be shared at home. A longtime Helena physical education and master teacher will be employed part-time to manage the development of the implementation plan. Funding for the position comes from federal stimulus money awarded to the district to support instructional improvement. The superintendent also noted that the plan will be developed with input from parent, student and teacher advisory councils. A local opt-out policy will allow parents and guardians to remove their children from instruction involving content they deem objectionable. The newly approved *Critical Competencies* mark the first time in over 15 years that Helena’s health education standards and guidelines have been thoroughly revised.<sup>101</sup>

In voting to approve the document, board member Don Jones referred specifically to the sexuality education content to explain his support: “As a board we cannot join those who advocate that we leave children alone. Innocence cannot be a justification for ignorance.”<sup>102</sup>

Despite opposition efforts to censor curriculum materials, and the contentious process to approve the new guidelines, supporters of more comprehensive sexuality education say the outcome was worth the effort. “I am really proud of the Helena Board of Trustees for going through this process - listening to the community, making some revisions that reflect a compromise - then ultimately doing the right thing for the kids who go to public schools in this community, which is give them the information that they need to make responsible choices and become responsible adults,” comments Kim Abbott, an organizer for the Montana Human Rights Network.<sup>103</sup>

### **Conclusion: How Many Lumps?**

The 2010-2011 school year affirmed that advocates for comprehensive sexuality education could at least conserve prior gains despite a vastly more hostile policy-making climate. Advocates took their lumps in places like North Dakota from a reinvigorated opposition, but also managed in neighboring Montana to survive the attacks and emerge stronger in some of the most unlikely locales. While many state- and local-level debates continued to be driven by alarm over adolescent risk behavior data, scrutiny of teen pregnancy and STI rates helped school stakeholders clearly see the inability of abstinence-only programs to deliver on their promises.

Passionate opposition continued unabated, newly empowered with the election of Tea Party-affiliated conservative legislators and school board members. Despite Tea Partiers' insistence that 'social issues' and 'culture wars' are not on their agenda, the school year proved otherwise as social conservatives welcomed the Tea Party into alliances to restrict access to information on condoms, contraception, and sexual orientation, and to increase opportunities for religious organizations to shape the curriculum.

As in past years, young people continue to voice the most powerful rationales in advocating for more comprehensive sex education. It is up to their parents and other adult allies in social and professional organizations, SIECUS among them, to stand behind young people's efforts and ensure that opponents cannot roll back the past decade's gains for more comprehensive sexuality education.

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