School Daze and Controversies

Sex ed in the nation's classrooms is still a hot-button topic.

March 7, 2016 By Kate Ferguson

Although strong public support for sex education in our schools continues unabated, arguments for and against a sexual health curriculum remain the same. Oh, and toss into the mix how to handle the effects of social media on this still very controversial issue.

Support for sex education in schools took root in the late 1980s. According to a report by the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), by 1989 many states had either passed mandates for sex education in schools, including teaching kids about HIV/AIDS, or encouraged adding sexual health to reading, writing and 'rithmetic in classroom lesson plans.

But the sexual health education students receive—or don't—is left to the discretion of local state school boards, that rule on what information is covered and how it's presented. In addition, grassroots groups weigh in on schools' sex ed programs to push their individual agendas. Should sex education programs focus on abstinence only until marriage? Should they include a discussion of gender identity and diversity issues?

Of course, these questions are just a few that local schools consider when they organize their sex ed programs. What's more, government funding also drives these discussions in ways that aren't readily visible to the public.

Also, social media now fuels additional controversies about how this way of communicating affects schools' sexual education programs.

For example, when state laws forbid sex ed teachers from talking about certain topics, the educators might direct their students to smart phone apps, YouTube, Twitter and websites that provide the missing information they need.

But SIECUS believes its role in the debate is clear: to continue efforts to advocate for positive, accurate, and quality comprehensive sexual education for youth.

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