

# SHOWDOWN

## Battle Ensues Over Sex Ed in NC Public Schools

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This article appears in  
the Spring 2018 edition  
of *Family North Carolina*  
magazine, a publication  
of the North Carolina  
Family Policy Council.



*Disgusting. Vile. Filth.  
Shock and awe.*

These are some of the words that Craig Autry used to describe Planned Parenthood's sex education curriculum, *Get Real: Comprehensive Sex Education That Works*, which was moving into Cumberland County middle and high schools in the Fall of 2017.

Autry is a Cumberland County parent and leader of a new citizens group called Cumberland Protect Our Students. This organization was formed and activated when it was learned that the Cumberland County Board of Education was preparing to expand the *Get Real* curriculum into more schools across the county. It was already in nine middle schools. The group worked to influence the Board by circulating petitions and educating parents about the contents of the curriculum. Hundreds attended a meeting with county officials, with many voicing opposition to the content of the curriculum.

An in-depth analysis of the *Get Real* curriculum was conducted by NC Family's sister organization, Massachusetts Family Institute. The following was found in the *Get Real* workbook designed for 7th graders:

- A list of "Dating Behaviors," which includes "touching a partner under clothes" and "having sex" (p. 21: Activity 7.5);
- An explanation that "condoms can be obtained from the school nurse";
- Sexually explicit instructions on how to use a dental dam as a prophylactic device (p. 36-37: Protection Methods Chart); and,
- A story of a child telling his parents he is gay and infers that anyone who disapproves of homosexual behavior is "against homosexuals" and "cruel." (p. 13: Activity 7.3).

Use of the *Get Real* curriculum was part of a larger project initiated by an organization called NC Youth Connected, and supported by a statewide organization called SHIFT NC. SHIFT NC, endorsed by Planned Parenthood,<sup>1</sup> receives millions of dollars annually in federal funding,<sup>2</sup> and as recently as 2017, stated its goal of moving its "pregnancy prevention" programs into every county in North Carolina.

Mrs. Bell (not her real name) is a teacher in the Cumberland County public schools. She expressed extreme concern over the contents of the curriculum: "It will influence a whole generation of students who are looking to their teachers for guidance. It's indoctrination. It is going to confuse them to be taught these things by people they trust. **Someone has to stand in the gap and say, 'This is wrong!' We need to be teaching them good things—encouraging them in their life goals—not teaching them different ways to have sex.**"

Because citizens were engaged, expressed concerns, and sought a working relationship with county officials, the Cumberland County Board of Education voted against utilizing the *Get Real* curriculum. They cited the outcry from parents who were concerned about its highly objectionable contents.

Back in 2016, Onslow County went through a similar process. Their Board of Education had contracted with NC Youth Connected, but the project was never implemented, thanks to objections from citizens in Onslow County. You can learn more about what transpired there by reading or listening to the interview with Dr. Joe Werrell<sup>3</sup> on our *Family Policy Matters* radio show and podcast.

According to North Carolina law,<sup>4</sup> parents have certain rights when it comes to sex education:

- You have the right to review all sex ed curriculum at least 60 days prior to use.
- You have the right to opt your children out of sex education instruction.

## Two Distinct Philosophies

Generally speaking, there are two camps when it comes to sex education for middle and high school students in our nation's public schools: Sexual Risk Reduction (SRR) (often referred to as "Comprehensive Sex Education" and favored by organizations such as Planned Parenthood) and Sexual Risk Avoidance (SRA) (formerly known as "Abstinence Until Marriage Education").

In North Carolina, conservative lawmakers and parents have fought to protect the "Abstinence Education" or SRA model (Think: A for Abstinence), which became law in our state in the mid-1990's. And for good reason: Mary Anne Mosack, Executive Director of Ascend, whose organization works to defend and promote SRA education, says when teens delay sex, the benefits "cannot be overstated."<sup>5</sup> In fact, Mosack explains that teens who abstain from sex outside of marriage have "life-changing outcomes" such as better academic success and a greatly reduced risk of poverty.

SRR programs run by SHIFT NC and backed by Planned Parenthood have claimed dramatic success in efforts to lower teen pregnancy rates. However, with some exceptions, overall teen birth

rates have been dropping steadily since 1957. What proponents of “safe sex” education don’t acknowledge is the fact that the rate of unmarried teen pregnancies has skyrocketed. According to Pew Research, in 1957, 15 percent of pregnant teens were unmarried. In 2016, 89 percent of pregnant teens between the ages of 15-19 were unmarried.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, SRR proponents are not acknowledging the dramatic increase in infections related to sexual activity. While “safe sex” proponents proudly report that over 80 percent of teens who have sex for the first time use a contraceptive, they fail to report the near-epidemic rates of sexually transmitted diseases among teenagers.<sup>7</sup>

### A Few Encouraging Stats

Despite those who believe it is futile to teach teens to postpone sex, more teens are reporting they have never had sex (49 percent in 1988, up to 56 percent in 2012).<sup>8</sup>

And the National Center for Health Statistics reports, “The abortion rate among females ages 15-19 has also fallen over roughly the same time period – from 43.5 per 1,000 female teens in 1988 to 16.3 in 2009.”<sup>9</sup>

While changes have been made to North Carolina’s abstinence education laws in recent years, the general framework remains intact,<sup>10</sup> although somewhat weakened by additional language. Below is a timeline of the changes that have taken place in laws regarding sex education in North Carolina.

**1995:** Passage of the Abstinence Education law, which required local schools to offer an “abstinence until marriage” program. “Abstinence from sexual activity outside of marriage” was (and still is) to be taught as the “expected standard” along with the “reasons, skills, and strategies” for choosing that standard. The curriculum could be expanded to include components from “Comprehensive

Sex Education” if requirements for parental review, a public hearing, and local approval were met.<sup>11</sup>

**2009:** Passage of the “Healthy Youth Act,” which altered and added to existing law on sex education by first changing the description of the curriculum from “abstinence until marriage education” to “reproductive health and safety education.” The new provisions required local schools to provide instruction in seventh through ninth grades on how sexually transmitted diseases are transmitted. While teaching children about the dangers of STDs can be a helpful discussion, it often includes graphic descriptions of sex acts.

Another new requirement mandated instruction on “the effectiveness and safety of all federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved methods of reducing the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, and...of all FDA-approved contraceptive methods in preventing pregnancy.” Once again, such instruction often includes graphic descriptions and demonstrations of birth control methods.

An addition that also proved to be problematic was a requirement that all instruction be “objective and based upon scientific research that is peer reviewed and accepted by professionals and credentialed experts in the field of sexual health education.” Many of the terms in this part of the policy were open to wide-ranging interpretation and led to cancellation of some excellent and long-standing abstinence education programs.

Although the new law outlined standards for what would be taught, it gave wide-ranging authority to local school boards to “expand on the subject areas



to be included in the program and on the instructional objectives to be met.”<sup>12</sup>

**2015:** Legislators fixed a problem in the 2009 law by providing explanation on what was meant by “scientific research that is peer reviewed and accepted by professionals and credentialed experts” to include professionals in the fields of adolescent psychology, behavioral counseling, medicine, human anatomy, biology, ethics, or health education.” This was helpful to those wishing to teach SRA/Abstinence Education as it clarified who was considered a professional or expert in the field of sex education.<sup>13</sup>

**2017:** North Carolina lawmakers passed important additions to the statutes, adding more scientific evidence into state law stating that “induced abortions” were shown to be a known factor in premature births in subsequent pregnancies, a point that many abortion supporters have never conceded. Another addition to the law required instruction on sex trafficking prevention and awareness.<sup>14</sup>

## Meanwhile, On The Federal Level

A quick survey since 1900 shows that sex education in America was birthed out of the sexual revolution and the need to curtail out of wedlock pregnancies. By the 1980’s, opponents of teaching sex education in schools turned to “Abstinence Until Marriage Education” as an alternative to so-called “safe sex” methods of instruction. In 1981, President Reagan signed “Adolescent Family Life” into law to encourage teen sexual abstinence. President Clinton signed the first state block grant for Abstinence Education into law in 1996 to teach the benefits of sexual abstinence

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until marriage.<sup>15</sup> However, by 2010, President Obama had eliminated all federal funding for Abstinence Education. Funding priorities shifted exclusively to Comprehensive Sex Education, funneling millions of dollars annually to groups such as SHIFT NC for teaching so-called “safe sex” to our teens.<sup>16</sup>

## A New Shift

But the tides are once again turning. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) recently announced it is cutting short Obama era SRR grants, and scrutinizing whether this has been money well spent. This was the result of a review by the Trump Administration over the efficacy of current Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) programs, which were receiving about \$108 million per year nationwide and have received nearly a billion dollars over the life of those programs. Their initial findings revealed that 80 percent of teens receiving instruction under these programs fared no better or worse than teens who did not receive sex education programs at all. Furthermore, the report showed three programs actually increased negative outcomes: more sexual initiation, more oral sex, and more teen pregnancy!

According to an article from Ascend, *Why Did HHS Eliminate TPP funding?*:

"TPP programs were promoted on an 'approved' list by the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) and showcased as model programs that could be implemented with confidence. The OAH website stated, 'Evidence-based programs can be expected to produce positive results consistently.' In good faith, many schools and communities across the country implemented these programs but did not experience the 'positive results' promised."<sup>17</sup>

## Obama era programs being cut short

SHIFT NC has received notification from DHHS that funding for some Teen Pregnancy Prevention programs (along with some other initiatives) will end on June 30, 2018. This DHHS decision will affect many of SHIFT NC’s programs, including the two projects below, which are among those receiving the most federal funding.<sup>18</sup>

*Every Teen Counts.* The stated goal of this program is to work with foster and juvenile centers in the state’s highest risk areas

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## These federal actions, combined with a willingness from citizens in communities across our state to speak up for what they believe, provide hope for our future.

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(Bertie, Franklin, Granville, Halifax, Nash, Northampton, Vance, Warren, and Wilson counties) to “help youth avoid unplanned pregnancies.” The program received funding of \$736,766 annually for 5 years. The grant originally funded the program through 2020, but due to recent federal cuts, the funding will now end on June 30, 2018.<sup>19</sup>

*North Carolina Youth Connected.*

This program, an initiative of SHIFT NC, received federal grants to reduce teen pregnancy rates in Cumberland and Onslow counties. Plans were to usher in “community-wide teen pregnancy prevention initiatives” primarily through the public schools by implementing Planned Parenthood’s sex education curriculum, *Get Real*. The two counties’ programs received grants that totaled \$1,749,000 annually for 5 years. Originally slated to go through 2020, the funding is now set to end on June 30, 2018.<sup>20</sup>

SHIFT NC works hard to present itself as a “neutral” organization that seeks to improve adolescent health in North Carolina. However, a closer look reveals a different story. The above programs are based on values clearly outlined and endorsed by Planned Parenthood, the nation’s largest abortion provider, and its allies. This list of SHIFT NC’s

organizational alliances gives a clearer picture of the organization’s extreme philosophical leanings:

- NARAL Pro-Choice North Carolina
- Planned Parenthood of Central North Carolina
- Planned Parenthood Health Systems
- Advocates for Youth
- ACLU of North Carolina

### What Now?

In an effort to find sex education programs that work toward more favorable outcomes, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is launching a \$10 million research study to investigate the effectiveness of current Teen Pregnancy Prevention programs and to develop recommendations on how to proceed in the future.<sup>21</sup>

It may be encouraging to know that the Trump Administration has placed Abstinence Education advocates in key jobs, including: Charmaine Yoest, former president of Americans United for Life and now Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS); and Valerie Huber, former president of Ascend, who is now Chief of Staff for the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health at HHS.

These federal actions, combined with a willingness of citizens in communities across our state to speak up for what they believe, provide hope for our future—hope that children in public schools may be taught about sex in a way that promotes families and values life. While support for federal funding for some of SHIFT NC’s programs appears to be waning, it’s imperative that we remain vigilant in this battle. Here are a few ways you can be engaged:

- Stay informed of local school board actions;
- Ask to view the sex education materials being taught in local schools in your area;
- Raise questions to school officials and elected officials if you are concerned with curriculum contents; and,
- Let others know of your concerns through letters to the editor and attending school board meetings.

When facing battles for Truth in our communities, remember that you can have an influence, despite what the odds may be. Galatians 6:9 offers great encouragement to press on: “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” 🏠

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