

May 25, 2010

Joel Klein
Chancellor, New York City Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellor Klein:

We write on behalf of the undersigned organizations to emphasize the support and need for a policy requiring a program for teaching comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality education in New York City middle and high schools, starting in the 2010-2011 school year.

This need, and the means to fulfill it, are underscored by the findings in a report recently completed by the New York City Departments of Education (DOE) and Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) evaluating the implementation of a DOE-approved, evidence-based sexuality education curriculum piloted in 10 South Bronx middle and high schools, seven of which completed it, during the spring semester of the 2007-08 school year. The New York Civil Liberties Union obtained a copy of the process evaluation in April 2010 and in concert with the undersigned groups, we would like to congratulate you on the positive findings. The findings, in addition to the availability of new Federal funding opportunities for evidence-based unintended pregnancy prevention programs, make the case for extending this pilot program City-wide stronger than ever.

New York young people's need for sexuality education was already clear when the pilot program was initiated. According to 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey data, 41% of New York City youth reported becoming sexually active by 9th grade and 58% by 12th grade. Data collected by the Centers for Disease Control in 2003/04 revealed that one of four teenage women had one of four common sexually transmitted infections, with even higher rates for young women of color. Nationwide, there are disparities based on race, gender and sexual orientation in new HIV infections among young people. In the South Bronx, where the pilot was conducted, nearly 26% of girls ages 15 to 19 reported that they used no birth control the last time they had sex.

Public support for sexuality education in the public schools is also clear, with a poll released in 2009 by Family Planning Advocates of New York State finding that 85% of New York voters supported school-based comprehensive sexuality education, and a stunning 77% believed incorrectly that it was already being taught in schools across New York State.

The process evaluation conducted by DOHMH and DOE demonstrates not only the possibility of implementing sexuality education in schools, but also the support of teachers, administrators and parents for implementation and the collateral benefits for education outcomes and the school climate:

- All of the teachers who participated in the pilot focus group reported that they thought teaching comprehensive sexuality education in school was important, and almost all thought it should be mandated.

- Similarly, all of the participating principals discussed the urgent need for sexuality education in their students' communities, with several stating that it should be mandatory.
- A majority of principals reported at least moderate parental support for the program, with only a few parents choosing to opt their children out of participating.
- Perhaps most importantly, the students who received the program showed that they wanted to learn about their sexual health. Teachers reported that most students were highly engaged and eager to participate. Many even reported that it was difficult to finish the lessons in one class period because topics inspired so many questions and so much discussion.

Moreover, a strong majority of the principals who participated in a final focus group reported that the pilot was helpful in improving attendance and grades, reducing disciplinary incidents, and fostering school pride and connectedness. None of them reported that the pilot had any negative affect on their academic goals and priorities. The collateral benefits of providing students with comprehensive, accurate information about sexual health are especially notable in this climate of educational accountability.

Yet sexuality education continues to be inconsistently provided in New York City middle and high schools. As a result, New York City continues to lag behind cities including Cleveland, Ohio and Washington, DC, which have committed to requirements for comprehensive sexuality education programming.

In his 2010 State of the City address, Mayor Michael Bloomberg stated his commitment to expanded education as a tool for reducing young people's unintended pregnancies. While we acknowledge the complexities of systemic change in a school system as large as New York City's, such expanded educational programming would increase the impact of existing sexual health resources such as health resource rooms, school-based health centers and state- and city-mandated HIV lessons. In addition, there is an increase in resources available for such programming. For example, a recent request for proposals from the Federal Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) lists the curriculum currently being used in DOE classrooms as one of the evidence-based programs for which districts can apply for significant funding. Federal funding from the OAH could provide financial resources for expanding comprehensive sexuality education further into New York City middle and high schools. Many of the undersigned organizations would be happy to provide support in the application and implementation processes for this or other funding for comprehensive sexuality education.

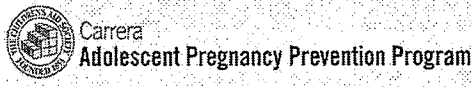
We join the authors of the process evaluation in emphasizing that, "Given New York City's teen pregnancy rate and high incidence of STDs among adolescents, providing middle and high school students the tools and knowledge they need to make healthy sexual choices should be a top priority for both DOE and DOHMH officials." We urge you to work with your colleagues in City government to address New York City adolescents' public health crisis and require that comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality education be taught in all New York City middle and high schools beginning in the 2010-11 school year. Only by implementing such a requirement will we be able to guarantee that students are provided with the information they need to embark on a lifetime of healthy choices about sex and sexuality.



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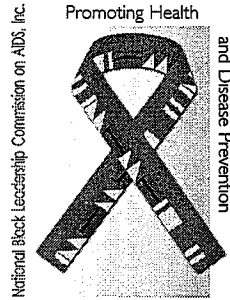
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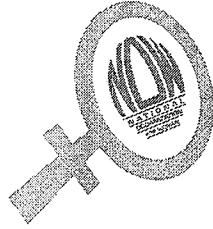
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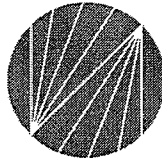
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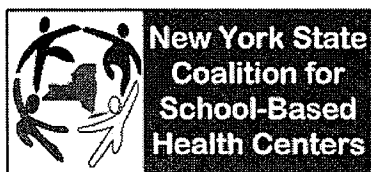


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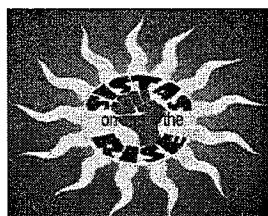
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