



educateUS
CHANGING SEX ED FOR GOOD

EducateUS Zine Library
Volume II

**Those Left Behind:
Policy and Sex Ed**

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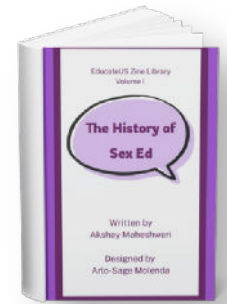
Designed by
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What's in a policy? Policies are like to-do lists or sets of recommendations; they're goalposts made of words, and **words can be rewritten.**

The link between policy and sex ed is no coincidence. Since 1981 (during the Reagan administration), the federal government has poured our taxpayer dollars into abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.

Other than pushing young people to abstain from sex until they're married, these programs don't always allow educators to discuss contraceptive methods... because they don't want all students to know they exist.

Interested in learning more about the history of sex ed? Check out **issue I** of this zine!



On top of that, abstinence-only education doesn't delay sexual initiation (AKA the first time young people have a sexual encounter).

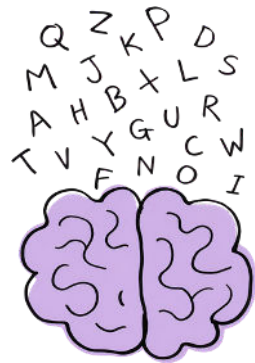
And students have even shared personal testimonies with us about how shame-based teaching tactics and materials that assume the whole student body is cishet have harmed them.

(More on that later.)

Even though there's plenty of evidence against abstinence-focused programming, it's still big in the policy world today. Just look at how the Trump administration is delivering executive orders and shuffling funding around:

In July 2026, they attempted to terminate over 50 Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program (TPPP) services. They planned on giving those funds to abstinence-only programs before the court swooped in to save the day and block the order in late August.

But, man, did those headlines make my brain feel scrambled...



One executive order, “Protecting Children from Chemical and Surgical Mutilation,” let the Department of Health and Human Services order the 46 states using the federally funded Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) to remove all “references to gender ideology” in August of 2025. What does this actually achieve? It brings a hate campaign into public schools.

Yeah.... yikes.

Some states — see Kansas, North Dakota, and Tennessee — have passed legislation that encourages public schools to use the “Baby Olivia” video. ICYMI, that’s a CGI video posted to YouTube in 2021 by Live Action, an anti-abortion nonprofit organization.

The video claims to visualize human development, but the weekly milestones it uses are wildly inaccurate. The visuals are misleading, too — they show an active, developed infant. A fetus is a clump of cells. This video is propaganda.

Other states, like California and Maine, have refused federal funding for abstinence-focused programming and instead set their own guidelines for comprehensive, inclusive, and gender-affirming sex ed. Woohoo!! 

What this means is that young people across our nation are being denied quality education depending on where they live. Even neighboring school districts can have totally different lesson plans. Two students in the same state could have vastly different experiences based on their zip code.

But you and I know that everyone deserves support in navigating relationships and identity questions. Humans are social creatures! This is an important part of every person’s life.

So, what effect does this really have on us?



Let's look at some personal accounts by members of the Youth Advisory Board at EducateUS to see how these policies actually play out.

Do their experiences sound anything like yours?

My lessons focused entirely on STIs and "scare tactics" rather than healthy relationships and communication.

I wish they had answered questions kids had instead of ignoring them... there were questions like, "What if I don't want my body to change?" "What if I don't feel like a girl?" and the teachers refused to answer.

My high school pushed ridiculously hard for students to test out of sex ed or work around the credit instead of taking the course.

There was a lot of 'This is an adult thing that you'll learn more about when you're older.'

When I asked my school gym teacher about why we didn't have this in our curriculum, he told me those topics were too "mature" and they'd make us think about sex "too much".

I wish that I had learned sex education in an objective and medical way. I distinctly remember a video in Health Class where sperm was characterized as these strong creatures racing to the helpless egg. It's ridiculous and terrifying. ...this gendered representation of sex very inaccurately represents me, and fails to even acknowledge queer sex (which I of course learned nothing about in school). It was especially frustrating because I went to an arts school where a large portion of our student body was queer. Our curriculum completely skipped over us.

Educational materials (diagrams and photos) primarily use white bodies, failing to account for how race and cultural background influence healthcare experiences and body image. My lessons assumed everyone has easy access to private doctors, expensive contraceptives, or safe environments to discuss these topics.

They showed us a video on grooming... It was the only time a gay person was in the video, which kinda feeds into the narrative that queer relationships and feelings are something dangerous.

I wish I received an explanation on critical topics that could help me in my relationships and personal life. Because I didn't receive a sex education curriculum, I relied on intangible resources on the internet to help me answer important questions.

POLICIES ARE JUST WORDS

For better or worse, federal, state, and local policies lay the foundation for what we learn in our health classes. The quality of our sex ed is directly linked to our zip codes...

...but it doesn't have to stay this way.

Remember, policies are just made of words, and words can be rewritten.

There's lots of different ways to take action with your school board! You're their most important constituent, so make sure they know sex ed needs to be high on their priority list!

Take Action!

1

EducateUS makes it easy to send your school board a sex ed guide. No phone calls, just a one-click email!



2

Want to teach your friends about school board elections? We've got a resource kit for you!



3

Want to go a step further? You could host a town hall with your friends and invite your school board using the YAB's Town Hall Guide:

