

Comprehensive Sexual Health Education

Group members included:

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Proposal: *For comprehensive sex education to be mandatory in NYS public schools. We can achieve this by pushing bill §3737 into effect. Bill §3737 calls for the mandation of **comprehensive, medically accurate, non-biased, and age appropriate** sex education be taught in schools for children in grades 1-12.*

Background on the Issue: Currently the State of New York has no bills regarding sex education. Due to the lack of sex education in the school system, the issue of misinformation has arisen, which has detrimental effects in our communities. For example, students who are not educated on sex education, (not familiarized with body anatomy, not informed on how to prevent STDs or the use of contraceptives, as well as individuals who are uninformed on how to respect boundaries and are not properly educated on the rules of consent) are more likely to: **A.)** become pregnant in their teenage years, which has led to many teenage abortions, **B.)** Make ill-informed sexual decisions, **C.)** contract an STD due to misinformation **D)** not speak out if they have been sexually assaulted or raped, due to the lack of education on consent and stigmatization surrounding sex.

Goals: Our goal is to have comprehensive sex education mandated throughout all public schools in NYS. We intend to:

- 1) Prevent STDs and decrease STI rates (primarily within the age demographic where they are most prevalent, which according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, is ages 14-24 in NYS.
- 2) Decrease abortion rates (specifically in teenagers)
- 3) Decrease rape and sexual assault cases, as well as challenge the stigma surrounding sex while also informing students on consent, and teaching students respect for each other's bodies from a young age.

Fiscal Implications: If put into effect under the plan proposed, it would have little to no cost as it would be implemented into the current health curriculum in schools. The curriculum would be made by any of the options that are listed in the description, some of which do cost some money, but minimal amounts. When projected through the suggestions mentioned, this curriculum would not cost any individual public school district any amount of money to implement and adopt. Already employed teachers and educators would be responsible for teaching this curriculum.

Description: We propose to create an age-appropriate sex education curriculum that is medically accurate and comprehensive. A first grader **will not be receiving** the same education as a freshman in high school. As an example, a first grader may be taught that their body is normal and to always ask permission before touching someone anywhere, whether that be their arms or their shoulder or any other part of the body. Children will be taught that if someone touches them without permission, it is not appropriate, and they should report it immediately (as well as how they would go about reporting it). Teaching this from a young age will decrease stigma surrounding reporting sexual assault, and ideally reduce sexual assault and rape cases by normalizing consent from a young age. The goal is to teach children to have respect for their body and others' bodies. In middle school, they would be taught education more appropriate to them, such as the traits of healthy and unhealthy relationships. Furthermore, they would be taught body positivity and the normalization of all body types preventing bullying, harassment, mental health disorders, and eating disorders in the future. In addition, the middle schoolers would be clearly taught about their changing bodies and how it impacts their own life, as well as how to maintain proper hygiene; older middle schoolers would have inclusive class discussions on crushes and the proper display of affection without causing discomfort and harm. In high school, they would learn about contraceptives and their proper use, and how to effectively prevent STDs. Also, they would have discussion about proper digital conduct and the appropriate consensual behavior on online platforms. Inclusive education involves awareness of LGBTQ+ relationships, how to properly prevent STDs, and how to properly use contraceptives if the child is a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Teaching these topics consistently across the state would prevent STD rates such as Chlamydia, which is currently at an all-time high. In addition,

sex education would prevent abortion rates by showing teens how to practice safe sex. This has been proven to be effective in other states that have mandated sex education, for example, Vermont.

Curriculum: The curriculum is flexible and can be developed in several different ways:

- 1) The Commissioner of Education, the Commissioner of Health, and the Commissioner of Mental Health could collaborate to create a curriculum that is age appropriate, medically accurate, comprehensive, and inclusive.
- 2) A committee of health teachers from across NYS as well as commissioner of education, commissioners of health and mental health, and student representatives come together to create a curriculum that meets all the necessary requirements for the mandate.
- 3) Planned Parenthood offers classes and seminars that the teachers could use to create and bring a comprehensive curriculum to their students.
- 4) The program could be purchased through an already existing comprehensive sex education curriculum. The program *Get Real* has a comprehensive sex education curriculum that can be purchased if necessary, though the previous options may be more effective for the State of New York.

Implementation: While this curriculum would be mandated for every grade level 1-12, there is no specific class that it must be enlisted in. We would highly recommend implementing it into a health class, but we do understand that may be a struggle for some school districts. If schools are unable to merge the curriculum into health classes, it can also be taught in classes such as science or physical education.

Justification: In 2007 the creators of Bill §3737 found that “A poll conducted by Zogby International reveal that 77 percent of New York voters believe that comprehensive age appropriate, medically accurate sex education should be taught in public schools. The State has a responsibility to bring this instruction into the classroom to keep our youth healthy and safe and give them the tools they need to make healthy lifestyle choices.” According to a U.S. Government report released in April 2007, “abstinence-only sex education does not keep teenagers from having sex. The independent study determined that the more than 2,000 teens who took part in the programs as elementary and middle school students were just as likely to have sex as those who did not participate in them.” Similarly, a report of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy found no credible evidence to support the claim that abstinence-only programs delay the onset of sexual activity or reduce its frequency. The report revealed that abstinence-only programs put teens in harm's way of contracting sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS and fail to provide information about contraceptive methods that could prevent pregnancy. The proposal to create an age-appropriate sex education curriculum that is medically accurate, non-biased and comprehensive is our best solution. Section 1 adds a new section 817 to the Education Law requiring the mandating of comprehensive, medically accurate and age-appropriate sex education curriculum for all grades to be created and requires that schools teach sex education. The section also grants local boards of education or the Chancellor of the New York City School System the option of adopting their own curriculum upon approval of the Commissioner. (-summary of bill S3737's research-)

Modernized Justification: According to the World Population Review, 1.7/100 teen girls (15-19) became pregnant and gave birth in New York in the year 2018. As of 2017, there were about 1,250,000 10- to 19-year-old girls in NYS. In 2017, there were 7,370 abortions performed in girls under 20 years old. (According to the CDC) Taking off age restraints, approximately 105,380 abortions occurred in New York in 2018, while carried to term pregnancies were at a rate annually of 380,500 in New York This means that about 2/9 of all pregnancies ended in abortion, or roughly 22%. If the population were informed about how to prevent teen pregnancy (via comprehensive sex education), this could have been averted, or at least would be lessened or decreased, which has been proven in states such as Vermont. In 2009, Vermont had a 21.3/1000 teen pregnancy rate (ages 15-19). In 2015, Vermont mandated comprehensive sex education and by 2019, after the approval of mandatory sex education, they had a 8.8/1000 teen pregnancy ratio. This is a drastic decrease that can be directly linked to the mandating of sex education in all public schools. Another prime example would be Maine; in 2008, Maine had a rate of 9.4/1000 pregnancies (ages 10-17). After approving a mandatory comprehensive sex education bill, Maine's statistics

drastically decreased (they went down by 6.3, or 76%.) In 2018, their rates were 2.7/1000. They passed an all-inclusive, enforceable bill on the mandating of sex education in 2015 and this led to a success for the youth and the community. With these statistics, it has been proven that sex education will benefit the community, lowering teen pregnancy rates and abortion rates. (All sources for the data will be listed below)

Teenage girls, aged 14-17, have been found to be the most sexually harassed age group by Stop Street Harassment. If properly confronted and destigmatized by Sex Ed, it will decrease the normalization of these behaviors as teens become adults and increase recognition and prevention. Sex Ed also offers adequate information on how to prevent STDs before, during and after sex. STD rates reached an all-time low in 2000, but have been steadily and quickly increasing, reaching a 110% increase since the year 2000. For example, chlamydia cases went up by 1,758,668 in 2018. Due to this sharp incline in STD cases, and the fact that STDs are diagnosed the most in 15-22 year olds, mandatory sex education is crucial. This is the age where Sex Education is crucial, as this is the time teens are going through puberty, hormonal changes and are experiencing many changes in their life, especially regarding their body, and many of the questions because of this natural and inevitable event can be resolved through sex education.

Effective Date: This proposal will go into effect the school year following the creation of the curriculum.

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