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Do not abstain on sex ed

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In most health classes in N.C. public schools, the message is abstinence until marriage. The state's abstinence-only policy provides too little information for teens, who need more consistent and accurate information.

The Wake County school board voted 5-4 in November to change its sex education curriculum, though the overall theme will remain abstinence until marriage.

The changes that start next school year, however, make it possible for seventh- to ninth-graders to learn about tolerance of alternative lifestyles, sexually transmitted diseases and contraceptives.

Opponents felt such changes would encourage teens to have sex. That's not the case.

Wake County is among the minority of counties teaching comprehensive sex education, and that school system is moving in the right direction.

Now, other school systems across the state need to be realistic about teenagers and give them the needed information to protect themselves.

So often in life, youth are given incorrect information regarding sex, sexuality and contraception due to the countless myths floating within the walls of middle and high schools.

Students must be given accurate information regarding many of the most talked about issues and concerns within a typical high school.

Youth don't want to get that information from adults, especially parents, because many feel uncomfortable discussing such issues with parents. Usually when adults attempt to provide information to youth, teens see that as adults "trying to live their lives," when in reality, adults are just trying to help.

Planned Parenthood of Central North Carolina offers a program that teaches comprehensive sex education called "Teen Voices."

"Teen Voices" is Durham County's adolescent pregnancy prevention and youth development program. By providing adolescents with medically accurate and factual information, Teen Voices empowers teenagers to make responsible choices based on their own ethics and values.

Although teen pregnancy and birth rates have steadily declined through the 1990s, 4 out of 10 girls in the United States still get pregnant at least once before the age of 20.

The United States still has the highest rates of teen pregnancy and births of any industrialized country.

Teen pregnancies have been a rising problem among youth and many are due to the myths of when it's "safe to have sex."

Kids raising kids is too often seen in American society. In order to prevent this rising problem, youth must be provided with raw facts that are not sugar-coated.

Despite parents, religions, society and school systems promoting abstinence until marriage, some teenagers are having sex and others are thinking about it, which prompts the need for comprehensive sex education.

Society has treated sex, alternative lifestyles and contraception as "taboo subjects" for too long. From 1993 to 2002, Durham County's adolescent pregnancy rate for 15- to 19-year-olds was higher than the state average six out of eight years.

In 2001, Durham County's teen pregnancy rate was 79.2 (per 1,000), while the state average was 69.3. North Carolina's pregnancy rate, 105 per 1,000 teens 15 to 19 years old, is higher than the national rate.

The statistics show why it's vital to adopt comprehensive sex education policies.

Comprehensive sex education hardly prompts teenagers to have sex. Rather it encourages youth to be equipped with the facts to make safe choices.

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