

**To:** School Health Advisory Committee Members & Meeting Attendees

**From:** Lynn Koller

**Date:** September 17, 2008

**Re:** Sex Education in Volusia County Public Schools

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**H**ello, SHAC members and meeting attendees. (We do have a rather ironic name, don't we?) Since we are charged with evaluating sex education curriculums prior to our next meeting, I'd like to provide you with some information to help us determine what type of program we would like to adopt, as well as provide a sample curriculum.

It would be useful to articulate our goals for the sex education program in Volusia County. I'm suggesting that we consider the goals outlined in *Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*, published by SEICUS (p. 19-21). See <http://www.siecus.org/data/global/images/guidelines.pdf>. Broadly, the guidelines state:

The primary goal of sexuality education is to promote adult sexual health. It should assist young people in developing a positive view of sexuality, provide them with information they need to take care of their sexual health, and help them acquire skills to make decisions now and in the future.

I suggest that the primary goal is to promote "sexual health" as opposed to "adult sexual health," understanding that one doesn't need to be sexually active to be sexually healthy and informed. The guidelines place the goals into four educational areas: information; attitudes, values, and insights; relationships and interpersonal skills; and responsibility. It's imperative that we outline our goals so that we can select an appropriate program and, just as importantly, assess that program for effectiveness - something that has not been done for the past eight years.

As you know, the Central Florida Pregnancy Center (CFPC) has been running an abstinence-only-until-marriage program called Pure Energy in Volusia County since 2000. The program has now been suspended. With Pure Energy, unqualified "coaches" – often young people whose only subject-matter qualification is an unplanned pregnancy or apparent sexual regret – teach our middle and high school students about human sexuality using the just-say-no-until-you're-married approach. While the program administrators promote the youth-teaching-youth approach as a way of reaching the students, the program has no credibility whatsoever based on scientifically-based research. Pure Energy is, essentially, a bridge to nowhere.

The April 2007 study commissioned by Congress proved that abstinence-only programs do not work. You can find the full text of that document at <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/pdfs/impactabstinence.pdf>. In the study, four abstinence-only programs out of 700+ were selected specifically because they appeared to provide promising results in terms of reducing teenage sexual activity, pregnancy, and STD transmission. However, even these cherry-picked programs failed to provide any evidence of success. No major study has provided any evidence that abstinence-only programs do more than siphon money to church-based pregnancy centers established for the purpose of opposing women's reproductive rights. See Senator Henry Waxman's July 2006 report, *False*

and Misleading Health Information Provided by Federally Funded Pregnancy Resource Centers, for specific dollar figures (p. i, 3) at <http://oversight.house.gov/documents/20060717101140-30092.pdf>.

Senator Waxman's December 2004 report, *The Content of Federally-Funded Abstinence-Only Education Programs*, specifically cites the curriculum used by Pure Energy in Volusia County middle schools - basketball player A.C. Green's *Game Plan* - as providing false and misleading information about the use of contraceptives (p. 9, 11). See the report at <http://oversight.house.gov/documents/20041201102153-50247.pdf>. The workbook, which I have, certainly offers an inane curriculum that provides misleading and false information about contraceptives. For example, it states that 20% of female oral contraceptive users between ages 12-18 became pregnant over "a mere six months" and condoms failed 18.4% of the time for teens under 18 after one year of use (p. 27).

*Game Plan* also perpetuates gender stereotypes and is centered on specific religious beliefs, all while totally rejecting gay and lesbian students and community members. Gay and lesbian students are often kids least able to seek information from their family, friends, and churches, and are in the most need of accurate information and resources. Nothing in the Florida Statutes precludes that we educate our students about a diverse range of family relationships, gender, and sexuality.

I wrote an editorial for the *Daytona Beach News-Journal* on May 22 (see <http://www.cosmicscribbler.com/Files/ab-only.pdf>) explicating the failure of Pure Energy and an article for *The Hometown News* on July 25 (see <http://www.myhometownnews.net/index.php?id=47623>) that more fully outlines the argument for a comprehensive sexual education program.

Jessica Errico of Pure Energy and SHAC member wrote a rebuttal to the original piece on May 30, where she misrepresents the argument about why Volusia public schools should eliminate the Pure Energy program. (I could not find an online link to this editorial but can provide an attachment upon request.) I clearly don't advocate casual sex with multiple partners or that teenagers have sex at all. All reputable comprehensive sex education curriculums advocate abstinence from sex as the most effective form of birth control and STD prevention. Ms. Errico provides no evidence to validate the effectiveness her program that affects thousands of children and has cost hundreds of thousands of dollars or any evidence to demonstrate that Pure Energy has helped anyone but the "pro-life" pregnancy center that receives much of its federal funds. In the editorial, she ironically claims that the program doesn't use a fear-based approach and "takes an upbeat tone" and then encourages readers to pick-up the book *Epidemic: How Teen Sex is Killing Our Kids*. She does confirm that the program teaches marriage as a benefit that only heterosexuals can enjoy. Pure Energy provides a reductive view of human sexuality and one that promotes discrimination and stigmatizes those students, parents, and community members who do not fall strictly into the heterosexual model.

Finally, an article in the *Deland-Deltona Beacon* dated August 13, states that Ms. Errico "hopes to revitalize another aspect of the center's ministry, the Pure Energy abstinence program." I suggest that a ministry is inappropriate for the public schools and particularly ineffective as a sex education provider. You can find the full *Beacon* article at <http://www.beacononlinenews.com/news/daily/1044>. I have objected to Ms. Errico's role on this committee as a result of her organization's financial interest in the outcome. I consider her viewpoint interesting, however, and have asked that if she remains on SHAC, that her organization, Pure Energy, be excluded from consideration as a sex education provider in Volusia County due to her influence over the process compared with competing organizations, and her publicized acknowledgement that she is seeking sources of funding for the CFPC.

Most importantly, I suggest that we focus on comprehensive sexual education programs that provide scientifically-based information for Volusia County students.

I encourage you to review a report from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, a non-ideological group focused on decreasing teen pregnancy in the US. Its November 2007 report, *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases* (see [http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/EA2007\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/EA2007_FINAL.pdf)), demonstrating that no independent evaluation has found that abstinence programs significantly impact teen sexual behavior while comprehensive programs have been found to both delay teen sexual initiation, increase use of condoms, and decrease the overall number of sexual partners (**p. 15**).

You can find an outline of a comprehensive health education program implemented in Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland as an example that we might use for Volusia County at <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/policy/pdf/igpra.pdf>. I am not suggesting that we adopt this program verbatim, but only that it is a good model. For example, it begins in Grade 5, and I am proposing that we adopt a program that begins in Grade 4 or earlier with age-appropriate information.

Frankly, I think it absurd to expect a sex education program of any kind to significantly curtail teen sexual activity in high school at any time in the foreseeable future. It's estimated that about half of all teens in high school have had sexual intercourse (in 2007, 46% of all girls and 50% of all boys), not including those who have had oral and/or anal sex. See the report "Teen Sexual Behavior and Contraceptive Use: Data From the Youth Risk Behavioral Survey, 2007" based on CDC data at <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/fast-facts-yrbs-2007.pdf>. Comprehensive sex education can make inroads, particularly when students are educated about sexuality BEFORE the onset of sexual activity. And, more importantly, a comprehensive program can make a significant difference in teen pregnancy and STD rates by providing students with accurate information about condoms and birth control. I am suggesting that we adopt a program that addresses students' needs from elementary through high school. In addition to influencing behaviors, we shouldn't forget that a sex education is also valuable for the sake of education itself. Those students who decide to remain celibate until marriage still benefit from an understanding of human sexuality and how it is a driving force of human behavior.

In sum, I propose that we adopt a comprehensive sex education program based on scientifically-verifiable information for Volusia County schools, and I offer a model for your examination. Please let me know if I can provide clarification or additional data to corroborate the positions outlined herein. I look forward to your feedback on this important issue by email or phone, and also look forward to seeing you at the upcoming SHAC meeting.

Lynn

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