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Volusia County Schools to teach birth control, starting this spring



Sex ed: 'Just say no' not enough

By Pat Hatfield
BEACON STAFF WRITER

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Volusia County students will no longer be taught avoiding sex is the only way to prevent pregnancy and sexual disease.

Abstinence is still encouraged, but, starting this spring, students will also learn about birth control.

"Abstinence is still the surest way to prevent pregnancies and STDs," said Bill Poniatowski, who's in charge of the school system's health curriculum.

Poniatowski said facts about students' sexual activity convinced the Volusia County School Board a different kind of sex education was needed.



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According to the 2007 Florida Youth Risk Behavior Survey, published online by the Florida Department of Health, 50 percent of high-school seniors and 8.2 percent of 13-year-olds had had sex.

Teens who are already having sex need more than encouragement not to do it, the School Board decided.

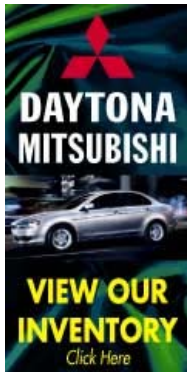
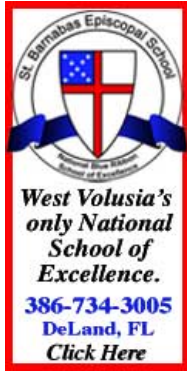
"We're telling them the facts," Poniatowski said.

The new material supplements textbooks adopted by the state in 2006. A state push that year encouraged schools to teach abstinence only.

To meet that requirement, in years past, Volusia County Schools had hired Central Florida Pregnancy Center volunteers to teach abstinence through the Pure Energy program. That contract has been canceled.

Now teachers are learning the new curriculum.

"We're doing training sessions this week and last week with middle- and high-school PE and health teachers," Poniatowski said.





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The sessions will familiarize teachers with the material and assure they are teaching a standardized curriculum, not their own ideas.

"Believe it or not, most of this information has already been taught," Poniatowski said.

By the time they are in high school, students have learned in health classes about the female and male reproductive systems and other body parts. They've learned about their own bodies. They've learned about pregnancy. They've learned about diseases, including the ones transmitted during sex.

Now, beginning in the eighth grade, students will also get information about contraceptives, including birth-control pills, condoms, sponges, cervical rings, intrauterine devices and other methods. The methods' effectiveness and failure rates will be discussed.

The school system's sex-education curriculum will still focus on abstinence as the only sure way to prevent pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Eighth-graders must have parental permission to attend the new classes, and parents of older students can request their children not take part. The classes will be part of the final nine weeks' curriculum this year.

In mid-March, the school district gave parents an opportunity to look at the materials that will be used to teach human sexuality in grades eight through 12.

Poniatowski said the biggest concern he's heard from parents is that condoms might be brought into the classrooms. They will not, nor will students learn how to put on a condom.

Life skills will be taught, including goal-setting, decision-making and how to say no. Poniatowski said these skills are just as important as teaching about contraceptives.

Parents can visit their child's school to preview the course materials.

Students who ask where to get contraceptives are directed to first go to their parents, pastor or another adult the student trusts. If that's not possible, students are directed to the Health Department.

Poniatowski said the worst thing students can do is go to other students for information. What they often get, he said, is misinformation.

The school system is also working with the Volusia County Health Department to develop programs to teach parents how to talk with their children about sex, abstinence and contraception. Parents will be able to take evening classes at the schools.

"The whole theme of this is education, to prevent pregnancies and STDs," Poniatowski said.

To view curriculum guides for Volusia County Schools, go online to www.volusia.k12.fl.us/strategicplan/curriculum_g.htm.

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