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## STATE, NATIONAL ORGS TO TEXAS: TEACH THE TRUTH ON SEX EDUCATION

### Report Details Recommendations for First Overhaul of State's Health Curriculum Standards Since 1990s

AUSTIN – With the teen birth rate in Texas continuing to rank among the highest in the nation and the majority of high school seniors saying they are already sexually active, the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund and the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) today released a report calling for an overhaul of the state's failed abstinence-only approach to sex education.

"It's past time for Texas to teach students the truth about sex education," said Kathy Miller, president of the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund. "That means teaching them not just about abstinence, but also how to protect themselves from disease and unintended pregnancy when they decide at whatever point in their lives not to be abstinent. This common-sense approach will help students make healthy, responsible decisions based on facts as well as their own and their families' values."

The State Board of Education has just begun a major revision of health curriculum standards, which include sex education, for grades K-12. This is the first revision of the health standards in more than two decades. The board in 2004 adopted abstinence-only health textbooks that are still in Texas classrooms.

Extensive evidence shows that a comprehensive approach to sex education can help young people delay the onset of sexual activity, reduce the number of sexual partners and increase condom and contraceptive use.

"These recommendations were born out of decades of research and expert guidance," said Jennifer Driver, the state policy director for SIECUS. "If we truly want sex education to benefit our young people, we need to base curricula off of what works – and that shouldn't be up for debate. Comprehensive sex education is rooted in evidence whereas Texas' current abstinence-only approach is driven purely by ideology. It's 2019. The education in Texas must be guided by fact, not a small but boisterous group of people who oppose sex ed in schools. We are failing our young people when we provide them with anything less than what they deserve: sex education that is accurate, inclusive, and empowering."

The vast majority of Texas school districts – 83 percent in 2016 – teach abstinence-only or nothing at all about sex education. Many abstinence-only programs used in Texas schools

suggest condoms and other contraception aren't effective, promote dangerous stereotypes about gender and sexual assault, ignore or even disparage the existence of LGBT people, and ignore or distort information about abortion, a common reproductive health care service accessed by nearly one in four women by age 45 in the United States. The joint report, *Time for Change*, includes recommendations in all of these areas.

"Our public schools can help families by being places where students know they can get reliable answers to their questions without being shamed or judged," Miller said. "And LGBTQ students, just like everyone else, deserve to learn in settings that are inclusive of their experiences and provide accurate information that is relevant to them."

Official curriculum work groups will draft the new health standards over the coming months, and the State Board of Education is set to debate and vote on those drafts in 2020. The current Texas standards include a single reference to contraception at the high school level. Because of the size of the state's market, Texas has historically had a major influence on content in student textbooks across the country.

An executive summary along with the full report and its detailed recommendations can be found at [tfn.org/sex-ed](http://tfn.org/sex-ed).

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*The Texas Freedom Network Education Fund (tfn.org) conducts public policy research on issues involving public education, religious freedom and individual liberties. The organization has published in-depth research on what Texas public schools teach on sex education.*

*SIECUS (siecus.org) has served as the national voice for sex education for 55 years, asserting that sexuality is a fundamental part of being human, one worthy of dignity and respect. Through policy, advocacy, education, and strategic communications efforts, SIECUS advances sex education as a vehicle for social change—working toward a world where all people can access and enjoy their own sexual and reproductive freedom.*