

Coahoma County School District

Abstinence-Plus Education Policy ICG , June 2011

A. Purpose

By adopting this policy statement, the Coahoma County School District seeks to

Affirm our commitment to creating healthy and responsible teens in the Coahoma County School District.

Adopt educational programs designed to help students and parents take action to reduce rates of teen birth and sexually transmitted infections.

Establish principles, guidelines, and strategies for implementing effective sex education programs, referred to in state law as “abstinence-plus” education programs.

B. Issue

Teen childbearing and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are major public health issues in the state of Mississippi. With a statewide average of 65.6 births per thousand among 15-19-year-olds in 2008, Mississippi leads the nation in the teen birth rate. Furthermore, Mississippi's young people lead the nation in rates of Chlamydia and gonorrhea, two sexually transmitted infections. *Coahoma County School District is one of 33 school districts in the 18 counties with the highest teen birth rates in the state.*”

Becoming a teen parent or contracting a sexually transmitted infection has profound consequences for our youth. According to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, adolescent girls who become mothers are less likely to complete high school. The Campaign also reports that children born to teen mothers are more likely to be poor, have lower academic achievement, and drop out of high school. The consequences of contracting a sexually transmitted infection such as Chlamydia or gonorrhea are equally harmful, as either infection increases a person's likelihood to contract HIV/AIDS and, if left untreated, can lead to infertility in women, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Students need accurate information about pregnancy prevention and sexually transmitted infections in order to make responsible decisions and to maintain healthy lifestyles. Unfortunately, many of our students lack access to this information and the opportunity to develop decision-making skills. Therefore, it is important that the Coahoma County School District take immediate action to reduce these alarming statistics.

C. Position

The Coahoma County School Board believes that every student has the right to accurate information concerning the prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. According to research compiled by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, personal responsibility education—or “abstinence-plus”—programs which provide age-appropriate, evidence-based, and medically accurate information can delay the onset of sex, reduce the frequency of sex, and/or reduce the number of sexual partners among teenagers. Furthermore, state law requires school districts to adopt a sex education policy by June 30, 2012, and to implement a sex education curriculum by the start of the 2012-2013 school year.

As a result, the Coahoma County School Board is committed to adopting an abstinence-plus program with evidence of effectiveness for students similar to those in our population. We are also committed to fostering community partnerships that educate both students and parents about this important topic.

D. Desired Outcome

The goal of the Coahoma County School District’s Abstinence-plus Education Policy is to reduce rates of teen birth and sexually transmitted infections.

E. Implementation Principles and Guidelines and Strategies

1. Principles and Guidelines: The principles and guidelines detailed below should guide the implementation of this policy.
 - a. State statute—State statute requires school districts to adopt a program teaching abstinence-only-until-marriage concepts as defined by state law or to adopt a program which takes a more comprehensive—or “abstinence-plus”—approach to sex education, as defined by the Mississippi State Department of Health. On this authority, the Board chooses to adopt this “abstinence-plus” policy.
 - b. Definition of abstinence-plus education—First and foremost, abstinence-plus education teaches the social, psychological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity. However, although this abstinence-plus education promotes abstinence, it acknowledges that some teenagers may become sexually active before marriage and that most Americans, whether they abstain until marriage or not, will become sexually active in their adulthood. Therefore, abstinence-plus education also provides instruction about effective methods of contraception, including rates of effectiveness and failure for “perfect use” and “typical use.” Finally, abstinence-plus education teaches students *how* to behave more responsibly by emphasizing the development of skills such as goal-setting, negotiation, self-esteem, and decision-making.
 - c. Curriculum—The Coahoma County School District shall adopt an age-appropriate, evidence-based, medically accurate abstinence-plus curriculum on the list of curricula recommended by the Mississippi Department of Health, in accordance with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This curriculum will be implemented beginning in the 2011-2012 school year, pending approval from the Mississippi

Department of Education. The curriculum will also conform to state law as outlined below:

- i) The curriculum must teach all definitional elements of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, which communicate
 1. The positive gains of abstaining from sexual activity, and the likely negative effects of not abstaining;
 2. The harmful consequences of out-of-wedlock children on the child, the parents, and the community;
 3. The irresponsible nature of unwanted sexual advances, how to reject them, and how drugs/alcohol increases vulnerability;
 4. That abstinence-until-marriage, and fidelity within marriage, is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections;
 5. The current state laws on sexual conduct, forcible and statutory rape, paternity establishment, child support, and homosexual activity; and
 6. That “a mutually faithful, monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the only appropriate setting for sexual intercourse.”
 - ii) The curriculum shall not provide information or demonstrations on how condoms are correctly applied.
 - iii) The Board may not adopt a curriculum which teaches that abortion may be used to prevent the birth of a baby.
- d. Grades taught—Abstinence-plus education will be offered in each grade required by the selected evidence-based program. Instruction must begin no later than the seventh grade. All students must be given the opportunity to receive instruction in abstinence-plus education.
- e. Instructor of record—The curriculum will be taught by licensed health educators, family and consumer science educators, or educators with a health education and/or science endorsement presently employed by the Coahoma County School District.
- f. Training—All educators assigned to teach abstinence-plus education must receive training on the curriculum adopted by the district and approved by the Mississippi Department of Education. Teachers and other school staff attending training sessions provided by the Mississippi Department of Health’s Bureau of Community and School Health will receive continuing education (CEU) credits.
- g. Parental consent—In compliance with Mississippi law, students are not required to participate in abstinence-plus education. Moreover, the district shall provide to parents/guardians no less than one week’s written notice of the abstinence-plus education program’s commencement. This written notice must inform the parents/guardians of their right to request the inclusion of their child into the program and the manner by which parents/guardians may exercise this right. The notice must

also inform the parents/guardians of the right and the process to review the Board-approved curriculum and materials. A parent/guardian's refusal to allow their child to participate in the abstinence-plus education program shall be without detriment to the student. However, every effort shall be made to ensure parents understand their right to request that their child participate in the program.

- i) Nothing in this section shall be interpreted to allow parents/guardians to opt students out of instruction in traditional courses in biological science.
 - h. Alternative coursework—Students not participating in the district's abstinence-plus program must complete alternative coursework for the duration of the program. This alternative coursework may include instruction in other health-related topics.
 - i. Single-sex classes—In accordance with requirements in state law, boys and girls shall be separated according to gender into different classrooms for the sex education curriculum.
2. Strategies: The following mandatory strategies shall be employed to ensure this policy is implemented with fidelity.
- a. Program Coordinator—The Superintendent will direct a currently employed district staff member to coordinate the implementation of the program and ensure program continuity as required by the Mississippi Department of Education. The Coordinator will also organize the following training activities:
 - i) Training for instructional staff as discussed in the principles and guidelines; and
 - ii) Training for non-instructional staff such as principals, counselors, administrators, and interested community activists designed to assist participants in creating community partnerships, implementing the program within their respective schools, and handling public relations.
 - b. Public awareness—The district shall conduct the following activities to raise the public's awareness and understanding of the program:
 - i) Publication and dissemination of the district policy as well as general information about abstinence-plus education and the approved curriculum, including where parents may review the curriculum materials; and
 - ii) Host one or more community-wide town hall meetings to educate community members on the program and its potential long-term effect on reducing the number of students affected by teen birth and sexually transmitted infections.

F. REVIEW AND REPORTING

The Superintendent will provide the Coahoma County School Board with an annual report on the outcomes of the abstinence-plus education program. If funding is available, this report shall include quantitative as well as qualitative analysis of the program and shall include the perspective of students, teachers, and parents/guardians.

This policy will be reviewed on an on-going basis in accordance with the Board's policy review process.

LEGAL REF.: Miss. Ann. Code §37-13-171, §37-13-173, §37-13-175

DATE: Proposed June, 2011