

Rebecca Poedy: Idaho made the right choice to reject federal abstinence funds

READER'S VIEW: TEEN SEX

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In March, a federal study reported that one in four American girls between the ages of 14 and 19 are infected with at least one of four sexually transmitted diseases: human papilloma virus, chlamydia, genital herpes and trichomoniasis. After years of decline, the national teen birth rate rose by 3 percent between 2005 and 2006. And like the rest of the country, Idaho is experiencing a rise in teen births as well: 6 percent from 2004 to 2006.

Such troubling statistics illustrate that many teens are not remaining abstinent. It's also clear that states are wise to reflect on their participation in a federal abstinence-only until marriage program that does not provide effective instruction to youth who are - or do become - sexually active. Under the program, states like Idaho have to put up \$3 for every \$4 they get from the federal government. The program, referred to as Title V, is one of three abstinence education programs funded by the federal government. In April 2007, a federally funded study of four abstinence-only programs by Mathematica Policy Research Inc., found that participants had just as many sexual partners as non-participants and had sex at the same median age as non-participants.

States like Idaho, Montana and Colorado have made a wise decision to stop receiving these funds. Every day, Planned Parenthood receives calls from parents who enroll their children in our popular parent-child and teen sex education programs. They tell us time and again they want to provide their children with accurate information that will help them make healthy choices throughout their lives. Parents want the best for their children and want them to postpone sex until they are mature. But Idaho parents also strongly express that they want their children to clearly know how to protect themselves if and when they become sexually active. This is not an uncommon phenomenon. National studies show that parents overwhelmingly support comprehensive sex education.

Teaching abstinence as part of a comprehensive approach to sex education that includes age-appropriate information about contraception has been shown to be effective.

According to the Journal of Public Health, teens receiving comprehensive sex education have a substantially lower risk of teenage pregnancy than those receiving abstinence-only or no sex education. More importantly, teaching about contraception is not associated with increased risk of sexual activity or sexually transmitted diseases.

It's time for parents and policymakers to seek a common-sense approach on sex education in Idaho. Our youth deserve nothing less.

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