



La Fe Policy Research and Education Center



*Promoviendo Bienestar para Familias y Comunidad con Conocimiento, Confianza y Poder
Promoting Family and Community Well-being through Knowledge, Trust and Empowerment*

March 31, 2009

House Public Education Committee
Attn: Clerk- Rita Ashley
Austin, TX 78768

Dear House Public Education Committee Members,

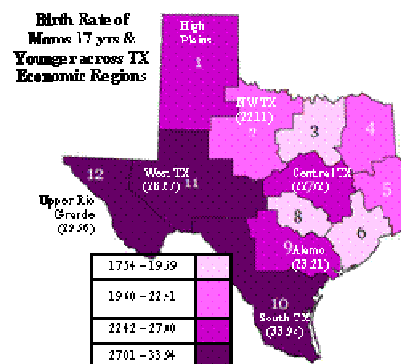
La Fe Policy Research and Education Center (La Fe PREC) is an organization that engages in efforts to create systemic changes to social and health policy through *policy analysis, education, leadership, and advocacy*. La Fe PREC is committed to key legislative priorities important to the Latino community in Texas. For those reasons **we urge you to support HB 741 (Castro-Education Works)** because Abstinence-only programs have proven not to work in Texas especially in underserved areas. Texas continues to face a high teen pregnancy rate while receiving the largest Abstinence-Only funding. **It is time to rethink our efforts to reduce unintended pregnancy and STDs among teens that is medically accurate and makes sense. For La Fe PREC and the Latino community:**

- **Unintended pregnancy is salient to the bienestar of our community** given the growth of births by Latinas in Texas, particularly to young mothers. Texas ranks third in teen birth rates nationally and Latina teens lead the state in births to teens with 82 of 1000 births. Along the border, teenage birth rates are the highest, 27.01-33.94 range, in the state. In a 2007 Youth Risk Behavioral Survey, more than half of Texas students have had intercourse. The sexual behavior of TX students is on par with U.S. students, but they were more likely to have not used a condom during last sexual intercourse.¹

- 53% have had sexual intercourse.
- 7% had sexual intercourse for the first time before age 13 years.
- 39% were currently sexually active.²
- 22% drank alcohol or used drugs before last sexual intercourse.³
- 3% have used a needle to inject illegal drugs into their body one or more times during their life.

- **Medically accurate information and local resources are critical.** Given that Latinos across all age groups are most likely to be uninsured, access to cultural and linguistic medically accurate information and local resources are vital. Amongst the states⁴, Texas schools are less likely to require two or more health education courses; 15% compared the U.S. median of 43%.⁵ Among TX schools:

- 15% taught 11 pregnancy, HIV, or STD prevention topics in a required health education course
- 69% taught abstinence as the most effective method to avoid pregnancy, HIV, and STDs in a required health education course. (U.S.~78%)
- 17% taught how to correctly use a condom in a required health education course (U.S.~24%)
- 56% taught how to find valid information or services related to HIV or HIV testing in a required health education course



¹ Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention, 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)

² Had sexual intercourse with at least one person during the 3 months before the survey.

³ Among students who were currently sexually active.

⁴ Among the 36 participating states with weighted principal survey results and the 34 states with weighted teacher survey results.

⁵ Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention, 2006 The School Health Profiles.

- **Culturally appropriate reproductive choices** - The issue of access to culturally appropriate reproductive choices is a complex paradigm that includes: views on the family; their cultural and religious experience; historical experience of coercive contraceptive policies in the form of forced sterilization; their limited access to opportunities educationally or economically; language barriers and challenges; and immigration status of many Latinos. Giving teens information and skills to make healthy decisions based on their cultural context and medically accurate information is a must.

We look forward to partnering and improving the health and well-being of our community and Texas. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact us at 210.208.9494.

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