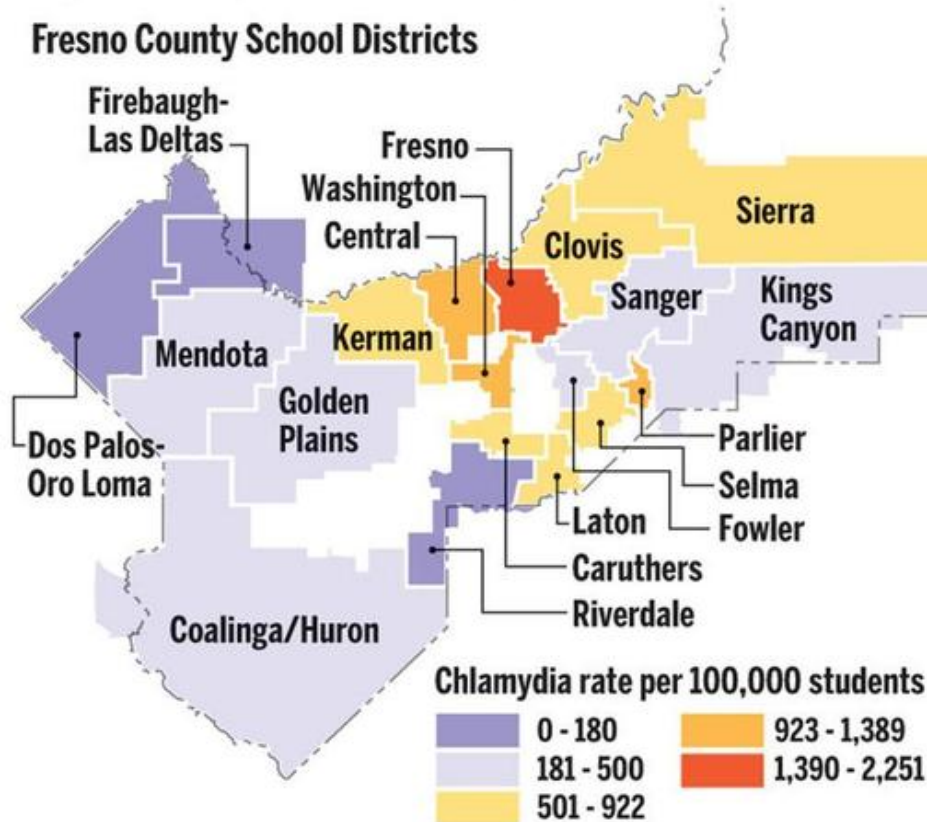


EDITORIAL: Ignorance is not bliss when subject is sex education

Chlamydia rates

Fresno County teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection rates are among the highest in California. Among local school districts, Fresno Unified had the highest chlamydia rate for teens age 13 - 18 in 2013.

Fresno County School Districts



Source: Fresno County Department of Public Health

THE FRESNO BEE

Once again, Fresno finds itself looking like a third-world nation.

This time, it's news that sex education quietly has disappeared from Fresno Unified School District curriculum. And not only is there no comprehensive sex education in a city with pockets of the worst concentrated poverty in America, but few people are certain what is being taught, according to a recent article by The Bee's Hannah Furfaro.

Fresno Unified explains away the problem, citing money issues. Sorry, but few challenges can derail education and self-sufficiency like serious illness or poor family planning.

Worse yet, some Fresno Unified trustees are so clueless either they like it that way or they have no idea what is going on.

Here is the weirdest comment in the story: "I don't believe that the government should be telling you about sex," says trustee Brooke Ashjian. He believes mothers, fathers and churches should teach children about it. School is not the place.

Let's get this right. "Government" — that would be physicians, credentialed public school teachers (many have master's degrees), physicians' assistants and registered nurses working in public health — can teach people about brain surgery, cancer or quantum physics, but they are not qualified to tell young people how their bodies and minds work, nor how to prevent and treat sexually transmitted disease and pregnancy. Meanwhile, any random mom, dad or church leader, regardless of education, can do all that?

Welcome to Fresno, USA.

So how is this approach working for Fresno Unified, which has more than 70,000 students?

Not well. Fresno County teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection rates are among the highest in California. Fresno Unified had the highest chlamydia rates for teens age 13-18 in 2013, and its gonorrhea rates are the highest in the county. Layer that on top of our poverty rates and low educational attainment among parents, and you have a formula for failure.

Our children deserve a better start in life as they go off to compete in the world.

Like all science, history and the arts, there are facts, and then there are moral, cultural, ethical and religious judgments made about those facts. Sexuality is no different. It is, at its center, biology, chemistry, anatomy, physiology and interpersonal communications. Misunderstanding it can leave devastation in its path.

Families and churches certainly should teach children what they think is best. At the same time, children should also be taught the facts by the finest experts in the field, those whose job it is to keep up with modern science and social science.

Fresno Unified is working with state officials to come up with a curriculum. We hope that it would be evidence-based with constant oversight to monitor its effectiveness. It cannot come too soon.