

Fresno Unified approves comprehensive sex education

By Mackenzie Mays
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The Fresno Unified school board approved sexual education curriculum at a meeting Wednesday after years of the district going without teaching the subject to students.

The [California Healthy Youth Act](#), signed into law earlier this month, requires all school districts in the state to provide “comprehensive, accurate and unbiased” sex education at least twice between grades 7 and 12 starting Jan. 1. Currently, sex education is not mandatory.

The new law mandates schools to provide information on HIV prevention, contraception and “all legally available pregnancy outcomes” including emergency contraception and abortion.

Lessons must be inclusive of all sexual orientations and also cover gender identity and consent. California is the first state to teach students about sexual consent – requiring high schools to include “[yes means yes](#)” lessons.

Parents can opt their children out of classes, but all schools are mandated to teach the courses.

Earlier this year, a Fresno County Superior Court judge [ruled](#) that students have a right to learn about sexual health – outside of an abstinence-only approach – after Fresno Unified came under fire for being one of the few districts in California that doesn’t provide the classes. Budget cutbacks at FUSD ended a sociology course that taught some sexual health in 2011.

[Positive Prevention Plus](#), the curriculum approved by the board on Wednesday, includes lessons on healthy relationships, relationship violence, STD testing and family planning. PPP is the highest-rated program approved by the California Department of Education. [Fresno Barrios Unidos](#) – which operates an after-school program focusing on teen pregnancy prevention – will provide some of the courses.

But trustees still had concerns about the now-mandatory lessons.

Trustee Brooke Ashjian took issue with the fact that in the teachers’ manual, phrases like, “obtain latex condoms” were in much larger print than phrases about abstinence.

“If we’re going to teach all forms and fashions from abstinence to birth control, which I believe in, there should be equal time spent,” Ashjian said.

Trustee Carol Mills said it’s a step in the right direction but that it’s important for students to remember that the age of sexual consent is 18 in California.

“It’s not 16 or 17 ... I think we need to make it clear to our students that you need to be not just physically able to engage in sexual relations but emotionally and intellectually,” she said. “There’s a lot more to it than just the physical aspect.”

Trustee Janet Ryan turned heads with her comments about pregnant teens in the district, saying some are pregnant because “they are lonely because they want somebody to love them and they believe that a baby is going to make them feel better.”

“We have young children having children, and that is a growing problem across the country with young women,” she said. “We have to somehow get across to our young girls that it is difficult enough to raise a child, but for a young

woman without an education to raise a child by herself on welfare is very difficult.”

To which a mother of Fresno Unified students called out, “what about the boys?” and added, “it takes two.”

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