

Understanding Mississippi's New Sexuality Education Law

In March 2011, the Mississippi state legislature passed House Bill 999, a dual-option sex education bill that was signed into law by Governor Haley Barbour on March 16, 2011. The new law serves as an unprecedented sexuality education mandate for the state. Under the legislation, all school districts in Mississippi are required to teach human sexuality instruction (referred to as “sex-related education”). **Each school board must adopt either an “abstinence-only” or “abstinence-plus” education policy by June 30, 2012, with each school district implementing a corresponding curriculum by the start of the 2012–2013 school year.**

The law requires that both “abstinence-only” and “abstinence-plus” instruction teach the following:

- “the social, psychological and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity, and the likely negative psychological and physical effects of not abstaining;
- the harmful consequences to the child, the child’s parents and society that bearing children out of wedlock is likely to produce, including the health, educational, financial, and other difficulties the child and his or her parents are likely to face, as well as the inappropriateness of the social and economic burden placed on others;
- that unwanted sexual advances are irresponsible and teaches how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increases vulnerability to sexual advances;
- that abstinence from sexual activity before marriage, and fidelity within marriage, is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and related health problems;
- the current state law related to sexual conduct, including forcible rape, statutory rape, paternity establishment, child support and homosexual activity; and
- that a mutually faithful monogamous marriage is the only appropriate setting for sexual intercourse.”

Human sexuality instruction need not address every component listed above; and instruction may also include a discussion of condoms and contraceptives, so long as it includes “a factual presentation of the risks and failure rates.” The department of education must approve each district’s curriculum as well as establish a protocol for ensuring that provided instruction is “age, grade and developmentally appropriate.”

An “abstinence-plus” policy allows for instruction to address a broader range of sexual health topics, such as contraceptive methods, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and STD/HIV prevention. The inclusion of such topics must be approved by the Mississippi Department of Education and the law prohibits “instruction and demonstrations on the application and use of condoms”.

Parents or guardians must receive notification at least one week prior to the teaching of any human sexuality instruction, and they must request for their child to participate in such classes. Furthermore, students must be separated by gender at all times when sexuality education is given.

The new law serves as an unprecedented sexuality education mandate. Under the legislation, all school districts are required to teach sexual health information.

Each school district may determine how to incorporate “sex-related education” into its core curriculum, including whether to use, or incorporate parts of, commercially available education programs. The Department of Education will develop an approved list of curricula. A district may also adopt an education program developed by the Mississippi Department of Human Services in conjunction with the Mississippi State Department of Health.

Mississippi PREP

The Mississippi Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) state-grant, managed by the Mississippi Department of Health, provides federal funding to school districts to implement evidence-based programs that provide medically accurate and age-appropriate information to students. Such information addresses both abstinence and contraception for the prevention of unintended pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and other sexually transmitted diseases. **The Mississippi PREP state-grant program allows school districts that have chosen to adopt an “abstinence-plus” policy to receive education resources, curriculum training, and technical support to implement one of six approved evidence-based curricula at no cost.**

School districts that choose to participate in the PREP state-grant program will be required to implement one of the following evidence-based curricula:

Becoming a Responsible Teen (BART)

Draw the Line/Respect the Line

It’s Your Game: Keep it Real

Making a Difference!

Raising Healthy Children

Reducing the Risk

These education programs have undergone rigorous scientific evaluation—published in peer-reviewed journals—that have proven them to be effective in changing sexual behavior, including helping young people delay sexual activity and/or, among those who are sexually active, increase their use of condoms or contraception, reduce their number of sexual partners, reduce their frequency of sexual intercourse, or reduce the incidence of pregnancy. All of these programs have been approved as evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention models by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Adolescent Health.

The six curricula offer different program models, number of curriculum sessions, and learning activities. Many are designed to meet the needs of diverse groups of students. They include medically accurate and age-appropriate information on a number of sexual health topics as well as skill-building exercises to equip youth with the tools to make healthy decisions and avoid risky behavior.

This Mississippi State Department of Health website provides additional information on the Personal Responsibility Education Program, including details for parents, school officials, students, and communities.

To learn more, please visit:

www.healthyms.com/PREP

Each of these programs has been approved as an evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention model by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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**Please see the following page for details on each of the six approved programs for Mississippi PREP*

Becoming a Responsible Teen (BART)

- HIV/AIDS-prevention education curriculum designed for African-American youth ages 14–18
- Promotes safer sex while also teaching about abstinence; Combines education with behavioral skills training on assertion, refusal, self-management, problem solving, risk recognition, and correct condom use.
- Includes interactive activities, group discussions, and role-plays
- Proven to delay the initiation of sexual intercourse; reduce the frequency of sex and the incidence of unprotected sex; and reduce the incidence of unprotected anal sex.

Draw the Line/Respect the Line

- School-based curriculum consisting of 19 sessions divided between grades six through eight
- Teaches students how to establish and maintain boundaries regarding sexual behavior
- Lessons include teaching about refusal skills, setting sexual limits and managing sexual pressure
- Includes individual teacher consultations and parent involvement through homework activities.
- Proven to reduce the incidence of sexual intercourse, particularly among male participants.

It's Your Game: Keep it Real

- School-based curriculum consisting of 24 classroom lessons designed for seventh and eighth grade students
- Encourages participants to delay sexual initiation while addressing the importance of practicing safer sex
- Lessons address setting personal limits, human growth and development, healthy relationships, refusal skills, the importance of STD and pregnancy testing, and skills for using condoms and contraceptives
- Incorporates group activities, computer-based sessions, role modeling, journaling, and group discussion
- Proven to reduce the incidence of sexual initiation among students who are not sexually active.

Making a Difference!

- Pregnancy, STD/ HIV-prevention education curriculum designed for use with adolescents ages 11–13
- Aims to increase participants' knowledge about HIV, STD, and pregnancy prevention as well as their confidence to negotiate sexual pressure and practice abstinence.
- Includes interactive activities, small group discussions, and skill-building exercises, such as role-plays
- Proven to reduce incidence of sexual intercourse among participants and delay sexual initiation among participants who are not sexually active.

Raising Healthy Children

- Positive youth development program designed for students in grades one through six
- Multi-year, school-based curriculum that incorporates individual, school and family programming
- Seeks to reduce risk factors, including school failure, substance abuse, and delinquency among students
- Targets protective factors such as parent-child connectedness, children's bonding with their school, academic achievement, interpersonal problem solving skills, refusal skills, and positive classroom behavior to support educational and life success.
- Proven to reduce the incidence of sexual intercourse, number of lifetime sexual partners, and STD diagnosis among participants; reduce incidence of teenage pregnancy and birth among female participants.

Reducing the Risk

- School-based curriculum consisting of 16 classroom lessons designed for students in grades nine and ten
- Aims to reduce high-risk behaviors among participants and emphasizes strategies for abstaining from sex or practicing safer sex.
- Includes experiential activities that teach students to develop refusal, negotiation, and communication skills.
- Proven to increase parent-child communication, delay the initiation of sexual intercourse, and reduced incidence of unprotected sex.