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Abstinence education suffers Supporters struggle to shield teens from heartache

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COURTESY

Risk avoidance vs. risk education:
which is best to help teens avoid
this?

Want kids to do better in school? Convince them not to have sex!

Want less chaotic and fragmented families in this country? Convince people not to have sex until they're married!

Want to get the entitlement rolls in this country back to a manageable level? Convince people not to have children until after they're married!

These are the answers to some of the more serious problems in this country that a group headquartered in Charleston has

KNOW THE FACTS

■ Less than half of mothers age 17 and younger ever graduate from high school

■ 66 percent of poor families were begun by a young, unmarried mother

■ One-in-two young people age 18 and under in South Carolina who live in some form of poverty

■ Children of teen mothers are 50 percent more likely to repeat a grade, less likely to complete high school and have lower standardized test grades

■ 13 percent of babies born to 15- to 17-year-olds have low birth weight

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been successfully advocating since 1995, but now the group that spreads the abstinence message says it's facing major funding and political obstacles.

"It's all the drama that comes with sex that is deterring our kids," said Mary McLellan, statewide chairman of the SC Healthy Family Formation Coalition, an advocacy component of Heritage Community Services.

At one point Heritage had five offices and about 50 trained male and female teachers

in South Carolina promoting abstinence and marriage across the state, but the Obama administration has diverted federal grant monies for abstinence programs to groups in the Planned Parenthood camp, who are more interested in teaching youngsters how to use condoms and have so-called "Safe Sex" than they are in teaching them to set boundaries, look to the future and formulate a successful plan for their lives, McLellan said.

McLellan and Anne Badgley, founder/CEO of Heritage, recently visited Horry County for a meeting of Christian women at Westminster Presbyterian Church where they spread the word about the possible demise of authentic abstinence education in South Carolina, as well as nationally.

They say they have the documents to prove that abstinence education has been successful.

During the Bush administration when abstinence funds were still available, McLellan says the Heritage group was extremely active.

Since federal and state-funded abstinence education began in 1996 in South Carolina, there has been a 44 percent decline in teen pregnancy in the age group Heritage typically reaches, 17-years-old and under, the ladies say, quoting a S.C.

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Department of Health and Environmental Control study.

According to a 2011 Centers for Disease Control report, nationally only 30 percent of teens in that age group report having had sex, McLellan said. This is a significant decrease over the past 15

■ In South Carolina, a girl between the ages of 10-19 gets pregnant every 49 minutes
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years, she said.

Programs that educate kids on how to use birth control or condoms can count success only within that 30 percent as they claim that their way is best, she said.

"The latest independent evaluation of Heritage's data shows that the kids who get our program are three times less likely to start having sex or continue having sex when measured a year afterward. That's unheard of. There are over 20 proven effective abstinence programs in the nation and we're one of the top ones," she said.

McLellan reports that "Heritage educators know how to teach abstinence effectively to students. Our evaluations on behavior change for the past 17 years prove it. Heritage Keepers® students choose to abstain from sex at a rate three times higher than students not getting the program, so why are we kidding ourselves that 'Safe Sex' programs can effectively teach students to abstain? Show me a 'Safe Sex' program that has data indicating that they influence behavior change in students to significantly delay sex or discontinue it. The goal of 'Safe Sex' is to increase condom use, not abstinence, and certainly not abstinence until marriage since the concept of marriage has been eliminated from the schools.

"Heritage educators have never shied away from teaching in the same schools that also have 'Safe Sex' instruction. Students are smart, they know the difference and are amazed to find out that abstinence is a science-based realistic choice they can make regardless of sexual history. They also need to feel validated and respected in their decisions about abstaining, not ridiculed," she added.

Heritage programs want not only to save young girls

"Because we are abstinence based, we don't promote the banding out contraceptives. We don't promote the buying of the contraceptives.."

Tammy Trulove
Horry County Schools

from unwanted pregnancy, but also work to rebuild American families.

"They hope to reconnect the dots among sex, children, families and parenting and help teens see that doing things in the right order can make huge differences in how successful their lives are.

They want to help youngsters build a life script around whom they are. They want them to see that if they complete their educations and get married before they have children that much of the fragmentation and chaos found in families today will be eliminated.

"We think people are more than their genitals. I know people think that's strong...We want to teach avoiding completely any

risky behavior," she said.

But McLellan says her group isn't naïve; they know that the older teens become the more likely they will be to have sex. Still, they think if they can hold them back at least until they're in their 20s the lives of young people and society in general will be improved.

It's clear, she said, "Science and biology support sex within marriage as the ideal healthy choice." Other programs teach "risk reduction;" theirs teaches "risk avoidance," she said.

"Risk reduction groups are tearing down boundaries that need to be set and kept," she said.

Although McLellan says she has run into people who think it is illegal to teach abstinence in schools, the truth is that South Carolina law requires that any sex education program strongly emphasize abstinence until marriage. Marriage is mentioned four times in the South Carolina law, so why has it been taken out of Comprehensive Health Education and the S.C. Health Standards? she asks.

Cayci Banks, director of communications with the S.C. Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, and Tammy Trulove, Horry County's coordinator for comprehensive health education, say their groups adhere to the law.

"All of the programs say that abstinence is the first and best program for young people, and I think everyone agrees with that," Banks said repeating later that they make it clear that abstinence is the first and best path to take.

"We believe strongly in abstinence, but we also want to give young people the facts and you always want to educate. If a young person is going to be sexually active you don't want them not protecting themselves....," she said.

Banks says all of their programs are age appropriate and medically accurate.

She likens their message to parents who tell their children not to drink alcohol, but follow that with a request to their teens to phone them if they do so they can pick them up and help them avoid automobile accidents.

Banks says studies within South Carolina show that about 50 percent of South Carolina's high school students are sexually active, but says that number swells closer to 70 to 75 percent for high school seniors. Many of them, she believes, are not as knowledgeable about sexual matters as people want to think.

The idea that kids should be instructed in birth control because they're going to have sex no matter what anyone tells them leads McLellan to pose this

■ Becoming a parent is the number one reason why teen girls drop out of school
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question: Why are adults prosecuted for giving alcohol to minors, yet it is okay, even mandated for teachers to instruct minors, who cannot legally consent to sex, that sex among and with minors is normal and expected?

The Heritage ladies have

Seven questions abstinence educators ponder:

■ **Why are adults prosecuted for giving alcohol to minors, yet it is okay, even mandated for teachers to instruct minors, who cannot legally consent to sex, that sex among minors is normal and expected?**

■ **Aren't minors caught drinking alcohol arrested? Or at least told to stop?**

■ **If a minor is having sex, shouldn't that be reported to the authorities since that minor cannot consent to sex? What if they are being forced to have sex? Who is protecting these minors from being exploited?**

■ **Isn't ignoring or promoting underage drinking and/or teen sex considered contributing to the delinquency of a minor? Doesn't ignoring or promoting sex among minors violate reporting laws and sexual abuse laws?**

■ **Why are we appalled when sexual predators entice and seduce children to sexual acts, yet think nothing of teachers grooming children to feel comfortable talking about sex and using condoms by practicing with their classmates?**

■ **Why are we shocked when teachers cross the line and have sex with students?**

■ **Does any of this make sense to you?**

a book, *See, Lies and Hook Ups - A Parent's Guide for Fighting Back* and a companion video series, which they are giving away to schools, churches and other concerned adults who are willing to use it to teach about the value of abstinence, because they fear the benefits of abstinence and marriage will be lost to another generation if more funds are cut. The number of free packages will be limited per county.

Horry County is of special concern to the ladies because the S.C. Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy has recently obtained a grant to promote its *Safer Choices* program throughout Horry County.

To be selected for the program, a county had to have a teen pregnancy rate higher than the national average, had to meet population requirements and had to have a community that was mobilized and ready to support the program.

The teen pregnancy prevention program is training teachers, health educators and others who work with teens who share their objectives.

The S.C. Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy has also gotten a grant for Anderson County where a program called Teen Outreach Program or TOP, has been implemented.

McLellan doesn't like

either of these programs. She calls them "gender bending," "Safe Sex," "condom pushing programs" that tell kids that safe sex is just as good as abstinence if kids are careful and use protection, but she counters that there is no birth control or protection that is 100 percent effective, especially when it comes to spreading sexually-transmitted diseases.

She points out that the program is called *Safer Choices* not *Safe Choices*.

Trulove said the S.C. Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy program hasn't changed Horry County Schools' curriculum. It was already using *Safer Choices* when the group came in for training. Horry County uses It's Your Game, Keep It Real with middle school students.

Trulove said the state group offered the school district better ways to train teachers who are taking the programs into the schools. About 20 people were trained in Horry County in October of 2011.

In accordance with state law, parents have the right to opt their children out of

■ Less than half of teen mothers ever graduate from high school and fewer than 2 percent earn a college degree by age 30
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some portions of the program.

If parents make a request, students can skip classes on reproductive health education, pregnancy prevention and contraceptive education. Male

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FROM A11

and female students are separated for these classes, Trulove said.

That leaves instruction in hygiene, wellness, fitness, consumer health, safety and accident prevention, substance abuse, dental, mental and emotional health, birth and development that parents cannot refuse for their

■ More than half of all mothers on welfare had their first child as a teen.
COURTESY OF CAROLINA TEEN HEALTH

children.

Trulove says the S.C. Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is also focused on family planning clinics and health clinics, not just on schools.

She says all Horry County Schools programs teach reproductive health in the context of future family planning within marriage.

"Because we are abstinence-based, we don't promote the handing out of contraceptives. We don't promote the buying of the contraceptives. You're not going to find school-based personnel handing out condoms to children. That's not going to happen," Trulove said.

Serena Holguin with the S.C. Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy in Horry County says their programs go beyond the schools into groups such as A Father's Place and Girls and Boys Clubs.

The S.C. Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy reports that great progress is being made in reducing teen pregnancy in the

"Without marriage as the context for sex. There are no boundaries for sex, which leads to more chaotically-formed families and soaring entitlements."

Mary McLellan
State chairman of the S.C. Healthy Family Formation Coalition

state.

It says that in 2009, the South Carolina teen birth rate was 49 births per 1,000 females, a 19 percent decrease from 1990 and also the lowest rate ever recorded in the state. During the same year, the Horry County teen birth rate was 50.2 births per 1,000 females, higher than the state and national average.

"We are seeing an increase in abstinence... I do also know that when you look at teen pregnancy, you do see it weighted more toward the 18 or 19-year-olds," Holguin said.

In its report, A Winnable Battle: Teen Pregnancy Prevention in Horry County, the S.C. Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy says it took two surveys in Horry County in 2010, one was a door-to-door survey with teens and a second was a telephone survey of adults.

Their findings show that:

■ 52 percent of Horry teens aged 15-19 reported they have had sexual intercourse.

■ Among teens who have had sex, the average age at first intercourse was 14.5, and they reported an average of 3.6 sexual partners.

■ 27 percent of sexually active teens said they did not use anything to keep them from getting pregnant the last time they had sex.

■ 19 percent of sexually active teens reported they

had ever been pregnant or had gotten a girl pregnant. Close to one-third of those aged 18-19 (29 percent) reported a pregnancy.

The survey also found that more than one-third of teens have not talked with one of their parents about sex and 62 percent said they don't know of any place their or their friends can go to get contraceptives or birth control.

The S.C. Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy recently launched a new website in Horry County, nrhorry.com, which stands for No Right Now.

The website says, "Not Right Now empowers teens to be in control of when and if they have sex."

"Abstinence is the only surefire way to avoid pregnancy, but the reality is that some teenagers will choose to have sex. We want to arm these teens with information so they can be as safe as possible. There's a good time to have a baby, but it's not

■ The daughters of teen moms are more likely to be teen moms themselves.
COURTESY OF CAROLINA TEEN HEALTH

Right Now."

It also links to a website Carolina Teen Health, which has three columns, each containing 14 methods of birth control. It allows users to compare up to three methods at a time, pointing out the benefits and shortcomings of each. Abstinence is one of them.

That website claims that a S.C. teen gets pregnant every 49 minutes.

Holguin says her group encourages parent-child communication.

"We don't want our reputation to be that we are the go-to people, that they should bypass their parents and come to us," she said.

To help in that area, the group has a program for parents called Roots and Wings, which is designed to help parents look for teachable moments and know what to say when they spot those moments.

In evaluations of Safer Choices, easily found on the internet, evaluators used 20 schools to compare schools that had used Safer Choices with schools assigned to a control group.

They found, "the program was not effective at delaying sexual initiation, reducing the frequency of sex, or decreasing students' number of sexual partners. However, the program was successful in reducing instances of unprotected sex. The program also had a positive impact on parent-child communication, students' knowledge, students' self-efficacy to refuse sex and communicate with a partner, and on students' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions related to condom use."

The evaluation also says that Safer Choices didn't impact every subgroup the same.

"On four outcomes that could be affected by condom use, it had a greater

impact on males than on females. It had greater effects on Hispanics, including a delay in sexual activity, than on other racial/ethnic groups. Its greatest overall effect was an increase in condom use among students who had

the school system is doing a good job with its comprehensive health education.

"...we do a good job trying to get that material to the children and following that curricula as it was intended to be delivered.

Mary McLellan
State chairman of the S.C. Healthy Family Formation Coalition

S.C. Health Standards. Abstain until when?

"Without marriage as the context for sex, there are no boundaries for sex, which leads to more chaotically-formed families and soaring entitlements," McLellan said.

Sen. Lindsey Graham introduces abstinence education bill in Senate

U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina recently introduced the Abstinence Education Reallocation Act in the Senate, together with original cosponsor Senator John Thune of South Dakota.

The bill will place a priority on Sexual Risk Avoidance as the optimal choice among America's teens. Since nearly 75 percent of 15-17 year olds are now sexually abstinent, the need to encourage these healthy behaviors is essential.

Valerie Huber, executive director of NAEA applauded Senator Graham's efforts: "In a perplexing move, President Obama is calling on Congress to eliminate every penny devoted to the Sexual Risk Avoidance abstinence approach despite the fact that studies show this approach is effective. We are happy that Senator Graham is infusing science and common sense back into the sex education discussion. This bill seeks the best health interests of America's youth."

Social science research extols the benefits of delayed sexual onset, which reach far beyond the prevention of pregnancy and STDs.

"We cannot overestimate the societal and individual benefits associated with sexual abstinence before marriage," Huber said.

The Graham bill is a Senate companion to HR 2874, introduced by Rep. Randy Hultgren of Illinois in the House. The House version has acquired almost 70 cosponsors spanning both sides of the aisle, showing widespread support for this strategy among Members.

"It's time for the Senate to do the same," Huber said.

engaged in unprotected sex before the intervention."

It is in part the teaching on condoms that concerns McLellan. She was outraged about a program promoted by the S.C.

Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and the New Morning Foundation called Project Condom Upstate, which was held Tuesday at the Spartanburg Marriott in which student groups participated in a fashion show where condoms were the primary material in the designs. Registered groups were provided non-lubricated colored condoms to use on their designs. They were instructed to design dresses or outfits that represented a topic of sexual health, which could include comprehensive sex

■ The sons of teen moms are more likely to be locked up in prison.
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education, HIV awareness, access to contraceptives, abstinence, etc.

The event promised the winning group \$200.

"I'm shocked," said S.C. Rep. Alan Glemmons, R-107, when he learned of the condom fashion show.

"I don't know how you do that with a straight face," he said, adding that it bothers him to think that his 10th grade daughter might be subjected to such theatrics when he and her mother are teaching her a different philosophy at home.

S.C. Rep. Lister Barfield, R-58, was equally concerned about what today's teens face. He talked about teens being instructed to read what he thinks is an improper book because it takes the name of the Lord in vain.

"We're being hit on every side by this kind of garbage. It's coming at us from every side," he said.

However, Trulove says she can't even imagine something like that being held in Horry County.

"I don't see that a condom fashion show would be supported," she said. "I may be out of line, but I just don't foresee that. I don't foresee that being advertised in any of our schools, really. I don't even think any administrative personnel would condone a condom fashion show."

Trulove said she thinks

Heritage has built a more than 4,300-member S.C. Healthy Family Formation Coalition that focuses on the relationship between

■ About 1-in-4 teen moms have a second baby within two years of the first ... that is two babies in two years.
COURTESY OF CAROLINA TEEN HEALTH

sex, conception and family. They also promote fidelity

in marriage.

McLellan and Badgley have been going around the state offering limited supplies of their free materials and giving free training in how to use them, but McLellan says they've had a hard time getting their messages into this area.

They are pursuing churches as their last hope for their messages, she said.

"It should be our first hope. A lot of churches are in denial that they have a problem with teen sex," she said.

The Sex, Lies and Hook-Ups training takes two to three hours and the Heritage Keepers® Abstinence Education Curriculum Training takes seven hours. People can choose both or just one training.

Heritage has 14 trainings scheduled so far for April, May and June. The closest one to Conway is in Georgetown Saturday at the Georgetown Library from 9:45 a.m. - 1 p.m. Lunch will be provided.

The Heritage ladies are eager to provide the training wherever people want it. To find out about Heritage's free materials and schedule training sessions, call Mary McLellan at 654-7740, ext. 122.

■ Two-thirds of families that have unmarried teen moms are poor.
COURTESY OF CAROLINA TEEN HEALTH

es, and that's one reason why we're teaching out to the churches because I think that's where these kids should be getting their information - parents and the churches."

McLellan said the five year grants that Heritage and other abstinence groups in South Carolina had were canceled two years into the programs, which required them to file most of their teaching staff, which has made it impossible to serve all of the schools and churches in the state that want

Heritage Keepers® Abstinence Education.

"We are very concerned that authentic abstinence-on-matrimony messages will be completely censored from this and future generations, especially since marriage has already been eliminated from the

S.C. Health Standards. Abstain until when?

"Without marriage as the context for sex, there are no boundaries for sex, which leads to more chaotically-formed families and soaring entitlements," McLellan said.