

The Post and Courier

Abstinence sex ed gives teens a choice

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Brian Hicks' Oct. 6 column "Why is the state fooling around with sex education?" did a great job of perpetuating tired stereotypes.

The column states, "... it is a constant war between folks who want to teach health and those who want to teach abstinence-only ..." and "... a bunch of old white men in Columbia decided that they — and their pastors — know what's best for our kids."

The offended tone implies that abstinence education, which is taught by Heritage Community Services locally, is not based in science and is driven by old, out-of-touch, religious zealots that are clueless to the dynamics of the 21st century.

The facts do not support these assumptions. Heritage's curriculum, Heritage Keepers Abstinence Education, is one of only 31 teen pregnancy prevention programs listed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as proven effective.

A year after being in the Heritage Keepers program, students surveyed said they were involved in sex at a rate 67 percent lower than non-program students. These were 2,215 students from 41 S.C. schools; 63 percent were African-American and the rest were Caucasian or "other."

Furthermore, Heritage Keepers is approved as medically accurate by the U.S. Health and Human Services Office of Population Affairs.

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) data indicate that more than 80 percent of teens under 15 and more than 70 percent of teens 15 to 17 say they have not had sex, a dramatic reduction from the 1980s and '90s.

CDC guidelines for Effective School Health Education to Prevent the Spread of AIDS recommends that schools provide programs that encourage young people to abstain from sex.

Healthy People 2020 challenges health advocates to increase teen abstinence by 10

percent. To meet these goals, evidence based abstinence education programs are needed.

Heritage Keepers is effective across age, gender and race in rural, urban and suburban communities, increasing the probability of academic success, economic stability and self sufficiency. It's about their lives, not politics.

Hicks concludes his article by writing, "If lawmakers want to be ignorant, well, that's their choice," implying that only ignorant lawmakers would support abstinence education.

However, the real ignorance is a lack of knowledge about what research really shows, that instruction that focuses primarily on contraception use does not necessarily make sex safe for all teens.

The multitude of families without fathers and teens with STDs speaks for itself.

Youth who learn the benefits and skills associated with avoiding risky behavior are statistically better off in nearly every category of well-being. All S.C. teens have a right to know they have a choice.

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This letter was also signed by Rodney Williams and Ted Jones, board members of Heritage Community Services.