



Iowa Youth Congress: Education Committee

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Incorporating Sexual Violence Prevention & Awareness into Sex Ed

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Position Statement:

It is the position of the Iowa Youth Congress, the voice of Iowa's youth, that sexual violence awareness and prevention education should be added to the current K-12 sexual education curriculum.

Position:

This bill will assist in preventing instances of sexual violence by educating Iowa's K-12 students on subjects such as consent, empathy, healthy relationships, and setting boundaries in order to increase sexual violence awareness and prevention among Iowans. This bill will change Iowa's current sexual education policies to mandate the inclusion of information on sexual violence prevention and awareness.

Current Situation:

Currently, in the United States, one in five women have experienced completed or attempted rape, and nearly a quarter of men have experienced some form of contact sexual violence (NSVRC). Nationwide, 81% of women and 43% of men reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment and/or assault in their lifetime (NSVRC). There are many reasons as to why sexual violence occurs; however, many experts agree that a key factor in preventing sexual violence is education. Iowa schools are required to teach sexual education, however, the only mandates for the curriculum are that it must be age-appropriate and science-based, and must include information on the prevention and control of disease. The curriculum is not required to include any information on consent. This lack of education does not only affect Iowans. Data from a nationwide survey shows that a majority of people think too little is being done to educate high school students on sexual assault (Planned Parenthood). This correlates to the data shown that very few people in the United States received education from either school or their parents about how to give consent, ask for consent, say no to sex, and how to recognize whether your partner is giving consent. If they did receive such education, the focus was usually on simply saying "no" or dealing with sexual assault after the fact (Planned Parenthood). While this type of education is important, experts agree that effective sexual violence prevention education goes beyond consent, and includes teachings on topics such as communicating and respecting boundaries (SIECUS). Other researchers say education on forming healthy relationships could minimize instances of sexual harassment in middle and high school (Santelli). Unfortunately, the current sexual education curriculum is lacking when it comes to this type of education.

Rationale:

No shortage of research backs up the claim that proper sex education prevents sexual violence. A recent study from Columbia University suggests that comprehensive sex education protects students from sexual assault even after high school. The research found that students who received formal education about how to say no to sex (refusal skills training) before age 18 were less likely to experience penetrative sexual assault in college (Santelli).

While numbers regarding older teens who have received sexual violence prevention education are promising, this education must precede college campuses and high school students. The Centers for Disease Control reports that over 42% of women who experienced sexual violence were first raped before the age of 18 (Tjaden and Thoennes). Thus, sexual violence prevention must start sooner rather than later. Iowa schools are currently required to begin teaching sexual education in grades seven or eight, and then continue this education at some point during grades nine through twelve. However, experts say that sexual health education should begin in elementary school with topics such as the human body, puberty, empathy, and healthy relationships (Pacheco). Other experts claim that sex education should begin with simple anatomy lessons during the toddler years (Mayo Clinic). The story of Angie Lauritsen, a victim of child sexual abuse, highlights the importance of this. Lauritsen explains that when she was raped by a family member, she had no education to help her understand that she was being sexually assaulted, and therefore could not protect herself. She explains that, “The process of teaching young kids their body parts is protective, not sexualizing” (Lauritsen). Additionally, one study found that some sex offenders avoid children who know the correct names for their genitals, because this suggests these children have been educated about body safety and sexuality (Kenny and Wurtele). A child is sexually assaulted in the US every nine minutes (Lauritsen). If sexual violence education is to be implemented, it needs to be implemented now.

In addition to its physical and emotional effects, sexual violence is also associated with high financial costs. Rape costs an estimated \$122,000 per victim. There are about 25 million rape survivors in the US right now, meaning we can expect to spend more than \$3 trillion over their lifetimes on health care, criminal justice response, lost productivity, and other costs (NSVRC). As sexual violence prevention education reduces instances of rape, this added curriculum will end up reducing the overall cost of rape to the economy as well as the state and national government. Therefore, funding this curriculum is a cost-effective investment.

Recommended Action:

The Iowa Youth Congress supports modifying Iowa Law 279.50 “Human Growth and Development Instruction” to mandate the inclusion of sexual violence awareness and prevention education in Iowa’s K-12 sexual education curriculum. This added curriculum would start in elementary school with topics such as naming and identifying parts of the body, establishing and respecting boundaries, and the importance of empathy. The curriculum would extend to middle school and high school with additional education on how to give and recognize proper consent, identify predatory behavior, healthy vs unhealthy sexual relationships, and tips on preventing assault.

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