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editorial

Support comprehensive sex ed

Minnesota parents overwhelmingly endorse all-inclusive programs.

It's old news, that abstinence-only sexual education programs at middle schools and high schools don't work. But new research done by the University's Department of Pediatrics found that Minnesota parents largely support all-inclusive sex ed.

The state provides no specific guidelines on what kind of sex education schools are required to provide; no requirements exist that say students must attend a course in sexual education. Essentially, that decision is left up to individual principals and teachers.

Contrary to teen movies with scenes featuring the protagonist awkwardly putting a condom on a banana, many students graduate high school in this state without ever receiving information on contraceptives.

From a policy standpoint, bills in the legislature that support sex education have failed, and even been threatened with vetoes by Gov. Tim Pawlenty. But the results from this study should send a clear message to lawmakers: Minnesota parents support programs that provide students with information on pregnancy prevention as well as abstinence.

Of the 1,605 parents of children ages 5 to 17 in Minnesota's eight congressional districts, 90 percent favored sex education programs that provided information on birth control, abstinence and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.

Teaching young people how to practice safe sex in order to prevent pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases does not encourage them to have sex. In fact, the majority of people have sex before marriage, and studies on abstinence-only education have found the curriculum ineffective.

It's time to forget what the family values crowd so loudly purports to be the norm among parents. Legislators should get back to the drawing board and heed Minnesota parents' message. The results of this study provide evidence that bolsters the argument against abstinence-only education. You can also share your thoughts on this issue with legislators at the Capitol on Tuesday, April 8 at lobby day with the Coalition for Responsible Sex Ed.