

Improving Sex Education in K-12 - WWU Agenda Proposal

Describe the issue: What is the problem? What is the solution?

Sex education in America varies widely by state and even region, leaving teenagers without adequate sex education and information. In our K-12 school system, sex education is not required. Washington law on sexual health education states that "the decision as to whether or not a program about sexual health education is to be introduced... is a matter for determination at the district level by the local school board." Furthermore, schools that do teach students about sex provide heteronormative sex education, excluding non heterosexual identities. Currently, most students lack the introduction and language for other identities. This is a problem because there is a multitude of sexual orientations and identities that individuals should be aware of entering their adult life. By failing to formally acknowledge different sexual orientations, students unsure of their own identities are disadvantaged in their own development.

In addition, education that emphasizes consent, in all forms, is nonexistent in the K-12 school system. Teaching students consent at an early age is vital to forming healthy sexual relationships later on. Currently, language and anti-assault messaging is primarily targeted to women. In order to reduce sexual assault, education on consent needs to shift and include conversations to young men about sexual assault and harassment. In addition, "virginity" needs to be emphasized as a social construct

We are encouraging strengthening and expansion of the Healthy Youth Act (RCW 28A.300.475) and requiring HIV and healthy sex education in all public schools in Washington State.

How does it directly impact and improve students' lives?

Inclusive sex education will institutionalize positive conversations about different gender identities and sexual orientations. Schools will introduce language for other identities, improving interpersonal and professional relationships. Including programming on consent and sexual harassment is vital to ensure the wellbeing of all people. This will also help to deconstruction gender roles.

Please provide background information and the current context of the issue:

- Washington State teen pregnancy rates have gone down in the last five years, to 28 per 1,000 young women aged 15-19. However, we can continue reduce this number.
- Washington State does not require sex education for public schools. But, for schools that do, the Healthy Youth Act encourages that "the education must be comprehensive (i.e., discuss both abstinence and contraception) and 'medically and scientifically accurate' (i.e., supported by research, published in peer-review journals, and objective)" (Soffes, 2010).
- In a survey done by the JAMA network from 2005-2006, nationwide, "Approximately 82% of respondents indicated support for programs that teach students about both abstinence and other methods of preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Similarly,

68.5% supported teaching how to properly use condoms. Abstinence-only education programs, in contrast, received the lowest levels of support (36%) and the highest level of opposition (about 50%) across the 3 program options. Self-identified conservative, liberal, and moderate respondents all supported abstinence-plus programs, although the extent of support varied significantly” ([Bleakly et al. 2006](#)).

Does it have a clear target? If yes, who? (e.g. a specific legislator, committee, or other agency)

Currently, Washington State Law states that "the decision as to whether or not a program about sexual health education is to be introduced into the common schools is a matter for determination at the district level by the local school board” (WAC 392-410-140). We believe this disenfranchises students and ill-prepares them for high school and their adult life after. Standardization of HIV and Sexual Health education is important so that all students are getting a comprehensive background and are prepared for healthy sexual relationships.

Additionally, our ask is to improve and expand the Healthy Youth Act (RCW 28A 300.475) by including education on non-heterosexual identities, discussion of different gender identities, emphasizing consent and giving education on forms of harassment to young men, and deconstructing the concept of virginity. Furthermore, requiring comprehensive HIV and healthy sex education for all K-12 public schools in Washington State.

ASWWU acknowledges that this ask may be controversial. Nonetheless, this does not negate the importance of positive sex education for K-12 students.

How could students build a diverse campus coalition around this issue?

Every student who attends a university has been taught some form of sex education. We can use their stories and testimonies as a reinforcement of our ask. Washington State by no means is one of the worse off states in regards to sex education, but there are still improvements to be made. Providing comprehensive and medically accurate sex education to our youth is critical, and effective-and we know students on Western’s campus will agree with these sentiments and will rally behind the efforts. Peer health educators, DVSAS, various AS offices, and Voices for Planned Parenthood are groups on our campus that would be in support of this.

In what way does it have a local/state/federal organizing and lobbying angle?

We would like to expand the Healthy Youth Act to be more encompassing of all identities and sexual orientations and deconstruct social constructs that previous sex education has created. Simply requiring, "All instruction and materials used must be appropriate for students regardless of gender and sexual orientation” does not provide enough information for health non binary relationships.

What creative and/or innovative tactics could we employ to engage the media and excite new students around this issue?

Let's Talk about SEX (education) - This is a fun/catchy way to get students excited to share their sex education in the K-12 system. Many students learn misleading facts about sex that they can share if they so chose.

- #LetsTalkAboutSexEd
- Tabling and events focusing on testimony on student's K-12 sex education.
- Movies/documentaries focusing on consent screenings on campus.