

**ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH**

# **Blueprint**

**For Ensuring Schools Offer  
Quality Sex Education**



# Introduction:

## Who can use this Blueprint and how?

This guideline is for **concerned community members, youth, parents, caregivers, educators, administrators, and advocates** – anyone who recognizes that sexual health education is under attack and wants to know how to **jump in, get involved, and help** keep our kids informed and safe.

When you find yourself the target of a disinformation campaign about sex education it can be disorienting – because it is designed to be. The goal is to retain focus and assert your principles. Just because the opposition is louder, does not mean there are more of them. In fact, it's critical to remember during this moment, **Sexual health education is not controversial.**

**98% of people support sex ed in high school<sup>1</sup>, and 89% support it in middle school<sup>2</sup>.**

These are the polling numbers of wildly popular positions like clean water and public roads that do not historically need to be defended. Just letting more parents know that sex ed is taught in your schools, why it's taught, and how kids benefit is a big win in gaining support for your cause.

The truth is that the vast majority of parents you'll encounter are in complete agreement that sex ed is a necessary part of learning. Most likely they have no idea it's under attack. We know it doesn't always feel that way – **the opposition is so loud!** It's true. But they are not pushing a popular agenda, and that's exactly why they resort to disinformation tactics.

**Disinformation campaigns are run to frighten and confuse people, in this case, parents.**

The opposition wants school superintendents to back down so they can control what curricula is taught in schools. Sex ed is not the only target of this campaign – it aims to stop school discussions of racism, LGBTQIA+ inclusion, and in many cases, basic health and safety measures. The same massive national entities and organizations that are funding the fight against sex ed are also funding the pushback against "Critical Race Theory," trans students' civil rights, book banning, and mask mandates. The end goal is to win elections, and they're willing to make kids vulnerable in order to do that.

This guide will take you through marshalling your supporters, gaining visibility, and crafting the trainings and messaging documents you need to get the good info out there. Each district is different with varying state standards, district policy, curricula, student bodies, parent and community groups, and access to teachers and school officials. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, but there is a blueprint that any successful campaign will follow.

---

1. Leslie Kantor, Nicole Levitz & Amelia Holstrom (2020) Support for sex education and teenage pregnancy prevention programmes in the USA: results from a national survey of likely voters, *Sex Education*, 20:3, 239-251, DOI: 10.1080/14681811.2019.1652807

2. Leslie Kantor, Nicole Levitz & Amelia Holstrom (2020) Support for sex education and teenage pregnancy prevention programmes in the USA: results from a national survey of likely voters, *Sex Education*, 20:3, 239-251, DOI: 10.1080/14681811.2019.1652807

**This document will outline your approach to the following tactics for combating misinformation:**

- **Community coalition forming**, where you'll compile your supporters among community leaders, parent groups, students, educators, faith leaders, elected officials, LGBTQIA+ organizations, and health experts.
- **Messaging documents and face-to-face conversations**, which include everything from internal background materials to social media graphics intended for distribution.
- **School Board Meetings and Visibility Events** such as PTA meetings, campaign events, community events and parades, anywhere people who may hear disinformation gather.
- **Trainings**, which will be an integral component to educate supporters and validators so they can talk about sex ed comfortably in any situation.
- **Press Strategy**, which includes everything from op eds and letters to the editor to interactions with reporters.

Your community coalition can use any/all of the above in your efforts to combat disinformation; simply tailor these guidelines to your own local needs. It may seem overwhelming, but you can do it. We are happy to offer consultation in applying this to your district and curriculum.

**Please reach out to Nora Gelperin at *Advocates for Youth* for further assistance or guidance. She can be contacted at [nora@advocatesforyouth.org](mailto:nora@advocatesforyouth.org).**

# Community Coalition/ Volunteer Database

Start by building and formalizing your community coalition – if you’re reading this document, you’re already concerned and you’re not alone.

Reach out to any relevant organizations in your area – youth, public health, reproductive freedom and justice, HIV prevention, and LGBTQIA+ civil rights orgs are a great place to start. Cast as wide a net as possible to bring in folks who care about online safety, social-emotional learning, sexual violence prevention, preventing child abuse and getting quality information to kids and parents. Consider naming your coalition so you have branding that stands up to the disinformation campaign and conveys a trusted source. For example, [District] Youth Deserve or [District] Healthy Kids would communicate that your priority is the health and safety of the students. Make sure all invitations and materials distributed by your coalition carry this branding so it can become recognizable throughout your area. Consider a user-friendly tool like [Canva](#) to create logos, headers, and social graphics like this for new coalitions:



The coalition can, and probably should be, volunteer-based. Ideally the members will already have roles within the community that will help them build networks and tackle this work. Consider hiring (or appointing a dedicated volunteer) for at least one part-time role who can keep the trains running, convene meetings, get approval for documents and actions, and stay on top of the schedule. If this isn’t within your budget, you may find a local or state organization (including your [GLSEN](#) chapter) that is willing to take the lead and provide the coordination pro bono or as part of their mission. When you’ve exhausted your state and local resources, reach out to your national affiliates (such as [Advocates for Youth](#) or [Planned Parenthood Action Fund](#)) to see whether resources can be brought to bear on your district.

Keep advocates and supporters in a database you can access when it’s time to get loud – you should have a few members from each group listed below in order to speak to any audience you might need:


## **Advocates and Supporters**

- Parents
- Educators and Administrators
- Students (current and former)
- Community leaders (elected officials and otherwise)
- Faith leaders
- LGBTQIA+ leaders (as gender inclusivity is an enormous target for disinformation)
- Public health experts
- Physicians (specifically pediatricians and adolescent medicine docs)

These supporters become your volunteers passing out flyers, posting on social media, alerting you to opposition disinformation, and for those interested – your public speakers.

# Messaging: Documents

It is critical for messaging documents to consider the audience first. Parents, teachers, community coalition members, and press all need distinct messaging to feel confident in the various conversations they have. It is critical **not to repeat** the disinformation in materials distributed to **parents** – multiple studies have shown that statements such as the following are **actually counterproductive**:

 **"No pornographic or adult material is used and classes are age appropriate."**

What people remember is the charge of pornography, not the accurate information that follows. So for external guidance materials (like FAQ sheets and social graphics), you may want to use a line such as the following, which provides the accurate answer and omits the disinformation entirely:

**"Students in elementary school learn basic foundational knowledge such as information about their bodies, friendships, personal safety, and setting and respecting boundaries."**

For **educators**, who are already steeped in the disinformation, you may want to provide a point-by-point rebuttal so they can feel confident when and if they're confronted with specific charges.

Consider these two different audiences when crafting your message documents:

- **Internal Guidance.** This is messaging for educators and coalition members; often a FAQ sheet of the toughest questions regularly received by members of this group. These documents are not meant to be shared publicly, and therefore can refer directly to the opposition and their claims.

- **External Guidance.** This will be the bulk of your materials – fact sheets to be distributed at parent and community events and turned into social graphics to post on coalition and supporter social media pages. Expect these materials to be shared widely and possibly printed in the press if seen by the media.

## Focus on what you want the community to know about your curriculum, including:

- Specifics about lessons that convey their age-appropriate nature.
- Transparency – let folks know they can access the entire lesson plan online, in a district office, or from the teacher/department responsible for this instruction.
- Data that shows comprehensive sexual health education reduces child abuse, trafficking, and bullying<sup>3</sup>.
- Any opportunities for family input, such as take-home worksheets or conversations.
- Information about the benefits of an inclusive curriculum – there are LGBTQIA+ students in every school and the CDC has shown that teaching students everyone deserves to be treated with dignity increases the health and safety of *everyone* – including the straight students.
- A reminder that students are harmed by inaccurate information they may find online, or from friends, and the focus of your curriculum is making sure students are healthy and safe.

The bottom line is that **preventing students from learning this information may be harmful to their health** – that message should be clearly communicated in any external material.

A more comprehensive FAQ sheet developed for Worcester Public Schools concludes this section of the Blueprint, but any district teaching comprehensive sex ed could put their own logo and district information on the following basic information and distribute it as is:

3. Goldfarb, E. S., & Lieberman, L. D. (2021). Three decades of research: The case for comprehensive sex education. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 68*(1), 13–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.07.036>

## The FACTS About Sexual Health Education

You may have been targeted by a false information campaign – [YOUR COMMUNITY COALITION] wants to set the record straight. [YOUR DISTRICT] has outlined the entire K-12 sexual health sequence that they are using: <link to online resources>

- Despite what you might have heard, sexual health education isn't controversial. The vast majority of parents/caregivers really do want their kids to have honest information and feel safe, welcome, and acknowledged at school. Inclusive lessons create a positive effect on all students and have been shown to reduce bullying, discrimination, and harassment.
- Our sex ed curriculum has lessons that are age-appropriate, so young people learn just the information they need now, and then layer it as they age to prepare them to make healthy decisions in the future. **This kind of curriculum has been shown to prevent child abuse, and make it easier for children to report if someone does try to harm them.**
- There are LGBTQ students in every school, including ours, and the CDC has shown that teaching students that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity increases the health and safety of *everyone* – whether or not they identify as LGBTQ.
- There's so much distracting misinformation floating around in the hallways. But hearing honest information from trusted sources can alleviate confusion students experience and give them the ability to concentrate on their future.
- Studies show that science-based comprehensive sexual health education helps students become healthier and more successful adults. It leads to lower STI rates, fewer unplanned pregnancies, better self-esteem, healthier relationships, and many more benefits. For the K-6 set, it's beneficial for anti-bullying, child abuse prevention, and personal safety.

As any teacher or parent knows, school is a place where children develop their understanding of the world and their ability to make meaningful connections in it. That's why honest, accurate sexual health education is so essential.

While it's critical not to *repeat* the disinformation in these materials, it is helpful to refer to it directly when you know there's a specific charge circulating. You may consider creating a talking point for trainings, a bullet for materials, or a graphic for social media that says:

**"You may have heard some misinformation about the curriculum our district uses and discussions of transgender people. This misinformation was shared to confuse and scare you. We are committed to making sure everyone feels safe and respected at our school, and to do so, we include the experience of all students, including those who are transgender, and make sure all students know everyone is deserving of respect."**

Remind families that the focus of sex ed is health and safety, and gatekeeping information from students can be harmful.

## Sample External Guidance Document

*\*This has been developed for the 3Rs curriculum specifically but may be adapted to yours.*

WORCESTER YOUTH  
DESERVE  
COMPREHENSIVE SEX ED!

### The FACTS About The 3Rs Curriculum in Worcester Public Schools

LA JOVENTUD DE  
WORCESTER MERECE  
EDUCACIÓN SEXUAL

Schools are where students learn the knowledge and skill they need to make healthy decisions. The curriculum implemented by [YOUR DISTRICT], called 3Rs: Rights, Respect, Responsibility, was designed by experts to convey factual, age-appropriate information to help students navigate the many confusing aspects of puberty and growing up.

You may have been targeted by a false information campaign – [YOUR COMMUNITY COALITION] wants to set the record straight. [YOUR DISTRICT] has outlined the entire K-12 sexual health sequence that they are using: <link to online resources>

- Despite what you might have heard, sexual health education isn't controversial. The vast majority of parents/caregivers really do want their kids to have honest information and feel safe, welcome, and acknowledged at school. Inclusive lessons create a positive effect on all students and have been shown to reduce bullying, discrimination, and harassment.
- The 3Rs curriculum has lessons that are age-appropriate, so young people learn just the information they need now, and then layer it as they age to prepare them to make healthy decisions in the future. This kind of curriculum has been shown to prevent child abuse, and make it easier for children to report if someone does try to harm them.
- Elementary education begins with concepts like respect, healthy friendships, anti-bullying, and bodily autonomy. In the lesson sequence being used by [YOUR DISTRICT], reproductive anatomy isn't introduced until the 5th grade.
- 3Rs is an age-appropriate curriculum and does not include anything that would be considered "adult material".
- Importantly, sexual health education (and the 3Rs) curriculum is respectful of the values parents are teaching at home. Schools aren't telling students what they should and shouldn't do – but giving them the information to help them stay safe and healthy as they make choices based on their own and their family's values. The curriculum offers an opportunity and supports families to talk about those values together at home.
- The 3Rs is an important tool for teachers in our district because it is inclusive and resonates with our students. Every one of our schools includes students who are LGBTQIA+. Young people of all sexual orientations, gender identities and backgrounds have a right to quality sexual health information that reflects their own experiences and is meaningful to them.
- There's so much distracting misinformation floating around in the hallways. But hearing honest information from trusted sources can alleviate confusion students experience and give them the ability to concentrate on their future.
- All too often in sexual health education policy, opinions get in the way of facts. But studies show that science-based comprehensive sexual health education helps students become healthier and more successful adults. It leads to lower STI rates, fewer unplanned pregnancies, better self-esteem, healthier relationships, and many more benefits. For the K-6 set, it's beneficial for anti-bullying, child abuse prevention, and personal safety.

As any teacher or parent knows, school is a place where children develop their understanding of the world and their ability to make meaningful connections in it. That's why honest, accurate sexual health education is so essential.



## Sample Social Media Graphics

*\*This has been developed for the 3Rs curriculum specifically but may be adapted to yours.*

**RIGHTS,  
RESPECT,  
RESPONSIBILITY.**

# BREAKING IT DOWN

A yearly lesson breakdown about what's in the 3Rs curriculum, as it is now being taught in the Worcester Public Schools.

## 4TH GRADE

# 4 LESSONS

4th graders learn about friendships and peer influence, continue to develop skills around preventing abuse and bullying, and begin to learn about puberty.

# Messaging:

## Face-to-Face Conversations

It's important to remember that the vast majority of people you encounter will already be in agreement that sex education is an important part of a student's school experience. Some will simply have heard a disturbing falsehood about what's being taught. A small but vocal number will be members of the disinformation campaign themselves – these are the toughest conversations, but as long as they're being held in public where others can hear, they can be an important tool in fighting back.

- Ask for the person's connection to the district – do they live in the community? Have children at the school? This will help you and others in the room understand whether this is an actual concerned parent, or someone who travels from district to district scaring parents to score political points.
  - No matter the answer to the first question, assume that the person you're speaking to is concerned about the children's physical safety and mental health, and let them know you share that concern – *that's why you support sex ed*. Comprehensive sex ed has been proven to keep kids safer from child abuse, sexual assault, and trafficking. It is precisely these concerns that lead you to support the sex ed curriculum at your school.
  - Remember not to repeat the disinformation, but do clearly refute it. If the question is "are you teaching pornography to our children?," your answer should be along the lines of this: "**No**. Students in middle school learn basic foundational knowledge such as information about their bodies and the changes they're experiencing, their friendships, and key concepts like privacy and respect."
  - Don't ignore the disinformation. If someone approaches you with false information, don't hesitate to say "You may have been targeted by a false information campaign – we want to set the record straight." It can be applied in circumstances like this:
    - **Question:** But I saw the video where the kids get taught how to masturbate! I don't want them learning that in school.
    - **Answer:** You may have been targeted by a false information attack. There is no such video. The truth
- is outside groups are heavily invested in scaring parents to score political points. But not having accurate information about their own bodies and basic concepts like respect makes kids vulnerable to bullying and child abuse, and we think their safety is more important than politics.
- The top three points you'll want to communicate in any such conversation are these:
    - Our curriculum is **age-appropriate**.
    - A curriculum that teaches **respect** for every student in the school **keeps all kids safe**.
    - We involve families throughout the process and are **transparent** about what students are being taught.
  - Don't back down from inclusivity. Open discussions about sexual orientation and gender identity might be new for some parents, so explain why they're important:
    - The curriculum is an important tool for teachers in our district because it is inclusive and resonates with our students. **Every one of our schools includes students who are LGBTQ**. Young people of all sexual orientations, gender identities and backgrounds have a right to quality sexual health information that reflects their own experiences and is meaningful to them.
    - Multiple studies have shown that learning that everyone deserves respect creates **a safer environment for all kinds of students – whether or not they identify as LGBTQ**.

Again, the vast majority of people you have face-to-face conversations with will agree that sex ed is important. You do not have to waste your time or energy changing the minds of right-wing extremists engaging in bad-faith arguments. But if those encounters happen in a public setting (such as a school board meeting), remember you're speaking not just to the activist, but to the other people in the room. Stay calm and strong with the facts on your side.

For additional strategies and talking points for speaking up, please consult the excellent guide put together here by [EducateUS](#).

# School Board Meetings

Every school district must post their meeting schedule online – meaning your ability to make the biggest impact possible is just a google search away. Once your coalition members are ready to have the face-to-face conversations outlined above, make sure you're a presence at every meeting. It's critical not only to provide an accurate counterpoint to any disinformation that might be spread there, but also to show the school board that their district includes parents and citizens who strongly support comprehensive sexual health education.

**At the end of most meetings, school boards will allow time for public comments. Encourage your members to make statements following these guidelines:**

- **State your relationship to the district.** Do you have students in school there? Have you lived there a long time or have a business in town? It's important to credential yourself as someone truly connected to the work being done in the meeting at which you're speaking.
- **Explain why you personally support sex ed.** Do you have a story from your own experience in school? A child who's been bullied? Or benefitted from the valuable lessons about respect and bodily autonomy in your district's curriculum?
- **Stress the major top lines from our messaging.** The curriculum is age appropriate, inclusive, and transparent. It keeps all kids safe from abuse, intimate partner violence, bullying, and trafficking.
- **Keep your remarks respectful and under three minutes.** Lean on your coalition members to practice!

# Visibility Events

A "Visibility Event" is anywhere members of your community are gathering. One of the simplest ways to identify an event you should be flyering, or otherwise participating in, is to look at the opposition. Where is their disinformation showing up? Where are they handing out materials or carrying signs? It might be a PTA meeting, or it might just be the school parking lot during drop-off.

**Make a list of upcoming community events were your coalition should be visible:**

- PTA Meetings
- School Board Meetings
- Local Government Forums
- Candidate Forums
- Parades/Fairs
- Youth Group Activities (Library Reading Days, YWCA Forums, etc)
- School team sports events
- Socials, Dances, and Back-to-School Nights

In most cases, these are an opportunity for flyering, where you can pass out your external FAQ sheet and engage in conversation with people taking it. In other cases, there is an opportunity to speak. You've already identified the public speakers in your community coalition, so it should be relatively easy to identify who the right messenger is for the event (a student, a faith leader, an elected representative, etc.).

Don't forget to treat your online community the same way! The town square also exists on Facebook, so make sure your material is posted and shared on any FB groups for school parents and town residents.

# Trainings

Trainings are absolutely vital in the pushback against disinformation — any concerned parent, educator, or advocate should learn how to effectively communicate the importance of sex ed in public and private settings. Messaging will likely be different for educators and parents, so plan your sessions around the audiences being trained and the conversations they're likely to have. Begin pulling these together early, first making sure everyone in your community coalition is trained to discuss sexual health education in your area.

## Planning a Training:

**Step One.** This is an excellent moment to hit up your state and then national organizations — [Advocates for Youth](#), [Answer](#), [Planned Parenthood](#), [SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change](#), etc. if you don't have someone in your community coalition who is versed as a trainer. They can make sure you're presenting the information in the best possible way to serve your community and help prepare you for the questions you're most likely to get.

**Step Two.** Educator trainings are helpful, in theory. In practice, the ability to hold them easily depends on the access you have to school administrators and teachers. If for any reason the community coalition is not allowed or encouraged to work directly with the school system, one-on-one outreach should be prioritized. Coalition members should have individual conversations with the school officials, administrators, and educators that they already have a relationship with — learn where and how they encounter disinformation, and introduce yourselves as a resource to help them combat it.

**Step Three.** Identify the members of your community coalition who can be trainers themselves, teaching parents and other members of the public how to speak confidently about sex ed, ideally hosting small house parties with their existing networks. Make sure they go through the training you've developed for your own school district's curriculum and they understand their role — it is NOT for them to know everything.

Which brings us back to one of the key points in successful organizing around this issue:

- One of the biggest challenges we face in protecting comprehensive sexual health education is that the opposition is very motivated to take it down — our side has barely come to understand that we have a fight on our hands. So talking to sympathetic parents is even more important than trying to change the hearts and minds of the opposition.
- Sexual health education is *not* controversial. 98% of voters support it in high school, 89% support it in middle school.

Your parent volunteers should not feel like they are going into battle with Q-Anon. They're really preparing to talk to their own friends (who likely already agree!) about the importance of sexual health education in your schools.

## Hosting a Training:

House Party!!! Per the challenges laid out in the previous step — the biggest obstacle here is getting busy people to make time for an issue they aren't yet concerned about. We suggest lowering the barrier to entry as much as you can, with an invite from someone you already know and like and the promise of a fun (in addition to educational) time.

## Sample Invite

*\*This sample invite was drafted for the Worcester Public School parents, but can be modified to fit your district and curriculum.*

### Talking to Your Kids About the 3Rs: Sex Ed House Party Forums for Parents!

**Worcester Youth Deserve** wants to invite you to attend (or host!) a house party for WPS parents and guardians who want to know how to talk to their kids about their 3Rs curriculum — kind of like those parties where you all go home with Tupperware, only instead you'll leave with all of your questions about sexual health education answered.

Schools are where students learn the knowledge and skills they need to make healthy decisions. The curriculum implemented by WPS — and endorsed by the Worcester Board of Health — is called 3Rs: Rights, Respect, Responsibility. It was designed by experts to convey factual, age-appropriate information to help students navigate the many confusing aspects of puberty and growing up.

Despite what you might have heard, sexual health education isn't controversial. The vast majority of parents and caregivers really do want their kids to have honest information and feel safe, welcome, and acknowledged at school. Inclusive lessons create a positive effect on all students and have been shown to reduce bullying, discrimination, and harassment.

This is your opportunity to hear from 3Rs parents, drink some wine, enjoy some snacks, and get to know what your kids are getting to know!

---

**Date: TBD**

**Location: TBD**

Consider offering a virtual session for parents who can't arrange childcare easily or aren't socializing in person due to health concerns.

**Bonus icebreaker idea:** Kick off the conversation by asking attendees what they remember about their own sex ed classes. Everyone has a story, and it's usually a fantastic reminder as to why we need comprehensive sexual health education!

#### **Post-Training.**

Collect the names and notes on every attendee so you know who to deploy as a speaker during a visibility event, who can stand up in a public forum to refute disinformation, and who can pass out flyers in the community.

Communicate monthly (or more if needed) to update this group on new curriculum, opt-out campaigns, legislative fights, or other areas they may need to turn their attention. Keeping the majority of parents informed and engaged is enough to win in most areas — the opposition is highly organized, but vastly outnumbered.

# Press Strategy

Press can be tricky when one of the first rules of defending against a disinformation campaign is not to repeat the disinformation. You might for this reason decide to forgo a press strategy. If the opposition is extremely small, or not too successful, you may find your most effective campaign is a relatively quiet one drumming up support among parents and educators.

But let's talk through the four types of media you're likely to encounter:

## Friendly outlets.

These are (often) local papers, advocacy (such as LGBTQIA+) press, and progressive sites. If you find yourself needing to quickly communicate to as many people as possible that legislation is imminent or another crisis is brewing, these are the outlets to start with. Start your relationship with any reporter "on background\*", which means you have the opportunity to explain your case without being quoted — then have an "on the record\*" interview where you make all the points you need without repeating the false information. If you're doing the outreach yourself, make sure to research the reporting and choose the journalist you feel would best understand the issue.

## Reporter incoming.

Arguably the toughest because you're not expecting it. A reporter is simply interested in the issue — perhaps they've seen the opposition campaign, perhaps they're looking into

recent school board fights, whatever the reason is, they're contacting you.

This is the moment to let your state, national and/or community organizations know you've been contacted and walk through next steps. First, try to get as much information as you can about the piece the reporter is thinking to write — who else are they talking to, and what angle are they thinking of taking. You can ask them all this on background before you agree to an on record interview.

If the story sounds like one you'd like to participate in, send them whatever materials are helpful and set them up with an on record interview with the best person from your community coalition for their piece.

If the story focuses on the disinformation (or worse, the reporter believes it) stay "on background\*" and send them the materials they need to understand the facts. Once you've corrected the record and are reasonably sure the reporter understands the issue, proceed with the interview.

## Right-wing media.

Do not engage. There is no good-faith dealing with an outlet that helps to spread disinformation. Do not respond to emails, if called or approached in person, a simple "I'm not interested in participating in this story" is just fine. But do alert your national organizations so they know to track whatever is coming. If you're unsure whether an outlet is

## Glossary of Terms

- **\*On background:** Not for direct attribution. This is a hugely varying definition almost no one agrees completely on, but do not confuse it for "off the record." Background material can be used in stories, quoted directly from a "source with knowledge" or some such, and followed up on. It is common practice to begin a conversation with a reporter "on background" before moving into an "on the record\*" interview — most people are just nervous, worried they'll swear, or don't think easily in complete sentences. Background allows you to be a little more loose, and less worried that anything you say might be quoted out of context — once you're on the record, you lose more control. Start your conversation with "can we speak on background and then follow up for an on record interview?" If the reporter says yes, you're on background.
- **\*On the record:** The reporter can quote what you're saying and use your name and any other identifying information they wish. You are on the record the second you begin talking to a reporter unless otherwise specified.
- **\*Off the record:** We don't anticipate you'll use this one, but it means you can't be quoted in any way. It does NOT mean the reporter can't follow up on the information and ask someone else. A good general rule is to never say anything off the record or on background that you would absolutely hate to see in print. You are not off the record until you have asked to be and the reporter agrees.

right-wing, go ahead and check out the homepage. The way they're covering the school board fights will likely tell you what angle they're coming from. Similarly, take a look at any reporter's twitter feed to learn how they approach the issue.

### Op-eds.

Opinion pieces are an excellent way to make sure your most trusted communicators, such as pediatricians, are heard by

the largest possible audience. Consider which outlets reach the audience you need, and submit an opinion piece (about 800 words) to the editor of the opinion page – their info is usually found on the paper's website. Op-eds are considered from students, educators, parents, community leaders, and advocates every day. An example of a successful op-ed placed in Washoe County Nevada is here:

## Young people in Washoe County need updated sex ed, says assistant professor of pediatrics

Oriaku Kas-Osoka

Published 7:00 a.m. PT June 4, 2019

*This opinion column was written by Dr. Oriaku Kas-Osoka, MD, MEd, FAAP, an assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas School of Medicine.*

As we come to a close for another school year, debates on sex education are once again raging. Should we teach sex education in K-12 schools? Should we teach teens about safer sex at all?

The truth is that we don't have a real debate on our hands – this issue was settled among health professionals decades ago. What we do have is a responsibility to make sure young people have access to essential, potentially lifesaving information and contraception options to protect their overall health.

We know teens have sex. According to the CDC, [almost 70 percent of teens report having sex by age 19](#). And we know that [states without comprehensive sex education have higher rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections](#). Withholding information and resources about how to make decisions about one's sexual health – which includes LGBTQ-inclusive information about consent, STI screenings, contraception and reproductive health – is unfair and can have a debilitating impact.

Attempting to shame or scare teens into abstaining from sex is ineffective and potentially dangerous. These abstinence-only or "sexual risk avoidance" programs often ignore the health needs of LGBTQ youth and simply don't work, [as outlined in a recent article in the Journal of Adolescent Health](#) and the [position statement from the Society of Adolescent Health and Medication](#), of which I am a member.

Instead, [30 years of public health research](#) has shown that sex education, which [Washoe County School District's Sexual Health and Responsibility Education Program](#) reflects, can help young people delay the onset of sexual intercourse, reduce the number of sexual partners they have and increase the use of reliable contraception once they do become sexually active. In fact, teens who use a contraceptive method right from the start, the first time they have sex, are [less likely to become pregnant](#) than those who don't. By age 17, [young women are five times as likely to have had a teen birth](#) if they don't use contraception the first time they have sex.

Whether or not they are sexually active, young people need and have the right to information that can help them make informed decisions and lead healthy lives. Medically accurate, age appropriate and LGBTQ-inclusive sex education, like that proposed in Washoe County School District's SHARE program, along with honest communication around sexuality, all play an important role in empowering young people to protect their sexual health throughout their lives. Our young people deserve nothing less.



---

# Showing Up, Speaking Out, Being Heard

You now have the tools to build a working community coalition with a strong message, and a strategy for demonstrating public support for sex ed and combatting disinformation. You're showing up at school board meetings, online, and everywhere people interested in your school district are gathering. You're developing relationships with the press and raising our voices in the media with trusted messengers throughout your community – ultimately creating a chorus of support that is visible and strong.

As always, please consider **Advocates for Youth** as a resource — if you're developing your strategy, whether that's training materials, social media graphics, talking points, please don't hesitate to reach out to **Nora Gelperin** at [nora@advocatesforyouth.org](mailto:nora@advocatesforyouth.org). We're all in this together.