

Future of Sex Education Fact Sheet

What is the Future of Sex Education?

In July 2007, staff from Advocates for Youth, Answer, and SIECUS first met to discuss the future of sex education. These organizations have long been working on various aspects of sexuality education, including implementation, national and state-level advocacy, training, technical assistance, and resource development. At the time, we were looking ahead to the possibility of a future without federal abstinence-only-until-marriage funding and found ourselves simultaneously exploring the question of how to advance comprehensive sex education.

In May of 2008, Advocates, Answer, and SIECUS formalized these discussions with funding from the Ford Foundation, George Gund Foundation, and Grove Foundation; the Future of Sex Education Project (FoSE Project) was launched. The purpose of the project is to create a national dialogue about the future of sex education and to promote the institutionalization of comprehensive sexuality education in public schools.

Subsequently, *The Future of Sex Education in America's Public Schools* was released. This report is the culmination of interviews and/or written comments from over 75 individuals in response to a draft document of the same name and a two-day planning meeting held in December 2008. This meeting, attended by 40 individuals, resulted in the beginnings of a strategic framework for advancing policy and implementation.

Today, the FoSE Project continues. Advocates for Youth, Answer, and SIECUS are working to address the need to build understanding of—and relationships with—the public education community and to further refine the strategic planning framework, particularly in the area of sexuality education implementation.

What is the goal of the FoSE Project?

The ultimate goal of the FoSE Project is to work in collaboration with a broad spectrum of stakeholders to ensure that every young person in public school has developmentally, culturally, and age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education in Pre-K through Grade 12.

Why is the FoSE Project only focused on public schools?

Given limited resources, the FoSE organizing partners decided early on to focus on public schools because that is where we determined we could reach the most young people.

What is the role of state, local, and national organizations in advancing comprehensive sex education?

State-based organizations and coalitions are pivotal in changing those state policies that directly govern what young people can and cannot learn in public schools. They can also be a source of technical assistance regarding sex education curriculum or program selection, teacher training, and other available resources. Here are some things state organizations can do:

1. Join the efforts in your state to advocate for sex education. To find out the organizations working in your state, visit the SIECUS web site at www.siecus.org/stateprofiles and click on your state.
2. Understand your state's educational system and hierarchy to learn who has responsibility for making and enforcing policy decisions. Learn what steps are necessary if a school or district is not in compliance with their state's law. A primer on public education and a "roadmap" to understanding your state's educational system is available on the FoSE website at www.futureofsexed.org.
3. Host a state, local, or regional Future of Sex Education Strategic Planning meeting. Similar to the initial phase of the FoSE Project (see *The Future of Sex Education in America's Public Schools* noted above), this process can jumpstart efforts to advance comprehensive sex education in your state, community, or region. For a copy of *Envisioning the Future of Sex Ed: A Tool Kit for States and Local Communities*, go to www.futureofsexed.org.

Parents, educators, and school administrators are also quite influential, especially at the local level where the ultimate decisions about what gets taught in classrooms are made. To get started:

1. Find out who is teaching health education, what topics are being taught, and at what grade levels.
2. Learn about the people who are involved in making decisions about the health curriculum (i.e., school board, superintendent, principal, curriculum supervisor, and teacher) and the process for selecting the curriculum.
3. Find out if your community has a School Health Advisory Committee (SHAC) or similar advisory group tasked with advising your community about components of comprehensive school health in public school. In some states, these committees are mandatory. Visit the National Association of State Boards of Education at www.nasbe.org. Or, to learn how to become a part of a SHAC or similar advisory group in your community, go to www.advocatesforyouth.org/backtheshac to request assistance in working with SHACs on comprehensive sexuality education.
4. Make your support known. Talk to other parents and teachers to mobilize support for comprehensive sexuality education.
5. For more information and ideas about how to get started, visit www.communityactionkit.org.
6. Engage students, since they are the ones most affected by access to sex education. A helpful resource, *The Roadmap: A Teen's Guide to Changing Your School's Sex Ed*, can be found on the Sex, Etc web site at www.sexetc.org/page/roadmap, or, for assistance engaging youth in your advocacy efforts, visit the Advocates for Youth web site at www.advocatesforyouth.org/recruiting.

National level organizations, ideally, work to support state and local efforts by:

1) generating supportive policies and funding streams for sex education at the federal level; 2) developing messages and reaching out to key stakeholders to promote support for comprehensive sex education; 3) providing networking opportunities for state and local advocates and implementers to share lessons learned, model policies, standards, practices, etc; and, 4) providing technical assistance in various aspects of policy and implementation to schools and colleague organizations. If you represent a national organization, you might consider joining the National Coalition to Support Sexuality Education (NCSSE). To learn more, visit www.ncsse.org.

Together, local, state, and national organizations need to be engaged in regular, ongoing conversation about successes, failures, challenges, and lessons learned.

Who can I contact if I have questions about the Future of Sex Education Project?

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact any of the FoSE national partner organizations:

Advocates for Youth:	info@advocatesforyouth.org
Answer:	answered@rci.rutgers.edu
SIECUS:	siecus@siecus.org