

WHY OUR SCHOOL IS SILENT

TISD officials address why we lack a sex education program

by **LEAH CRENSHAW**
viewpoint editor

Many believe that abstinence should be the only option for all unmarried persons. Others embrace the reality that teenagers are having sex, and believe sex should be thoroughly explained as part of a public school education. Meanwhile, the students are caught in the middle. Texas has the fifth highest teen pregnancy rate in the nation, which begs the question: what is wrong with the current system?

The first step to answering this question is to figure out what's currently being taught for sex education. The answer isn't much.

"We do not have an actual sex education curriculum," Principal Brad Bailey said. "Our policy for the district and the state has been to promote abstinence and that's all."

This has not always been the case. Sex education is briefly incorporated into the curriculum for Biology I, a required course for students. It is also part of Biology II and Child Development. Those classes are not required, so many students will never take them.

All policies involving curriculum trickle down through the TISD Board of Trustees. It is their responsibility to make these decisions for all TISD schools.

"For the board to approve a sex education policy, it has to go through our School Health Advisory Council," Superintendent Paul Norton said. "The SHAC committee determines if material is appropriate or not and if so, what grade levels it is appropriate for."

While there is some leeway for the Board through the SHAC, the real power is in the hands of the Texas Board of Education. Texas state law does not require sex education, but it does have strict standards for schools if they choose to provide it.

"I would point out that rather than there being a whole lot of discretion with local school boards, that's one area where our state legislatures have taken control," School Board President Paul Miller said. "They laid out requirements and mandates that apply to all public education. Any public school sex education program has to be abstinence based, abstinence focused."

This reflects the moral goals of the Texas Board of Education in encouraging all teenagers to abstain until marriage. The state is forced to try to straddle both sides of the issue. Some say that sex education must be limited to abstinence—if it is taught at all—where others say modern culture necessitates something more. Each side has its merits, but they also have serious flaws. Solving this quandary is one of the burdens falling on the state board.

According to the Center for Disease Control, Texas has the fifth highest teen pregnancy rate in the nation. It is also the leader for repeat-pregnancies. In addition, the CDC reports that an 47 percent of American high schoolers have had sex at least once. Regardless of morals, the facts are undeniable: abstinence is not realistic.

Some kind of change is needed. The question at this point is what kind of change. Many high schools have mandatory health classes which include sex education.

This has the benefit of ensuring all students receive a uniform, comprehensive education, but there are several consequences as well. Many believe that comprehensive sex education in schools encourages students to have sex. There is also a legitimate concern that sex education in public schools would violate the morals—particularly religious—of the community, parents and students.

"You start getting into political viewpoints and other personal ideology," Bailey said. "I think that's the reason why the state has remained neutral and said abstinence is the best policy. They think 'if you don't have sex education, then sex wouldn't happen.'"

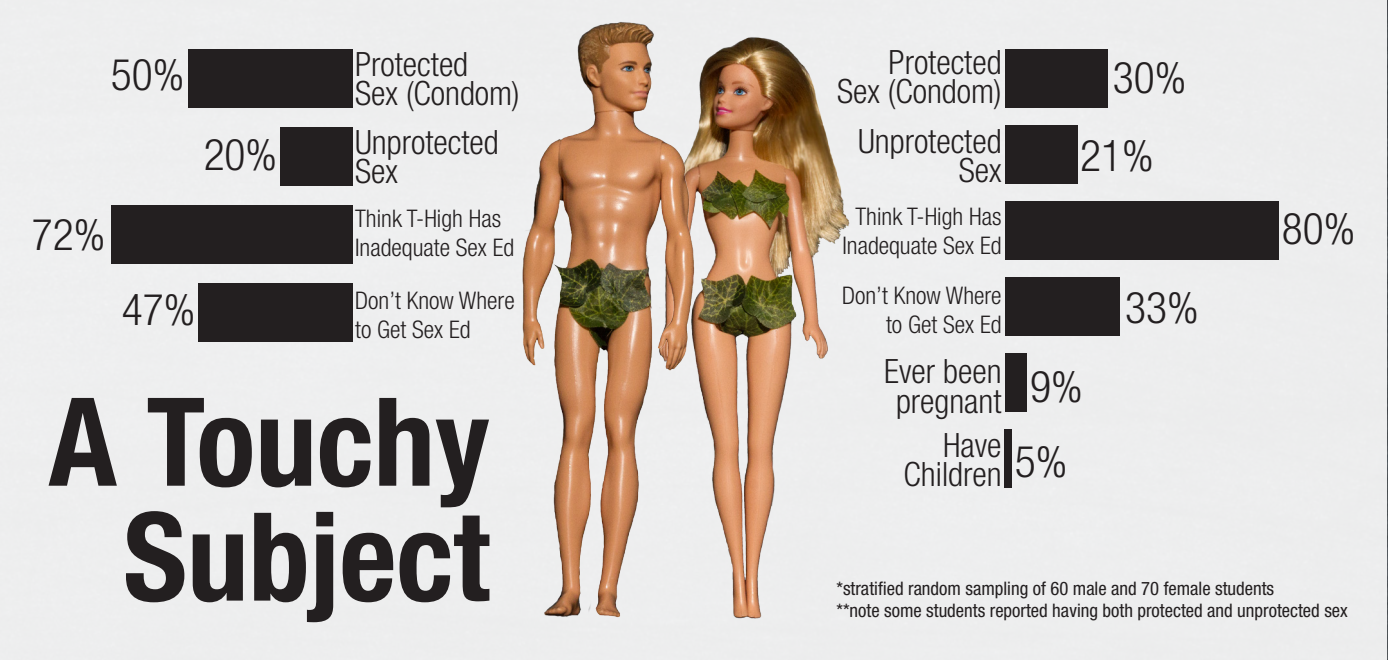
It is with this idea that many schools leave it entirely up to parents to teach their children as they please. This solves the aforementioned morality problem by letting parents choose exactly what their children learn. But there are several people who

believe this method could put some students at a disadvantage.

"In the 21st century, it's a parental right to be more involved with their children and having those discussions with them," Bailey said. "We know sometimes students don't have that parental support at home, that structure. So it's left to the schools to help provide that parental structure."

This is the reason why it's so difficult for the state to set sex education standards. In the meantime, Texas High is dead in the water, and its students have to figure everything out on their own.

"Without having specific language in state policy to reinforce at the local level, schools would open themselves up to more issue," Bailey said. "I think that's the only reservation we have about teaching more, but I think sex education is definitely something that needs to be improved." *photo by S. York*



MORE THAN JUST MEDIA

Sex Education has to be more than just from the Internet

by **ALEX O'GORMAN**
viewpoint editor

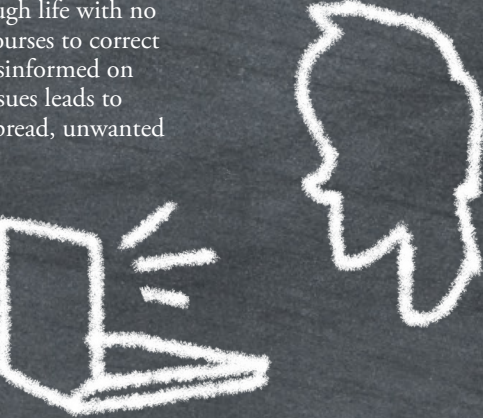
The Internet: infamous for being a conglomeration of pornography, pedophiles and no parental supervision. According to Common Sense Media, the biggest users of online pornography are 12 to 17-year-old boys. Pornography tends to show sexual situations in the most appealing way possible for its viewers. Unfortunately, this usually means ignoring the safe part of sex; condoms are rarely

used in online pornographic videos, and some videos feature situations that are not consensual.

Inappropriate material does not stop at browsing the Internet, however. Many video games are known for unnecessarily sexualizing female characters. This gives both the male and female players of these games unrealistic expectations on how women should look.

Teenagers carry these ideas from video games as well blatantly untrue information

picked up from pornography with them through life with no sex education courses to correct them. Being misinformed on such sensitive issues leads to diseases being spread, unwanted pregnancies and a lot of people wishing they had been safe rather than sorry.



TV skips over the most important parts of sex, causing a need for proper education

THAT'S A WRAP

by **JILLIAN CHENEY**
entertainment editor

Scenes with sexual content - including those on television and in movies - average 4.4 per hour, according to greatschools.org. That means about nine in an entire movie, or the standard four in a 45-minute show. This is only the standard movies and television, not those like

"Masters of Sex" and "Scandal" who have a reputation for featuring sex. When children aren't given a reputable sex education, all they have to learn from is the controlling "romance" of Christian Grey and the experimentation of Olivia Pope.

The exploration of sexual preferences should not happen in the middle of high school. With the explicit scenes shown on television, however, this is almost inevitable. Seeing sex on television encourages students to try it with their significant other, and this isn't always the best idea.

There's few couples on television who stops to say, "Wait, let's be sure we use a condom." If there is sex at all, it's

included purely for the romantic content. Television shows and movies are not an accurate representation of sex that should be practiced. It isn't an acceptable replacement for a sex education program, and it shouldn't be treated as such.



illustrations by A. O'Gorman



Lowest Teen Pregnancy Rate in America

- > 12.1/1000 girls
- > Sex ed not required by state
- > Decided entirely by local school boards
- > No abstinence until marriage federal funds
- > Most have extensive health classes
- > Many schools distribute condoms to students



Fifth Highest Teen Pregnancy Rate in America

- > 41/1000 girls
- > Must stress abstinence as the only 100 percent effective method
- > Received \$5,402,595 from federal government for abstinence education
- > Sex ed must be "age-appropriate"
- > Sex ed not required, but has strict rules if taught
- > Sex ed not included in TEKS
- > Condoms cannot be given to students



Highest Teen Pregnancy Rate in America

- > 43.5/1000 girls
- > Not required by state law
- > Most schools, like Southside in Fort Smith, have mandatory health classes and speakers from the health department
- > Also had anti-sex week just like anti-drug week and anti-bullying week