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Group Stages Abstinence Education Rally At Statehouse

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COLUMBUS, Ohio – The birds and the bees are under scrutiny in Ohio's schools tonight.

Voice Your Choice, a group that advocates sexual abstinence education, came to the state capital Thursday with a message for the governor, **NBC 4's** Mikaela Hunt reported.

The group came to urge Governor Strickland to accept free federal funds for abstinence education and stop diverting money away from it.

The governor's office said that they weren't sure where the group was getting its information.

A few hundred people attended the rally. Many of them were teens that support an abstinence-only education.

Last spring the governor eliminated abstinence-only funding from the state budget and chose not to apply for federal abstinence-only grants.

"(The governor's decision) is not in the best interest of youth nor in keeping with what parents want taught to their children," Valerie Huber, of the National Abstinence Education Association, said.

The governor's office, however, said that it is currently applying for federal abstinence education money as long as it is used in comprehensive programs.

The governor's office said that they believe a comprehensive program will be the most effective. Planned Parenthood agreed.

"For them to hear a 'Just say no' message may not work," said Gary Doughtry of the Planned Parenthood Affiliates of Ohio.

Two polls on the subject had very different results.

A Zogby International poll showed that parents prefer abstinence education over a comprehensive sex education program by two to one.

A separate poll conducted by a university in New York, however, said that 81 percent of parents with kids in public school prefer balanced sex education.

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Several hundred rally for abstinence-only program

Protesters urging governor to change stand on sex education.

By William Hershey

Staff Writer

Friday, November 30, 2007

COLUMBUS — Preble County high school student Kristin Fannin risked an unexcused absence from school Thursday to join several hundred people at a Statehouse rally aimed at changing Gov. Ted Strickland's mind on abstinence-only sex education.

"It gives you self worth and helps you appreciate yourself," said Fannin, 18, a senior at Tri-County North High School in Lewisburg.

She and others want Strickland to apply to the federal government for \$1.6 million for abstinence-only sex education, to be matched with state funds.

The money would go to groups such as REACH — Responsibility, Education for Abstinence and Character — located in Greenville in Darke County. REACH develops abstinence-only programs for schools and without the money faces a loss of funding, said Janis Seibel, executive director.

Strickland vetoed provisions in the current two-year state budget that would have provided the money for abstinence-only programs. Instead, the state has applied for federal funds to support a comprehensive approach to sex education, including abstinence.

Valerie Huber, executive director of the National Abstinence Education Association, called that a "tragic decision" that would put students' health at risk.

Strickland is sticking to his position.

He said abstinence-only "seems to show a lack of concern for those young people who are sexually active or who may become sexually active." They need information to protect themselves, he said.

"The safest thing to do is to avoid sexual activity outside of marriage and I support that being taught, but I think it's unfortunate that information will be withheld that could protect a young person's health and even their lives," he said.

Huber and others also accused Strickland of flip-flopping, based on a 2002 letter he wrote as a U.S. House member in support of a federal grant for REACH.

Strickland said he thought he was being consistent but said that as governor he has a "perfect right to respond to circumstances and conditions as the best I can at the moment." He said research he has seen shows that abstinence only is not as effective as a comprehensive approach to sex education.

THE PLAIN DEALER

Strickland urged to restore money for Ohio abstinence education

Friday, November 30, 2007

Mark Rollenhagen
Plain Dealer Bureau Chief

Columbus- A national group on Thursday launched a campaign urging Gov. Ted Strickland to restore money for abstinence education programs in Ohio.

Such programs have flourished in the nearly 10 years since the legislature mandated that school education programs emphasize abstinence from sex as the only certain protection against unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

Strickland in June struck from the state budget requirements that state and federal sex education money be used for abstinence-only education programs, saying research had shown such programs are not effective.

"We are compelled to make Ohio citizens and parents aware of the tragic decision Gov. Strickland made to eliminate a clear abstinence message for teens from the public health landscape of Ohio," said Valerie Huber, executive director of the National Abstinence Education Association. "This decision is not in the best interest of the youth or in keeping with what parents want taught to their children."

Huber's remarks were greeted by a chorus of "Amens" and loud applause from students and supporters of abstinence-only education gathered for a rally at the Statehouse on Thursday.

Several high school students, including Andrew Pickard, a 14-year-old from Maple Heights, spoke in favor of programs that stress abstinence. Pickard is a freshman at St. Peter Chanel High School in Bedford.

"Some of my friends have chosen not to remain sexually abstinent and I've seen some of the consequences," said Pickard, who participated in an abstinence program while attending middle school at Holy Spirit Academy in Bedford.

State Rep. Bill Batchelder, a Medina Republican, told the rally: "Let us approach the education of our governor in a prayerful way, in a kind way, but by the same token let him know that there are a lot of people out here who don't believe that this was the right thing to do for the children of this state."

A Strickland spokesman said the governor opposes abstinence-only education because research indicates it is not effective.

"There is significant evidence that suggests those programs don't work," said Keith Dailey, the governor's press secretary. "Governor Strickland supports an approach

that includes abstinence education as well as providing Ohio's youth with vital health information."

He said school and community organizations can still apply on their own for money under a separate federal grant program.

When Strickland's health director, Dr. Alvin Jackson, applied for federal money two weeks ago, he said the state's revised abstinence program would emphasize abstinence along with "medically accurate information about contraception."

Huber said in an interview after the rally that the Strickland administration's plan doesn't comply with congressional abstinence guidelines and probably won't receive federal money.

Even if it does, she said, the abstinence programs that rallied Thursday probably won't get any of it, losing out on about \$1.6 million for programs involving about 100,000 students.

"They want abstinence as part of a comprehensive program," Huber said of the Strickland plan. "But what that means is that a very small portion of the message would be abstinence-related and more of it would be on risk reduction rather than risk elimination."

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Chastity advocates protest fund cut

Abstinence groups say they may close

BY JON CRAIG | JCRAIG@ENQUIRER.COM

COLUMBUS - About 300 students and teachers jammed into the Statehouse Atrium on Thursday to protest Gov. Ted Strickland's decision to change the way abstinence education is taught in Ohio.

Leaders of a national abstinence group and two Southwest Ohio organizations that offer taxpayer-supported, abstinence-only programs to schools held a news conference at which they criticized the governor.

They claimed Strickland has cut \$1 million in state funding over the next two years, risking the loss of another \$600,000 in federal aid.

Valerie Huber, executive director of the National Abstinence Education Association, called that "misguided."

She suggested Strickland should have accepted "the free federal money."

But Keith Dailey, a spokesman for Strickland, said the state Health Department continues to seek federal money for abstinence programs, but as part of a broader sexual health education curriculum.

"The governor supports comprehensive education," Dailey said, and he'll continue to support an "evidence-backed approach to protect the health and well-being of Ohio's youth."

Kathy Haugen, education director with PregnancyCare of Cincinnati, said their Making Abstinence Possible (MAP) program serves 27,000 students in 107 schools in Butler, Clermont, Hamilton and Warren counties and is directly affected by Strickland's decision.

"The governor wants to replace the strong character message of abstinence until marriage with a contraceptive program that has a very weak abstinence message," Haugen said.

Haugen said statistics show a steady decline in teen pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and abortions during the years the abstinence programs have been offered. But Strickland's office argues there is no evidence to prove such declines are caused by abstinence-only programs, and not a combination of public programs that help young girls.

Haugen and Huber urged the public to call the governor's office at 614-466-3555 to "voice your choice" for abstinence and marriage funding.

Jan Seibel, executive director of REACH of Southwestern Ohio, which provides abstinence-only programs to 30 schools in Darke and Preble counties, said: "Without these funds, we are in risk of closure. ... By quietly abolishing the abstinence education office, we believe the governor has broken trust with the state (General) Assembly and the people of Ohio."

Abstinence-only works, protesters say

Friday, November 30, 2007 4:22 AM

BY [CATHERINE CANDISKY](#)

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

If not for abstinence-only sex education, high school freshman Sonia Triana says she probably would have had sex by now, possibly dealing with an unplanned pregnancy or a sexually transmitted disease.

"Sex is not something I want to do until I get married," said Triana, who attends Wauseon High School in northwestern Ohio.

Her comments drew wild applause at a Statehouse rally yesterday. About 300 gathered to protest Gov. Ted Strickland's decision to direct more than \$1 million in federal funding away from abstinence-only education programs.

Instead, the governor wants the money used on comprehensive sex education that includes abstinence and information about contraceptives.

Abstinence-only supporters say Strickland doesn't understand their programs. "We see it as very holistic," said Valerie Huber, executive director of the National Abstinence Education Association.

"Abstinence education teaches self-control and how sex outside marriage can impact all aspects of one's life," said Janis Seibel, executive director of Reach of Southwest Ohio, which provides programs in 17 school districts.

The organization relies almost entirely on federal money and will have to shut down without it.

The administration recently applied for about \$1.6 million in federal abstinence funding for two years, Strickland spokesman Keith Dailey said.

But the governor vetoed language in the recently passed state budget that would have required the funds to be spent on abstinence-only programs.

"Gov. Strickland supports abstinence education as part of a comprehensive approach that also provides our youth with vital health education," Dailey said. "He does not support an exclusive abstinence-only approach because all available evidence demonstrates (it) doesn't work."

While the administration directs money toward comprehensive programs, local schools ultimately decide what sex education is offered to students.

Huber and other advocates are focusing on Ohio because the state has long supported abstinence programs. Backers point out that the teen pregnancy rate has decreased in recent years.

"To date, \$1 billion has been wasted on these programs that have been definitively found to be ineffective by researchers," said Gary Dougherty, spokesman for Planned Parenthood Affiliates of Ohio.

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