

Future of Sex Education Strategic Plan, 2016–2021

Background and Context

The Future of Sex Education Initiative (FoSE) was launched in July 2007 as a partnership between Advocates for Youth, Answer, and the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS) at a time when a large proportion of states had rejected federal abstinence-only funding and research commissioned by the federal government¹ confirmed what previous studies had found: abstinence-only education is not effective in delaying teen sex.

Eight years later, the sexuality education landscape has shifted significantly. The balance of federal funding now supports more effective approaches through the Office of Adolescent Health's (OAH) Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program (TPPP), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH) and the Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP). While abstinence-only funding continues, and despite a recent increase in funding, it is no longer the predominant strategy. In fact, abstinence-only advocates have been actively re-branding their programs as promoting "sexual risk avoidance" in an attempt to distance them from discredited abstinence-only approaches.

Policy relative to sexuality education has made slow, steady gains. There have been state level advancements (California, Colorado, Hawaii, Mississippi, Nebraska and Oregon) and many local policy gains, including in Broward County (FL), Buffalo (NY), Chicago (IL), New York City (NY) and dozens of other smaller school districts. North Carolina and Wisconsin are the only states that have regressed relative to state-wide sexuality education law.

In the education arena, school budgets have stabilized somewhat as the overall economy has strengthened. Significant resources have been devoted to the development, adoption, and implementation of the Common Core Standards. Despite widespread controversy, 39 states, including the District of Columbia, have adopted part or all of the Standards, five states are reviewing the Standards, and only seven states have not adopted or have repealed the Standards. Now that Common Core Standards are largely here to stay, reform efforts have shifted to concerns regarding the amount of time students spend taking tests and developing a fair system to assess teacher effectiveness.

Simultaneously, FoSE partners have successfully completed numerous projects to advance the collective effort of improving sexuality education in U.S. schools including:

- Developing and disseminating the first-ever *National Sexuality Education Standards*,

¹ Trenholm, Christopher, et al. "Impacts of Four Title V, Section 510 Abstinence Education Programs. Final Report." *Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.* (2007).

K–12² which are being used in 32 states. Initially released in a special report of the *Journal of School Health* in January 2012, a series of Webinars, conference presentations, and technical assistance supported their initial adoption and implementation.

- Developing the *National Teacher Preparation Standards for Sexuality Education* and corresponding article “Improving Sexuality Education: The Development of Teacher Preparation Standards”³ published in the *Journal of School Health* in June 2014.
- Grant-making to 21 institutions of higher education in 15 states to implement the *National Teacher Preparation Standards for Sexuality Education*.
- Commissioning the development and publication of “Broadening the Evidence for Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Education in the U.S.”⁴ in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, which provided an expanded view of the evidence for sexuality education including research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer and questioning (LGBTQ) youth, gender, and economic inequalities and health.
- Successfully influencing the Office of Adolescent Health to adopt language reflective of research commissioned by FoSE partners (see above), particularly that teen pregnancy prevention initiatives must provide young people with sequential, age-appropriate evidence-based programs at multiple times and language emphasizing the importance of addressing cultural norms, gender equity, economic and educational opportunities, and healthy relationships.
- Informing and shaping the new direction and focus of DASH-funded activity, which now includes an emphasis on sex education.

Against this backdrop, the FoSE partners embarked on a comprehensive strategic planning process to assess the impact of the FoSE Initiative and to delineate future priorities for the partnership. Details of the strategic planning process are included at the end of this document.

² Future of Sex Education Initiative. "National sexuality education standards: core content and skills, K–12 (a special publication of the journal of school health)." (2012).

³ Barr, Elissa M., et al. "Improving Sexuality Education: The Development of Teacher-Preparation Standards." *Journal of school health* 84.6 (2014): 396–415.

⁴ Schalet, Amy T., et al. "Invited commentary: broadening the evidence for adolescent sexual and reproductive health and education in the United States." *Journal of youth and adolescence* 43.10 (2014): 1595–1610.

Introduction to Strategic Plan

Thirty years of public health research demonstrates that quality sexuality education can provide young people with the essential information and skills they need to reduce their risk for unplanned pregnancy and STDs, including HIV. Quality sexuality education can also help young people traverse puberty, form healthy relationships, develop a positive body image, communicate effectively, make informed decisions, and navigate health care. In short, quality sexuality education can go beyond the promotion of abstinence or even the prevention of unplanned pregnancy and disease to provide a life-long foundation for sexual health.

The Future of Sex Education Initiative affirms these core beliefs, which underscore the strategic blueprint that follows:

- *Sexuality is an intrinsic part of being human;*
- *Every young person has the right to quality sexuality education;*
- *Parents and other caregivers play a vital role in contributing to the sexual development of their children;*
- *Schools, in particular, have a unique opportunity to provide young people with quality sexuality education given that 50 million students attend 13,500 school districts nationwide;⁵ and*
- *Quality sexuality education is foundational to life-long sexual health.*

Vision

Every school provides quality sexuality education, K-12 in support of healthy sexual development.

Mission

To create an enabling environment at the national level that supports implementation of school-based sexuality education policy and practice at the state and local levels.

⁵ Fast Facts, National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372> accessed on October 15, 2015.

Strategic Priorities

1. Elevate sexuality education as a priority

Among parents, school administrators, policy makers, funders, and other key stakeholders, FoSE will promote the prioritization of quality sexuality education not only as an effective mechanism for the prevention of unintended pregnancy, HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) but also for the promotion of healthy adolescent sexual development inclusive of healthy relationships, interpersonal violence prevention, gender equity, body image, and self-esteem.

By December 2018, FoSE will have:

- Conducted and widely disseminated results of a national poll among the general public and parents documenting support for K–12 sexuality education.
- Engaged a consultant to help develop and implement a communications plan that underscores public opinion, policy and evidence in support of sexuality education, and elevates the need for sexuality education among key stakeholder groups (i.e., advocates, parents, educators, administrators, and policy makers).
- Cultivated additional funders through an intentional communications strategy that promotes quality sexuality education and the FoSE Initiative.

By December 2021, FoSE will have:

- Developed a series of research briefs to elevate quality sexuality education in relation to other health, education and social justice issues.
- Conducted focus group research to hone messaging to mobilize school administrators in support of quality sexuality education.

Success indicators include:

- Increased support for sexuality education as a priority strategy among key stakeholders as demonstrated by:
 - Increased and sustained media attention that highlights support for sexuality education and unmet need;
 - Increased number of key stakeholder groups that incorporate goals or activities into their work elevating sexuality education as a priority; and
 - Increased number of funders supporting quality sexuality education as a priority strategy.

2. Ensure and enhance the implementation of sexuality education

Through the provision and dissemination of materials and other resources, FoSE will strive to ensure that more schools provide quality sexuality education to students nationwide and enhance existing implementation efforts.

By December 2018, FoSE will have:

- Updated and widely disseminated the *National Sexuality Education Standards*.
- Begun to develop a YouTube Channel for teachers modeling delivery of common sexuality education activities in classrooms.
- Continued dissemination of the *National Teacher Preparation Standards for Sexuality Education* and undergraduate teaching resources to enhance teacher candidate preparation.
- Completed analysis of additional popular sexuality education curricula and programs to assess their alignment with the *National Sexuality Education Standards*.

By December 2021, FoSE will have:

- Developed assessment tools to be used in conjunction with the *National Sexuality Education Standards*.
- Supported the coordination of a national meeting to strengthen school-based sexuality implementation.
- Created a guidance document to assist schools in selecting curricula and lessons.
- Created a professional development planning guide to help schools provide high quality professional development to teachers.
- Established an online community of practice focused on quality sexuality education implementation to connect educators nationally.

Success indicators include:

- Increased use of the *National Teacher Preparation Standards for Sexuality Education* among institutions of higher education.
- Increased utilization and/or adoption of the *National Sexuality Education Standards* by states and local school districts as well as other agencies.
- Connected and well-resourced teachers who feel prepared to deliver quality sexuality education nationally.

3. Expand sexuality education policy

FoSE will work in collaboration with partners to expand federal, state, and local policy in support of quality sexuality education and leverage resources and support to: 1) promote funding and policies that support quality sexuality education; and 2) eliminate abstinence-only funding and other restrictive policies.

By December 2018, FoSE will have:

- Conducted policymaker education to sustain funding and improve implementation of federal funding streams that support quality sexuality education, with an emphasis on sustainability.
- Leveraged best practices and lessons learned from quality sexuality education implementation to improve policy.
- Updated and widely disseminated *Addressing Sexual Health in Schools: Policy Considerations* to support state and local adoption of model policies.
- Created and widely disseminated tools to support utilization of the *National Sexuality Education Standards* to improve sexuality education policy.

By December 2021, FoSE, in collaboration with federal Sex Ed Coalition, will have:

- Continued conducting policymaker education and mobilized support in order to eliminate abstinence-only funding and other restrictive policies.
- Continued conducting policymaker education in support of federal policies and regulations that advance quality sexuality education.

Success indicators include:

- Increased number of state and/or local school districts that have new or improved policies in support of quality sexuality education.
- Increased federal funding for quality sexuality education.
- Improved and advanced federal initiatives to promote healthy adolescent sexual development through quality sexuality education.
- Reduction in abstinence-only funding and other restrictive policies.

Strategic Planning Approach

FoSE utilized a mixed methods approach to develop this strategic plan, including a national survey, in-person meetings and key informant interviews. Participants included researchers, youth, advocates, implementers, funders, federal partners, curriculum developers, and trainers.

To kick-start the strategic planning process, a survey was widely distributed in November 2014. The purpose of the survey was to identify priorities in the field and the degree to which respondents were currently utilizing resources developed by the Future of Sex Education Initiative. One hundred eighty-five individuals from nearly every state and the District of Columbia with the exception of AR, KY, ND, OK, RI, SD, TN, and UT and responded to the survey.

Informed by the survey responses and the themes that emerged from those data, three in-person meetings were held with federal policy advocates, executive directors of state-based adolescent health organizations and attendees at the 2015 State Sex Ed Summit. In addition, key informant interviews were also conducted over the course of the 10-month strategic planning process. In sum, a total of 273 individuals participated in the development of this plan.