

The Role of School Health Advisory Councils (SHACs) in Comprehensive Sexual Health Policies and Programs



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Objectives

- Discuss the need for comprehensive sexual health policies and programs
- Describe the purpose and function of a school health advisory council (SHAC)
- Identify key players in SHACs
- Describe strategies and skills for being an effective SHAC member
- Discuss the role of SHACs in comprehensive sexual health programs and policies in schools



What is comprehensive sexuality education?

Programs that build a foundation of knowledge and skills relating to human development, relationships, decision-making, abstinence, contraception, and disease prevention.

At each developmental stage, these programs teach age-appropriate, medically accurate information.¹



Need for comprehensive sexual health policies and programs

- 750,000 teens in the U.S. become pregnant each year.¹
- Young people aged 15-24 years of age account for nearly half of all STD cases.²
- A study of the U.S. Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage programs found no evidence that programs increased rates of abstinence in students.³



Need for comprehensive sexual health policies and programs

- Among U.S. high school students,
 - 47.4% have had sexual intercourse;
 - 6.2% had sexual intercourse for the first time before age 13; and
 - 15.3% have had four or more sex partners.⁴



Need for comprehensive sexual health policies and programs

- In 2009, young people aged 13-29 accounted for 39% of all new HIV infections.⁵
- In one nationwide survey:
 - 81.9% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students reported being verbally harassed
 - 38.3% reported being physically harassed, and
 - 18.3% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation.⁶



Need for comprehensive sexual health policies and programs

- Comprehensive sexuality education programs can help youth:^{8,9,10}
 - delay the onset of sexual activity,
 - reduce the frequency of sexual activity,
 - reduce the number of sexual partners, and
 - increase condom and contraceptive use.
- Sexuality education has a “protective influence” that includes healthier relationships and better long term reproductive health outcomes.¹⁰
- Integrated services offer a multidisciplinary, holistic approach that allow youth to access care without exposing type of service sought.^{11,12}



What is a School Health Advisory Council (SHAC)?



What is a SHAC?

- A community-based advisory group that is managed by a local school district.
- SHACs make recommendations to local school boards on issues of health and wellness.^{13,14,15}



Why are SHACs important?

- Provide an opportunity to recommend effective and inclusive comprehensive sexual health education policies and programs as well as make changes in your local school district.
- Facilitate communication among community partners and reflect a community's values and norms.^{13,14,15}



Understanding SHACs in the Coordinated School Health Framework



Coordinated School Health Framework

- SHACs are an important part of the Coordinated School Health framework.
- The CSH approach enables schools to:
 - Eliminate gaps and reduce redundancies;
 - Build partnerships;
 - Build collaboration and enhance communication; and
 - Focus efforts on helping students.¹⁶



Coordinated School Health Framework^{17,18}



Key Functions of SHACs



Key Functions of SHACs¹⁴

1. Program Planning
2. Fiscal Planning
3. Liaison with District, State, Community and Local Agencies
4. Direct Intervention
5. Evaluation, Accountability, and Quality Control
6. Advocacy



Key SHAC Members



Examples of SHAC members:^{13,14,18}

- Parents, students, medical professionals, attorneys, law enforcement officials, school personnel, faculty members from colleges or universities, and government officials;
- Members of volunteer health agencies, faith-based, civic service organizations, and professional societies; as well as
- Professionals from local businesses, news media organizations, and social service and public health agencies.



SHAC Member Selection:¹⁴

- 1. Appointment
- 2. Election
- 3. Volunteering



How SHACs are Structured



SHAC Structure:^{14,18}

- 1. SHAC reports to the school board

- 2. SHAC reports to a school staff administrator



SHAC Structure

- How SHACs operate varies from district to district and state to state:^{13,14,18}
 - Some SHACs are highly organized, while others are just getting started.
 - Many SHACs have an Executive Committee composed of a Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Committee Chairs, and other officers.
 - Some SHACs break into committees to do work.



SHAC Structure

- To make a recommendation, an individual or sub-committee can bring a proposal to the SHAC for a vote.
 - If the SHAC comes to an agreement, it makes a recommendation to the School Board, which may accept or reject the recommendation.^{13,14,18}



Joining a SHAC



Joining a SHAC

- In order to join a SHAC, first determine if your local school district has one.
- If your district has a SHAC, do research on current members and officers, as well as requirements for joining.



Joining a SHAC

- Speak with a current member to learn about the process for SHAC membership.
 - When members of a SHAC are appointed, offer assistance in identifying prospective new members.
- OR*
- Build relationships and demonstrate your commitment to making a positive to earn an appointment.



Joining a SHAC

- If your district does not have a SHAC, consider creating one:
 - Partner with the district by meeting with key school district personnel to develop a collaborative relationship.
 - Invite a cross-section of supportive community members to an initial meeting about setting up a SHAC.



Being an Effective SHAC Member



Being an Effective SHAC Member

- Do your research!
- Join the committee that works on sexual health policies and programs.
- Be consistent, pay attention, ask questions, and carefully observe the dynamics of the SHAC.



Being an Effective SHAC Member

- Be a good ally to other members.
- Bring a friend to SHAC meetings. A good way to know you have an ally is to bring your own.
- Build your own coalition of support by identifying potential allies.



The Role of SHACs in Comprehensive Sexual Health Policies and Programs



Do research on a wide range of issues including:

- Is there a sexuality education, HIV, or abstinence policy in your district? In your state?
- What are the community norms on various issues, including comprehensive sexuality education, GLBTQ youth inclusivity, contraceptive access in your district?
- What policies exist at the district and state level on condom and contraceptive access, anti-bullying, or anti-discrimination?
- Are schools in your district complying with these policies?



Do research on a wide range of issues including:

- What are the rates of teen pregnancy and STIs, including HIV, in your district?
- What is the drop out rate of students within your district?
- What is the average number of school days missed annually within your district?



Do research on a wide range of issues including:

- What sexual health curricula/programs are being used in your district?
- Who is teaching these curricula and/or programs and what sort of training do they receive? If there are outside groups or speakers conducting trainings and programs, what are their affiliations?
- What stories can you share about inadequate sexuality education, teen pregnancy, STIs, or a lack of LGBTQ – inclusive material?



After your research...

- If you find that sexual health policies and programs are not in place or are limited, speak with the executive committee to add the topic to the SHAC agenda.
- Consider surveying parents on various issues such as their opinions on comprehensive sexuality education in schools.



Role of SHACs in Comprehensive Sexual Health Policies and Programs

- When working with a SHAC, you can engage in a variety of strategies to improve comprehensive sexual health policies and programs. The following section offers nine potential recommendations:



Recommendations:

1. Educate the School Board to adopt a resolution recommending comprehensive sexuality education in your district.
2. Encourage the school district to amend or adopt standards for comprehensive sexuality education.
3. Review, assess, and recommend a comprehensive, evidence-based sexuality education curriculum to be taught in schools.



Recommendations:

4. Recommend teacher training requirements or professional development opportunities for educators and school staff.
5. Review all outside speakers and their materials to ensure content is medically accurate and age-appropriate.
6. Draft recommended information that can be sent to parents about comprehensive sexual health policies and programs.



Recommendations:

7. Recommend policies which support inclusivity and create safe spaces for GLBTQ youth.
8. Recommend the implementation of an in-school condom availability program.
9. Encourage the school district to strengthen existing school-based health centers (SBHC) or linkages to community health services – such as local health centers, hospitals, or Title X clinics – for all students’ health needs including sexual and reproductive health services.



Case Study:

Austin Independent School District



Background

- The Austin Independent School District (AISD) policy is to teach the most current evidence-based information in regard to sexuality education.
- Texas state law requires that all sexuality education instruction be abstinence-focused, but does not prohibit districts from teaching comprehensive sexuality education.



Background

- Within AISD, sexuality education is provided by health and science teachers who are trained by the district.
- Outside organizations sometimes supplement the sexuality education provided by school faculty members with additional in-school instruction.



Issue

- An outside organization’s supplemental instruction prompted concerns from school faculty around the district.
- An Austin-based crisis pregnancy center was implementing an abstinence-only program in district schools.



Role of the SHAC

- Committee created to review:
 - Outside organizations that are permitted to present in the district
 - District policy concerning requirements for outside groups that provide instruction in schools
- Guidance provided by Texas Freedom Network (TFN)
- SHAC members effectively strategized and mobilized to address school health



Role of the SHAC

- Members concluded that when an outside organization conducts presentations the content provided must be:
 - Medically accurate
 - Groups must clearly identify affiliation with any religious groups
- Groups must utilize CDC supported evidence-based information.



Role of the SHAC

- Health Education Committee made the following recommendation to the entire SHAC:
 - Outside groups that teach sexuality education in AISD schools must use evidence-based information
 - Permit a local Planned Parenthood affiliate and the City of Austin/Travis County to continue providing supplemental instruction
 - Prohibit the crisis pregnancy center’s abstinence-only program from being taught in the district



Result

- The AISD SHAC voted in favor of the Health Committee’s recommendation.
- Final recommendation sent to the AISD Board of Trustees.
- Board of Trustees accepted the recommendation.



Summary

- SHACs provide a great opportunity through which to recommend effective and inclusive sexual health policies and programs.
- SHACs facilitate communication among school administrators and board members, parents and community stakeholders, and students.
- Empower young people to be involved in health and public policy.



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Thank you!

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