



Good morning!

First, I would like to thank Iris Harvey, Planned Parenthood of Greater Ohio and the Ohio Center for Sexual Education for the honor of being here today. And thank you for dedicating a full day out of your lives to come together to find meaningful ways we can ensure young people have every opportunity to succeed in school and in life.

As Iris mentioned, I have the privilege of leading Power to Decide, a national organization dedicated to ensuring that all young people – no matter who they are or where they live – have the information, access, and sense of opportunity necessary to pursue the futures they want by deciding if, when and under what circumstances to get pregnant and have a child. We provide objective, evidence-based information about sexual health and contraceptive options, and we work to guarantee equitable access to the full range of reproductive health services.

I am especially excited to be here because we are talking about two of my favorite topics. Education and health – I have spent my more than 25-year career working on these issues because I believe that they are the keys to leveling the playing field for youth.

The evidence clearly establishes that links between health and learning are inextricable. There is no doubt that healthy kids learn better. That holds true in the case of nutrition, physical activity, substance use, and yes – sexual health. This makes it essential that schools play a role in ensuring that students have the knowledge and skills necessary to make healthy decisions now and into the future.

That's where our topic of today comes in – ensuring that the young people of Ohio receive what they deserve as a part of their overall schooling – quality sex education. Bottom line – it matters.

I am assuming that most of you agree. And I am going to offer you some food for thought about WHY it matters which I hope will get you thinking about how you will help make that happen in Ohio – which is why we're here today. To activate.

In my 25 plus years in education, what has been true time and again is that what gets measured gets done. So if we want to ensure that all students in Ohio get quality sex education, then we need to align to the goals of public education.

The good news is that we do. As you may know, the Board of Education in Ohio has issued a strategic plan for education that emphasizes a "whole child" approach. To quote them:

"Ohio can only reach success by meeting the needs of the whole child. The time a child spends in school is precious and should ensure all aspects of a child's well-being are addressed, including the physical, social, emotional and intellectual aspects. Each plan component works harmoniously to support the whole-child approach; however, the three core principles are, perhaps, most critical...equity, partnerships and quality schools."

"In Ohio, each child is challenged to discover and learn, prepared to pursue a fulfilling post-high school path and empowered to become a resilient, lifelong learner who contributes to society."

# POWER TO DECIDE

Goals: Ohio will increase annually the percentage of its high school graduates who, one year after graduation, are:

- Enrolled and succeeding in a post-high school learning experience, including an adult career-technical education program, an apprenticeship and/or a two-year or four-year college program;
- Serving in a military branch;
- Earning a living wage; or
- Engaged in a meaningful, self-sustaining vocation”

So it seems quite obvious that committing to and investing in quality education would be a “no brainer” for the Ohio Board of Education.

However, that doesn’t seem to be the case. Twenty-nine states mandate sex education. Ohio is not one of them. As a result, sex education in Ohio varies district by district, school by school, sometimes even classroom by classroom. If you want to learn more, you should check out the very comprehensive report developed by the Center for Community Solutions on the state of sex education in Ohio.

This lack of consistency likely means that young people are not getting accurate information and skills training on building healthy relationships, understanding the importance of consent, sexually transmitted infections, and contraception.

This is where you come in. You have the power to change this...I’ll spend the rest of my time offering evidenced based information that supports a strong investment in quality sex education.

**First – it is an evidence-based way to help Ohio achieve its vision and goals for education.**

Quality sex education has been shown to improve academic success; prevent child abuse, dating violence and bullying; and prevent unintended pregnancy, HIV, and other sexually transmitted infections.

Quality sex education has also been proven effective at helping teens be able to make healthier decisions about having sex and helping to adopt positive sexual behaviors.

This supports a whole child approach AND the principle of quality education.

The good news is that through the Ohio Center for Sex Education and other resources, you have access to a “gold standard” sex education program for middle and high school students. It is called *Get Real* – and it includes all of the characteristics of effective sex education. It also works. A rigorous study showed that it:

- Delayed the onset of sexual intercourse for boys and girls. 16% fewer boys and 15% fewer girls who received *Get Real* having had sex by the end of eighth grade compared to boys and girls who had other sex education in comparison schools.
- For boys, family involvement showed an additional effect, with boys who completed Family Activities in sixth grade being less likely to report having had sex in eighth grade than boys who did not complete these activities.

# POWER TO DECIDE

In addition to delaying sex, the research study found that *Get Real* also:

- Reinforced family communication through family activities and empowered parents to help their children delay sex.
- Improved communication skills for healthy relationships. Both boys and girls who received *Get Real* identified that they were more prepared to assert themselves and communicate in a relationship, including saying 'no' to sex.

In addition to these great results, *Get Real* is framed with the concept of social and emotional learning, and key skills of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making as key elements in learning how to negotiate relationships. This is very aligned to the whole child approach to education supported by your Board of Education.

The *Get Real* program also recognizes and stresses what we all believe...that families and parents are the primary sexuality educators for their children through their emphasis on family communications.

## **Now, let's talk about why quality sex education matters in terms of unplanned pregnancy.**

Despite the fact that the teen birth rates in the United States have dropped by 67% since 1991, we still have the highest rates in the industrialized world. Ohio's teen birth rate has dropped 64% in that same time frame and in 2016, the rates for 15-19 year olds were 21.8 per 1,000, as compared to 20.3 per 1,000 nationwide.

We still have tremendous work to do. Most notably, to close the disparity gaps that persist for young women of color and low income women. African American and Latina teens in Ohio and nationwide are 1.5 x to 2 x more likely to become pregnant as a teen than their Caucasian peers, and teens living in poverty are also more likely to get pregnant than their more affluent peers. Finally, teens girls in foster care are twice as likely to get pregnant than those who are not.

**These rates do not represent the shortcomings of these youth. They represent a lack of equity – and the fact that the system is failing these youths on many levels – including the system that does not offer young people quality sex education.**

A risk of unprotected sex is of course, unplanned pregnancy - and about 82% of teens who get pregnant report that their pregnancies were unintended. For the brave and determined teens who decide to become parents, these unplanned pregnancies create obstacles in their pursuit of educational and career goals and future economic well-being.

**Let's look specifically at Ohio's goals - high school completion, achieving post-secondary success, and economic well-being – two factors tied to unplanned pregnancies.**

Here's the current state of affairs:

- Teen parents have lower rates of high school completion than their peers who do not have children as adolescents. A report from Child Trends found that only about 50 percent of teen mothers receive a high school diploma by the age of 22, as compared with 89 percent of women who do not have a child during their teen years (Perper, Peterson, and Manlove 2010).

# POWER TO DECIDE

- Notably, younger teen mothers are at higher risk for not completing high school: only 38 percent of teen mothers who have a child before age 18 have a high school diploma by age 22.
- And these numbers line up with what the young women themselves report. A survey supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation found that a third of the young women who had dropped out of school corroborated these statistics, reporting that becoming a parent played a major role in their decision to leave school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison 2006).

When looking at postsecondary education, the results show even more challenges.

- Hoffman (2006) reported that only two percent of young teen mothers (aged 17 or younger) and three percent of older teen mothers (aged 18 to 19) had earned a four-year college degree by the age of 30, compared 31% of all females.
- Considering that college graduates earn close to 70 percent more than high school graduates and 135 percent more than those with less than a high school education, it becomes clear how not completing high school and or post-secondary education can translate into significant income and wealth disparities throughout adulthood (Center for American Progress | The High Cost of Truancy).

So again, quality sex education is essential to Ohio meeting its education goals and more importantly, for young people to get what they deserve.

Let me be extremely clear before I move on. Teens who decide to parent are incredibly brave people and love their children as much as we love ours. We should do everything in our power to honor them and offer them a system of support that allows these young people and their children the opportunity to thrive. They deserve nothing less.

AND we need to remember that the vast majority of these young people did not intend to get pregnant. And that comes down to their lack of access to quality sexual health information, access to contraception, and belief that it matters in their lives – which brings us back to the importance of quality sex education.

## **So, we have talked about why and how quality sex education is aligned to the goals of public education in Ohio.**

Now, let's discuss the common arguments for not offering it in schools: controversy, time, and money.

The biggest myth is controversy. The vast majority of people in the United States support quality sex education. In a nationally representative poll that Power to Decide conducted in October 2016, 79% of people in the U.S. believed that sex education should include discussion of abstinence, contraception and STI prevention. The whole gambit.

How many of you are thinking – well, we are more “conservative” here in Ohio? If you are, then let me share you that when we broke those same data down by geographic region, the north central region of the U.S., which included Ohio, showed an 80% rate for support of quality sex education.

Our numbers are also consistent with other polls. And a 2015 nationally representative poll conducted by YouGov/Huffington Post showed that 66% of people in the US supported sex education that taught students about birth control discussion of contraceptives and condoms. Only 15% indicated that they believed that abstinence should be the sole focus of sex education, while only 7% believed that sex

# POWER TO DECIDE

education should not be taught at all. This poll didn't offer an "all of the above" option. If you do a little math – that suggest that their poll showed that 78% of the respondents supported what we would consider quality sex education.

The important thing to remember is that those who believe in "abstinence only" approaches, presumably want kids to delay sex. The good news is that there are several evidence-based sex education programs which have been shown to delay intercourse, including **Get Real**. And as importantly, NO quality sex education program has EVER been shown to hasten the initiation of intercourse. Good facts for you to remember in your advocacy.

Let's look at the financial argument. First, the Get Real curriculum cost is about \$16 per student. Compare that to the HUMAN costs associated with the impact of an unplanned pregnancy on young people – priceless.

More broadly, we know that investment in prevention saves money. Our Progress Pays Off study shows that public investments in prevention, including in quality sex-ed programs, contributed to a \$165 Million savings in Ohio in 2015 alone. Nationwide, we saved \$4.4 Billion.

Now, let's look at the argument that suggests teachers don't have TIME to teach sex education in schools.

If sex education is an example of quality education, helps support the whole child, achieves equity and increase graduation rates and economic mobility by reducing unplanned pregnancies, it seems to me that it is classroom time well-spent. It also seems to that these aligned with the goals set by your own Board of Education.

But, I want to be clear. Schools cannot act alone when it comes to educating youth about sex, love and relationships. The truth is that we all need to step up and in particular, parents. We need other champions and allies to step up too.

Surprising fact for you on parents – not only do adults want parents to be the primary sex educators for their children; kids do too.

This month is Let's Talk Month and we suggest that Talking is Power – Here are our tips for talking about sex, love and relationships with the young people in your lives.

- Talk early and often about sex, and be specific
- Cultivate a culture of openness—be an "ask-able champion" and allow the young person in your life to share their feelings without fear of shame or condemnation
- Don't assume that your young person's emotions aren't valid just because they are young
- Build a trusting relationship with the young person in your life
- Help the young person in your life plan for the future they envision for themselves
- Don't give up

Not giving up is important because if you don't talk with the young people in your lives, they will get the information elsewhere. Here is where youth say they go to access information.



<https://powertodecide.org/what-we-do/information/resource-library/talkingispower-polling-data>

Not all of these sources are bad ones, but it is startling that porn was cited just 2% less frequently than parents.

And on the media, that can cut both ways. There are positive examples of how popular culture can be influential. East Los High and 16& Pregnant and Teen Mom, are examples of entertainment media that has had positive results. Last Spring, we worked with The Fosters on a transmedia effort that led to increased discussions between parents and youth.

We are working to do more of that. And to supplement that, we need to prepare youth to critically view media – which leads back to the importance of quality sex education and parents, champions, and allies talking!

Those are the key ingredients – quality sex education and trusted and positive relationships between youth and their champions.

I hope that these key advocacy points are a helpful springboard for a day of fabulous workshops and planning to ensure that the young people of Ohio receive the information, supports, and access they deserve to live their best life stories.

Each and every one of you can make a difference. And while the challenge might feel massive, there are small things you can do that will add up to big results for our young people. Here are a few options...

- o Host sex education classes led by the Ohio Center for Sex Ed
- o Host professional development led by the Ohio Center for Sex Ed
- o Host parent workshop led by the Ohio Center for Sex Ed
- o Get updates on political state of affairs from Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio
- o Use talking points on the value of sex education with friends, colleagues, and family
- o Organize parents and advocates in your community to advocate for quality sex education in public schools

On that note, I will end with and often used, but in my view, not overused quote:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”– Margaret Mead

Thank you and I wish you great success!