Join the national conversation!

HEALTH ISSUES IN EDUCATION: WHAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR OUR SCHOOLS?

Word Generation - Unit 2.03

Focus Words

capacity | distribute | method | morality | abstain

WEEKLY PASSAGE

The United States has a high rate of teen pregnancies. Sexually transmitted diseases are also common among teens. Each year, about one million teenaged girls become pregnant. One in four young people gets a sexually transmitted disease before turning twenty-one.

Some people say schools have the **capacity** to make a difference. They think sex education can help students make better choices. For example, students can talk about peer pressure that leads to having sex too early. They can practice saying no if they are not ready. Some schools also **distribute** information about **methods** for safer sex.

Other people think parents should teach kids what is right and wrong. They say sex education should be the parents' responsibility. They believe only parents can teach their children **morality.** It is hard to teach about such a mature topic in school, others say. Students might just make jokes or misbehave.

Some people believe schools must only teach students to **abstain** or stay away from sex until marriage. They think teaching students about safer sex is like saying that sex at a young age is okay.

Since 1991, the government has spent about half billion dollars on programs that focus on abstinence. Other people say, however, that students need more information. Should schools try to help prevent teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases? What is appropriate to discuss at school?

BY-NC-ND

Unit 2.03

Health issues in education: what is appropriate for our schools?

FOCUS WORDS OF THE WEEK

capacity : (noun) an ability

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

distribute : (verb) to give out

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

method : (noun) a way of doing something

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

morality : (noun) a sense of right and wrong; values

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

abstain : (verb) to choose not to do something

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

BY-NC-ND

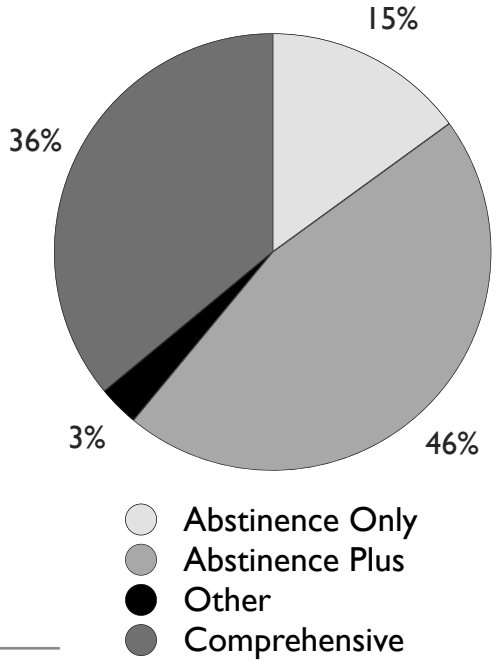
Unit 2.03

Health issues in education: what is appropriate for our schools?

PROBLEM OF THE WEEK

The graph shows the results from a 2004 poll. In this poll, parents were asked which method of sex education they preferred. They chose from these three methods:

- **Abstinence** Only: Students are taught that abstaining from pre-marital sex is the only safe, **moral** choice.
- Abstinence Plus: Abstinence is presented as the safest, most moral option. However, Abstinence Plus programs **distribute** information about safer sex as well.
- Comprehensive: The Comprehensive approach does not suggest that teen sex is immoral. It provides lots of information about safer sex in an effort to help students develop the **capacity** to make good choices.



Option 1: What percent of parents prefer Abstinence Only?

A) 36%
B) 49%
C) 15%
D) 100%

Option 2: Based only on the information in the graph, is the following statement true, false, or does the graph not tell you enough information to decide?

"85% of parents prefer sex education programs that provide safer sex information."

Discussion Question: Only a small percentage of parents prefer the **Abstinence**-Only **method**. But both Abstinence-Only and Abstinence-Plus are based on the idea that abstinence is the most **moral** option. So both these statements are true:

1. Only 15% of Americans favor Abstinence-Only sex education.
2. Over 60% of Americans favor sex education that encourages abstinence.

Without changing the **distribution** of opinion, we can make things look very different. This means pollsters and politicians have the **capacity** to manipulate how information will be interpreted. If you were in favor of Abstinence-Only programs, which statistic would you probably use? If you were in favor of programs that taught about contraception and safer sex, which statistic would you probably use? What does this suggest about statistics in general?

BY-NC-ND

Unit 2.03

Health issues in education: what is appropriate for our schools?

THINKING SCIENTIFICALLY

Ms. Kahn's class is preparing for a debate about what students should learn in health education classes. Students have to defend a position about who is responsible for teaching kids about sex, so they're doing research looking for studies with scientific data on the topic. They talk while they search.

"Sex education is a **moral** issue. It should be left up to parents to teach their kids about sex," says Briana.

"No way!" exclaims Valerie, "What if parents are scared to talk to their kids about sex? My dad freaks out every time my sister and I even mention dating. Schools need a **method** for teaching kids what they don't learn at home."

"I know, right?" says Erick, "I think kids and teens have the **capacity** to learn about the topic and still uphold their personal beliefs. But people at my church think that if a school **distributes** information about sex, it's like saying sex before marriage is okay. They think teaching kids to **abstain** from sex is the best choice."

Ms. Kahn checks in with the group. "Try searching for studies about **abstinence**-only education programs. You'll need to compare them with comprehensive programs."

"I found something! It's a research study that compares the risk of teen pregnancy with the type of sex education teens received," says Valerie. "I bet if kids get comprehensive information about sex, they'll be better off."

"Okay, Valerie, you sound like *you* have a position. Let's find out if you can support it with evidence from a reliable source," says Ms. Kahn.

Data Source:

- "Abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education and the initiation of sexual activity and teen pregnancy" by P.K. Kohler, L.E. Manhart, and W.E. Lafferty in the April 2008 edition of the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, pages 344-351.

Type of sex education	Percentage who reported NO teen pregnancy
No formal sex education	9.4%
Abstinence-only sex education	23.8%
Comprehensive sex education	66.8%

Is Valerie's position on sex education supported by the data table? Why or why not?

Is there information about Erick's church's position on the data table? What about Briana's position?

Explain what additional information you would want related to this data in order to better understand how Drs. Kohlers, Manhart, and Lafferty studied this question.

BY-NC-ND

Unit 2.03

Health issues in education: what is appropriate for our schools?

DEBATING THE ISSUE

Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A Public schools should not teach sex education. Parents should decide what they want to teach their children.

B Public schools should teach students to abstain from sex until marriage.

C Public schools should teach students about safer sex to help them avoid unwanted pregnancies or sexually transmitted diseases.

D Public schools should teach different kinds of sex education classes. One kind would teach abstinence. Another would teach about safer sex. Parents would decide which class students can take.

E _____

_____

_____

Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

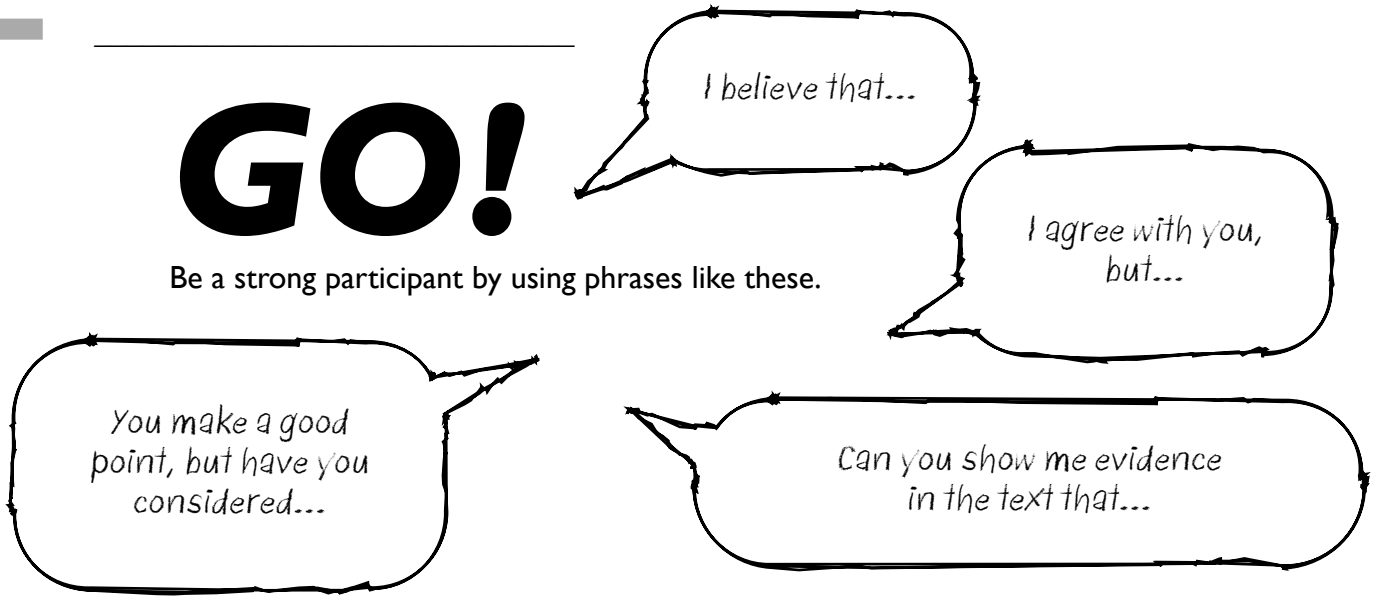
_____

_____

_____

GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.



BY-NC-ND

Unit 2.03

Health issues in education: what is appropriate for our schools?

WRITE ABOUT IT

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples.
Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

Focus Words

capacity | distribute | method | morality | abstain

BY-NC-ND