

Cy-Fair ISD may drop 7th-graders from sex-ed classes

By Erin Mulvaney | Tuesday, October 16, 2012 | Updated: Tuesday, October 16, 2012 9:03pm

The Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District told parents Tuesday that its new **"abstinence-plus"** sex education program, which has prompted complaints from some parents, will be reviewed and may not be taught to seventh-graders this school year.

The announcement goes a step further than the district's decision last week to push the last four lessons of the 12-lesson seventh-grade curriculum into the eighth grade. Superintendent Mark Henry announced that change in a letter to parents on Friday, but some parents said it didn't go far enough.

The "It's Your Game" program developed by the University of Texas Prevention Research Center in Houston came under fire from hundreds of parents who said **the material was too sexually explicit and inappropriate for their 12-year-old students.** The curriculum will now be reviewed by a local health advisory council made up of staff and parents. The program was scheduled to begin at the end of October, but the sex education curriculum has been postponed until the spring, said a letter sent to parents Tuesday.

Linda Macias, associate superintendant of curriculum and instruction, said the district has not decided whether the program will be eliminated. If the panel and district decide to keep it, then **the final four lessons still will be pushed back to the eighth grade.**

Falkenberg: Sex-ed program is effective

By Lisa Falkenberg | Wednesday, October 17, 2012 | Updated: Wednesday, October 17, 2012 11:57pm

When people find out I've got two daughters who will someday be teens at the same time, they often give me this look of sympathy or concern that I never really understood. Until now.

The hours I spent reviewing statistics on sexual activity among today's children were enough to frighten any parent, including those of you breathing a sigh of relief that you have boys.

At age 11, I think I was still playing with Barbies, maybe even still mourning the loss of Santa. Today, in the age of YouTube, **11 is the average age of a child's first exposure to porn,** according to Melissa Peskin, an associate director of University of Texas Prevention Research Center.

In the United States, 11 percent of sixth-graders are sexually active. By the ninth grade, it's 35 percent. By the 12th grade, it's nearly 70 percent. These are among the statistics Cypress-Fairbanks ISD provided to parents who had questions about the district's new sexual education curriculum, called "It's Your Game, Keep it Real."

But it wasn't these statistics that some parents of Cy-Fair middle-schoolers found most shocking. It was the abstinence-plus program the district implemented. Parents have made headlines recently, speaking out against the supposedly graphic nature of the "It's Your Game" curriculum, expressing concern that it prematurely exposes children to sex.

This week, the district informed parents that the curriculum will be reviewed by a local advisory council made up of staff and parents, and may not be taught to seventh-graders at all. Parental objections to sex education classes are nothing new in our conservative state, where **three-quarters of school districts use abstinence-only programs, and only a quarter use something called "abstinence-plus,"** which teaches medically accurate information about contraception, according to the Texas Freedom Network's analysis of Texas Education Agency data.

The course works

But most Texans may not know that the vast majority of districts are not implementing programs that are proven to work, according to UT's Peskin. In the vernacular of scientific studies, **these programs proven to change children's behavior, which include abstinence-only and abstinence-plus, are called "evidence based."** **And the award-winning program that Cy-Fair is thinking about delaying, and possibly eliminating, is one of the few that has earned this distinction.**

Harris County middle-schoolers who participated in trials of "It's Your Game" were 1.5 times more likely to delay initiating sex, 50 percent more likely to delay oral sex, 29 percent more likely to delay vaginal sex, and 66 percent more likely to delay anal sex.

"It's Your Game" is used in 11 districts in Harris County and cities as different as Midland and Los Angeles. It was developed by the folks at the University of Texas Prevention Research Center, which is funded in part by the Centers for Disease Control. And it was designed very specifically to begin in seventh grade, early enough so that children can still be influenced, and encouraged to delay sex, and hopefully avoid teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Despite claims from some parents, and the fear-mongering on websites such as Tea Party Nation, UT's program is not trying to encourage kids to have sex or to shun traditional marriage. Its main focus is abstinence, a message that's repeated more than 80 times in program materials. Videos that may seem too sexually explicit to parents are geared toward reality, Peskin says, presenting situations that students can relate to and take seriously.

While Peskin says she respects parents' concerns, and Cy-Fair's decisions, she cautions: "We don't know if the program will be as effective if the program is delayed until later grades." When I shared this fact with Cy-Fair's Linda Macias, associate superintendent of curriculum, instruction and accountability, she said she'd share it with the panel reviewing the program. I hope so.

Frightening statistics

Every parent has the right to be scared when it comes to today's statistics. And every parent has the right to choose how to educate our children about sex. Parents in Cy-Fair who disagreed with the "It's Your Game" approach were given the option to opt out.

But before those parents pressure the district to scrap a program that's proven to encourage our kids to delay sex - and help prevent the pregnancy, STDs and other problems - they should face the facts first.