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## **New Abstinence-Only Study Points to the Importance of Comprehensive Sex Ed**

Denver, Colorado – A study released in the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine yesterday compared four programs: a theory based abstinence-only program; a comprehensive sexuality education intervention, including information about abstinence and contraception; a program that did not include any information on abstinence and focused only on promoting contraception and condom use; and a health curriculum not related to sexuality at all. The study found that youth who received the abstinence-only program were more likely to delay the onset of sexual activity for 2 years than those in the other three groups.

“This study highlights the first and foremost message of comprehensive sexuality education – abstinence,” says Lori Casillas, Executive Director of the Colorado Organization for Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting and Prevention (COAPPP). “Like the program that was evaluated in this study, one of the priorities of all evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education curricula is to help young people delay sex until they are ready.”

“This study also supports our argument that we must start education about healthy sexuality and family life in elementary school, before children enter adolescence and become sexually active. A quarter of students in this study were already having sex – without access to complete information, you’ve already missed the boat with a significant number of these youth,” Ms. Casillas says.

The study provides no data in support of the failed abstinence-only-until-marriage programs of the Bush era. The curriculum tested did not represent most abstinence programs. For example, it did not take a moralistic tone, as many abstinence programs do. The sessions encouraged students to delay sex until they are ready, not necessarily until married. It did not portray sex outside marriage as inappropriate or emotionally damaging, nor did it disparage the efficacy of condoms to prevent unplanned pregnancy and STDs.

“The fact that this program helped 12-year-olds delay the onset of sexual activity for two years is laudable,” says Lisa Olcese, Director of the Healthy Colorado Youth Alliance, a statewide coalition that supports comprehensive sexuality education. “However, this particular result is just one of many outcomes of evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education programs, which, over the last 30 years, have been proven to help youth delay the onset of sexual activity and reduce sexual risk-taking behaviors.”

The Obama administration is funding only science-based teen pregnancy prevention programs with evidence of effectiveness. These programs serve the greatest number of youth and deliver two outcomes – abstinence and informed decision-making about safer sex practices.

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