

The birds and the bees are still clueless

Where is the sex ed class that teens actually need?

BY MICHAEL DAVIS

md133614@students.davenport.k12.ia.us

Let's be honest we've all turned to Google's fine services when we've had a question about our bodies at some point in time, and there's nothing wrong with that. But consider this: what would it be like already having learned these questions over the course of nine weeks in a school setting surrounded by peers your age with similar inquiries? Why, it almost sounds like an actual high school sex-ed class (which by the way West should totally have for students junior level and above).

I'll repeat that more clearly: Davenport West High School should offer an optional one-term class with a curriculum built around sex education that only juniors and seniors can take that also serves as a requirement for Lifetime Fitness for those students with tricky schedules freshmen year.

In my opinion, this idea definitely beats the two-week (at best) sex-ed unit where you learned about sex from a biological viewpoint. "Okay, kids, here's a picture of the male and female reproductive system," the advisor says. "This goes in here, this leaves through here, and these... well, these make this." And, that's the in-depth, educational sex ed lessons you never knew you needed.

Having a proper sex-ed class would eliminate the teacher having to skip, skim, or graze over certain topics for the sake of time. The nine weeks could be spent exploring a plethora of topics and evoking mature and engaging conversations, but unfortunately that expectation isn't being met.

Teenagers around the world have spoken. *The Huffington Post* reported on a global study lead by Pandora Pound, a researcher focusing on youth and sexual health education at the University of Bristol. As stated by the *The Huffington Post*, "The researchers reviewed 55 qualitative studies of students, primarily aged 12 to 18 years, from 10 different countries over 25 years. The responses were strikingly similar across decades and countries and educational methods."

It's remarkable that teenagers around the world across decades can all agree that the sex ed they've experienced was unsatisfactory. It's not surprising that teens feel the current way sex ed is taught is boring.

Self-help author Mark Manson says it best, "Sex ed should account for the recreational, social and emotional reasons for sex and their consequences. It should discuss the interpersonal meaning of intercourse, setting clear expectations and boundaries, communicating desires, dealing with feelings of shame and awkwardness, and of course, being responsible about protection and privacy."

Tell me honestly that the sex education you learned wasn't reduced to "Don't have sex, won't get pregnant," as if that was the best policy, as if that was rational for teenagers nowadays. Abstinence isn't the be-all and end-all method, and you can't limit teenagers to that ill-judged advice.

It's 2017— things have changed. While abstinence is a sure-fire way to avoid pregnancy, giving teens all the tools they need to make smart and responsible decisions is the next best thing. The information they learn in a comprehensive sex-ed class outweighs the expiration date abstinence carries.

Abstinence won't teach you what to do if you happen to catch a STD, will it? Speaking of which, who actually remembers the unit where you learned about STDs and STIs? Hint: those are abbreviations for 'Sexually Transmitted Disease' and 'Sexually Transmitted Infection'.

65 % of West students surveyed feel that sex-ed classes are beneficial.

Do teens even know the difference between STDs and STIs? Okay, maybe knowing that isn't the biggest priority, but don't you think it'd be smart to know what gonorrhea is, how you get it, and how you get it treated? That seems practical, but I bet you can't even list the symptoms of gonorrhea without looking it up first.

Nevertheless, this is just another one of those things that teens should receive a brush-up on, especially as they near the age where teens are more sexually active.

Almost half of seniors in high school are sexually active meaning they have had sex in the previous three months, the CDC (Center



for Disease Control and Prevention) reported. This is juxtaposed to the twenty percent of freshmen who are sexually active. Hence why an additional sex-ed class for students at the junior and senior levels would be more beneficial.

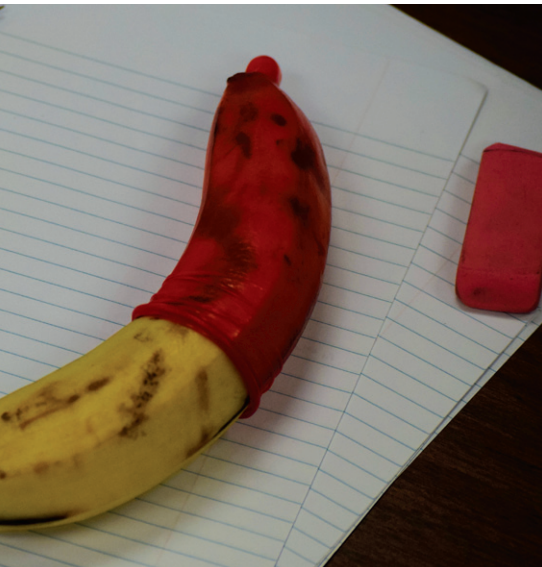
If juniors and seniors need an extra credit, they can take the class. If juniors and seniors need a block filled, they can take the class. If juniors and seniors want to learn material that isn't full of numbers, essays, and periodic tables, then this class is the answer to every teenager's question: "When will we actually use this?"

Furthermore, a sex-ed class at higher school levels generally means higher levels of maturity within the students, allowing for an array of discussion topics the teacher and students can dive into. The conversation will be able to finally go beyond the biology of you and me because there is just so much more you can say when you're not limited to a temporary unit.

Imagine discussing themes concerning rape culture, LGBT inclusion, advanced contraceptive methods, the mental effects of abortion, the adoption process, toxic gender roles, toxic masculinity, toxic relationships, sexual abuse, homophobia, transphobia, consent, sexual desire, sexual confidence, sexual pleasure, and so much more.

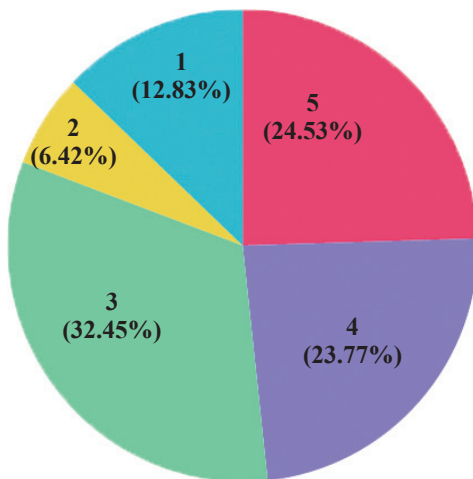
Sure, the internet does a perfectly fine job of giving us that immediate information we crave, but have you stopped to wonder if anyone else is having those same very questions? Well, you're not alone. Despite over half of the West students surveyed revealing that they have never taken a sex-ed course post-middle school, approximately 65 percent collectively felt that sex-ed classes were indeed beneficial. On top of that, a whopping 78 percent majority were in favor of West offering an additional sex-ed class to junior-level students and above.

The demand is there. All we need is action.

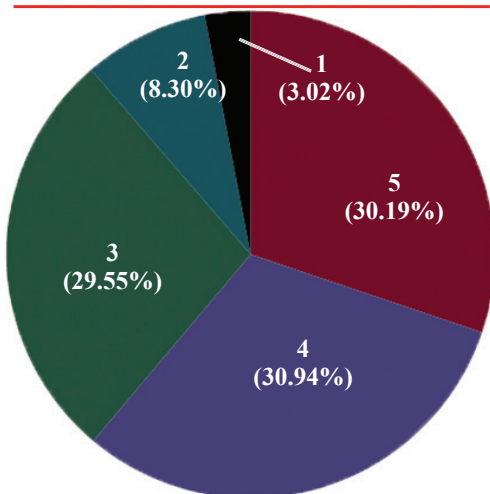


The iconic sex ed symbol. *photo by Tatiana Stepanek.*

How knowledgeable are you on contraceptive methods? On a scale of 1 (not so good) to 5 (excellent)



How knowledgeable are you on STDs/STIs? On a scale of 1 (not so good) to 5 (excellent)?



Sex Ed Trivia!

Quiz Your Peers

Can girls get pregnant before having their first period?

Yes. They start ovulating (releasing eggs from ovaries) before they start menstruating.

Which birth control method is 100% effective?

No form of birth control is 100% effective except abstinence (not having sex at all).

How many American teens contract an STD each year?

Approx. 3,750,000 contract an STD in the US each year. That's about 10,274 teens each day.

Which one of these STDs is curable?

Hepatitis B. HIV. Gonorrhea. Herpes. Gonorrhea can be cured with antibiotics because it is a bacterial infection. However, HIV, Hepatitis B, and Herpes are viral infections and are incurable.

Do all STDs have symptoms?

No, you could be infecting people without even knowing it. Also, STDs can often be confused with common cold or flu symptoms and won't be caught until it's too late.

How often should sexually active teens see a physician?

Once a year— but there's never a wrong time to go.

How many Americans teens get pregnant every year?

One million teenage girls become pregnant in the United States each year. This accounts for about 20% (1 in 5) of all sexually active teens.

What are the four fluids that can transmit HIV?

Blood, semen, vaginal fluid, and breast milk.

Contraceptive List Off

A contraceptive is a method of birth control intended to prevent pregnancy.

There are different kinds of birth control, but how many do you actually know? Assess your knowledge of contraceptives and list them below. If you can fill in all of the blanks correctly without looking anything up, you'll get extra credit!

1. Male Condom
2. Birth Control Pill
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____

*Pregnant...
or think you might be?*

Stop by Birthright for a pregnancy test that is free, confidential, reliable & accurate.

We care about you and your tomorrows!



An International Pregnancy Service

563-324-5261

2020 Harrison St. Davenport, IA 52803

www.birthright.org