



Case Study of WCC's Sexual Education Advocacy in New York City Schools

BACKGROUND

The Women's City Club of New York (WCC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, multi-issue activist organization that is dedicated to improving the quality of life for all New Yorkers. WCC works to shape public policy to promote responsive government through education, issue analysis, advocacy and civic participation. Now in its second century of service, WCC has focused its efforts to empowering women to become more civically engaged.

Under Mayor Bloomberg, in 2011 the NYC Department of Education (DOE) mandated that sexual health education be taught during health education courses in both middle and high school. Concerned about inequities in access to sexual education in schools, the WCC Task Force on Sexual Education in New York City Schools (TFSE) was created in 2014.

In 2017, the New York City Comptroller released a report that showed that NYC schools were not complying with the minimum standards set by New York State for sex education. Many students were not receiving sex education from a certified health instructor, and it was unclear if others are receiving sex education at all.

The WCC supports comprehensive and age-appropriate sexuality education for grades K-12, and has worked to ensure that the middle and high school mandate is met by all schools.

ACTIONS

From 2014 through 2016, the Task force on Sexuality Education exhausted all efforts to gather qualitative and quantitative information from multiple access points about the instructors teaching sexual health education, the curriculum used, and the number of sexual education classes taught. Those efforts included meetings with DOE Office of School Wellness; discussions with the Independent Budget Office and the office of NYC Comptroller; surveys of key stakeholders; filing a Freedom of Information Act request of DOE; and working with Sexual Education Alliance of New York City (SEANYC) to advocate for the release of data related to the sex education. As a result, the Task Force on Sexual Education concluded that DOE failed

to require schools to collect the information necessary to determine the degree to which DOE was complying with the mandate.

In order to educate the public and raise awareness about sexual education, TFSE participated in advocacy efforts that included: testifying at NYC City Council Public Hearings; participating in radio and television interviews; presenting TFSE mission and activities in community organization meetings; and organizing a 2-part WCC public education program.

IMPACT

In April 2016, Mayor De Blasio signed into law landmark bills that require tracking and oversight of sexual health education by the DOE. DOE will be required to post critical data on sexual education taught in the middle and high schools, which will enable advocates to determine DOE's compliance with the sexual health mandate. More importantly, WCC and other advocates can use this information to ensure that all schools provide the medically accurate, comprehensive and inclusive sexual health education to students and that teachers are adequately trained on sexual education.

In April, 2017, a bill to create a New York City Sexual Health Education Task Force was signed. In May 2017, the New York City Council passed legislation creating a task force to review the state of sexual health education in city schools. This task force has been charged with reviewing current sexual health education curricula and, based on its findings, is expected to issue a report by December 2017. The task force will offer recommendations for improvements in sexual health curricula, implementation of sexual health education, accountability reporting, and the training and professional development of instructors.

Throughout these efforts, WCC collaborated with the [Sexual Education Alliance of New York City](#) (SEANYC), including co-chairing the policy committee, and found support in the then New York City Council Education Committee Chair, Daniel Dromm.