Higher Education

A new federal initiative funds sex ed that works.

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The Obama administration has launched a $110 million sex education grant initiative that takes the guesswork out of which sex-ed programs work best. It only funds programs that provide evidence they reduce teenage pregnancy and the under-lying factors and behaviors associated with it.

“The program provides funds to public and private entities on a competitive basis for proven-effective or otherwise promising teenage pregnancy programs that provide medically accurate, age appropriate and complete information to youths,” says Evelyn Kappeler, acting director of the Office of Adolescent Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

In 2010, $75 million was awarded to 75 grantees to implement 28 evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs that have been shown to be effective through rigorous evaluation. In addition, $35 million was awarded to 40 grantees to test innovative strategies for reducing teen pregnancy.

“The overwhelming majority of teen pregnancies are unplanned,” Kappeler says, “therefore, reducing the incidence of teenage pregnancy can have individual and societal benefits including reducing poverty, improving education outcomes, improving child well-being and reducing the need for abortions.”

While unplanned pregnancy remains a major focus of the projects, many initiatives support comprehensive sex ed, which covers sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. In fact, Kappeler points out, “several of the program models were originally developed to address HIV prevention in youth.”

And of course, anyone who gets pregnant has had unprotected sex. So it’s critical to teach them sex ed and encourage them to get tested for HIV.

Go to hhs.gov/ash/oah/prevention for more information.

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