



**Testimony on 11/27/07 before the  
New York City Council Health and Education Committees  
Re NYC Sex Ed Curriculum**

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Good afternoon. My name is Nancy Biberman, I am the Executive Director of the Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation – WHEDCo.

WHEDCo is a 15-year-old non profit organization in the South Bronx that helps women and their families enter the economic mainstream. I am here today to speak about a remarkable group of young women from WHEDCo's after-school teen program – five of whom are here with me today – who came together two years ago to demand that their school – PS/MS 218 in the South Bronx – adopt a mandatory, comprehensive sex education curriculum. In April 2006, these brave and resourceful students presented their principal with a petition signed by 206 students and community members asking that they be taught about sexuality, pregnancy and contraception, topics that were not taught at their school. The girls went on to launch an educational website and create other materials communicating their message about sex education. If a group of young girls from the Bronx can take on this issue with such dedication and commitment, surely the Department of Education can implement an effective citywide sex education program.

Teen pregnancy rates are higher in the US than in any other industrialized country, due to the lack of mandatory sex education and other factors such as limited access to contraceptives (see Appendix A.) According to the Centers for Disease Control in 2005, only 6.4 percent of students in the Bronx used oral contraceptives at last sex, compared to 8.1 percent in New York City as a whole and percentages as high as 11.5 in San Francisco and other large cities ( see Appendix B.)

**New York City lags behind 20 other US cities which already implement mandatory sex ed in the schools.<sup>1</sup>**

According to the City Health Department's latest information, in 2005, 12.6 percent of teenage girls in the Bronx became pregnant.<sup>2</sup> In the South Bronx the rate of teen pregnancy was even higher -- 15.3 percent.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Guttmacher Institute, State Policies in Brief as of November 1,2007

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Maternal, Infant and Reproductive Health (BMIRH) calculations from the Bureau of Vital Statistics Data. NYCDOHMH

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One of WHEDCo's young activists told a reporter for the New York Post at the time the petition was drawn up, "The only sex education we have is music videos, the Internet and books because our parents don't talk about it with us and we don't get it in school."

The curriculum that the Department of Education unveiled a month ago is an embodiment of these girls' hopes and dreams. We are here today to say that this curriculum must not sit on the shelf: it must become mandatory and be taught by trained teachers in order to effectively reach all high school and middle school students in our city.

We know that teenage pregnancy leads to increased school drop out rates for girls. In a City that is struggling to keep children in schools, young people need to learn the facts of life as surely as they learn their A, B, C's. The National Women's Law Center, in a study issued a few weeks ago, found that pregnancy and parenting responsibilities are a significant risk factor contributing to girls' school drop out rates.<sup>4</sup> In a survey financed by the Gates foundation, one-third of female school drop outs reported that becoming a parent played a major role in their decision to leave school.<sup>5</sup>

Comprehensive sex ed programs help prevent teen parenting. Imagine the effect that a reduction in teen parenting would have on the drop out rate in the Bronx, which at over 50 percent is the highest in New York City. The Dept of Education should be as committed to sex ed as it is to raising test scores, as it strives to improve New York City's schools.

Sex ed is also a key to winning the battle against sexually transmitted disease. Furthermore, each year in the United States, four million teenagers contract sexually transmitted infections which, left undiagnosed/untreated, increase an individual's chances to acquire HIV.

We agree with the November 8<sup>th</sup> editorial in *El Diario* which called for mandatory implementation of the new DOE curriculum. Parents and teens are learning too late the consequences of not having standard, comprehensive sex education in schools. The recommended DOE curriculum is a proven curriculum, which has been shown to increase the use of birth control and condoms while not increasing the rates of sexual activity.

When it comes to sex ed curricula, we know what works already. We don't need "innovative" programs, we don't need to study the issue any further. We need to implement sex education as a necessary foundation to keeping our children safe and ensuring that they graduate from high school.

According to Planned Parenthood, over 85% of New Yorkers - across party lines, religions and demographics - believe that kids should be taught comprehensive sex ed in the schools. And with good reason: Study after study shows that comprehensive sex education programs that include information about abstinence and birth control are effective at helping young people make healthier decisions about sex.

I am proud to be here today with a group of young women who are willing to stand up and ask for sex education in their schools. New York City must listen to these women and take the new curriculum from vision to reality.

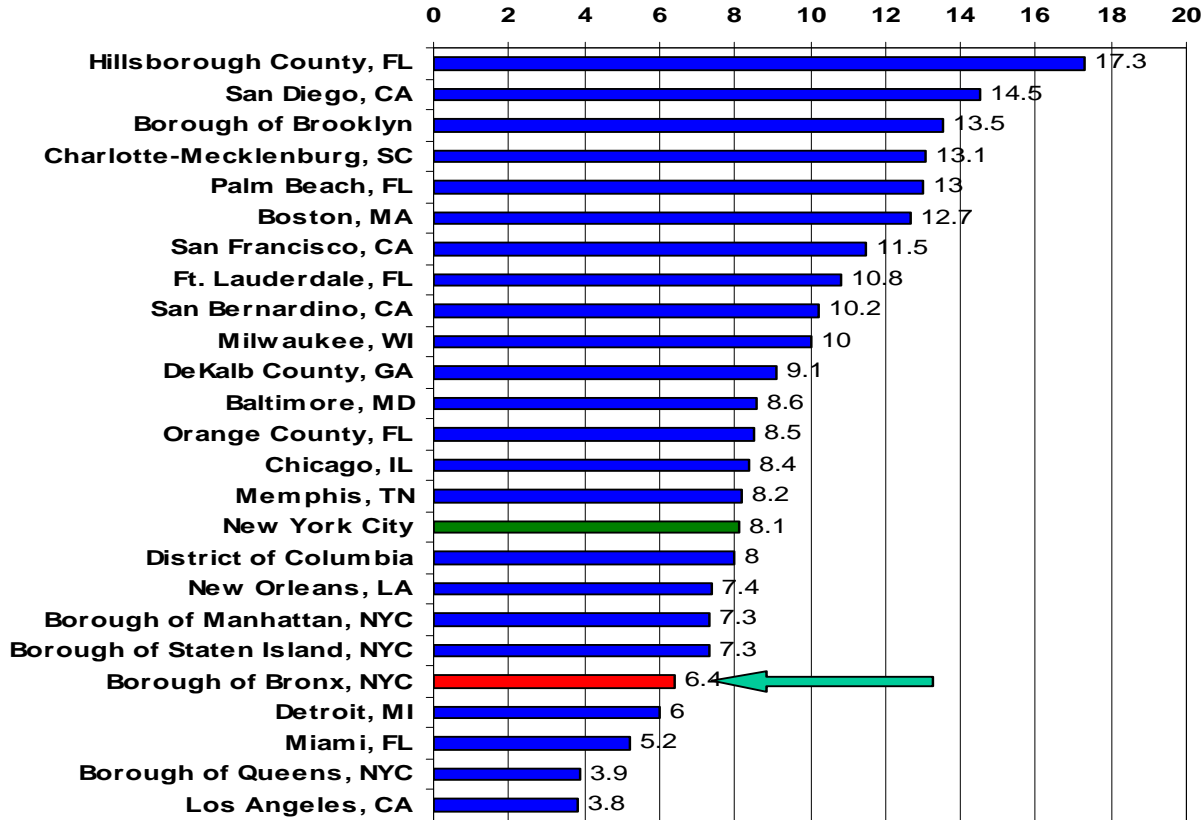
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<sup>4</sup> When Girls Don't Graduate we all Fail. National Women's Law Center. 2007.

<sup>5</sup> When Girls Don't Graduate we all Fail. National Women's Law Center. 2007

# Appendix A

Percent of Students who used Oral Contraceptives At Last Sex, YRBS 2005



Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website: <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/YRBS>

## Appendix B

Teen Pregnancy is More Common in the Bronx, NYC and the United States than in Most Other Industrialized Countries

*Teen Pregnancy, rate per 1000 15-19 year old females, Bronx, NYC, U.S., and Europe*

