



NARAL

Pro-Choice Colorado

October 23, 2009

Jo O'Brien
Assistant Commissioner of Standards and Assessment
Office of Standards and Assessments
Colorado Department of Education
201 East Colfax Ave.
Denver, CO 80203

Submitted via fax and e-mail to 303-866-6680 / Standards_Review_Com@cde.state.co.us

Dear Ms. O'Brien,

We, the undersigned, respectfully submit the following comments and feedback regarding the new health education standards proposed for adoption by the Colorado Board of Education later this year.

We would like to begin our comments by thanking you for your leadership during the comprehensive revision of Colorado's model content standards. NARAL Pro-Choice Colorado appreciates the work carried out by the Department of Education and the content subcommittees to put forth recommendations to promote educational attainment and economic self-sufficiency by, among other things, recognizing the critical role of comprehensive health and wellness in a child's development.

As you know, NARAL Pro-Choice Colorado is a statewide, membership-based organization whose includes community outreach and engagement to ensure public policies empower Colorado's women, girls and their families to access a full spectrum of information and health care services when they need to make responsible decisions to prevent unintended pregnancy, bear healthy children, or access safe, legal abortion. We especially want to recognize the efforts of the Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Standards Subcommittee to incorporate the language and intent of Colorado House Bill 07-1292, *Content Standards for Instruction Regarding Human Sexuality*, into the new health education standards that have been proposed. This is critical to ensuring that all Colorado youth have access to the information and resources they need to make responsible decisions in their intimate relationships throughout their lifetimes.

While the proposed health education standards provide a solid foundation to instill the knowledge and skills in our youth that they will need to make healthy relationship decisions, NARAL Pro-Choice Colorado believes there are opportunities to strengthen these standards with an aim toward providing greater clarity for local school boards to implement Colorado House Bill 07-1292 in their classrooms. Specifically, NARAL Pro-Choice Colorado recommends

revising the health education standards in the following manner.

1. Initiating age-appropriate concepts related to reproductive health, bodily integrity, and relationship development earlier in the educational timeline in a manner that both is consistent with children's cognitive development abilities and reflective of the social, economic, cultural, ethnic, gender, and religious diversity found within Colorado's classrooms.
2. Emphasizing skills development based on human sexuality curricula that promotes evidence-based outcomes tied to delaying onset of sexual activity, reducing the number of sexual partners, and increasing contraceptive use when individuals become sexually active; see, for example, Douglas Kirby's "Emerging Answers 2007: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases" published in 2007 by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.
3. Incorporating critical-analysis elements that correlate individual decisions and community policies about sexual and reproductive health to timely, local issues, such as: (1) comparing a community's teen pregnancy and STI rates with other communities across the state or nation and evaluating how different local, state, or national policies related to sexuality education contribute to the disparities in rates; or (2) evaluating school policy regarding on-site contraceptive counseling, prescription and distribution; screenings for and treatment of STIs; and pregnancy testing; and whether that policy meets students' needs and reflects the diverse values of the greater community.

Again, NARAL Pro-Choice Colorado commends the efforts of the Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Standards Subcommittee and the Colorado Department of Education's Office of Standards and Assessments to prepare these recommendations. This work is critical to ensuring all Colorado youth receive age-appropriate, comprehensive, scientifically and medically accurate, and culturally relevant information about human sexuality and healthy relationships – including the health benefits of contraception – so they have the knowledge and skills to make responsible decisions to protect themselves and their partners from unintended pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted infections.

Sincerely,



Emilie C. Ailts
Executive Director

[Signed Electronically by Nearly 600 NARAL Pro-Choice Colorado Members and Activists Statewide; Names and Cities Removed for Online Version of Letter to Protect Signatories' Privacy]