

Inquiring About Adolescent Sexual Behavior in Utah: A Policy Analysis

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1 Background

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) monitors priority health-risk behaviors among adolescents. The YRBS includes a national school-based survey conducted by the CDC and state, territorial, tribal, and district surveys conducted by state, territorial, and local education and health agencies and tribal governments. Utah does not collect sexual behavior data during its administration of the YRBS; individual states, territories, and tribes may choose to add or omit questions from the national survey as they conduct their own YRBS. For years it has been assumed that parents in Utah will not provide consent for their children, grades 9 through 12, to be asked sexual behavior questions on the Utah YRBS; however, no supporting evidence or data exist to support this assumption. In 2009 a policy analysis was conducted addressing the following research question: How can Utah gain access to sufficient YRBS data to effectively plan, implement and evaluate programs and services that aim to reduce risky sexual behavior and associated health complications among adolescents?

2 Landscape

Including the National Sexual Behavior Questions in the Utah YRBS

In Favor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planned Parenthood Association of Utah Utah AIDS Foundation Voices for Utah Children
Opposed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utah Eagle Forum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An organization for conservative principles
Unknown Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents Utah State Office of Education School Districts Utah Congress of Parents and Teachers (Utah PTA) Student Health and Risk Prevention (SHARP) Committee

3 Criteria

Four options were constructed to influence key decision-makers and produce change. Each option was evaluated according to the five criteria listed below, in order of importance:

- Criteria #1:**
Projected Impact on Decision-makers (Individual School Districts and SHARP)
- Criteria #2:**
Cost
- Criteria #3:**
Minimize Risk of Poor Survey Response
- Criteria #4:**
Within the Utah Department of Health's Immediate Control
- Criteria #5:**
Option will Generate Pivotal Data

5 Recommendation

Gauging public opinion would best accomplish the goal of including sexual behavior questions in the Utah YRBS. In communication with the SHARP Committee and close contacts of school district administrators, a chief concern is that many Utah parents are opposed to including the sexual behavior questions. Our preliminary interviewing, however, leads us to believe that public opinion is actually in favor of including the questions. A representative survey of parents showing approval for including the questions would mitigate fear that public reaction would lead to a poor survey response rate. Conducting the survey would be in the complete control of the Utah Department of Health, and its results (hard data) would have the potential to influence key decision-makers (SHARP Committee Members and individual school districts). Conducting the survey would be more costly than utilizing senior health officials, but proof that the public is behind the YRBS changes would be powerful. The Utah Department of Health, therefore, would be most likely to find success if it demonstrated to key decision-makers that the public is in favor of the proposed YRBS changes.

4 Options

Based on these criteria, the following four options were constructed:

- Option #1:**
Gauge public opinion and present to decision-makers
- Option #2:**
Empower school nurses as advocates
- Option #3:**
Conduct a YRBS pilot survey including sexual behavior questions in a select Utah area
- Option #4:**
Engage public health officials

Table 1—Assessment of Options Measured by Key Criteria

Options	Impact on Decision-Makers*	UDOH's Control*	Minimize Poor Survey Response*	Generate Pivotal Data*	Cost**
<i>Gauge Public Opinion & Present</i>	High	High	High	High	Medium
<i>Empower School Nurses</i>	Medium	Low	High	Medium	High
<i>Conduct a YRBS Pilot Survey</i>	Medium	High	Medium	High	High
<i>Engage Public Health Officials</i>	Medium	High	Low	Low	Low

*the ranking associated with these criteria is referencing the quality of options as associated with the criteria
**the ranking associated with cost represents a reference to estimated actual cost

6 References

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