

## Motion 2

**The government should introduce sex education as a compulsory subject to cultivate proper knowledge and positive values about sex among children**

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## **Introduction**

In recent years, information technology has developed rapidly. Children can easily obtain different kinds of information through different channels, for example, from the mass media and the Internet. Such information can include pornographic materials and information propagating unhealthy ideas about sex. Presently, schools lack a formal and systematic curriculum of sex education. In October 2008, we conducted a questionnaire survey on sex education and successfully interviewed 1,409 persons including 747 secondary school students, 509 primary school students and 153 teachers. According to the findings of the survey, only 23% secondary school students and 21% primary school students find sex education in school practical. Only a quarter of the secondary school students find the sex education they received in school compatible with the needs of students.

In addition, parents are usually conservative about issues relating to sex. As a result, children cannot receive appropriate and comprehensive sex education. Less than half of the surveyed students (607 persons) acquire knowledge about sex mainly from the school and family. In order for children to satisfy their curiosity about sex, they might seek sexual information through other channels, such as pornographic websites or magazines. If they receive unhealthy information or develop inappropriate sexual values, both their physical and mental development could be affected.

Currently, sex education in most schools has not been carried out to achieve the most efficient result. According to Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, education for children should be directed to the development of their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. Hong Kong's education system emphasizes children's intellects. Little emphasis is put on their comprehensive development. Sex education is not only concerned with physiological knowledge; it is also concerned with personal skills and the values of life. It is also very important to inculcate in children the correct attitudes towards sex. An all-round sex education can allow students to learn about the values of life and cultivate good characters, giving them more than just the knowledge they obtain from other subjects such as languages and science.

Sexual problems of children and teenagers have become a worry for society. These problems include indulgence in pornography, premarital sex, unwed pregnancy, casual sex, prostitution, sexual harassment/abuse and other sexual crimes. If schools carry out formal sex education, students can be provided with proper knowledge and values about sex. This will help preventing the above problems. Therefore, we ask the Government to list sex education as a compulsory subject in school.

## **The importance of sex education as a compulsory subject in school**

Nowadays, many countries in the world have listed sex education as a compulsory subject to

effectively reduce sexual problems of children and teenagers. For example, since 1976, Sweden has run a system in which sex education starts as early as kindergarten and continues through to high school. The number of teenage pregnancies and abortions in that country has dropped significantly. Sexually transmitted diseases and the sex crime rate have also decreased.

Education should help students develop their ‘Five Qualities’, namely the moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic. However, Hong Kong’s education system only emphasizes students’ intellectual development, and little attention is paid to the question of moral development. This is in fact against the spirit of education. Sex education in Hong Kong only has a small place in the Moral and Civic Education curriculum. This is to put the cart before the horse. The Hong Kong Government should list sex education as a compulsory subject in school, so that it will be as important as other subjects, and this will help foster outstanding young people for Hong Kong who are well-developed in all five qualities.

Sex education as a compulsory subject in school enables students to acquire correct ideas about sex in a guaranteed time slot, and it provides proper channels for students to ask questions and discuss topics related to sex. Listing sex education as a compulsory subject makes sure that children of this generation will have the opportunity to receive foundational sex education. This can also solve the problems caused by some families in Hong Kong that do not educate their children about sex. In the long run, children who have received foundational sex education can pass their knowledge and correct concepts about sex down to their next generation. In this way, family education can be enhanced.

Compulsory sex education in schools has long term benefits for students and for society at large. Therefore, it is extremely important to list sex education as a compulsory subject.

## **Suggestions**

### Government

#### **Schools should adopt *Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools* as the model for sex education**

In 1997, the Curriculum Development Council prepared the *Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools*. The Guidelines state clearly the definition and purposes of sex education, and pedagogic details such as the basic principles of sex education. It also includes the curricula, major concepts, course themes, details and methods of sex education and assessments for students of different age groups. It is a comprehensive document. Some sexologists said that the Guidelines are still applicable to the current state of our society and the contents are also detailed enough for schools to implement. The Government should adopt the Guidelines as the model of sex education and avoid wasting time on preparing new sex education guidelines.

### **Suggestion to start sex education certificate course**

The *Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools* suggest that appropriate facilities be provided to promote sex education in schools. However, the Government has not carried this out, causing various problems and even obstacles for schools in promoting sex education. For example, there is a shortage of resources and labour. First, teachers should be the ones disseminating knowledge in schools. According to the findings of our survey, around 70% of the teachers who have conducted sex education in class find it difficult to do so. Therefore, our group suggests that all teachers who teach sex education should first attend a sex education certificate course to learn about sex education and teaching techniques in a comprehensive manner. The certificate course should be offered by universities or the Hong Kong Institute of Education in order to facilitate allocation and to guarantee recognition for the course. The course can be taught by sexologists or sex education experts. Their experience in sex education can show that it is an indispensable part in the growth and development of students.

New teachers will also need to pass this course and the course assessment to acquire the qualification to teach sex education so that the quality of sex education can be guaranteed.

Among the 153 surveyed teachers, 90% believe it is important to conduct sex education in school and 76% hold that the government should introduce sex education as a compulsory part of the school curriculum. We can see that the teachers do support conducting sex education in school and as such they will be committed to studying such certificate courses. Assurance of the effectiveness of these certificate courses in turn helps to guarantee the success in implementing compulsory sex education.

### Schools

#### **Schools should hire experts on sex education as Curriculum Consultants**

Many schools and teachers who have never offered formal sex education might feel at a loss as to what to do when sex education is first implemented. Nowadays, most teachers lack a comprehensive knowledge about the curriculum of sex education, and they do not have sufficient experience in offering formal sex education. It might, therefore, not be feasible to provide high-quality sex education for students merely via teachers. According to our survey, respondents who have taught sex education admit that they encounter difficulties in offering the subject as they either do not have the expertise in this area or they feel embarrassed in the course of teaching. Schools could hire experts on sex education as curriculum consultants so that they could join hands with teachers to discuss the problems the teachers are facing and rectify the deficiency of the curriculum. That will provide better and more effective sex education for students.

#### **Schools should create the post of Sex Education Co-ordinators**

In schools, there is currently no such post as 'Sex Education Co-coordinator' who specifically deals with problems concerning sex education. In most cases, sex education is dealt with by guidance master or the panel chairman of civil education. However, these staff members do

not often have an in-depth knowledge about sex education, and sex education is not within the scope of their main job duties. Hence, some of them might be hesitant about taking up the subject and therefore students may not receive comprehensive sex knowledge in school.

By creating the post of Sex Education Co-ordinator, schools can establish sex education as an individual subject which enjoys equal status with other mainstream subjects. By doing so, the status of sex education in the curriculum will be enhanced. Sex Education Co-ordinators can also focus on implementing sex education and do not have to spend time on handling other things. This could help enhancing division of labour when implementing sex education and avoid adding extra work burden on teachers.

### **Schools should adopt a dynamic approach to sex education**

Successful acquisition of knowledge for students is an important goal of teaching. Schools, however, conduct sex education with one-way approaches such as talks and lectures, which helps little to increase the students' learning motivation and efficiency. Schools should adopt a dynamic approach to sex education, such as using games, drama, small group discussions, etc. to raise students' interest in sex education. This also provides more opportunities for students to acquire proper knowledge about sex.

The *Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools* also point out that the methods of teaching are as important as the content of the lessons. Participation of the students is essential in order to encourage them to learn from others, and help them use appropriate language in ways that are understood by others. Opportunities should be provided for students to assess situations, make decisions, make and deal with relationships, and to solve problems and work independently and with greater confidence. The Guidelines also include a list of appropriate teaching methods and approaches. Schools could develop a school-based sex education curriculum by making reference to the Guidelines. For example, schools can encourage active participation of students by utilizing audio-visual aids and computer-aided learning or inviting speakers from outside the school to deliver a talk to the students.

### **Conclusion**

Sex education is a kind of life education in which cooperation between school and family is of paramount importance. The role of the school is to offer children correct information and help them develop the right attitudes towards sex, so that they will not be affected by unhealthy information. Parents, for their part, should act as a role model for their kids. Both the family and the school should complement each other in sex education. Without doubt, many other factors such as the media and the social atmosphere also affect the physical and psychological development of children. However, our proposal focuses mainly on sex education in school. To conclude, by establishing sex education as a compulsory subject, we can ensure that children will acquire proper knowledge and develop positive values about sex. This can help reduce sexual problems encountered by children and adolescents and the possible social costs of these problems.

Chairman, on behalf of the 16 child councilors in my group, I move that the motion ‘The government should introduce sex education as a compulsory subject to cultivate proper knowledge and positive values about sex among children’ be passed.

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