



## Legislation Text

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### Res. No. 1701

Resolution supporting the Department of Education's health education programs and urging the Department of Education to ensure that all middle and high school students have access to an appropriate health education curriculum, and encouraging the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to provide regular status reports on teen pregnancy rates.

By Council Members James, Barron, Brewer, Fidler, Gerson, Gonzalez, Weprin, Vann, White Jr. and Lappin

Whereas, The New York City Department of Education (DOE) provides primary and secondary education to approximately 1.1 million pre-kindergarten to grade 12 students in more than 1,400 schools; and

Whereas, On October 18, 2007, DOE Chancellor Joel Klein announced the creation of a new Office of Fitness and Health Education, to be supported by both the DOE and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH); and

Whereas, The new office is charged with combating epidemics of obesity, diabetes, teen pregnancy and HIV/AIDS, through the integration of both fitness and health education; and

Whereas, Staggering statistics indicate the need for a renewed focus on health education, including the findings of a 2003 joint DOE and DOHMH survey which revealed that 43% of elementary school children were overweight or obese, triple the national average; and

Whereas, Additionally, according to DOHMH, approximately half of the New York City public high school students surveyed responded that they had engaged in sex, nearly 20% reported having 4 or more sex partners and about one-third reported not using condoms, possibly exposing themselves to sexually-transmitted diseases; and

Whereas, According to a 2008 joint DOE and DOHMH presentation, there were 543,000

teenagers in New York City, and of this group there were 24,373 teen pregnancies, of which 15,058 resulted in abortions and 8,595 in live births; and

Whereas, While data from this presentation indicated that teen pregnancy rates have dropped steadily since 1994, the rates in New York City are still higher than the national goal; and

Whereas, Advocates believe that inadequate sex education contributes to high incidence of sexually-transmitted diseases and high rates of pregnancy; and

Whereas, New initiatives from the Office of Fitness and Health Education include *HealthSmart* and *Reducing the Risk*, curricula for middle and high school students; and

Whereas, The *HealthSmart* curriculum, taught to middle and high school students, addresses the top 6 areas of risk behavior identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and offers modules in sexual health, emotional and mental health, HIV, STD and pregnancy prevention, healthy behaviors, nutrition, and physical health; and

Whereas, *Reducing the Risk*, provided to high school students, is an evidence-based program which builds skills and fosters communication between parent and child; and

Whereas, Evaluations of this program have shown that it has contributed to better communication between parent and child about abstinence and contraception, delayed initiation of sexual intercourse and reduced incidence of unprotected sex; and

Whereas, While the *HealthSmart* curriculum and the *Reducing the Risk* program have been widely viewed as favorable, advocates are concerned that not all middle and high school students are receiving health education; and

Whereas, The Chancellor's regulations in this area contribute to this concern, since the regulations require that health education be taught to middle and high school level students by a teacher who holds a certificate to teach health; and

Whereas, According to Inwood House's Teen Choice Program, in 2007 there were fewer than

200 licensed health teachers in approximately 1,200 city middle and high schools, underscoring severe shortages of certified staff to teach the health education curriculum and resulting in countless students not receiving this invaluable instruction; and

Whereas, Recent efforts to ensure that health education is taught in all schools have included making the health education requirement one of the aspects on which a principal is evaluated, thus providing a strong incentive to ensuring that the health curriculum is instructed to all middle and high school students; and

Whereas, Accurate, ongoing tracking of teen pregnancy rates in New York City would help determine the effectiveness of the new health education curriculum; and

Whereas, Proven strategies such as universal instruction of health education and the reporting of pregnancy rates can help the City achieve lower rates of teen pregnancies and sexually-transmitted diseases among youth; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York supports the Department of Education's health education programs and urges the Department of Education to ensure that all middle and high school students have access to an appropriate health education curriculum, and encouraging the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to provide regular status reports on teen pregnancy rates.

JM  
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October 31, 2008