Coalition for Adolescent Sexual Health

c/o CWA, 1015 Fifteenth St., N.W., Ste. 1100
Washington, DC 20005
Website: Whatparentsthink.com

February 13, 2003

Dear member of Congress:

Subject: National poll shows overwhelmingly support for character-based abstinence education

Congress is currently considering welfare reform legislation that includes funding for abstinence education. Also under consideration are annual appropriations bills that fund a variety of approaches to sexuality education and prevention of sexually transmitted disease, teen pregnancy, and HIV/AIDS.

A GAO study estimated that condom-based programs aimed at teen pregnancy prevention received at least $219 million in federal funding in 1998. This figure does not include independent initiatives in federally funded programs such as Title X, Medicaid, and Extension Services of the United States Department of Agriculture.

The President has stated that federal funding should support an unambiguous message to teens that sex is best reserved for marriage. This message is contained in character-based abstinence education programs (also called abstinence-centered education) which have been recommended for $135 million in federal funding in the President's budget requests for Fiscal Years 2003 and 2004.

Despite the President's desire to come close to equitable funding between abstinence-centered programs and condom-based programs, a number of organizations are seeking to eliminate federal support for character-based abstinence education. These programs cite opinion polls that use carefully crafted questions to demonstrate public support for condom promotion.

In January 2003, Zogby International conducted a survey on behalf of the Coalition for Adolescent Sexual Health to determine what parents think about abstinence-centered sex education vs. comprehensive or "abstinence-first then condom" education.

The survey of more than 1,200 parents from across the country found that parents overwhelmingly support abstinence-centered sex education and oppose comprehensive or "abstinence-first" sex education. Parents adamantly object to the type of information contained in the "abstinence-first" curricula that have traditionally been promoted by the CDC. Additional findings are reported in the table below.

	% of parents who approve or strongly approve	% of parents who disapprove or strongly disapprove
Comprehensive or "abstinence-first" sex education guidelines	25.3%	60.5%

Character-based abstinence-centered sex education guidelines	76.1%	14.2%
CDC-promoted sex education curricula	15.1%	73.8%
Misc. aspects of condom-based "safer-sex" education	29.8%	59.4%

By a 4.6 to 1 margin, parents approve or strongly approve abstinence-centered sex education. By a 2.4 to 1 margin, parents disapprove or strongly disapprove of comprehensive or "abstinence-first" sex education.

By a 5.3 to 1 margin, parents disapprove or strongly disapprove of the information contained in "safer-sex" curricula that have been promoted by the CDC.

The message is clear. In terms of sex education, parents want schools to provide their children with information consistent with their values and expectations. Those values and expectations are most closely reflected in programs that promote messages of abstinence from sexual activity until marriage. The polling data strongly suggests that parents want their children to receive a strong message on abstinence. In addition, it demonstrates that an overwhelming proportion of parents disapprove of the messages contained in comprehensive or "abstinence-first" sex education.

The complete results of the Zogby survey are attached. We trust that this information will be helpful to you as you consider legislation and funding for federal programs that affect the lives and futures of teens and families.

Sincerely,

The Coalition for Adolescent Sexual Health