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Educators cite defects of No Child Left Behind

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President Bush's signature education law hurts schools by interfering with local decision making and by wrongly stigmatizing some schools as failures.

That was the message a dozen Colorado education leaders gave Assistant Education Secretary Ray Simon Wednesday.

"You have a system that's de-motivating, not motivating," Jefferson County School Superintendent Cindy Stevenson told Simon.

Simon, a former Arkansas state school official, is on a listening tour in several Western states.

Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002. The measure calls for all children to meet academic standards by 2014.

But many educators dislike the measure.

Many are bitter over a requirement that classroom aides have at least a two-year college degree. That led to the loss of many parents without degrees who have a wealth of knowledge about kids and know how to speak Spanish, said Denver Board of Education member Michelle Moss.

“It was important to have those parents in the building . . . They serve as ambassadors to the community,” Moss said. “We have lost most of them.”

Such rules stifle creativity, said Ken DeLay, the director of the Colorado Association of School Boards.

“Creativity is hard to grow and develop in a heavily regulated environment,” DeLay said.

The law sets dozens of academic targets for schools and school districts that become increasingly difficult each year. And schools that miss even one goal can be stigmatized as failing to make “adequate yearly progress.”

That’s frustrating for educators, said Stevenson, who heads the state’s largest district.

“If you felt you had a chance to be successful, you’d have more motivation to play the game,” she said. Most educators support the goals, she added.

Simon appeared sympathetic to much of what the officials told him, including the plea to stop lumping schools that miss just one goal with those that fail most of their goals.

“You need to be able to concentrate on that core group (of failing schools),” Simon said.

Greeley school board member Robert Stack said No Child Left Behind is losing public support because it is identified with Bush.

“There is a portion of our nation who does not like him and they have associated No Child Left Behind with him,” Stack, a political independent, said after the meeting.

Following the meeting, Simon said parents still support the goal of No Child Left Behind — raising achievement — once it’s explained to them.

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STD numbers add up to "staggering" challenge

By Katy Human
Denver Post

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At Denver's school and community health clinics — the front lines in the battle against sexually transmitted disease among teenagers — health officials say they face limited funding and the challenge of getting through to some teens and adults.

The weapons that health officials rely on to fight a group of illnesses that can silently steal a young woman's fertility or give her deadly cancer are education, surveillance and condoms.

Still, the task is huge, experts said Wednesday, following this week's release of a federal study showing that one in four teenage American girls has a sexually transmitted disease.

"Those numbers were unsurprising to me, but they are staggering," said Kees Rietmeijer, director of Denver Health's STD clinic on Bannock Street.

The study — which focused on just four types of infection — found nearly half of African-American girls had at least one disease, compared with 20 percent among whites and Mexican-Americans.

"There's this sense in early and mid-adolescence that it's not going to happen to me, that somehow I'm special, I'm not at risk

for this," said David Kaplan, chief of adolescent medicine at Children's Hospital in Aurora.

"All kids really need to be educated to protect themselves," Kaplan said.

A task force looking at Denver's school-based health centers last year recommended contraceptives be available to high school students to help reduce the rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease.

The school board received the recommendation last month in a meeting jammed with people protesting the concept of distributing contraception — including condoms — at schools. District staff are reviewing the proposal and no decision has been made.

Vivie Duclos, 17, a senior at the Denver School of Science and Technology, said the new study lends support to getting condoms in Denver schools.

"Look, if it's one in four, if it's that big an issue, we need to do something about it," said Duclos, who sits on a youth advisory board of the state Department of Public Health and the Environment.

"Girls, especially, need a confidential, safe, inexpensive way of getting contraceptives," Duclos said. "Kids are at school every day. It makes sense."

The study by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that among girls aged 14 to 19, 18 percent were infected with human papilloma virus — some strains of which can cause cervical cancer.

Chlamydia affected 4 percent of the girls. The infection can cause pelvic inflammatory disease and scarring.

Trichomoniasis affected 2.5 percent; and genital herpes, 2 percent, the CDC said.

The study did not look at the incidence of syphilis or gonorrhea.

About 50 percent of girls surveyed said they were sexually active.

The figures are probably similar in Denver, said Steve Federico, who directs Denver Health's 14 school-based clinics in Denver Public Schools.

At those clinics, about 1,950 student-visits a year are related to STDs — either for education, testing or treatment, he said.

Health care providers at school clinics can now dispense a vaccine against human papilloma virus — the study's most prevalent STD. They cannot dispense condoms.

Another group that Denver Health's Rietmeijer worries about are teenagers in juvenile detention centers, where Denver Health has begun an STD surveillance program.

Chlamydia rates in juvenile detention centers were four times higher than the national average, Rietmeijer said, which is nearly 18 percent.

"We are severely limited in what we can do. We don't have the resources," he said.

The state health department is also beginning STD educational campaigns in communities in west Denver and the Montbello neighborhood, where STD rates are also high, said Lisa Miller, the department's director of disease control and environmental epidemiology

The new figures speak to the importance of comprehensive education programs, which discuss more than sexual abstinence, Miller said.

"We know abstinence-only is not as effective as we would like it to be," Miller said. "These young women are already sexually active."

Rietmeijer said studies show that real talk helps the most.

"We know if we do good counseling with our patients, we can reduce STD rates," he said.

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