

REALITY★CHECK

Did Modesto City Schools partner with a faith-based organization for their sex ed curriculum? Here's what we know

BY [TAYLOR JOHNSON](#)

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(Debbie Noda/dnoda@modbee.com) - The new and larger home of the Modesto Pregnancy Center on Coffee Rd. (6-24-11)

In our Reality Check stories, Modesto Bee journalists deliver fast facts about the issues that matter to local residents to hold officials and institutions accountable. [Read more.](#) Story idea? Tips@modbee.com.

Modesto City Schools is updating its 8th-grade sexual education curriculum as its relationship with a faith-based organization is being questioned by [the state Attorney General's Office](#).

Earlier this month the school district received a copy of a letter addressed to the [Modesto Pregnancy Center](#) from California Attorney General Rob Bonta questioning the medical accuracy of the content provided by the pregnancy center.

According to their website, the pregnancy center's mission is: "MPC is a Christ-centered ministry dedicated to protecting the unborn, providing for those facing unplanned pregnancies and post abortion trauma, and promoting healthy relationships through a system of support with the love of Jesus Christ."

In February, parents raised concerns with the school district over the sex ed curriculum. And some parents contacted the the California Department of Justice to file a complaint.

While the district says they weren't aware of any parent concerns before February, the district began reviewing other educational partners besides the pregnancy center.

WHAT DOES THE AG'S LETTER SAY?

The Modesto Pregnancy Center [was sent a letter](#) from Attorney General Rob Bonta regarding the center's "Personal Health Now" sexual health program and various claims made on the center's website.

The letter cites California's false advertising law that states that the Office of the Attorney General "...may require any person doing business in California to substantiate any advertising claim, including any claim that purports to be based on factual, objective, or clinical evidence..."

The letter goes on to list six claims made on the pregnancy center's website that need to be substantiated by providing the AG's office with "...supporting business records, memoranda, or other documents should include any and all tests, analyses, research, studies, or other evidence based on the expertise of professionals in the relevant area..."

The listed claims include the pregnancy center's statement that the material they provide "meets California Healthy Youth Act standards."

"The California Healthy Youth Act requires California public schools, including charter schools, to provide comprehensive sexual health education," said a statement from Bonta included in the release. "The education is required at least once in middle school and at least once in high school. All instruction in all grades must be age appropriate, medically accurate and may not promote religious doctrine."

The Modesto Bee reviewed a copy of Modesto Pregnancy Center's sexual education curriculum.

The California Healthy Youth Act states that sex education instruction should include objective information about abortion. The pregnancy center curriculum includes one paragraph that mentions abortion and in its list of Modesto-area health clinics it does not include reproductive health centers that provide abortion services such as [Planned Parenthood](#) and [FPA Women's Health](#).

The Modesto Pregnancy Center said on its website: “We have received the Attorney General’s letter and look forward to addressing documented concerns about our curriculum in conjunction with our trusted legal advisors. We are confident our supplemental curriculum complies with relevant laws.”

HOW WAS THE MODESTO PREGNANCY CENTER INVOLVED WITH MCS?

According to district officials, Modesto City Schools has used Modesto Pregnancy Center’s “Personal Health Now” curriculum for 8th graders since at least the 1990s.

As part of the curriculum, representatives from the pregnancy center would go into 8th-grade classes and give their sex ed presentations.

After they heard concerns from parents in February, the district began to research a new curriculum through the [California Healthy Kid Research Center](#), which maintains and reviews a collection of health education materials for schools that is in accordance with the California Healthy Youth Act.

Modesto Pregnancy Center’s materials is not featured in this collection.

Sharokina Shams, the Chief Communications Officer at Modesto City Schools said the district believes the Modesto Pregnancy Center’s presentations to 8th-grade classes have been informative and compliant with legal requirements but recognizes the need for a new comprehensive curriculum.

“As such, we have proposed a new curriculum—specifically, text that is widely used in school districts—for parent review,” she said. “In fact, those parents who initially expressed concern about the Modesto Pregnancy Center’s curriculum began providing their feedback several months ago.”

Last month, the district told the concerned parents of the updated curriculum, met with them and asked for feedback.

NEW SEX ED CURRICULUM COMING FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL

After deciding between three sex education curricula, the district settled with “[Teen Talk, Middle School: A Comprehensive Sexuality Education Curriculum](#).”

The curriculum was updated last year to meet the new requirements of the California Healthy Youth Act and was reviewed by the [Adolescent Sexual Health Work Group](#), a collaborative organization that is made up of young people and youth-serving providers and caregivers to promote and protect the sexual and reproductive health of youth in the state.

The report on the new curriculum will be presented at the May 13th school board meeting and parents have until May 19 to review and provide feedback before it is submitted for adoption to the board on June 3.

Those that want to submit their feedback online after reviewing the material can send comments to cipd@monet.k12.ca.us.

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