

**BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: COMPARING ABSTINENCE-ONLY AND
COMPREHENSIVE SEX EDUCATION AT A CHRISTIAN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL
IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

by

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Dedication & Acknowledgement

This capstone is dedicated to all who were harmed by purity culture. I hope that the future generation of youth group kids have a better relationship and understanding of sexuality than we did.

I want to acknowledge my wife, Adrienne Heinrichs, my family, and my dog, Ramsey, who was just far enough away that I couldn't pet him all the way through writing this capstone.

Abstract

Christian schools in British Columbia face a complex challenge in providing sexual education that is both developmentally appropriate and aligned with faith-based values. While public health policy promotes comprehensive sexual education, many faith-based institutions have historically preferred abstinence-only approaches or avoided formal sexual education altogether. This capstone project critically examines the two primary models of sexual education: abstinence-only and comprehensive, through the lens of their compatibility with Christian educational goals and student well-being. Drawing on current literature and guided by my personal experience, including my upbringing in the church and current teaching at Kelowna Christian School, this capstone explores theological tensions, pedagogical implications, and practical strategies for program delivery. The aim is to find a way forward that honours spiritual formation while addressing the developmental needs of youth in faith-based settings. The final chapter offers recommendations for implementing a values-based, student-informed sexual education program at Kelowna Christian School and similar schools.

Keywords: sexual education, Christian schools, abstinence-only programs, comprehensive sex education, faith-based education, school counselling, British Columbia, adolescent development, sexual ethics, faith-informed pedagogy

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Sexual Education at Kelowna Christian School

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Sexual education is inherently titillating, pun intended. Add to that the waters of piety many religions swim in, and you have a recipe for discomfort at best, and a schism within religious communities in extreme cases. The school I work at, Kelowna Christian School (KCS), is both a religious and an independent school under the BC Provincial Charter. Therefore, we, as a school, have an obligation to both the faith of the shared student body and community, and to the expectations of the provincial government regarding the education of minors in BC. However, these two obligations sometimes conflict, especially when it comes to sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual education. I have heard countless parents say that their main reason for moving their children from public schools to our Christian school is due to what is being taught in sex education in public schools. However, the alternative we are currently offering at the grade 11 and 12 levels is lacking. Since I began teaching at Kelowna Christian School, I have been concerned that students receive no sex education in their final two years, and I believe that needs to change.

Background Information

KCS currently offers some form of sexual education, but it primarily focuses on relationships and interpersonal interactions. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is not comprehensive enough; it is only a small piece of the puzzle. The primary issue with KCS's approach to sex education is that it concludes in Grade 10. While some students may receive

further sex education if they take Life Sciences 11 and 12, not every student does. Also, that course is primarily focused on animal reproduction rather than on teenagers. In conversations with graduates from previous years, the main complaint I hear is that KCS does not provide enough sexual education, especially regarding consent in relationships.

Another challenge in this area is the intersectional overlap between the faith component and sexual education. KCS is described as a multi-denominational school, meaning we do not adhere to a single belief or interpretation of the Christian faith. This offers both freedom and complexity, as families with different perspectives on faith have varying expectations that we, as a school, must align with. The situation becomes even more complicated when discussing sex, a historically divisive issue in Christianity, from purity movements to detailed guidelines on what is and is not acceptable for Christians to partake in. Even within the same denomination, individual families hold their own beliefs. Our task as a school is to balance these perspectives and aim for a middle ground, teaching accordingly. However, with a topic as contentious and sensitive as this, finding that middle ground becomes increasingly challenging, raising the question of whether it is even possible.

All of this does not even take into account the broader political climate around sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) education, inclusive spaces for queer individuals, and how divided our population is on these issues, with a loud subsection of Christian people being opposed to any education beyond “sex is bad until marriage.”

Statement of the Problem

Therefore, the problem I aim to address in this Capstone is to find an effective sexual education program or approach that balances provincial expectations, the concerns of faith groups, and the actual needs of these students as they prepare to attend university. While there

are many approaches to sexual education around the world, I have identified two primary approaches to sex education in Canada: abstinence-only sex education and comprehensive sex education. So I will analyze and compare these two approaches. Admittedly, as someone who personally values social justice, equity and inclusion, and professionally believes that education should reflect both the realities students face and the compassion central to Christian teaching, I am naturally inclined to support comprehensive sex education. However, I will do my best to set aside my personal biases and beliefs to analyze the research and determine the best approach thoroughly. Currently, my school does not have any program, so even if it is abstinence-only sex education, that is still an improvement on what we currently have.

An anticipated concern is the specificity of the research. I have found studies on faith communities and sexual education. However, most are from a Catholic or Anglican perspective, which differs from the broader evangelical tradition in which KCS currently operates. Additionally, there is extensive international research from countries such as Thailand, Nepal, the United States, and Australia, which differ from Canada in their political and cultural contexts. Therefore, while these studies will be helpful in some areas, a gap will remain between their findings and their relevance to the context of this capstone. I hope to find some Canadian-specific papers, but even then, there may be a bias towards the Ontario education system, as it is the largest in the country.

Purpose of the Capstone

The purpose of this capstone project is to assess the effectiveness of abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education models and determine how each aligns with the values, responsibilities, and educational objectives of Christian secondary schools in British Columbia.

This assessment will help establish an appropriate sex education framework for Kelowna Christian School.

I am approaching this capstone through a theoretical framework of Values-Based Education Theory, as it addresses the intersection of developmental needs, spirituality and evidence-informed curriculum. This inquiry is grounded in a values-based education framework, which recognizes that all educational content and delivery are shaped by ethical, cultural, and ideological values (Lovat, 2020). Within Christian schools, curricular choices around sex education are not neutral decisions but rather reflections of theological convictions about identity, morality, and human relationships. A values-based approach does not reject these commitments; instead, it invites reflection on how they intersect with students' developmental needs and broader public health principles. This framework enables the project to examine how faith-based schools, such as Kelowna Christian School, might deliver sex education that is both curricularly sound, meets provincial/federal guidelines, and ethically consistent with the school's belief systems. This framework also aligns with student-centred approaches that prioritize well-being, relational understanding, and the development of moral agency. In this way, the hope is that the research resists binary assumptions that comprehensive sex education and Christian values are incompatible. Instead, it seeks a third way: an integrative model of sexual education that respects religious identity while still promoting relational health, informed consent, and adolescent well-being.

Research Question or Thesis Statement

How do abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education models align with the educational and spiritual goals of Christian secondary schools in British Columbia?

Positionality Statement

I have a personal interest in the outcome of this capstone because it is something I am passionate about, and its implementation could alter my school environment. As a progressive person, I have a clear expectation for the result even before I begin researching, because I believe that comprehensive sex education is the best method for students. However, I want to stay as objective as possible. Therefore, if the research shows that abstinence-only sexual education is most effective, I will set aside my personal beliefs and accept the evidence as it is presented.

As a fifth-year teacher at KCS, my role is to have authority over my students and the curriculum I teach. This enables me to implement this research in the future, as students are less likely to question it because of my position of influence. Therefore, I have a direct connection to and relationship with this research question. Furthermore, upon completion of this program, I will be stepping into a counselling role at my school, which may be a position where I have discussions with students about topics like teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and consent.

I grew up in the evangelical church during the height of what is called "Purity Culture," and because of that, I have my own resistance to explicitly abstinence-only teaching. I am a direct product of it and have spent years undoing the understandings of sex that were drilled into me as an impressionable teen. My wife and I married at 21 and 20 years old, respectively, and we have had countless conversations about how our teaching in the church affected our understanding of marriage, sex, and how the two were inextricably linked. I am also queer-affirming in the Christian space, which is uncommon in the broader Canadian Christian community, including at my school. Consequently, I am more open to accepting and promoting

teachings that are inclusive of all perspectives, even though this may not reflect the views of the general KCS population.

I am also a straight, white, cisgendered, able-bodied, neurotypical male, coming from an upper-middle-class background, and therefore approach topics like sexual education from a position of power and privilege. I am in my early 30s, am a Canadian citizen from birth, and grew up in the Christian evangelical church; therefore, in many ways, I am the “rule” rather than the “exception” within these classifications in the context of modern Canadian history. The majority of historical scientific studies have been conducted on individuals like me, for the benefit of people like me. As a result, there are subjects I will explore that I have no personal experience with or understanding of, such as being female, queer, transgender, or a racial minority. This will no doubt lead to gaps in my research, knowledge, and experience, and I acknowledge that my work is limited and influenced by my own perspective. Additionally, there may be gaps in the research itself due to this historical bias, so I will strive to find research that supports diverse perspectives.

I have a Russian Mennonite background, an ethnic or ethnoreligious group born out of persecution of protestant believers in the Netherlands by the catholic church. From the 14th century onwards, this group of people was nomadic, travelling around Eastern Europe. Eventually, in the late 1800s and into the mid-1900s, they immigrated to the Americas, from Paraguay and Bolivia, up through Mexico, the United States and Canada. Upon immigrating, Mennonites often established their own settlements away from the already established cities. In some cases, the Canadian government put aside Indigenous reserve land for these Mennonite immigrants. This background unquestionably impacts my values of pacifism and non-violence, care for community, and pursuit of education.

I am writing this capstone on the unceded and traditional territories of the Okanagan/Syilx people, who have a long history of learning, knowledge, and teaching. I live just north of Kelowna, BC, in the centre of the Okanagan Valley, which has a long history of prosperity, often at the expense of local indigenous nations. As a white settler of European descent living on the Syilx land, I am aware of my position of privilege and power.

Significance of the Study

This study highlights a crucial and ongoing gap in discussions about adolescent sexual health education: the conflict between evidence-based practices and faith-based educational values. In British Columbia, where public education policy has moved toward greater inclusivity and comprehensiveness, many Christian schools still rely on abstinence-only approaches or avoid formal sex education altogether. This has concrete effects on student well-being, particularly regarding consent, gender identity, mental health, and health outcomes. By examining how abstinence-only and comprehensive models are implemented or challenged within Christian school settings, I hope to shed light on the ethical, pedagogical, and cultural forces at play in these contexts. It also offers practical recommendations for school counsellors, administrators, and educators who must balance theological commitments with their duty of care to students. The findings are timely and meaningful, especially amid increasing educational polarization around SOGI-inclusive content within Canada's independent school sector. For this inquiry, "Christian schools" refers primarily to independent faith-based schools in British Columbia that self-identify with evangelical or mainline Protestant traditions, and can teach faith-based courses and incorporate religious elements to provincially required courses, provided the curriculum is still being taught, according to the Independent School Act. When sex-ed is done effectively and correctly, it can truly be life-changing and have significant impacts on both

public health and self-image and self-concept (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2019). I hope that this change can be implemented at our school, for the benefit of our students, within a Christian context.

Outline of the Remainder of the Capstone

The remaining sections of this capstone are split into two chapters. Chapter Two reviews current literature on sexual education models, focusing on the comparative outcomes of abstinence-only and comprehensive approaches. It also discusses the specific challenges faced by faith-based schools, including theological tensions, parental resistance, and implementation barriers. Chapter Three provides a summary and analysis of these findings, highlighting the key implications for school counselling practices and curriculum development in Christian schools. The capstone concludes with a set of recommendations designed to promote faith-informed, ethically sound, and pedagogically effective sexual education frameworks within British Columbia's independent school system.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

There is a wealth of existing literature to review for such a topic, and this capstone will benefit from the extensive research that has preceded it. This capstone will need to explore multiple angles to reach a conclusion, and no single capstone will be able to highlight all of them precisely. This review of literature will break down into the existing consensus on sex education in schools, moral frameworks to consider, a comparison of comprehensive vs. abstinence-only sex education, what are the most prominent potential barriers to implementing such a sex education program in a Canadian Christian school, inclusion equity and intersectionality in sex education, and finally, what a balanced model may look like. I will draw heavily on *Sex Education*, a journal with extensive research and a positive team that explores the topic from many different perspectives, actively working to avoid a biased approach, as well as the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care.

Review of Research Literature

Current Model of Sex Education in Canada

Sexual education has a long history within the education system, ranging from a purely biological, scientific approach to one that emphasizes pleasure and self-determination, as well as everything in between. To identify the most effective sexual education strategy for Kelowna Christian School, it is essential first to understand Canada's current state of sexual education, investigate the two most common models (comprehensive & abstinence-only), then examine it from a faith-based perspective, where this may come into conflict with an inclusive educational perspective, and finally, explore where all these different perspectives may coalesce in an effective program.

Informal Learning and the 'Ignored Curriculum'

Students learn about sex in many ways, whether through formal education or not. Suggesting otherwise is overly idealistic. Their friends, families, and even overheard conversations teach them bits and pieces about sex and related topics. This is known as the 'ignored curriculum' of young people sharing information and guidance about sexuality (Garcia & Fields, 2017). This process occurs regardless of formal sex education. While some may view this as an issue to be stamped out, the ignored curriculum is crucial for youth to figure things out together. Young people need to discuss these topics with peers because it provides a safe space separate from adults. However, this is most effective when combined with formal education, because without it, there is no check on the information they are being fed.

Students also self-educate through social media and entertainment. While plenty of reliable information exists online, having access to accurate facts does not guarantee that students will use or understand it, either because they choose not to or because they cannot tell which sources are credible (Garcia & Fields, 2017). Furthermore, some concepts in sexual education are not intuitive and require an expert to explain them in an age-appropriate context and manner. Moreover, whether we like it or not, students turn to movies, TV, magazines, music, YouTube, TikTok, and more for details about sexual pleasure and other topics usually not covered in the school system, both outside and within current sex education programs (Garcia & Fields, 2017). Therefore, it is my argument that we at Kelowna Christian School must take on effective sexual education because we are doing our students a disservice by ignoring it, and in extreme cases, may actually be contributing to harm, such as increased risk of unhealthy relationships, unplanned pregnancies, STIs, internalized shame, or poor boundary setting. That goes against our identity as educators and against my role as a future counsellor.

National Trends and the Promise of School-Based Education

To add to the importance of the gap in KCS's education, Canadian teens see their school's sex education as their primary source of information on sexuality issues, considering high school sex education the most important, valuable, and helpful resource for learning about sex and sexual health (Levin & Hammock, 2020). Within Canada, this is especially true for males (Rotermann & McKay, 2024). This is a gap in our students' knowledge that their peers at the average Canadian school are receiving. Additionally, Canadian schools are committed to providing students with fair access to trained teachers, quality instruction, and extra resources, thereby supporting community well-being, a shared goal among schools and educators worldwide (Garcia & Fields, 2017). This is in addition to the revamped curriculum introduced in 2015, when British Columbia began implementing a province-wide curriculum redesign. This redesign included updated sexual health outcomes across K-12, with an emphasis on healthy relationships (BC Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2016). So, generally speaking, Canadian schools have been recognized by former students as a positive and beneficial place to receive sex education. School-based sex education also offers a more neutral environment than family or faith-based settings, where students may feel more comfortable asking questions and are accustomed to an investigative approach (Garcia & Fields, 2017). In an ideal situation, educators strive to deliver unbiased information and education, unlike parents or faith-based institutions, which may promote specific motives. In this way, if implemented correctly, school-based sex education is vital for a student's growing understanding of sex education.

Limitations and Provincial Inconsistencies

However, the ideal cannot always be achieved, and in this case, that rings true. Sexual education in Canada is delivered at the provincial level, with most provinces mandating it in

some capacity. However, in every province, students (or their parents) have the option to opt out of such education. This applies to private, independent, and faith-based schools as well.

Therefore, any changes implemented at Kelowna Christian School that parents disagree with still allow them to remove their students from specific classes or the entire sex education program.

Additionally, because it is not federally regulated, each province differs in what is taught, when it is taught, and the teaching method. Notably, the three provinces of Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick do not require sex education in grades 10-12 (Sulz et al., 2024).

In the mid-2000s, sex education was incorporated into a career and/or personal planning course in British Columbia, where KCS is situated. Currently, in British Columbia, it is recommended to be taught in physical education (PE) classes (BC Ministry of Education and Child Care, n.d.-b). However, during personal conversations, many physical education teachers chose their specific areas of focus, knowing that sex education might be part of their teaching responsibilities, as this has been a recent change in BC. Additionally, many PE teachers feel uncomfortable teaching sex education to students. In fact, the content of sexuality education classes has often been shaped by the comfort levels and interests of educators (A. Davies et al., 2024). As a result, there is considerable variability in what is covered. Moreover, there is no explicit education or training required to teach these components of Physical Education, often leading to it being treated as just another unit in a PE course. However, many PE teachers do not see it this way and often feel unprepared to teach it, especially across genders (e.g. a male PE teacher educating on female reproductive organs).

Finally, sex education is not considered as vital as numeracy and literacy, with very little time being allotted to sex education across all grades in Canada. As little as 2% to 8% of a

child's total instructional time is given to sex education, which is inadequate and will potentially have little to no impact on the student's health over their educational career (Sulz et al., 2024).

The Role of Educators and School Autonomy

It is essential to acknowledge that, although most schools follow general recommendations, each school may adapt sex education to better meet the needs of its students and school environment. School policies and practices vary and are influenced by and rooted in historical, sociocultural, and political factors. They are also shaped by local school traditions and cultures (Roien et al., 2018). For example, a school in BC might have the majority of its students mainly from a single cultural background (e.g., Chinese, Indian, Portuguese, or Indigenous). It may adjust their sex education classes accordingly to reflect those dominant cultural values. This can be seen as both positive, as it promotes inclusiveness and adaptability, or negative, depending on how students perceive their exclusion. This differentiation can even apply from school to school and teacher to teacher, depending on whether that school places a high or low priority on sex-ed (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2019).

Suppose an admin staff member or a teacher with the sex ed teaching assignment deems it personally not valuable. In that case, they may teach the minimum, skip portions, or forego it altogether. Since there is no oversight (provincially or federally), it is up to the schools themselves to ensure sex education is being taught effectively. Moreover, because schools often have many other pressing matters, even an administrative team with the best intentions will not be aware of whether effective sex ed is being taught at their school. Additionally, schools are at the mercy of those in charge, whether it is a school board, a superintendent, the head of school, or even a particularly influential parent group or church body. In public schools, funding may change, or the provincial body may change expectations based on the election results. In

independent schools, the same kind of problems exist, though on a smaller scale. If funding for the independent school declines due to a drop in enrollment, resources for sex education may be eliminated. If the board of an independent school swings one way or the other politically, what is taught in sex education (or if it is taught at all) may change.

Where KCS Stands, and the Opportunity Ahead

At Kelowna Christian School, we are behind the average school in Canada when it comes to sexual education at grades 11 and 12, simply because we do not have sexual education classes. While any teaching would be an improvement on that, that does not imply that sex education in Canada is overly successful or viewed positively. Recent studies over the past decade have shown that students in Ontario are not satisfied with the overall information they are being given, as it focuses too much on biology and physiology and does not discuss relationships, consent, and partner abuse (Levin & Hammock, 2020). This is consistent with reports from LetsStopAIDS and their survey of 1,090 students, which found that two out of three students reported that they feel their sex ed program did not make them feel confident or ready for sex (LetsStopAIDS, 2023). So, while Canada has generally done better than some countries in having effective sex-ed, we should not be patting ourselves on the back. Therefore, KCS's work is not to meet the standards of the rest of the country, but rather to surpass them in the hope of providing effective sexual education that prepares students for their future.

What Should Be Included in Modern Sex Ed?

One element that needs to be considered when talking about sex education in Canada is that it does not just teach about sex as an act, but about many other things. For example, reports have stated that sex education in Canada *should* cover reproductive organs, gender fluidity, sexual orientation, intercourse and pleasure, STIs, contraception and consent, as these are the

components considered ‘required’ according to Canadian official guidelines (Sex Information & Education Council of Canada, 2019). However, their research found that the results differ from province to province and from school to school, as stated earlier. Furthermore, this list of topics is not considered to be exhaustive by experts in the field, as it omits several key components. It ultimately comes back to our goal as educators: is it to explain sex exclusively, or is it to cover the expansive reality they will face upon graduation? Sex Education should be taught to help students think about and engage with challenges they may encounter, such as consent, sexting, identity, and their rights (Roien et al., 2018). The required list does not encompass all of these. While aspects of this, such as identity and rights, are emphasized within the BC curriculum, it is not taught from a sex perspective (BC Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2015). Therefore, we have students graduating without learning that their sexual orientation and gender identity are part of their identity, that part of their identity is that of a sexual being, that their rights extend to that of consent, and that they have a right to sex as well.

Post-COVID Realities and the Case for Reform

As with all facets of education, sex education was also affected by COVID-19, which is a crucial wrinkle in what effective sex ed looks like in 2025. A study done in 2023 found that Canada witnessed a “historic surge in STIs” in youth following students’ return to school after the lockdown (LetsStopAIDS, 2023). The same organization did the same study a year later and found that condom use dropped from 53% in 2020 to 24% in 2024 among young people (LetsStopAIDS, 2024). Both LetsStopAIDS and Action Canada, two leading Canadian sex education advocacy agencies, have recently been calling for more effective sex education across Canada, stating that Canadian classrooms do not live up to human rights standards and are not following the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada’s (SIECCAN) revised

directives published in 2019 (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2019). Unquestionably, this is a significant issue for the general Canadian population and schools across our country. However, at KCS, we have the unique opportunity to be among the few schools that actually implement SIECCAN's recommendations and meet the UN's human rights standards.

Moral Frameworks to Consider in Sex Education

Discussing sex education in classrooms must recognize the broader political and societal influences shaping the debate. Sex education, especially SOGI education and representations of gender beyond the traditional binary, has been a controversial issue for advocates across the political spectrum. This includes, but is not limited to, transgender students' preferred names and pronouns, the availability of gender-neutral bathrooms in schools, and the types of books and resources in school libraries. Queer identity, gay marriage, and female reproductive rights have faced challenges in the United States over the past decade, and there are concerns that Canada might encounter similar issues soon, with vocal minority voices gaining significant support (Homes, 2023). While some may perceive concerns about inclusivity in education as an overreaction, failing to actively promote inclusive approaches in our education system risks perpetuating discrimination. For a small Christian school such as ours, any shift in sex education policy must be approached with a clear understanding of the broader sociopolitical climate. Without careful planning and awareness, such changes could invite controversy and unintended consequences. Therefore, it is essential to consider not only whether such a program should be implemented, but also how it can be introduced thoughtfully and responsibly in order to mitigate potential backlash. To assume that schools exist in isolation from the broader societal discourse is both unrealistic and professionally unwise.

The Power of Tone and Context in Program Delivery

Additionally, it was found that the type of school (public, private, independent, or Catholic) had a lesser influence on sex education outcomes and was more strongly affected by the program the school was implementing (Levin & Hammock, 2020). Interestingly, the researchers found that not only the program itself, but also the tone in which it is delivered, remains essential. For example, is sex education being taught primarily from a religious, moral, safety, pleasure, or procreation perspective? Students may receive the same program at different schools, but the underlying tone will influence the varying interpretations of the identical program (Levin & Hammock, 2020). Furthermore, these contextual factors can significantly impact how students receive sex education messages. Students at well-resourced schools *and* communities, regardless of the school's categorization, receive better sex education than students who attend a lower socio-economic school or live in a town with limited resources (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2019).

Risks of Outsourcing Sexual Health Education

When schools struggle to implement comprehensive sex education in-house, they may reach out to external organizations to deliver this content. While this strategy can alleviate pressure on staff who may lack formal training or feel personally conflicted about delivering the material, it also carries risks. Some schools invite public health nurses or local health professionals to deliver sexual health education, aiming for medical accuracy and neutrality. However, this can raise questions in faith-based contexts around worldview alignment, relational trust, and spiritual formation. Additionally, as independent schools, we do not have the same agreements in place as public schools do. Educators and administrators may worry that outside presenters lack theological sensitivity or fail to reinforce the school's Christian values around embodiment, relationships, or purpose.

There is also the risk that health professionals default to a purely biomedical or harm-reduction model that excludes discussions of morality, identity, or spiritual discernment, potentially leaving students with fragmented or conflicting messages. Additionally, these medical professionals may not have received formal training in education, and therefore may have the information but not the ability to deliver it effectively.

In other cases, schools partner with community organizations offering “free” or pre-packaged sexual health programs. Some of the most readily available and cost-free providers of sexual health programming offer curricula that mandate anti-choice, homophobic and abstinence-based sex-ed (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2019). Administrators may be unaware that accepting these services could signal endorsement of more extreme ideological views or failing to provide medically accurate information. These external partnerships often prioritize theological orthodoxy over pedagogical rigour, delivering messages that are rhetorically persuasive but lack nuance, accuracy, or inclusivity. Just as with medical professionals, these faith-based organizers are usually not trained educators. The moral weight of outsourcing becomes even greater when considering schools’ ethical obligation to protect all students, particularly those with marginalized or stigmatized identities, from harm. What may begin as a pragmatic decision to manage capacity can ultimately compromise the quality, inclusivity, and credibility of the sex education program as a whole. For schools already navigating conservative cultural norms, this can reinforce problematic content under the guise of accessibility.

Abstinence-Only Approaches and Public Policy Tensions

Our neighbours to the south have also been dealing with the complexity of teaching sex education in all schools, much less faith-based schools, and it will no doubt only become more

fractured with the ongoing dismantling of the Department of Education. In the United States, there have been federally funded and sponsored abstinence-only programs as a response to an increase in STIs in the 15-24 year old age group in the past (Miller, 2007). While these stats are older, it is vital to understand the context within which the current and upcoming lawmakers grew up, because that, in part, shaped their identity and worldview. Because the school's funding is conditional on completing these programs, the individual schools are required to implement them, effectively handcuffing the school's staff. Even if the teachers/nurses believe a comprehensive approach is the most effective, they can not teach it for fear of losing the school's funding. While this is a dated reference and not Canadian, it is a crucial illustrative example of how sex education has been treated in the past in our area of the world. It may no longer be true in practice, but it still has rippling effects on how some people, especially those who grew up at that time, view sex education and its implications. Following George W. Bush's administration, sex education changed toward a more comprehensive approach in the USA. Barack Obama's administration removed all funding for abstinence-based sexual education (Dent & Maloney, 2017). However, Donald Trump's administration has rolled back the progressive, science-based approach, with some states such as North Carolina feeling emboldened to move back toward an abstinence-only approach (Garcia & Fields, 2017). As this capstone is being written, Trump's second administration is threatening states for teaching about transgender people in their sex education programs, stating that these states are "now on notice," or they risk losing millions of dollars of funding (Christensen, 2025). There is indeed an increasing popularity in a return to abstinence-only programs in certain parts of the United States (Barriuso-Ortega et al., 2024).

Similar dynamics are emerging in Canada. In Alberta, socially conservative 'parents' rights' groups have lobbied the government to force schools to ban books for sexually explicit

content, specifically targeting Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (2SLGBTQI+) books (Bowden, 2025). One such book that would be prohibited under this new policy is George Orwell's *1984*, a novel central to many adults' high school experience and foundational to the conversation about censorship. While abstinence-only education may no longer be a central component of most curricula, it still has far-reaching impacts. It continues to shape public attitudes, parental expectations, and our government's leanings. Indeed, the last decade of progress in implementing comprehensive sex-ed across North America is now facing renewed pushback.

In a Canadian medical setting, healthcare professionals may not withhold information from a patient in order to influence their healthcare choices, even if their own personal beliefs go against that recommendation, such as an abortion or Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) (Ewuoso et al., 2021). While teachers are not healthcare professionals, we should hold ourselves to the same standard and be willing to provide all the information they need, regardless of the decision they make based on that information. In fact, educators are called to "demonstrate a broad knowledge base and an understanding of areas they teach," and should "cultivate the values, beliefs and knowledge of Canada's democratic and inclusive society" (BC Teachers' Council, 2019). It is inherently unethical to withhold information or to provide misinformation to our students about their sexual health to influence them to follow a moral code we have decided for them. That is a form of indoctrination. Furthermore, it does not uphold an inclusive society. If we do not teach comprehensive sexual education, we are not demonstrating a broad knowledge of the subject, which goes directly against our code of ethics.

This is especially true when the information being withheld is hindering them from protecting themselves against STIs or unwanted pregnancies, both of which may alter their lives

forever. It is coercive and does not treat students with the acceptance, dignity and respect they deserve, which is our job (BC Teachers' Council, 2019). While some teachers may argue that they are curating content for age appropriateness, at the grade 11 and 12 level, students are approaching adulthood. They should be provided with complete and accurate information to support informed decision-making. As they approach graduation, many students may already possess knowledge acquired through other channels, often beyond what is addressed in formal instruction. We must prepare them for adulthood. Moreover, we are hindering our medical professionals by providing our students with misinformation, which may lead to an increase in cases. Therefore, educators must teach comprehensive sex education because it is our job, our professional duty of care, and the medical field's responsibility to provide accurate information and educate about it. It is under this belief that there is consistent and strong support among medical professionals for comprehensive sexuality education to be taught in schools over abstinence-only (Santelli et al., 2017). Given the overwhelming support from both the medical field and our guiding documents in Canadian education, we at KCS should take this very seriously and implement a robust program, lest we do a disservice to our students.

Ethical Obligations of Educators

Finally, when considering the importance of teaching sex education in schools, many global organizations and treaties see it as a human right. And not just sex education, but comprehensive sex education. This view is supported by United Nations agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNESCO, as well as by treaties such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2019). These organizations and agreements highlight the importance of accurate, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate sex education

in promoting the health and well-being of all children and youth. Recognizing this widespread international consensus strengthens the ethical case for implementing comprehensive sex education, even within faith-based contexts.

Religious Worldviews and Purity Culture Ethics

While I disagree with it, it is paramount to acknowledge the ethics I am coming up against when discussing sexual education through a Christian school lens. Religious frameworks, particularly within Christian education, often frame abstinence-based curricula as protective, rooted in the belief that limiting sexual information fosters moral integrity, preserves spiritual identity, and guards youth from emotional harm. Research suggests religiosity is often associated with delayed sexual initiation and lower sexual risk behaviours, suggesting that selective knowledge withholding is perceived as a proactive safeguard (Gold et al., 2010; Koletić et al., 2021; LeJeune et al., 2013). For many Christian parents and educators, this is viewed as a fundamental goal, as sexual virginity is viewed as a gift to be preserved for one's spouse at marriage, and experiencing any form of sex outside of that is harmful to oneself and one's future spouse (Muskrat et al., 2025). Simultaneously, theological scholarship documents how purity discourses utilize abstinence not only as a behavioural norm but also as an identity-forming moral script that helps maintain community cohesion and boundary maintenance (Navarro-Prado et al., 2023). This is a crucial identity piece, which is to be set apart from this world, as alluded to in Romans 12:2 (BibleGateway.com, 2021). While these intentions are understandable within faith contexts, they must be weighed against ethical requirements for informed well-being.

Given the various ethical perspectives analyzed in this section, it becomes necessary to examine the strengths and limitations of the two dominant curricular frameworks: abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education.

Comprehensive vs Abstinence-Only Approaches

In both the United States and Canada, sex education programs generally fall into two broad categories. However, there is a more nuanced spectrum between the two rather than a strict division. The main options are a comprehensive approach to sex education and an abstinence-only approach. In some circles, comprehensive can also be referred to as abstinence-plus. These methods are usually determined by the school, district, or province/territory where the school is located, with independent, religious, and private schools having slightly more autonomy in decision-making compared to public schools, provided they still follow the required provincial curriculum (Independent School Act, RSBC 1996, c 216, s 4(1)(b), 1996).

Overview of the Two Dominant Approaches

Abstinence-only, as the name implies, teaches that teens should completely abstain from sexual intercourse. Without question, this is an effective method to avoid the transmission of STIs, unwanted teenage pregnancies, and potentially avoid situations of abuse (Santelli et al., 2017). However, abstinence as a behavioural goal is not the same as abstinence-only education programs, and therein lies the issue many educators have with abstinence-only education. Comprehensive sex education, on the other hand, teaches a more robust and wide-ranging approach to sex, which does include, but is not limited to, abstinence. Comprehensive sex education provides a more holistic approach to sex education, presenting many different options to students about how they may or may not engage in sex, and allows students to make decisions for themselves given the information they receive (Boozalis et al., 2020). Proponents of abstinence-only sex education have viewed comprehensive sex education as “sex education that covers safe sexual practices, such as condom use, [and therefore] sends a mixed message to students and promotes sexual activity” (Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011). This is a common argument

and belief against comprehensive sex education, that it encourages sexual risk-taking and promotes promiscuity, though there is no substantial evidence to support it (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2019; Barriuso-Ortega et al., 2024; R & Kumar, 2025).

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Abstinence-Only Programs

Although abstinence-only education aims to promote abstinence as the only viable option for students, research has concluded that abstinence-only programs have “not been found to decrease sexual risk behaviors such as engaging in unprotected sex” (Muskrat et al., 2025). Additionally, “If abstinence education results in teenagers being abstinent, teenage pregnancy and birth rates should be lower in the states that emphasize abstinence more,” (Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011). However, Stanger-Hall & Hall’s research found that that was not the case, and that in states where abstinence was emphasized, teens are statistically more likely to get pregnant (Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011). This is supported by all research in the field (Barriuso-Ortega et al., 2024; Garcia & Fields, 2017; Levin & Hammock, 2020; Santelli et al., 2017). It has also clearly been reported that abstinence-only education has “yielded no statistically significant impact on improving attitudes, intentions, and current sexual behaviors among youth and young adults” (Yu & Lee, 2018). Finally, these programs fail to prevent “sexual risk-taking” and “sustain positive sexual health outcomes,” two goals that should be essential to sex education (Yu & Lee, 2018). Abstinence-only education does not have the desired outcome of abstinence for proponents of this sexual education approach, either for the measurable data points of STIs and teenage pregnancy, or the more abstract measures like attitudes and intentions of youth. Ultimately, abstinence-only sexual education programs do not help adolescents choose sexual abstinence (Barriuso-Ortega et al., 2024).

Although ethics is not always considered when discussing which sexual education program to utilize in a school setting, it should play a significant role in our decision-making process. Abstinence-only programs have been described as inherently coercive and often provide misinformation to convince students of their approach (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2019; Santelli et al., 2017). Furthermore, information is often withheld from students, so students who are in our care are making uninformed decisions and leaving our school with either misinformation or a lack of information regarding their own bodies and how sex works (Santelli et al., 2017). While some may view these claims as sensational, they at least need to be considered by educators. Some students and advocates have even argued that abstinence-only education, if that is all that is provided, is an infringement and suppression of free speech (Ferise, 2023). Therefore, not only has abstinence-only sex education been proven over and over to have no benefits for students, but there is an argument to be made that it is not a net neutral, and is in fact a detrimental approach, and that we are ultimately doing our students a disservice by providing this form of sex education. It would be better if students had no sex education than abstinence-only sex education.

The Strengths of Comprehensive Sex Education

Comprehensive sex education, on the other hand, has been found to provide more information on relationship dynamics and education than abstinence programs (Levin & Hammock, 2020). Their research demonstrated that comprehensive sex education programs are not only more effective but also more holistic, emphasizing the development of the whole person as a sexual being (emotionally, cognitively, socially, and physically) rather than focusing solely on the avoidance of intercourse (Boozalis et al., 2020). Consequently, the most effective sexual education is one that is comprehensive in the traditional sense of the word, in scope, and

delivered with a tone that prioritizes safety, respect, and informed decision-making. Therefore, it was found that the most effective sexual education is a comprehensive sexual education programme, taught with the tone of a safety-based approach.

Vygotsky's Social Constructivism

This is supported by Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism, which suggests that learning is inherently embedded within social contexts and shaped through interactions with others, particularly more knowledgeable peers or adults (Pardjono, 2016). According to Vygotsky, the "zone of proximal development" suggests that learners benefit most when guidance is offered just beyond their current understanding. This makes sex education ideally situated within collaborative and dialogic environments that build on students' lived realities and prior knowledge. When sex education is presented in isolation or with rigid moral messaging (as is often the case in abstinence-only curricula), it not only fails to meet students within their zone of proximal development but also undermines opportunities for meaningful engagement and critical thinking. In this way, social constructivism supports the idea that students must be equipped with comprehensive, contextually relevant knowledge to fully participate in their own sexual development and decision-making. Greslé-Favier takes the argument for comprehensive sex education one step further, arguing that an abstinence-only sex education program is actually an act of discrimination against children and youth by denying them access to essential, evidence-based health information, which other studies also support (Ferise, 2023; 2013; Sex Information & Education Council of Canada, 2019; Young, 2017).

Clarifying Misconceptions About Comprehensive Sex Ed

Sometimes, parents and educators hear "abstinence-only" or "comprehensive" sex ed and assume that the former is pro-abstinence, while the latter is anti-abstinence or a promotion and

encouragement for teens to be sexually active. Both approaches are viewed as promoting a specific type of behaviour. This reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of comprehensive sex education, so much so that some advocates have instead started using the label “abstinence-plus education” to emphasize that abstinence is still being taught, with education on contraceptives and so on (Barriuso-Ortega et al., 2024). It is essential to clarify, though, that while abstinence itself is not harmful and is unquestionably a healthy choice for teens, presenting it as the *only* option is problematic. In fact, all sex education programs, whether they are comprehensive or not, should teach abstinence as a viable approach to being a sexual being. Abstinence *needs* to be taught as an approach because, for many students, that is what they are most comfortable with.

Statistically, teens are at a considerable risk for unintended pregnancies and STIs (Sex Information & Education Council of Canada, 2019), and therefore, abstinence is a beneficial approach to teach because it is the most effective form of birth control. However, all other forms of birth control should also be taught to mitigate unwanted pregnancies and STIs for all students. Providing abstinence-only education is problematic from both scientific and medical ethics viewpoints (Santelli et al., 2017). Although it may seem counterintuitive at face value to many proponents of abstinence-only sex education, that exclusionary approach did nothing to slow the initiation of sexual intercourse in teens, while comprehensive sex-ed (which includes abstinence as one of the comprehensive approaches to sex) consistently and successfully delayed the initiation of sexual intercourse in teens (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2019; Dent & Maloney, 2017; Ferise, 2023; Rotermann & McKay, 2024; Santelli et al., 2017). To be clear, abstinence *should* be taught and encouraged as the most viable approach to avoid teenage pregnancies and STIs. It is a great behavioural strategy. In fact, it has been found that abstinence taught within a comprehensive sex education program is the most effective form of sex education

(Kim et al., 2023; Mark & Wu, 2022; Shepherd et al., 2017; Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011).

Nevertheless, that should be taught alongside information about contraception, and it should always be a choice a student makes, and not a coerced choice.

For example, in some Canadian households, including my own extended family, there remains strong opposition to public school sex ed curricula. One relative, based in Edmonton, opted to homeschool his children out of concern that the curriculum promoted sexual promiscuity, including homosexuality and early sexual activity. This perspective is not unique, as many, especially within the religious right, believe this, and it can be reinforced by their own echo chambers, both in person and online. This is true, despite clear research to the contrary that comprehensive sex education *does not* encourage underage sex, but instead educates students who may be inclined to initiate it.

Can Abstinence-Only Programs Ever Be Effective?

So far, the analysis of these two approaches has been quite one-sided toward comprehensive sex education, based on existing research. However, some limited evidence suggests that abstinence-only messaging can delay sexual debut under certain conditions. For example, Jemmott et al. (2010) found that a single-session abstinence-only intervention delayed sexual initiation among younger adolescents, though this effect was only short-term. In the long run, these adolescents initiated sex at the same rate as their peers who did not receive abstinence-only education. More recent reviews have echoed this, acknowledging that some abstinence-only programs may show modest short-term effects under specific conditions, but these outcomes are rare, difficult to replicate, and often offset by methodological concerns (Levin & Hammock, 2020; Santelli et al., 2017). A more recent study examined the impact of abstinence-only education and concluded that while such programs may influence attitudes about sex in the short

term by delaying the initiation of sex, they lack long-term efficacy and fail to adequately equip students with knowledge about contraception, consent and healthy relationships, and therefore are not an effective primary prevention strategy (Bhochhibhoya et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the delay of sexual initiation is also taught in comprehensive sex education, indicating that it was not abstinence-only that was successful, but the communication of that one component of the program, which both share. Therefore, while abstinence-only education can be effective in specific situations and influential in the short term, the broader literature consistently shows that comprehensive sexual education leads to better outcomes across health, ethical, and developmental areas. When applied to my school and its given context of lacking education at the 11th and 12th grade levels, this research does not support adopting abstinence-only education.

Public Opinion and Political Misalignment

Transitioning to public perception, a survey categorizing American public opinion on which approach to sex education should be taught, the combined abstinence and contraception education model received 82 percent support. In comparison, abstinence-only education received 36 percent support (Bleakley et al., 2006). Abstinence-only sex education also received the highest level of opposition. This survey was also published in 2006, before Obama and the progressive politics that followed. Therefore, it can be assumed that this support of comprehensive and opposition to abstinence-only has at least maintained, if not increased. These results were also explicitly independent of political affiliation or ideology. Therefore, public opinion, despite what some subjective feelings are, generally supports a combination of abstinence plus contraception education programs in schools.

This also shows that in the USA, both the general public and the scientific community are mainly in agreement against the federally mandated abstinence-only programs, which include

requirements for schools to teach that abstinence from sexual activity outside of marriage is the expected standard, sexual activity outside of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects, and that to engage in sexual activity, self-sufficiency must be obtained (House & Moslener, 2023). One such abstinence-only program explicitly teaches that a “mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of human sexual activity” (Santelli et al., 2017). Additionally, the only time contraceptives could be mentioned was concerning their failure rate to emphasize further an abstinence-only approach (Levin & Hammock, 2020). This is problematic given that condoms are the most accessible and short-term solution to mitigating unwanted teenage pregnancies. This shows that the governing bodies are listening to a politically mobilized minority group over both the majority of the citizens and the scientific community, which, as highlighted in an earlier paragraph, could actually lead to psychological issues for students, if not clear miseducation on sex and relationships for students, again leading to false beliefs and actions regarding their own sexual bodies and experiences.

When an American congressional committee investigated and reported on this implemented abstinence-only sexual education, it found that there were significant errors and distortions of public health information in their curricula. They contained either “false, misleading or distorted information about reproductive health, including inaccurate information about contraceptive effectiveness and risks of abortion” (Santelli et al., 2017). This further emphasizes the belief that abstinence-only programs prioritize a specific moral viewpoint over public health and education (Santelli et al., 2017).

A Holistic Vision of Sexuality and Health

Although sex education is often reduced to just sex in the public's perception, and even those teaching and implementing the curriculum tend to emphasize the risks and serious consequences of sex, it is much more than just talking about sex. Sexuality, as a whole, and understanding it within ourselves and others, is an integral component of human nature, and also has many positive mental health consequences (Santelli et al., 2017). This is supported by the World Health Organization, which encourages a biopsychosocial approach to sex education over an approach that only addresses the act and outcomes of biological sex (Sex Information & Education Council of Canada, 2019). This approach recognizes the interaction between the elements of biology, psychology, and sociology as all equal, interacting aspects of the sexual experience. This approach views all people as sexual in nature, whether they are actively engaging in sex or abstaining from it. Sexuality is viewed as a central aspect of being human, and is not always experienced or expressed.

Furthermore, sexual health is a “state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity” (Sex Information & Education Council of Canada, 2019). While this is viewed as the best approach to sex education, very few sexual educators have been provided training or curriculum to support the navigation and teaching of a more holistic approach to sex education from a comprehensive lens (Woodley et al., 2024). Therefore, although we have a consensus on the best approach, there is still considerable work to be done in implementing that approach.

Limitations of Both Models

Clearly, the two approaches to sex education of abstinence-only and comprehensive differ considerably in content; both are currently based on assumptions about students' knowledge, schooling, sexuality, and youth (Garcia & Fields, 2017). They also both approach

sex education from a perspective of ‘pan-optimism,’ believing that their specific method promotes the greatest sociality, happiness, and order (Garcia & Fields, 2017). From this perspective, regardless of which sex education approach is taught, it can be assumed that there is no hostility from educators or administrators; instead, a firm conviction that their approach is correct. However, it can also be assumed that there is an inherent moral superiority when compared to the alternative approach. Moreover, both approaches present themselves as all-knowing and purely fact-based, offering straightforward answers that make sex easier to understand and remember, rather than encouraging inquiry. This can be a positive aspect, as it provides some information that needs to be more fact-based (i.e. how does pregnancy occur) in a straightforward manner. However, it can be limiting for students in other moments where their own curiosity and the ambiguous grey areas they want to explore are not addressed. Still, they feel they cannot because of the teacher’s approach. Finally, if a student feels opposite to the program they are being taught (e.g. a student feeling strongly about abstinence-only in a comprehensive program, or a student feeling interested in all aspects of a comprehensive approach in an abstinence-only program), they may be hesitant to speak up because the approach in which they are being taught implies that a different approach is wrong. In this way, there is no encouragement of an inquiry approach on behalf of the students.

To improve sex education, it has been suggested that it become a space for ‘holding questions’ rather than providing definitive answers (Garcia & Fields, 2017). This approach values vulnerability and curiosity, making it more beneficial to students because it challenges habitual ways of knowing. In Canada, this approach has yet to be implemented on a full-scale level, as students graduating from high school feel that their sexual health education did not address their questions very well (Levin & Hammock, 2020). From this perspective, neither

comprehensive sex education nor abstinence-only sex education entirely creates such an environment. Therefore, both fall short of the ideal in fostering curious yet informed students on their sexual journeys. While comprehensive sex education emerges as the more effective, ethical, and socially responsive approach, it must evolve to create space for inquiry, critical thinking, and student agency.

Barriers to Implementation in Christian Schools

While the research clearly supports comprehensive sex education as the most effective and ethical approach, implementing such programming in Christian schools poses significant challenges. Some barriers are not merely logistical, but often stem from deeply held theological, cultural, and community-based values that shape educational decisions in independent faith-based contexts. Understanding these obstacles is essential if we are to approach implementation with nuance, respect, and strategic care.

Moral Framing of Abstinence and Purity

First, the term “abstinence” carries moral connotations that are especially emphasized within Christian schools. In these cultural settings, “abstinence” is closely associated with terms like “chastity” or “virginity,” framing it not only as a behavioural choice but as a marker of personal worth or moral standing (Santelli et al., 2017). These connections are reinforced through language such as “purity” and “innocence,” which are valued attributes in Christian communities. This draws on the Genesis story, where Adam and Eve are depicted as pure and innocent in Eden, a symbolic “paradise” in the Bible, and it becomes a goal in the Christian faith to emulate that purity (Yu & Lee, 2018).

Such language can be very alienating to teenagers who have had any sexual experience, subtly or explicitly implying that they are damaged, undesirable, or less-than because they are

not “pure.” This is especially troubling in cases of sexual assault, where the loss of sexual “purity” was not a choice. In such contexts, the abstinence framework can inadvertently reinforce shame and silence, particularly harmful given that young people report the highest rates of sexual assault in Canada, twice the national average (Levin & Hammock, 2020). Even students who now choose abstinence may feel excluded by purity-focused messaging, as their experience disqualifies them from being considered “pure.” Suppose purity becomes the sole moral frame for sexual ethics in school settings. In that case, we risk not only marginalizing vulnerable students but also perpetuating a framework that fails to acknowledge the complexity of their experiences and agency. This can have damaging effects long after the teaching ends, as many have expressed late into their 30s that purity culture “levied a harmful and emotional toll on their mental health because of the unfulfilled purity prosperity gospel” (Natarajan et al., 2022).

Tensions Between Adulthood, Innocence, and Agency

There is a significant focus on purity, innocence and being “set apart” in Christian circles, particularly when it comes to young people. Many Christian parents hope to keep their children innocent from the world for as long as possible. Once these children reach high school (and therefore adolescence), they are often pulled between wanting to be treated as emerging adults and their parents wanting them to remain innocent children. This infantilizing becomes especially apparent when it comes to sex education, because the belief is that any education about sex is reserved exclusively for adults. From the parents’ perspective, these teens are not yet adults and therefore do not possess the cognitive ability to argue for their rights or their agency. They are considered by their parents to still be under their moral guardianship and guidance. In broader cultural terms, our society believes that “sex is constructed in opposition to innocence,

and specifically as a ‘corrupter’ of innocence” (A. Davies et al., 2024), reinforcing a binary view in which sexual knowledge only taints moral purity. Davies and colleagues continue, arguing that this lens treats these students “as human becomings rather than as full human beings, and thus in need of protection from the ‘adult’ world,” rather than participation in conversations about their own bodies and relationships (A. Davies et al., 2024). This type of thinking has actively led to change in Canada, as in Ontario, there was parental pushback on changes to the provincial sexual education program, including “incorporated explicit conversations regarding bodily boundaries, consent, digital technologies, gender and sexual identities, mental health and diverse families” (A. Davies et al., 2024).

Despite this moral framing often present in Christian school settings, there remains a high likelihood that students at a Christian school will explore romantic and sexual relationships during high school through dating, hugging, holding hands or emotional intimacy, even if that does not mean engaging in sexual intercourse. Students should not feel like these experiences are sexually explicit in nature, morally suspect, or taint their purity. Instead, they are developmentally appropriate and often form essential aspects of teenage identity and growth. By avoiding it in education, it becomes taboo. It may, therefore, carry a sense of shame or confusion for students, even though it is a natural part of the teenage experience in Canada.

It is important to note that across Canada, and indeed around the world, early sexual experiences are far more than just medical outcomes. Therefore, sexual education in a Christian school, as well as every school, needs to focus on building strong relationships, communication within and outside of romance, and consent of body autonomy, going beyond the biological instruction typically associated with sex ed. Students must recognize themselves as rightfully sexual beings, and that the education on sex education cultivates self-efficacy and awareness

necessary to young people's ability to participate meaningfully in a discourse of sex, sexuality, and sexual desire (Garcia & Fields, 2017). This holds regardless of one's faith tradition or political upbringing, and does not contradict faith-based values. However, instead, it ensures that students are equipped to participate meaningfully in discussions about their sexuality, desires, and relationships. We cannot expect students to grow in their understanding of sexuality if they do not first understand themselves as sexual beings and are willing to exist in that space. Santelli et al. argue that abstinence as a behavioural goal is not the same as abstinence-only education programs, which are primarily concerned with abstinence as a moral issue, which therefore is a distinction that highlights the need for education that is both morally respectful and developmentally informed (Santelli et al., 2017).

Developing a Theology of Sexuality

Another significant barrier lies in the theological frameworks that underscores curriculum choices in many Christian schools. For some educators and decision-makers, sexuality is not seen as a topic open to interpretation or adaptation based on developmental psychology or evolving social norms. Instead, it is regarded as a fixed moral category, governed by biblical authority and denominational doctrine. This theological perspective is rooted in the hegemonic notion of white marital norms (Natarajan et al., 2022), and as such, is incredibly difficult to push back against. This can create tension with comprehensive sex education models, which emphasize autonomy, inclusivity, and evidence-based knowledge. These are all qualities that may be perceived as relativistic or even morally subversive in a conservative faith context. These theo-ethics provide "uniquely forceful meanings to various abstinence practices" (Heyes & Stolberg, 2018). In many Christian communities, especially those aligned with evangelical or traditional Catholic worldviews, teachings about sexuality are tightly linked to notions of sin,

temptation, and spiritual purity (Yu & Lee, 2018). As a result, even the suggestion of providing information about contraception, consent, or diverse sexual orientations can be viewed not merely as controversial but as antithetical to the moral mission of the school. This theological absolutism functions as an immovable barrier, limiting the space for educational nuance or student-centred inquiry. Without first grappling with the foundational values that inform these stances, attempts to implement comprehensive sex education may be perceived as hostile intrusions rather than as constructive or caring interventions.

However, in many Christian faith communities, sex and even physical affection are viewed as weaknesses of the flesh that need to be either resisted or kept in check, rather than essential aspects of our being. While certain biblical texts, such as the Song of Songs, communicate that physicality is not inherently evil and spirituality is not necessarily equated with abstinence, these teachings are often overshadowed by ascetic teachings found elsewhere in the Bible (Yu & Lee, 2018). For example, in the New Testament writings traditionally attributed to Paul, he states that marriage is a means to deal with sexual desire: “to the unmarried...it is good for them to remain unmarried...but if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion” (1 Corinthians 7:8-9) (BibleGateway.com, 2021). Earlier in the passage, Paul, when talking about a married couple who chooses to abstain from sex for a time in order to pray (a type of fasting), states that “come back together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:5). These verses support the belief that sexuality is worldly, and a temptation from Satan, and that it is more desirable to neglect marriage and sex, to abstain entirely. Still, if one cannot, they should get married in order to deal with sexual desires that cannot be repressed (Yu & Lee, 2018). From this perspective, it is aspirational to be sexually pious, as it can become an

indicator of the seriousness of your faith. Marriage, therefore, becomes the concession for those unable to achieve the higher spiritual ideal of celibacy.

Obviously, this perspective can create an incredibly detrimental view of sex and sexuality in Christian communities that teach and ascribe to this approach, where restraint and abstinence are equated with deeper faithfulness. However, when this framework is adopted uncritically within Christian education, it risks cultivating a negative or shame-based view of sexuality. Rather than equipping students to understand sexuality as part of their created identity, it positions sexual desire as a spiritual defect to be subdued; a stance that can be psychologically and theologically damaging for youth seeking to integrate their faith and identity.

The Evangelical Subculture and the Purity Movement

Though separate from sex education inside schools, there was a large trend in the 1990s and 2000s of teens' virginity being a significant topic of focus at camps, church youth groups, conferences, and other faith-based events (House & Moslener, 2023). This was primarily driven by the belief that abstinence leads to a deeper faith. This led to a sex obsessed culture of chastity, including purity balls, virginity clubs, purity rings, and ritualized celibacy pledges (Natarajan et al., 2022). Research has shown that these pledges, much like abstinence-only sex education, do not delay initiation of sexual intercourse, and the failure rates of these pledges are very high, especially when biological outcomes such as STIs are considered (Santelli et al., 2017). In studies on pledge takers, 88% of teens broke their pledges, and pledgers also had more partners in a shorter period of time than their non-pledging peers (Advocates for Youth, 2009). While this trend has died down and there are no current statistics on pledgers, pledge-taking is still extremely popular in more conservative and religious corners of North America. Therefore, this phenomenon of focus on abstinence is clearly not unique to just school sexual education

programs, but is pervasive to the entire subculture of faith-based sex education, both in and out of traditional educational settings.

The Taboo of Pleasure in Faith Contexts

In many faith communities, there can be the perspective that a pleasure-based tone or perspective to sex education is a hedonistic, worldly perspective to teach from, and promotes students to explore sexuality for the sake of pleasure without caution or responsibility. In this approach, sex becomes a selfish means to self-centred pleasure, and therefore has no objective meaning or moral significance (Yu & Lee, 2018). As a result, some Christian schools and families (including those in the KCS community) may be inclined to resist or restrict pleasure-based messaging to limit youth sexuality.

However, research has shown that when sex education is taught from a pleasure-based focus, the teaching can actually prevent sexual violence and promote safety. It was found that pleasure-based sex education helps students recognize and understand their own experiences, enabling them to identify what they do and do not want in a sexual encounter (Levin & Hammock, 2020). In doing so, it gives students ownership and agency over their own sexuality, confidence, and the ability to advocate for themselves when something does not feel right. Furthermore, pleasure-driven sex education programmes were found to deliver the most effective information regarding personal relationships and what constitutes sexual violence (Levin & Hammock, 2020).

Despite these findings, pleasure and desire are still viewed as taboo in many faith traditions, where they are still seen as inherently corrupting or shameful. This can also be applied to broader conservative circles. This discomfort continues to drive resistance against comprehensive sexual education in both the United States and Canada, particularly from more

right-wing political and religious groups who view this teaching as undermining moral or family values.

Gendered Expectations and Harmful Stereotypes

However, even when pleasure is addressed, it is rarely treated equitably. In many Christian and conservative contexts, the distribution of sexual agency and desire is highly gendered, with stark disparities in how young men and women are taught to understand their own bodies, needs, and responsibilities. Research shows that female pleasure is deprioritized, and there is a focus on the teaching of female students “serving their husband’s needs and pleasure more so than partaking in sex equally” (Natarajan et al., 2022). This is not the only area in which students receive gender-specific sex education, especially within the evangelical faith tradition. It is clear, both in research and from personal experience, that young men are characterized as inherently sexual beings without control over their ‘natural urges.’ At the same time, girls are taught to consider everything they do, everything they wear, in order to ‘protect their brothers in Christ’ as gatekeepers of sex, but without any of the urges or sexuality themselves (Natarajan et al., 2022). The onus is placed upon the women.

In several abstinence-only sexual education curricula, reports have found that harmful gender stereotypes are presented as scientific fact, such as girls being weak and dependent on boys, and boys being sexually aggressive and lacking emotional depth (Santelli et al., 2017). These are both talking points often repeated by faith-based communities, despite having no scientific evidence to support them. These falsehoods both communicate an internalized sexism that many students would feel is a scientific confirmation of the beliefs they have heard repeated before. These teachings mirror my personal experience growing up in the evangelical church, as

well as those of my sisters and wife. I was taught pseudoscience, sexism, and that my attraction to my female classmates was their responsibility, not mine.

However, this was not exclusive to churches, youth groups, or even Christian schools. Historically speaking, sex education has avoided a pleasure-focused lens in hopes of mitigating youth sex. Still, in doing so, schools and educators placed women in a position of passive reception, teaching them not to consider pleasure as part of their sexual experience, and that they naturally embody a victim's mindset (Garcia & Fields, 2017).

Remedying this means, at a minimum, teaching a balanced approach that incorporates both male and female perspectives, and perhaps offering targeted instruction by both male and female instructors (Levin & Hammock, 2020). It may as well mean teaching from a feminist perspective, although expressing that to the student and parent population within conservative contexts would most certainly lead to complaints. However, the pros far outweigh the cons, as ensuring a balanced teaching approach that includes a focus on female pleasure and desire directly leads to an improvement in female students' perspective on not only improved sexual health, but also an improved view of their rights, and a view of equality, as is the academic consensus (Garcia & Fields, 2017). Much of the resistance stems from a belief that centring pleasure, particularly female pleasure, removes moral structure entirely, a concept closely tied to both conservative traditions and most Christian households. Therefore, balance is of utmost importance. Additionally, teaching solely for pleasure is not effective, as it is removed from ethical considerations. Hence, pleasure should only be taught if it is linked to mutuality and care for oneself and others (Garcia & Fields, 2017).

Administrative Ambiguity and Curricular Gatekeeping

In Christian school settings, administrative leaders and boards often act as theological gatekeepers, interpreting provincial mandates through denominational or faith-tinged filters. This can lead to vagueness or, in some cases, such as my own school, silence in policy language, making it difficult for educators to know what they are allowed (or expected) to teach. There are many reasons why the administration and/or board may not be transparent, but a common occurrence is that they may “wish to avoid confrontations with imagined angry parents” (Dent & Maloney, 2017), leading to preemptive self-censorship. In other cases, administrators have avoided comprehensive sex-education implementation, specifically about contraceptives, because they believe it would encourage their students to have sex (Boozalis et al., 2020). In Ontario, the provincial laws require school boards to develop, implement and monitor an equity and inclusive education policy that includes religious accommodation guidelines (Young, 2017). However, it is unclear what happens when these two components (equity/inclusion and religious accommodation) come into conflict with one another. The result is that access to high-quality, effective sex education is dependent on your local leadership. When a school board or principal prioritizes religion over science and evidence-based practices, it fails to empower students or uphold their human rights (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2019).

Teacher Discomfort and Lack of Training

Another frequently under-discussed barrier is the role of teacher discomfort or lack of training. Many Christian educators were themselves formed within abstinence-based traditions and may not have the pedagogical tools or theological vocabulary to lead nuanced, inclusive discussions about sex, gender, and identity. Unquestionably, this should be something we value, as it is not only a curricular area but also a potential safety concern. Unfortunately, in Canada, the USA, and Australia, no additional training has been provided for educators to support them

in navigating and teaching these sensitive and complex topics (Garcia & Fields, 2017; Levin & Hammock, 2020; Woodley et al., 2024). Without adequate professional development and institutional support, even well-designed curricula can falter in the classroom. Failing to equip teachers places the burden of navigating these complexities on individual educators, creating wide variation in delivery and leaving students vulnerable to inconsistent or even harmful messaging.

Parental Rights and the Politics of Curriculum Control

There is a widespread belief, particularly pronounced in independent Christian schools, that parents should maintain authority over what is taught in the classroom. This has led to groups banding together and lobbying the government and school boards under the label of “Parent Rights.” This concept of parental rights is “a construct that has picked up political momentum in a North American context that fuels homophobia and transphobia, as well as sex negativity” (A. Davies et al., 2024). This is also true for a small group at KCS. This reaction to the educational curriculum says more about the parents than about the curriculum, as their endorsement or rejection of it “is situated within the context of what they know about sex education, their own experiences with sex education, and their values about sex and sexuality” (Dent & Maloney, 2017).

Furthermore, parents are not educated in curriculum development or implementation. This desire to influence curriculum often stems from their personal schooling experiences. Many parents assume curricular expertise based on their own experiences as former students; however, this experiential familiarity can lead to a false sense of understanding of how curricula are developed and implemented, particularly in sensitive or evolving subjects such as sex education. This is compounded at independent schools, where parents pay tuition for their students to

attend, leading to even greater belief that they should have control over the curriculum. Moreover, this almost always leads to a more conservative, sex-negative type of curriculum. However, Dent & Maloney argue that this is because parents default to an abstinence-focused curriculum because they have not been encouraged to imagine a school-based curriculum that reflects their own normative, sex-positive attitudes outside of school, as parents overwhelmingly believe that school-based instruction should be exclusively informative rather than normative (Dent & Maloney, 2017).

Going hand-in-hand with this push is also the belief that sex education should be the role of the parents or guardians, and not of educators, to explain everything covered in sexual education. Historically and traditionally, this is one of the most recognized methods of sex education. Prior to the implementation of schools, it is assumed that this was the primary way it was communicated. However, this can also be highly challenging for both parents and the student, or for either one. For some student-parent relationships, discussing a topic perceived as extremely intimate may not be a comfortable experience. As noted earlier, this topic may also be considered taboo in some families; therefore, it is likely never to be discussed. Alternatively, the parents may have never been properly educated on sex and sexuality themselves, and so they may pass down misinformation that could be wrong, damaging, and harmful. The likelihood is high that they are not experts in the field; therefore, even if their information was correct at one point, they may be sharing outdated information, especially regarding topics such as contraceptives, HIV, digital safety, consent laws, or gender identity frameworks, and other areas that have undergone drastic shifts in the last thirty years.

Withdrawing from Sex Ed: Legal and Ethical Tensions

In some cases, this appears as parents choosing to remove their children from any sex education that happens at school, as they have deemed it inappropriate. In British Columbia, parents are legally entitled to withdraw their child from sex education if they find the content objectionable on a moral front (BC Ministry of Education and Child Care, n.d.-a). While this is often associated with conservative objections to topics such as gender or pleasure, it can also apply to more progressive parents who feel the curriculum is insufficient or outdated.

However, advocates argue that students should have the right to access sexual health education and information without parental meddling (Sulz et al., 2024). The information communicated in sexual education at school is “so valuable that policymakers must protect children’s interests in receiving them,” and that this content “is predicated on the idea that the relevant package of educational goods will only be generated if the subject is provided in a way that is sufficiently attentive to the plurality of view that exist on matters of sexual ethics” or, put another way, faith-sensitive (Wareham, 2022). This approach is described as faith-sensitive sex education: instruction that honours plural views on sexual ethics while safeguarding students’ rights to evidence-based, comprehensive information. However, this is a difficult sell for some parents, because as religiosity increased in interviewed parents, their support for sex education declined (Boos et al., 2020).

There is a significant emphasis among parents that the conversation should happen both at school *and* at home, and they should support one another. However, in this scenario, it is not easy to agree upon a specific curriculum. Of the parents surveyed, they supported the idea of the *values* of sex and sexuality being taught at home, while the biology and information of sex and sexuality being taught at school (Dent & Maloney, 2017). For example, a value of *why* students should stay abstinent would be taught at home. This is emphasized from Dent & Maloney’s

research in this quote from a parent: “school really degrade what sex is, because they make it this very mechanical thing that is bad” (Dent & Maloney, 2017). However, more often than not, parents and adolescents have discordant views about both the components and delivery of sexual health discussions (Weeks et al., 2016).

Toward Faith-Sensitive and Inclusive Approaches

Rather than portraying sex education as a contest between educators and parents, with two separate, competing perspectives and agendas, it is vital that we, as educators, create a collaborative partnership with parents. In doing so, we will lift them up as part of the process, allowing them to fill the values gap in their own way, consulting, educating and empowering them to reinforce their values. Schools must view parents as essential partners and allies in their children’s sexual health education (Sex Information & Education Council of Canada, 2019). If parents feel that their perspective is valued and that they are part of the process, they are more likely to support and complement what is taught in the classroom. This collaboration also increases the accuracy and openness of sexual health conversations at home. Ultimately, the goal of sex education in schools should not just be about educating the child, but also about increasing both the quantity and quality of parent-child communication about sexuality (Sex Information & Education Council of Canada, 2019).

In addition to theological and moral arguments, fiscal considerations are also leveraged by some conservative communities as part of their resistance to comprehensive sex education. Fiscally speaking, STIs from people aged 15-24, including HIV, cost the United States approximately \$4.2 billion annually, and therefore, more education would bring this cost down (Chesson et al., 2021). This may prove persuasive to fiscally conservative communities resistant to sex education on ideological grounds.

As noted previously in this capstone, sex education programs can and should be modified to fit the school's context. The sociological implications of a micro-community, such as my own, require us to consider its values and norms. This is especially true when considering the broader view of sexuality, sex, gender, bodies, families, and relationships (Roien et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, how do we determine which norms to adopt, especially in a school serving a multi-denominational Christian population? Moreover, how far can we ethically bend to accommodate them? If our sex education is reduced to the notion that "sex happens between a man and a woman for procreation, and that is it," then we have failed, both pedagogically and ethically, by denying students the dignity of complete, truthful, and developmentally appropriate education.

Inclusion, Equity and Intersectionality

As an educator, I firmly believe that students have the right to be taught accurate information that is vital to them. This is why, despite some members of our student body disagreeing, we teach evolution in biology. They must understand it, regardless of whether they agree with it. Sex education should follow a similar approach. It is a human right, and information that is vital to their functioning in society. If they choose to disagree or ignore that information, that is their prerogative. However, withholding the information is not an option. "Access to complete and accurate...sexual health information is a basic human right," and should therefore be taught to the most complete and accurate level and standard of health (Santelli et al., 2017). This should include all students and provide information that may be deemed controversial, allowing them to decide for themselves whether it aligns with their views.

Intersectionality and the Impact of Identity

It would be irresponsible to talk about sexual education and make the assumption that the information lands, or is communicated, the same for every student across the board. In our

present day, we are becoming increasingly aware of how the various ways we define and classify ourselves and others significantly impact how information is perceived. With that in mind, it is vital to consider how sexuality and sexual education intersect with other identities such as ability, age, immigration status, race, gender, and class, among others. As a society, we have made significant progress in recognizing the importance of these different lenses. However, we still have a way to go in understanding, considering, and prioritizing these differences when it comes to sexual education. So, even just introducing the concept of intersectionality regarding sexuality can be a beneficial and life-giving thing for students who feel marginalized. Therefore, educators need to ensure that their sex education program's literature and curriculum are vetted and do not support, either explicitly or implicitly, a sexist, classist, or racist notion of sexuality that contributes to an oppressive understanding (Garcia & Fields, 2017; Moles, 2017; Muskrat et al., 2025; Natarajan et al., 2022). Many advocates push back against the idea of a 'raceless' sex education, and instead advocate for sex education that is aware of the historic and contemporary existence of colonization, racialization and assimilation (Garcia & Fields, 2017). This becomes especially important when considering the disproportionate representation of HIV in young people of colour. Furthermore, it is the educator's responsibility to attend to intersecting identities and to challenge individual student perceptions of racism, sexism, classism, ablism, and heterosexism (Moles, 2017).

Anglo-Centrism and the Global Gap

Not only does Sex Education need to consider intersectionality, but it may also need to reconsider the source of the information it provides. Research has shown that the dominant amount of sexual education programs taught in North America and the United Kingdom address only Anglo-Saxon contexts (Roien et al., 2018). Furthermore, Roien et. al found that the majority

of the *research* into sex education school programs also centers on Anglo-Saxon and English-speaking countries. While this Anglo-centric focus may benefit the scope of this capstone, it raises concerns globally, as sexual education is a human right for all people, not just those in English-speaking nations.

Race, Reconciliation, and Historical Harm

In most North American schools, some students are a racial minority. So race is something that we need to be aware of, particularly because it is not intuitive that race may affect sexual education. For example, Black students describe there being a push of purity culture taught by Black teachers at a public school due to the belief that promiscuity “was damaging to the Black community” (Natarajan et al., 2022). In Canada, we also need to consider the role sex education may play in the process of reconciliation with the Indigenous peoples. Therefore, sexual health educators must be aware of the intergenerational impact of colonialism on the sexual health of indigenous peoples (i.e. forced sterilization, systemic removal of children) (Sex Information & Education Council of Canada, 2019). Historically, Canada promoted eugenic ideologies, which were “articulated through categories of race, gender, disability and class” (A. Davies et al., 2024). Therefore, we need to clearly reject these beliefs, both vocally and in our curricula.

Immigrant Youth and Cultural Dissonance

Along the same lines, immigrant youth in Canadian schools often navigate a unique intersection of cultural dissonance and unfamiliar expectations, particularly when it comes to sex education. This is obviously dependent on the sex education and general context of the country these students are arriving from, perhaps where discussions of sexuality are taboo, forbidden, or never addressed, whether in schools or at home. Ethnocultural factors influence all of this, as

they shape sex, sexuality and behaviours (Sex Information & Education Council of Canada, 2019). For some, school-based sex education may be the very first time they encounter open and direct information about bodies, relationships, consent, or gender identity. While this can be freeing for some, for others it can be disorienting or anxiety-inducing, especially when the curriculum appears to clash with the cultural values or religious beliefs held by their families.

Furthermore, for the average student, each grade builds upon the previous when it comes to sex education, so to be dropped into a higher grade with no context earlier would be incredibly jarring. This distressing experience will be unique for them, as their parents are not experiencing the education, and their eventual children will not have the same experience either, as “second generation Canadians view both religion and sex differently from their immigrant parents” (Young, 2017). They are caught in the in-between, having both the whole experience of a previous culture and the learning of a new culture, not fully belonging to either.

Language barriers may further limit their access to nuanced understandings of the content, and educators must recognize the added vulnerability this can create. Still, this does not negate their right to receive accurate, evidence-based, and inclusive sexual health education. In fact, it reinforces it. For educators, this means creating space for respectful dialogue, allowing students to process at their own pace, and acknowledging that their silence may not signal disengagement, but rather a complex negotiation of competing cultural norms. At the same time, we must not withhold or dilute the information. Every student, regardless of their country of origin or cultural context, deserves the tools to understand their bodies, make informed decisions, and protect their well-being.

Sexually Active Students Deserve Support

Although the broader community at my school would prefer to ignore this concept, it is paramount that we consider that some of our students are, in fact, currently sexually active. Therefore, teaching from an abstinence-only curriculum does them a disservice, as they will learn nothing from such an approach. To choose an abstinence-only program would be ignoring our sexually experienced adolescents, who have “different reproductive health needs who likely require a different approach to abstinence education” (Santelli et al., 2017). These students need information on contraception, STIs, and legal rights regarding healthcare, none of which they would learn in an abstinence-only program.

Neurodivergence and the Hidden Curriculum Gap

Sexual health education often assumes a level of neurotypical processing: abstract reasoning, social inference, and comfort with ambiguity. This does not reflect the reality of all learners, especially neurodivergent students. Those with autism, ADHD, or other cognitive and sensory differences and diagnoses are often left behind, not because they cannot understand the material, but because the material was never designed with their needs in mind. Figurative language, ambiguous phrasing, and euphemistic discussions about consent, relationships, and bodies can make essential information inaccessible. This challenge is worsened when educators and fellow students feel uncomfortable with these topics, resorting to euphemisms, metaphors, symbols, and allusions.

Neurodivergent students may also be more vulnerable to manipulation or abuse because they were never explicitly taught what healthy, safe, and respectful relationships look like. The risk posed by this gap is not just pedagogical but also moral. It wrongly suggests that neurodivergent students are not sexual beings or that they do not need this knowledge. This is

especially true for autistic students, who are societally presumed to be asexual, not having a specific sexual orientation, and do not have any sexual desires (A. W. J. Davies et al., 2022).

Rewriting the Narrative for Disabled Students

In some schools, sexual education is delivered in academic or elective classes with prerequisites, which can exclude students in modified or life-skills programs entirely. From this perspective, educators are gatekeeping sex education. If this is the case, what are we communicating to the rest of the student body that those students with intellectual disabilities are not full citizens worthy of this knowledge, or that students with intellectual disabilities are therefore not sexual beings? Even when content is provided to neurodivergent and disabled students, it is often delivered without consulting them, depriving them of agency in a curriculum meant to empower them. True inclusion involves designing programs *with* neurodivergent students, not just *for* them. It requires acknowledging their potential, affirming their curiosity, and actively challenging the ableist assumptions that continue to determine who is considered “eligible” for sexual knowledge. This potential exclusion “perpetuates the societal stigmatization of ASD and the relegation of children and youth with ASD to the margins of society” (A. W. J. Davies et al., 2022). This approach fails to reflect principles of inclusion, Christian care, or educational effectiveness.

Even when classes are technically accessible, research shows sexual education for “disabled children and youth in K-12 education remains an afterthought and is highly ignored” (A. Davies et al., 2024). It is clear that throughout history, disabled people have been neglected when it comes to education, not just sexual education. However, just changing and modifying the approach to sexual education on behalf of disabled students without their input still dismisses their intelligence. There is work that needs to be done “that centres the epistemic location of

disabled students, children and youth by affirming their location as knowledge holders...who have questions and curiosities that deserve to be engaged with (A. Davies et al., 2024). As educators, we must consider children with disabilities as capable and having their own valid and worthy perspectives to share (A. Davies et al., 2024; Vivet et al., 2025).

We must avoid the social norms that portray and construct disabled students as “unknowing, infantilized, vulnerable and lacking in agency...perpetuat[ing] cycles of marginalization and silencing” (A. Davies et al., 2024). Additionally, there is a history of infantilizing disabled students, which communicates that they are “asexual and either not interested or not worthy of sexual pleasure seeking” (A. Davies et al., 2024). When taken to the extreme, this perspective places their embodiment and sexualities as “abhorrent and undesirable, even forwarding eugenics notions that disabled people should not reproduce” (A. Davies et al., 2024). Currently, there is minimal mention of students with disabilities in any sexuality education curriculum documents across Canada (A. Davies et al., 2024; A. W. J. Davies et al., 2022; Vivet et al., 2025). It is essential to note that the research on the previous two sections, neurodiversity and diversabilities, is limited. Given the limitations of the research, it is evident that “little attention has been paid to the sexual health needs, recommendations, and interventions of young people with disabilities” (Vivet et al., 2025). As a result, researchers often encounter methodological limitations, leading to further underresearching of the field.

Queer Inclusion and the Ethics of SOGI

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Education has been a hot-button topic in Canada for close to a decade now, and British Columbia’s curriculum is amongst the most progressive in the world when it comes to queer inclusion. This is also extended to many comprehensive sexual education programs. However, the abstinence-only models that exist that

schools such as KCS may consider implementing refrain from SOGI inclusion. Abstinence-only programs “have profoundly negative impacts on the well-being of sexual minority youth including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth,” as these programs limit the definition of marriage to heterosexual couples (Santelli et al., 2017). It would be naive to assume that all students at KCS are straight simply because the school is Christian. Statistically, a portion of our student body will identify somewhere along the 2SLGBTQI+ spectrum, whether openly or not.

A truly comprehensive program would ensure these students are acknowledged, included, and protected. Our 2SLGBTQI+ students are important and are often fearful of rejection or discrimination, and so inclusion in our sex education program would be important for them. 2SLGBTQI+ students more often have health problems such as suicide, feelings of isolation and loneliness, HIV infection, substance abuse and violence (Santelli et al., 2017). Abstinence-only programs not only ignore queer issues, but in some cases, actually stigmatize homosexuality as deviant and unnatural behaviours (Santelli et al., 2017). The emotional and psychological costs of exclusion are high, and Christian schools must ask whether their practices truly reflect care, dignity, and equity for all students. Inclusion is not an “extra,” it is essential.

Opt-Out Policies and Curricular Silence

It is also important to note that the curriculum requirements in the province of British Columbia have excellent, *optional* education about different sexual orientations. There is no mandated learning, and, as always, students can be removed if their parents deem it detrimental to their well-being. This approach is explicitly outlined in the BC Curriculum, known as the “Alternative Delivery Policy,” which states that it gives “parents the ability to teach health topics from the Physical and Health Education curriculum at home” (BC Ministry of Education and

Child Care, n.d.-b). The reasoning given is that the curriculum includes “sensitive topics related to reproduction and sexuality that some students and their parents or guardians may feel more comfortable addressing by means other than instruction by a teacher in a regular classroom setting” (BC Ministry of Education and Child Care, n.d.-a). The province provides robust resources such as lesson plans in the form of SOGI 123 (Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity), but again, these are optional and not required, with the implementation of those lesson plans up to the individual teacher (Baxter et al., n.d.). In British Columbia, since a bulk of the more progressive sex education remains in the “suggested curriculum” section (i.e. SOGI, Queer inclusion), some independent schools opt to sidestep these lessons as they can be seen as controversial, as the only required component of SOGI for independent schools in the inclusion of reference of sexual orientation and gender identity in the schools anti-bullying school policy (BC Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2017). As long as this material remains in the “suggested curriculum” section, the decision to include or exclude it often rests not with the best interests of students, but with the perceived controversy it might cause.

Sexual Violence and the Consequences of Silence

Sexual violence and abuse remain underdiscussed, especially in faith-based schools, yet they are essential components of comprehensive sex education. Some parents interviewed for their attitudes about sexual education pointed to their own experiences with sexual abuse as a factor. They believed that a more positive and practical understanding of sex “may have allowed them to identify abuse” (Dent & Maloney, 2017). Unfortunately, sexual violence and abuse continue to be a problem in our society. So, many parents believe that protecting or keeping their children innocent of the knowledge of sex will protect them. However, it has been found that “sexual abuse of children is more likely to thrive where they are kept in ignorance of sexual

matters” (Wareham, 2022). Instead, by having a clear understanding of their bodies and consent, children can articulate when they have unwanted advances.

Grooming, Faith, and Institutional Risk

Child sex abusers often “look for a child who doesn’t know the rules about touching, and who hasn’t learned the scientific names for their body parts” (Menon, 2022). Additionally, while experiencing one instance of sexual abuse is associated with negative outcomes (such as substance abuse, interpersonal issues and mental health issues), revictimization “poses an even greater risk, especially for [PTSD] and depression” (Santelli et al., 2018). Therefore, even in scenarios where sexual abuse or violence occurs, it is still vital to educate in order to protect from further instances.

This is especially important in a religious school setting. While no community is immune to abuse, there are distinct dynamics at play in faith-based environments. Religious grooming often occurs in spaces where there is deep, institutional trust placed in adults by children, parents, and staff. Raine & Kent describe this as abuse occurring in the context of “unquestioned faith” in those who offend, which can delay or obstruct disclosure and reporting (Raine & Kent, 2019).

Additionally, these cases can be systemic in the case of organizations like the Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Convention, meaning it is not just individuals, but the entire system that props up these predators. It does appear to be a systemic issue, as child abuse is the second most frequent cause of insurance loss at religious institutions (Bitner Henry Insurance Group, 2022). Additionally, religious organizations account for 30% of all child sexual abuse losses in insurance claims, second only to schools at 39%. Given that KCS is both a religious organization and a school, we are categorically at a higher risk. Moreover, religious

organizations are more likely to rely on volunteers, leading to a lower barrier for predators to get involved with children and youth.

Unfortunately, when predators are grooming in faith-based contexts, some specific attributes and beliefs that are synonymous with religious groups set it up for sexual abuse to be more pervasive, like “obedience, patriarchy, claims of divine justification, appeals to God and salvational outcomes, the use of familial language, and closed communities” (Raine & Kent, 2019). Finally, Raine & Kent report that even when the abused come forward, faith-based communities are less likely to report on it because members “may have a greater loyalty to the institution than to the abused victim,” especially when the community feels that there are eternal stakes (Raine & Kent, 2019). Loyalty to the institution, concerns about scandal, and theological interpretations that raise the stakes to eternal consequences can lead to silence, disbelief, or minimization of harm. This is not just a legal risk but a moral one as well.

Inclusion Is a Mandate, Not a Concession

Comprehensive, intersectional sex education does not cater to identity politics; it honours the real, lived experiences of students in all their diversity. This is not optional. It is a moral, pedagogical, and human rights imperative. Furthermore, if we, as Christian educators, are committed to serving students in truth and love, we cannot leave anyone out. While these topics of inclusion and equity may be uncomfortable for certain students, parents, and even educators, it is crucial that educators and administrators not only consider what participants *want* to learn, but also what they *need* to learn, since “many people may resist discussing difficult topics, such as sexuality and race, due to discomfort” (Moles, 2017). As educators, we need to be willing to step into the murky, gray areas and muddle through together with our students. It models a

willingness to learn, a desire to equip, and a commitment to inclusion. Inclusion is not a political concession; it is an educational imperative.

Moving Toward a Balanced Model

As faith-based schools navigate the competing demands of theology, public health, and social responsibility, the need for a more balanced approach to sexual education becomes increasingly apparent. The need for such a model has been clear for multiple decades, with calls for such a program that would acknowledge the value of abstinence while also equipping students with critical knowledge about contraception, protection from sexually transmitted infections, and healthy decision-making going back to 2006/7 (Bleakley et al., 2006; Miller, 2007). These calls have been reiterated in more recent studies and reports within Canada as well (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2019; Sex Information & Education Council of Canada, 2019). Within this tension lies an opportunity: to move beyond fear-based messaging or moral gatekeeping and instead deliver sexual education that prioritizes well-being, informed choice, and dignity for all students. Even in Christian school contexts, sexual health instruction should be guided not by dogma, but by a commitment to evidence-based practice and public health outcomes (Santelli et al., 2017). Internationally, researchers have called for a shift away from curricula that focus narrowly on risk and toward models that also emphasize the joy, agency, and relational complexity of human sexuality (Woodley et al., 2024). For independent schools seeking to honour both faith and student flourishing, this balanced model offers a promising way forward.

Values-Based Pedagogy in Faith Contexts

In exploring the debate between abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education, the concept of values education emerged as a particularly fitting model for independent faith-based

schools. This is a holistic approach that focuses explicitly and intentionally on integrating moral, ethical, and spiritual values into teaching and learning as a core part of the educational practice and culture. Research suggests that when educational programs intentionally incorporate values into their core objectives, rather than treating them as secondary or implicit elements, students report higher satisfaction and demonstrate stronger academic engagement (Lovat et al., 2010). This approach was popularized by Terence Lovat, whose 2010 academic article on the subject proved to be foundational. At KCS, we are already implementing this work in other areas of our education, such as service learning and community-focused belonging initiatives, and we measure its impact annually through surveys. It stands to reason, then, that this same intentionality could be extended to our sexual health education programming.

This approach positions sex education not as neutral or value-free, but as a meaningful expression of the values we hold as a school community. It is relational and holistic, with values clearly modelled by teachers, embedded in our curriculum, and supported by our overall community (Lovat et al., 2010). Importantly, this approach does not rely on doctrinal agreement or faith alignment. Instead, it centres shared human values and ethical discernment, which are important in both secular and faith-based settings.

The Role of Shared Values in Curriculum Design

Experts have suggested that all sex education curricula, regardless of the delivery model, ultimately are guided by the following three values: health promotion, individual flourishing, and ethical relationships (Bialystok, 2021). These values are not particularly controversial and would likely be supported by the vast majority of educators, parents, and students. When concerns or objections are raised about particular content taught in sex education, educators can clearly point to the reasoning for that content in one of these values. Even when disagreements persist about

specific topics, the broader underlying values often provide common ground. Bialystok notes, in support of this idea, that “these guiding values, however, can result in different, even incompatible, attitudes toward curriculum,” which is why grounding this work in our own faith-informed values becomes essential (Bialystok, 2021).

Even if we choose a comprehensive sex education curriculum, grounding that sex education in a values-based pedagogical stance will allow for a shared emphasis on mutual respect, consent, stewardship of the body, and relational integrity. These values honour both faith-based teachings and public health goals, rather than being purely biological or moralistic, and therefore offering a much more balanced and holistic approach. Since a values-based approach also leads to improved relationships of care between teachers and students, there will be greater student engagement and trust (Lovat et al., 2010).

By grounding our sex education in our school values, and therefore our faith values, parents and students may be more willing to engage in conversations with openness. Thus, educators will be able to communicate both what is being taught in sex education and *why it matters*. Why specific topics are necessary, why every student deserves access to this learning, and why even content that may feel uncomfortable is still valuable and necessary for their growth and safety. Framing the curriculum in these shared values builds trust, models transparency, and helps shift difficult conversations into deeper discussions about purpose and shared responsibility.

This approach also addresses common parental concerns. We are not endorsing a rigid stance that promotes abstinence only, nor are we taking a purely secular, morally and values-neutral view. Instead, we are teaching students to reflect critically by comparing information about contraception and STIs, for example, with the values of our school and faith community.

We provide the knowledge and the ethical framework to process that knowledge. This dual commitment strengthens both our credibility and our educational outcomes.

A values-based approach also allows us to affirm the dignity and worth of all our students, including immigrants, the 2SLGBTQI+ community, those with neurodiversity, and any others who may feel marginalized. It affirms the worth of all students, and supports their right to learn about healthy relationships, boundaries and self-understanding. One of the most foundational and central shared values of both educators and faith communities is that every human being is made in God's image and therefore is worthy of respect, dignity, and knowledge. Our pedagogy must reflect that belief, not only in what we say, but in what we teach, and to whom.

Finally, this framework aligns with national recommendations for holistic sexual education. While research into a values-based pedagogy in sexual education is limited, extensive research exists on the success of a values-based approach in the broader educational context, as well as numerous studies supporting holistic sexual education. A values-based approach educates the whole person, mind, body, and spirit, and aligns with the calls from the Sex Information & Education Council of Canada for instruction that reflects the realities of students' lives and relationships (Lovat, 2020; Sex Information & Education Council of Canada, 2019). By doing so, we create space for meaningful learning and principled disagreement. The goal, ultimately, is not to eliminate disagreements but rather to ensure that responsible discourse and democratic decision-making are grounded in shared values, thoughtful discernment and mutual care (Bialystok, 2021). In addition to values-based pedagogy, there are practical ways to structure and deliver sex education that support a more balanced and effective model. One such approach is to reconsider the curricular location of sexual health education within the school day.

Cross-disciplinary integration of sexual ethics and identity

Though sex education is currently included in physical education classes in British Columbia, some advocates suggest it be integrated into social studies. This shift would allow for a more comprehensive exploration of the history of sex and sexuality, and their connections to broader issues of gender, politics, and injustice (Garcia & Fields, 2017). This framing may also create a productive emotional distance, encouraging students to engage more critically and comfortably by studying sexuality as part of a historical record rather than as a personal or moral dilemma they must immediately apply to themselves.

Schools often teach sex education in a silo, even within the current parameters of sex education. It is a separate unit, often relocated from the gym to a classroom, and is treated as something completely distinct from physical education or any other course in which it is taught. Moving it to social studies or another course allows for cross-disciplinary integration and significant curricular connections and overlap. Take, for example, teaching sex education as part of Literature Studies, where values such as identity, empathy, healthy relationships, and personal boundaries are already established in the curriculum. This could also be true for art, for psychology, and for the sciences. This could even be integrated into the Christian studies and Bible classes at KCS, focusing on ethics, body theology, and identity. Exploring and integrating it across curricula causes students to consider sex and sexuality as integrated into the very fibre of education, rather than this awkward two-week unit in PE. This approach deepens understanding and de-stigmatizes the content by embedding it in broader discussions.

This curricular approach aligns with British Columbia's broader educational goals, including the development of positive personal and cultural identity, increased social responsibility, and greater empathy through the examination of past and present discrimination

against marginalized groups, including women, queer individuals, and Indigenous peoples (BC Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2015). It also aligns with the First Peoples' Principles of Learning, such as learning embedded in memory, history, and storytelling. For example, the history of Two-Spirit people and survivor narratives of gendered violence offer important insight into identity, belonging, and resilience (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2006). For these reasons, there is a compelling case for considering the integration of sex education into the social studies classroom.

Teacher training, professional development and capacity building

As mentioned earlier in this capstone, teachers are often tasked with sex education, but are not given any additional training, and are left to their own devices to find a curriculum and implement the education without clear direction of provincial mandate or school board expectations. This is even more true for faith-based educators, who must navigate a myriad of ethical considerations. Without sustained training, even well-meaning teachers may default to discomfort, avoidance, or oversimplification of moral issues. Therefore, a balanced model would ensure that educators tasked with teaching sex education are effectively trained in this area, either as a requirement for teaching it or as an expectation alongside their other teaching responsibilities. The issue is that schools do not “typically acknowledge that sex-ed is a special subject that...requires a bit more finesse to teach effectively” (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2019). Support and capacity-building are vital for supporting teachers to teach sex ed, and that starts with practical, effective training.

This would include training on sexual health education from a content perspective (i.e., ensuring educators communicate current standards on the topics, rather than outdated health advice) and training from a pedagogical perspective, as sex education is a more sensitive topic

than some teachers are accustomed to teaching. For example, teachers should be required to receive trauma-informed, bias-awareness, and values-based facilitation training. In doing so, educators will ensure that their lessons “are not unintentionally presented with personal biases (A. W. J. Davies et al., 2022). Finally, in a faith-based school, educators tasked with sex education would need to know how to facilitate theological reflection for the multi-denominational student body, as well as the ability to sit with the discomfort and tensions that arise among students. The research is clear that practical training reduces harm and increases teacher confidence (Sex Information & Education Council of Canada, 2019). It would also be beneficial for those teachers who have sex education as part of their teaching assignment to be expected to attend professional development specific to sexual education delivery.

Trauma-informed practices

This training is essential when considering trauma-informed practices. With a sensitive topic such as sex education, where educators are unaware of their students’ experiences with it, there is the potential to do unintentional harm. People who have experienced sexual violence and trauma often harbour it in their bodies, which then may be “activated when engaging sexuality-related materials” (Moles, 2017). This is an essential component of inclusivity and ensuring the safety and dignity of the students in our care. Educators, especially those in a faith-based environment, need to be aware that students’ awareness and experience with sexual trauma may have been downplayed or brushed away in pursuit of maintaining the innocence of both the student and the various religious institutions that may be involved. Therefore, educators must know how to broach such subjects with care and respect, while remaining direct about the realities of these experiences. This is vital because “sexual health education programs can play an active role in contributing to the reduction of sexual and gender-based violence by helping

people become aware of societal norms, attitudes, and practices that contribute to violence” (Sex Information & Education Council of Canada, 2019).

Student voice, agency and participatory curriculum design

Although it will undoubtedly be challenging, incorporating student voice into curriculum development will foster agency and buy-in from both a sexual education lens and a values-based sense. Student agency is vital in sex education because, without it, students will not embody or practice what is being taught. They must be able to see themselves in the education, and have an active role in their learning. However, “advocates for democratic education have proclaimed for years that student voice and participation is missing,” which is true for education across the board, but is especially true for sex education, and is supported by the research (Marshall & Hernandez, 2013; Moles, 2017; Tavrow et al., 2023).

Student agency is also a central component of values-based pedagogy, as “student agency was advanced by pedagogies that engaged students at intellectual depth and involved them in real-world learning” (Lovat et al., 2010). This is especially vital when we are considering an inclusive approach to sex education, where one of the main recommendations is to include autistic voices, disabled students’ voices, and advocates in the further development of sexuality education curricula (A. Davies et al., 2024; A. W. J. Davies et al., 2022).

By incorporating student voice and agency into our sex education curriculum, we can foster democratic engagement and transparency, and adapt to students’ needs in real time. This is especially vital given the ever-changing digital landscape that inevitably affects how our students engage with sex and sexuality. This could look like surveys, discussions, anonymous written or verbal reflections, student advisory panels, topic suggestions, or co-developing classroom agreements when sex education is being taught. If we want sex education to be effective, we

need our students to have a sense of ownership and respect for it. When students feel ownership over their learning, especially in sensitive topics like sex ed, overall outcomes improve. Faith-based schools often adopt a one-directional model of instruction, but there is evidence that engaging students' voices promotes relevance, trust, and critical reflection (Lovat, 2020).

Partnering With Parents to Strengthen Sex Ed

Another important consideration in building a more balanced model is increasing parental involvement in sex education. While this is a complex and often sensitive endeavour, it holds the potential to bridge gaps between home and school, as well as between personal beliefs and public curriculum. Some have proposed that, rather than teachers being the sole source of sex education for students, schools could take on the role of educating parents, who would then engage in the learning process with their children. While not without logistical hurdles, this approach ensures that parents are equipped with accurate information and tools to support meaningful conversations at home (Garcia & Fields, 2017).

By providing strategies, timelines, and practical language, teachers can empower parents to speak to their children about sexual health in ways that reflect their own values, while still meeting educational standards. In doing so, parents themselves may receive some of the most comprehensive and current sex education they have ever had, further normalizing these conversations within the family (Garcia & Fields, 2017). When this process begins at a young age, it can foster trust and comfort that carry into adolescence.

This emphasis on parent-child collaboration is also supported by the suggested Canadian educational guidelines, which state: "Parents and guardians are essential partners in the sexual health education of their children ... [and] should have access to resources to increase their capacity, knowledge and skills to provide their children with accurate information about

sexuality and sexual health and well-being” (Sex Information & Education Council of Canada, 2019). By building parent capacity alongside student understanding, schools create an ecosystem of support and shared responsibility that furthers the goals of balanced, holistic sex education.

A Holistic Roadmap Forward

Taken together, these components (including a values-based pedagogy, a reconsideration of curricular placement, and deeper parental involvement) create a pragmatic and principled roadmap for faith-based schools. Instead of presenting sexual education as a binary choice between abstinence-only and comprehensive models, this approach provides a contextually grounded and ethically coherent path forward that respects both public health goals and the moral commitments of the school community.

While no single model will perfectly meet the needs of every school community, the evidence clearly indicates that a more balanced approach, grounded in shared values, integrated learning opportunities, and authentic parent engagement, can honour both faith commitments and public health goals. Such an approach does not resolve all tensions, but it provides a principled, adaptable, and attentive path forward for the learners we serve. In doing so, we move beyond polarized debates and begin to develop a sexual health curriculum that is both theologically rooted and responsive to the lived realities of our students.

Summary

While the literature overwhelmingly supports comprehensive sex education as more effective and inclusive than abstinence-only models, there is limited guidance for educators navigating faith-based contexts, particularly within Canadian Christian schools. This is especially true when it comes to reconciling evidence-based practices with theological commitments. Abstinence-only approaches are widely discredited in public health research for

their ineffectiveness and ethical concerns, yet they remain prevalent due to theological, political, and institutional pressures. However, framing the debate as a binary between abstinence and comprehensive models obscures more productive possibilities. A more balanced and contextually grounded model, rooted in shared values, supported by curricular flexibility, and inclusive of parents, offers a way forward that respects both student well-being and institutional identity.

This chapter has examined the limitations of polarized approaches, highlighted the particular tensions faced by Christian educators, and introduced a values-based pedagogical framework as a promising alternative. However, a gap remains in both the literature and practice regarding practical, site-specific guidance for educators managing these tensions in real settings. Chapter 3 addresses this need by offering concrete recommendations for schools like KCS. These recommendations aim not only to achieve curricular outcomes and public health objectives but also to align with the spiritual and moral commitments central to faith-based education.

Chapter 3: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions

Summary

My goal throughout this capstone project was to identify and determine the most effective sex education program for my own school, Kelowna Christian School, as well as for Christian independent schools across British Columbia. However, to be both educationally sound and contextually appropriate, this program needs to strike a careful balance between evidence-based public health education and respect for a given independent school's unique and firmly held values.

Although I had a bias towards comprehensive sex education rather than abstinence-only sex education coming into this project, I looked for articles written from both perspectives. I approached the research with a willingness to explore abstinence-only models and adopt that approach if the research supported it. While abstinence-only sex education would arguably be better than having no sex education at all, my research has shown that comprehensive sex education is the most effective form of sex education and has actually been shown to lead to long-term sexual health outcomes and to foster informed, ethical decision-making among youth.

Ultimately, the evidence overwhelmingly supports a comprehensive sex education model when compared to abstinence-only, but that does not mean it is perfect, as there are still those who say it has failings, both in the content and delivery method. This is also supported by both surveys of graduating students from Canadian high schools and by personal conversations with them. At a faith-based school, I have found that teaching comprehensive sex education through a values-based pedagogical lens is the most effective approach, as it grounds sex education in the shared values of the faith-based school and both provides students with a more holistic view of sex education and a greater sense of ownership over their education.

Recommendations

Establishing Clear Guiding Values

Kelowna Christian School's mission is "to *educate* [emphasis added], *equip* [emphasis added], and inspire our school community to become disciples of Jesus who love and serve God and others" (Kelowna Christian School, n.d.). KCS is not educating, nor equipping our students for life outside of KCS, if we fail them in sex education. Having no sex education in grades 11 & 12, where they are preparing for life outside of a faith-based, independent school, is negligent on our part as educators, especially when the research shows that it leads to higher rates of STIs and teen pregnancy. We are neither educating students about sex nor equipping them to understand how sexuality shapes human experience. One former student who had a baby in grade 10 even explicitly stated that she became pregnant because she was not educated on contraceptives at our school. We must do better.

The rest of the KCS mission statement asserts that the education and equipping of students are intended to enable them to become disciples of Jesus who love and serve God and others. To exclude sex and sexuality from their education communicates, whether explicitly or implicitly, to our students that we are not sexual beings, and that sex is outside the scope of being a Christian. Furthermore, the final line, "serve God and others," emphasizes the importance of being part of a community. Leaving sex education out of our graduates' curriculum fails to model what respectful and ethical relationships look like, both inside and outside of a sexual relationship. Therefore, our students are graduating from KCS without a complete understanding of what it means to serve others.

The stated vision of KCS is to "seek to be a Christ-like community passionately *transforming* [emphasis added] our world" (Kelowna Christian School, n.d.). Again, failing to

teach effective sex ed leaves our students with potentially no guidance around their sexual relationships, meaning many students will turn to the online world (such as pornography), their friends, or other adults who are not educators for guidance. In doing so, we are not transforming our world through our students having a misguided understanding of sex education, and may even lead to negative understandings and portrayals, like that of distorted understandings of sexual relationships, the generation of false expectations, and normalized coercive and aggressive sexual behaviours (Ballester et al., 2022). Ensuring that the comprehensive sex education curriculum our school chooses to use includes media literacy, including how digital content shapes understandings of sex, bodies, relationships, and consent, is essential in a world of growing entanglement with the digital world.

KCS also has seven core values that are part of our graduate profile, which are statements we hope our graduates can say as they walk across the stage at the end of their high school careers. The seven are: Prayer, Biblical Foundation, Integrity, Excellence, Perseverance, Community and Creativity. I want to focus on both community and integrity. I, as a KCS educator, cannot say that I feel a sense of integrity when I know my grads do not have effective sex education. Acting with integrity “means a willingness to make the right call even when no one sees it or whether it comes with a personal cost” (Kelowna Christian School, n.d.). This is how I feel about sex education at KCS: that it is the right call, even if many others disagree with me. Community talks about how we treat our neighbours by “showing care, shaping culture, and valuing others...through my words and actions” (Kelowna Christian School, n.d.). To value the care of the community is to understand how to be a sexual being in that community, which includes respecting each other’s bodies, consent, and the words we use when talking to each

other. A student who understands the difference between coercion and consent is better equipped to honour the dignity of others, and that is something we should strive for all our grads to know.

As a faith-based school, we have values aligned with the faith, but these values also align with the broad, universal beliefs regarding sex education; that we want to promote health (living a full life), individual flourishing (being made in God's image), and ethical relationships (treat others how you want to be treated). These should not be controversial beliefs, even within the uneasy subject of sex education. By framing our sex education according to these values, we can build trust and transparency with our parents and students, via handbooks and parent info sessions. These values give a clear intention and direction for our sex education.

Adopting a Values-Based Pedagogical Model

This is why Lovat's pedagogical model of values-based education is integral to sex education at KCS. This lens shifts the focus from content delivery to ethical discernment, even when using the same comprehensive sex education curricula as all other schools. We shift our perspective and, in doing so, can ground the entire education in faith-based values. This enables us to align everything taught in sex education with our mission, vision, and core values. Furthermore, by viewing and organizing all sex education through our values, from the way the teacher speaks about it, to the curriculum itself, to the types of class discussions we have, we communicate to all our students that these values are important to our school community, and are not just fluff on the website, or things we say every once in a while. They guide all our decisions and are deeply embedded in our educational model. Because we uphold these values, we are modelling for our students that they should uphold them as well. It is more than just lip service; it is clear, explicit action.

This approach also allows students more ownership over their sex education. In a multi-denominational school, this approach enables more in-depth discussions of differing perspectives across various faith traditions, while still grounding them in the shared values of our school. In this way, it is less about informing them of what is right and wrong and more about normalizing a conversation where we respectfully consider the different perspectives people in our community may have, while still valuing our shared values. For example, this model would encourage a discussion in which students debate differing Christian views on contraception while affirming shared values, such as respect and stewardship, and would allow students to see the issue from a different perspective without communicating that there is a “right” or “wrong” way to view the topic.

This model encourages students’ voice and choice in their own education and emboldens students to ask questions. They feel as though their perspective is important, rather than just being talked at. This encourages student engagement, and Lovat’s research into values education clearly supports that idea (Lovat, 2020). Student voice is also a central part of faith formation, which involves taking over one’s faith from the adults in their life and making it their own. For KCS educators, allowing students to wrestle with tough questions and guiding them in developing moral discernment is a form of discipleship that encourages critical thinking about one’s own beliefs and values rather than blindly accepting what is taught from the pulpit or the front of the classroom.

This values-based approach also allows for the use of more inclusive language, as it can be grounded in the idea that, as Genesis says, all are created in the image of God (BibleGateway.com, 2021). In this approach, we can discuss all races, genders, diversabilities, and even more controversial topics such as 2SLGBTQI+ perspectives. Because students

understand the lens through which we view and discuss these issues, even disagreements about the topics can be expressed in a kind and respectful way. If we begin all conversations with the concept that all humans have inherent worth because they are made in the image of God, it may remove partisan perspectives and a divided room along moral lines.

By grounding sex ed in our values as well, we can avoid concerns about cultural trends being misaligned with faith traditions because that would be accusing our shared values of such things. For example, holistic wellbeing can be interpreted as a more new-age perspective. However, when we ground holistic being in a verse such as 1 Thessalonians 5:23, which speaks about being wholly sanctified in spirit, soul and body, we avoid these arguments, as our values clearly support it. This holistic lens is fully supported by the values pedagogical lens, recommendations by SIECCAN, the BC curricular competencies, and is supported biblically.

Finally, by communicating through a values-based approach, we ensure that students, the school board, parents in our community, and the broader faith community understand that this is not moral relativism, but rather principled, shared values at work. The hope is that basing sex education in this approach will assuage many from questioning our motivation, and for those who still question, it will provide us with a clear foundation to argue from. We are not abandoning our calling; we are, in fact, taking it seriously by taking responsibility for the whole formation of our students.

Deliver Comprehensive Sex Education Content

With that lens in place and based on the conclusions drawn in this capstone, it is recommended that independent schools in BC (such as KCS) adopt a sex education program that is as comprehensive as possible. Educators will then teach that comprehensive program through a values-based lens, aligning it with the school's beliefs (e.g., faith-based, culturally based,

community-based), while still adhering to a comprehensive education of the content. As articulated throughout this capstone, abstinence-only sex education is not successful in educating students on sex education, nor is it successful in maintaining student abstinence.

Therefore, it is recommended that a curriculum be adopted that is medically accurate, age-appropriate, and relationally grounded. This education must include the topics of consent, physical anatomy, STI prevention, contraception, and holistic, healthy relationships. Again, this all is taught from a values-based lens, firmly grounding the education in understanding rather than encouragement. It is paramount that questions are encouraged and that students are given the opportunity to explore their own beliefs in peer conversations.

It is important to note that just choosing a comprehensive sex education curriculum is not enough, though, as the majority of comprehensive sex education is still not meeting the standard. Therefore, it is recommended that independent, faith-based schools such as KCS ensure that their comprehensive sex education, taught through a values-based lens, meets the expectations set out by SIECCAN as well as the United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization expectations and the UN Rights to Education, which “emphasize the inclusion of sexuality education for children” (A. Davies et al., 2024). Excellence is what schools should strive for, and if we want to “transform the world’s” view of sexuality, we should be ascribing to the highest quality of sex education.

The myth that comprehensive sex education “encourages” sexual activity is harmful and wrong. There have been claims that comprehensive sex education teaches young children about sexual intercourse at an extremely young age, ruining their innocence. However, sex and intercourse are not taught to young children and are not broached until Grade 7. Additionally, when it is taught, students are taught about the importance of delaying sexual activity (Maitland,

2023). Being educated on something does not therefore encourage it. When we teach the holocaust to students, that is not encouraging genocide or antisemitism. The goal of education is to understand where the harms lie and to avoid those harms. Just as it applies to studying history, so it applies to sex education.

The body of research overwhelmingly supports high-quality, comprehensive sex education. It has shown that it leads to delayed teenage sexual activity, reduced sexual risk-taking, increased condom and contraception use (leading to a reduction in unwanted teenage pregnancies), increased knowledge of STIs (leading to a reduction in STIs), increased safe-sex behaviours, and overall improved attitudes related to sexual and reproductive health (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2019). Action Canada also reports that comprehensive sex education leads to increased communication with parents about sex and relationships, increased knowledge of rights within a sexual relationship, and greater effectiveness when managing risky situations (Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights, 2019). This knowledge is practical and important. It is preventative and protective, and students actually understand why they are being encouraged to avoid it rather than it being a rule without rationale.

Finally, concerning rejections about sensitive topics within comprehensive sex education, KCS can reframe things, but only if doing so does not erase essential knowledge or increase risk to students. For example, choosing to frame the discussion through a values-based lens (as discussed earlier) would be an adaptation that would not compromise the content. This would also include facilitating conversations of personal or denominational differences. Emphasizing ethical discernment throughout the teaching of comprehensive sex education would be extremely valuable and important as well.

Denominational differences arise frequently within our student and parent body, and as educators, we are always aware of them. However, because our school is not exclusively aligned with any one denomination, it allows us to exist in the gray areas more often. However, this may not be a practical approach to discussing things like contraception or queer inclusion. It is always our school's policy, and the expectation placed upon parents, that all divergent denominational beliefs and interpretations are held and discussed respectfully; however, we, as a school, do not take an explicit side.

Regardless of denominational differences, the majority of comprehensive sex education should still be taught. Even if students and parents disagree with the topic (for example, 2SLGBTQI+ rights), students should still be informed on the research and realities, even if they still choose to disagree with the content. By choosing to omit queer information, we are completely abandoning queer students, students who have queer family members, and students who may be questioning. Furthermore, queer omission would increase invisibility in our student body, and may also therefore increase the risk of bullying or self-harm. It is important to note that Canadian queer youth are five times more likely to consider suicide and seven times more likely to attempt suicide than their straight classmates (The Centre for Suicide Prevention, 2022). Even if students, parents, or educators disagree with the inclusion of queer information, we should still educate on it because it becomes a risk-mitigation argument.

All topics in comprehensive sex education are foundational to overall student well-being and are overwhelmingly supported by public health research and educational research. Omitting large swaths of the comprehensive sexual education curriculum would be negligent and harmful. Some have called for the removal of the discussion of consent, which would be problematic. Consent and coercion are essential topics, and should be non-negotiable in any ethical model.

We must speak directly and clearly about this. Finally, we must be accurate in our information about contraceptives, STIs and teenage pregnancy. Withholding any of this information puts students at risk, both physically and emotionally. So, regardless of the school, parent, or student moral stance on sexual activity, the students have a right to know this information, and we as educators have the obligation to inform them.

Cross-Curricular Embedding of Sexual Health in the School Curriculum

It is important to consider where in our school curriculum sexual education is taught. As outlined in the research, there is significant support for embedding it in a course such as English or Social Studies, allowing for cross-curricular connections. This may help students engage more comfortably by offering distance and depersonalized approaches to sensitive topics. Students can engage more comfortably through critical distance and contextual understanding, rather than feeling targeted by talking about *their* sexuality. In doing so, we facilitate more nuanced conversations about topics such as the history of gender roles, the ethics of reproduction, two-spirit history, and the cultural norms of Western society compared to other cultures.

It is also worth considering teaching components of sexuality across many different courses in order to avoid siloing and confining sex education to one unit or one course. While some may perceive this as overemphasizing sexuality, normalizing conversations around sex within the school curriculum as a developmental and relational topic, rather than purely a biological one, removes the stigma associated with discussing sex and sexuality. This approach also aligns well with FNEESC recommendations and the BC curriculum, which emphasizes personal identity, empathy, and grounding our understanding in history. For example, a teacher may organize a lesson discussing Gender and Power in Canadian History. This would emphasize historical awareness of structural inequities, ground students in the importance of their current

privilege, while also allowing for deeper engagement with current events and attacks on rights. It would support critical thinking and ethical reflection, while building empathy and fostering inclusion. Alternatively, analyzing gender roles in *The Crucible* or *The Handmaid's Tale* would allow discussions of gender without triggering a political debate.

Admittedly, this may be difficult to pull off, as it requires many teachers to feel comfortable teaching sex ed, rather than just a select few. However, it would allow for teacher collaboration across courses. Additionally, it would complicate the BC Alternative Delivery approach as a typical opt-out option for parents, since instruction would be embedded across multiple subjects, rather than isolated to a single unit or course. However, this reinforces the message that sexuality is a normal and important part of human learning, human existence, and not a taboo. By embedding sex education across the curriculum, it also makes sure that it is accessible to all, regardless of the courses they are taking or mental or physical diversabilities. This approach would ensure that, regardless of the classes a student is taking, students receive consistent and meaningful exposure to education on sex.

Provide Teacher Training and Support

Effective implementation of this new curriculum, though, entirely depends on thorough teacher preparation and ongoing support. Teachers need the accurate tools, language, and confidence to teach sexual health and teach it well. Suppose independent schools do decide to implement the suggestions in the previous section. In that case, they will need teachers who feel confident, informed, and supported in delivering that program with integrity and sensitivity. However, at this time, many educators have reported discomfort and a lack of preparedness around the subject. They would, therefore, require further training and equipping if this were to become a reality. Likewise, some teachers may feel a moral barrier to implementing

comprehensive sex education, as they have a moral objection to the content. This is unquestionably a reality, and so it would be imperative to implement a policy of voluntary participation in the early rollout of a new sex education program. Additionally, having anonymous feedback loops would allow the school administration to identify and address these concerns more holistically.

The most obvious place to implement this is during professional development, where sessions can cover various aspects of sexual education, like value-based pedagogy, trauma-informed delivery, inclusive language, and classroom management for sensitive topics. Such professional development sessions would be beneficial not only for teaching sex education but also for their entire teaching model. All of those professional development topics can be used across all teaching, and all students would benefit from better-equipped teachers in these various areas.

Additionally, it is recommended that sex education be co-taught by male and female educators. Co-teaching by both male and female educators can help ensure representation, balance gender perspectives, and make students of all genders feel more seen and supported. Ultimately, those teaching the program should be vetted for their comfort after the professional development sessions, fully trained beforehand, and given access to a medically trained member of the community for clarification (e.g., a nurse, doctor). This program should not focus exclusively on sexual intercourse, biology, and sexually transmitted infections. However, it should cover broader implications of gender, relationships, and how sex is a positive, active thing, not meant to be passive.

It may be valuable to start small when implementing such a program. Given that at KCS, we would be moving from no sex education to a comprehensive sex education, which is quite a

drastic shift, it may be beneficial to roll it out to a third of the class where there is full parent approval rather than to their entire class, and then build it up from there in order to ensure the highest quality of education.

Furthermore, it would be valuable to set up a Sex Ed Support Team, with the staff delivering the sex education, administration, a school counsellor, staff interested in helping with the roll-out of sex education at the school (or interested in teaching it in the future), and a representative from the board. They would meet monthly to discuss the successes and failures of the education, as well as ethical and moral concerns or considerations, and adaptations for the future of sex education at that school. In KCS's context, we are members of the Society of Christian Schools of BC (SCSBC) and therefore have a network of other schools that are on their own journeys in sex education. We could connect with the leadership at SCSBC, as well as other schools, in a mentorship capacity to identify their strengths and weaknesses and have an ongoing conversation to ensure that this sensitive topic is dealt with the care it deserves all across the province.

Educators, administrators, and school boards should prioritize proactivity over reactivity when implementing a sex education program; therefore, there must be an emphasis on high-quality training and thorough vetting. This will prevent both misinformation and missteps. Given that sex education is such a sensitive topic, especially amongst a faith-based school body, the school needs to ensure that they are thoroughly prepared in order to avoid any failures.

Ultimately, it would be invaluable to have medical professionals join us on this journey. Many schools have nurses on staff, but in our context, we do not. We do, however, have a large number of doctors, nurses, and mental health professionals in our parent population. Therefore, it would be beneficial to have these professionals as part of a sounding board for our rollout and, if

they agree, to incorporate their expertise into our sex education at some point, provided they fully support our comprehensive, values-based approach.

When schools embark on this journey of implementing a new sex education approach, they need to admit they are not islands, independent of everything and everyone. Leaning on the expertise and experience of both our community and other schools will be paramount to ensuring a successful rollout of a new program.

Engage Parents as Partners

None of this will be implemented without the support and buy-in of parents. Our administration often discusses the 10% on either end of the political spectrum (the far right and far left), and that there will always be 10% unhappy with any decision they make. School administration has emphasized the importance of engaging the broad majority of parents, by which I mean the 80% in the middle, in support of the school's direction, particularly when implementing major educational shifts. Applying this to the implementation of a new sex education approach, we would need at least 80% of parents to understand why we are changing and the reasoning behind our chosen sex education model. This is no small feat.

The goal would be to include parents early in the process, involve them frequently throughout the rollout, and engage them in meaningful ways, rather than in performative or surface-level interactions. This means we would need to hold workshops and information nights for parents about what will be taught and why. During these information and workshop nights, we will focus on research, the medical approaches our government and medical community follow, and the recommendations from both the United Nations and SIECCAN. Embedding our reasoning in expert opinions and suggestions will persuade some parents. Grounding our approach further in the biblical mandate for student education, as well as the school's mission,

vision, and values, ensures that the school is not abandoning its call from the surrounding faith community.

Ideally, this type of communication would also turn into sex education information nights for parents, wherein they also learn about the benefits of this type of sex education, and know the language to speak with their teens at home. The school could also create and offer take-home conversation guides about sex education that also align with the school's values. Generally speaking, Christian parents want their children to have a favourable view of sex, but many parents do not have the knowledge or confidence to speak to their children about sex (Dent & Maloney, 2017). Helping them in this area would also benefit the school educators, as it would happen at home and at school. Therefore, implementing a comprehensive sex education approach would empower parents as well. To facilitate this conversation, the school should create structured opportunities to gather parent feedback, either in person or online, so that implementation remains responsive and transparent.

As a school, in conjunction with the school board, it would be paramount to develop an opt-in/opt-out mechanism. It is a parent's right, as outlined by the BC Ministry of Education. Its difficulty is conditional on the eventual curricular placement of sex education. If it is embedded across more than one course, such as English or Social Studies, as suggested earlier, the logistics become more complicated, potentially requiring changes to individual courses or individualized learning plans. While this should be allowed, schools should not be making more work for themselves by implementing comprehensive sex education. When presenting this opt-in/opt-out option to parents, it is recommended to clearly outline the benefits of opting in for students.

Ultimately, when this is presented to parents, it is crucial that we emphasize the importance of relationships, holistic values, and community-building. Parents should not feel like

we are pushing for compliance, but rather that we are in a partnership in the raising of their children in *all* areas of development, and that now includes sex education. By fostering a partnership with parents grounded in transparency and shared purpose, our school can ensure students receive the education they need and deserve, while also honouring the voices of the broader faith community.

Ensure Inclusion and Affirmation for All Students

As both Christians and educators, schools like KCS should uphold and enforce the dignity of every student in the student body. This applies regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation, race, citizenship, socioeconomic status, or ability, physical or mental. All students, all *people* have inherent worth, and that is an understanding we want every KCS graduate to carry forward. That also needs to be extended to how we communicate sex education. This inclusive approach aligns not only with biblical values but also with the BC curriculum's emphasis on identity, empathy, and respect for diversity, as well as FNEESC's value that learning requires the exploration of one's identity (BC Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2016; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2006).

The majority of our students and the broader school body would agree with this. However, for many, the sticking point is the inclusion of the 2SLGBTQI+ community *anywhere* in the curriculum, much less in sex education. However, both the research, the health community, and the recommendations from all important bodies support including 2SLGBTQI+ youth as a learning point in sex education. Ideally, they should be fully affirmed in our teaching, but at the very least, they should be acknowledged as a learning point. That said, acknowledgement without affirmation risks leaving students feeling erased or ashamed. While theological perspectives may differ on full affirmation, what is a non-negotiable is that every

student knows they are seen, respected, and safe. Our educational approach must never jeopardize a student's well-being in the name of theological purity. Given that these youth are statistically more likely to suffer from mental health and self-harm thoughts, as well as targeted bullying, inclusion becomes a safety point, which should trump all other arguments (Sex Information & Education Council of Canada, 2019). Given that we are approaching comprehensive sex education through a values-based lens, we, as educators, can create space for discussing theological diversity while still protecting student dignity and safety. That is why values-based is so crucial in this implementation. If we start with the expectation that there is no harm and that is our value, we must adhere to it, even when complex issues like queer inclusion in the church come up.

Practically speaking, inclusion involves diverse representation in materials, incorporating inclusive and non-shaming language, and including trauma-informed content throughout sex education. This also includes acknowledging the different lived experiences of gender and race, and how that intersects with sex education. This is an important learning that develops understanding and empathy amongst the student body. This also informs how we include students with mental or physical diversabilities, and whether they need to be adapted (or not) for such students.

Radical inclusion reflects what the early church did in Acts, as “In Christ Jesus [we] are all children of God through faith...there is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of [us] are one in Christ Jesus” (BibleGateway.com, 2021). This verse clearly articulates that race/citizenship, socioeconomic status, and gender are not dividing factors in the New Testament Church. Bringing this back to the school's vision of “transforming our world,” being a radically inclusive space where there is

no discrimination is the heavenly transformation of the world that Jesus began 2000 years ago, and that we are called to continue today. To transform our world, as our school's vision calls us to do, we must begin by transforming our classrooms into spaces where every student is seen, valued, and known.

Pilot and Evaluate Programming

To start, it is recommended to begin with a small-scale pilot of a comprehensive sex education program in one grade 11 class, preferably in their careers class, English class, or Social Studies class, over a one-semester period. The recommendation would be to teach the entire comprehensive sex education curriculum to these students, with identical surveys beforehand and after that, measure both their knowledge and attitudes towards sex, relationships, STIs, and contraception. This is modelled after a successful study of teens at a Christian high school in Uganda (Boozalis et al., 2020). This would require significant buy-in from parents, administration, and the school board, but starting small would allow us to adapt and mould the program more easily to our school and student body.

We would also need to use student, parent and staff feedback tools throughout, such as surveys and reflection prompts. This approach again centres transparency, student and parent voice, and community alignment. It allows for incremental and micro-improvements throughout the program, and upon reflection, macro-adaptations can be made based on the feedback we receive. Evaluation criteria should include student engagement, knowledge retention, perceived comfort and safety, and parent satisfaction. We should gather this information from the students themselves, their parents, the teachers implementing the program, the administration, and a representative from the school board. This could also be expanded to include student-led Q&A panels, peer educators, or inclusion clubs, with specific students volunteering for some training,

and then acting as ambassadors or mentors of the program. This is because student-led initiatives can foster trust and normalize discussions in ways that adults may struggle to do. This again would contribute to student voice, relational building, and community culture.

By approaching the implementation of comprehensive sex education this way, we are truly modelling for our entire school body the FNESC value of “learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational” (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2006). The key idea is to start small, assess honestly, and revise as we continue to learn. This also aligns with and enables us to model a values-based, holistic approach where learning is community-focused and student voice is valued (Lovat et al., 2010). Finally, this approach aligns with our faith-based goals of fostering student comfort, values, and relational trust. By taking a measured and reflective approach to implementation, we model the very values we wish to instill: discernment, community engagement, and responsive leadership. This approach aligns with both our educational priorities and our faith commitments by centring student voice and comfort, and focusing on relational trust.

Conclusions

Educators are called to truth, compassion, and the flourishing of students. This should be a holistic flourishing, not only educational, mental, or physical, but also inclusive of their sexual development and relationship well-being. To overlook this is to overlook the fullness of the student experience. Although positive views on sex and Christianity have not always historically been in harmony, I believe Kelowna Christian School, where I teach, is ready to take a step toward change. This is born out of my passion for social justice, my belief in complete, full-person education, and the reality that many students leaving our school feel completely underprepared when it comes to healthy relationships and understanding sex and sexuality.

Sex, from a biblical perspective, is something sacred that God created for consenting adults as a union of their love. Ignoring sex, or distorting it, in our education as a faith-based school, is to deny this aspect of humanity. As people made in God's image (Imago Dei), students deserve teaching that honours their bodies, their questions, and their dignity. To withhold accurate sexual health education and information from students is not a neutral act. It reinforces disparities and endangers well-being, particularly of students navigating trauma or marginalization. We should embody Micah 6:8, which commands us to do justice and love kindness (BibleGateway.com, 2021). Therefore, comprehensive sex education is not a departure from Christian values, but a complete fulfilment of them. It supports respectful choices, informed consent, bodily boundaries, and meaningful relationships.

From a biblical and educational perspective, it is our job, in conjunction with parents, to ensure we are creating students who can be respectful (consent) and knowledgeable in all areas of adulthood before they arrive there. I base this on Proverbs 22:6, which says, "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray" (BibleGateway.com, 2021). This verse clearly states that youth need to be trained in the "right way" *before* they encounter it, so they will be able to act correctly when they are older and encounter that experience. This is proactive education. This is also supported by the research, which states that "Christian communities should educate youth and young adults about risks of engaging in the contemporary sex culture, while also teaching them about preventive methods... This priority aligns with the purpose and outcome of comprehensive sex education; to educate and therefore assist individuals to truly comprehend their sexual natures truly and to navigate their behaviors accordingly" (Yu & Lee, 2018). This approach will foster open conversations, promote discernment, encourage mutual respect, and prioritize restorative justice in addressing sex in our world.

This is why I recommend comprehensive sex ed rather than abstinence-only sex ed, as it is more holistic, all-encompassing, research-informed, and is recommended by the above Christian advocates as well as public sexual health advocates across Canada and around the globe. The goals of comprehensive sex education are to increase the capacity for sexual health enhancement and the prevention of outcomes that can have a negative impact on sexual health and well-being (Sex Information & Education Council of Canada, 2019), while still maintaining the shared values and goals of the community within which it is being taught.

While I am idealistic in my approach, I know it will not be so simple. Throughout this capstone, I have chosen to remain positive, even when addressing anticipated disagreements. However, despite careful planning and values-based framing, KCS should anticipate sustained disagreement from a vocal minority of stakeholders. Resistance may come from within the parent body, staff, alums, or broader faith community, especially when topics like 2SLGBTQI+ inclusion, contraception, or gender identity are addressed. While disagreement is expected and does not immediately derail our approach, failing to prepare for it can lead to confusion or reputational harm. In response, we must adopt a posture of transparency, communicating clearly that this program does not represent a shift away from biblical or institutional values, but rather a deepening commitment to holistic student well-being, truth-telling, and affirming all students as image-bearers of God. This, again, is where our values-based pedagogical lens is vital. The reality is that discomfort does not equal harm. We can hold space for discomfort in dialogue while standing firm on the school's educational integrity. By leading with empathy, listening, and communicating, we have, and will continue to, honour different denominational viewpoints without compromising our educational or ethical responsibilities. This approach to sexual

education is not moral relativism. It is courage rooted in clarity and faithfulness expressed through educational care. Moreover, it is the embodiment of biblical education.

Ultimately, choosing to implement comprehensive sex education, from a values-based lens, and doing it well, is an act of *love*. It models *care* for our students beyond their graduation. It models *integrity*, but doing what is right and honest, even when it is difficult. Furthermore, it models *courage*, because implementing such a system is not easy, but it is worth it. As Christians, we seek to ‘transform the world.’ Therefore, we must begin by forming whole students, prepared to navigate the complexities of human relationships, and who pursue wisdom and understanding, because, as Proverbs 3:14 says, it is better than silver and gold (BibleGateway.com, 2021).

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Appendix A