

Preliminary results were mixed: Although more teens said they viewed abstinence as "wise," "good," "safe" and "right," the number of teens who said they had sex grew. For instance, before the middle school students took the abstinence classes, fewer than 8 percent said they had had sex. After they took the program, 12.3 percent said they had had sex. This "unexpected" response also was seen among the high school students.

"We didn't find what many would like for us to find," lead researcher B.E. "Buzz" Pruitt told the Dallas Morning News.

Officials with the Texas Department of State Health Services stressed that the evaluation was preliminary and that the study can't say whether abstinence education works unless it has a control group to show how teens behave without abstinence education.

Abstinence supporters also said the study was flawed. When Texas teens in abstinence education are compared with Texas teens in the federal Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey, abstinence-educated teens have far lower rates of sexual activity, said a report from the National Abstinence Clearinghouse in Sioux Falls, S.D.

While Texas struggles with questions about the effectiveness of abstinence education, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Louisiana has renewed questions about whether such lessons unconstitutionally promote religion.

In 2002, the ACLU successfully sued the Louisiana Governor's Abstinence Program for allowing its abstinence funds to buy religious materials. The state and the ACLU eventually settled out of court, with the state agreeing to closely monitor its abstinence spending.

In November, the ACLU warned Louisiana officials that their www.AbstinencEdu.com Web site was promoting religion in violation of its settlement, arguing that on the site "state-appointed experts" say, "Abstaining from sex until entering a loving marriage will ... [make you] really, truly 'cool' in God's eyes" and "God is standing beside you the whole way" for choosing abstinence.

Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco said the state is "in full compliance" with the court settlement. One ACLU complaint refers to a Web forum where young people talk about abstinence, she noted.

"If these young people choose to discuss their faith in God as a motivating factor in their abstinence decision, they are well within their rights under the Constitution," the governor said.

Mrs. Blanco, a Democrat, also defended the state's Web site links to other Web sites, including ones "that discuss abstinence from a religious perspective."

"While I do not believe that government should promote any religion, I will fight any efforts to banish the discussion of religious issues — in this case, links to outside Web sites — from any Web site or other forum under my jurisdiction," she said.

The ACLU of Louisiana disagreed and on Jan. 17 formally asked a federal court to hold Louisiana in contempt of its 2002 settlement.

"The state promised to clean up its act but it has failed to do so," said Louise Melling, director of the ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project.

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