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May 4, 2021

Dear Mayor Petty, members of the Standing Committee on Teaching, Learning, and Student Supports, and members of the Worcester School Committee,

Girls Inc. of Worcester is proudly in favor of Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) for middle and high school students in the Worcester Public Schools. We strongly support the four motions advanced from the Standing Committee, especially implementing the 3Rs curriculum, as a comprehensive K-12 health curriculum for the 2020-2021 school year, utilizing the 3Rs sex education curriculum for middle and high school students, and providing resources for teacher training. We also support the motions for hiring additional health teachers, expanding classroom time for health education for high school students, and encouraging stronger communication and parent engagement about the curriculum.

Why is comprehensive sexual education important?

- Healthy relationship education, a component of comprehensive sex education, is a key proven way we can prevent sexual harassment and violence.
- Youth who receive comprehensive sex ed with a focus on healthy relationships are less likely to perpetrate intimate partner violence and sexual harassment.
- When raising the subject of sex is taboo or abstinence is presented as the only way to avoid teen pregnancy or STIs, survivors of sexual assault tend to feel less comfortable coming forward to report sexual assault when it happens to them. They suffer in silence to avoid the shame they expect to face if they report it, and don't get the help they need to heal and thrive.
- Similarly, if sex education is not LGBTQ+ inclusive, students who identify as LGBTQ+ lack the tools to learn how to protect their bodies in a safe, judgment-free zone.

The 3Rs curriculum has lessons that are age-appropriate, so young people receive information they need now, and then additional layers are taught as they age to prepare them to make healthy decisions in the future.

What does the data say?

- There is substantial evidence that CSE positively influences behaviors related to preventing unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.
 - CSE delays sexual intercourse, increases contraception and condom use, and reduces frequency of sex and number of partners.
- Comprehensive Sex Education includes a broader set of outcomes such as an appreciation of sexual orientation and gender diversity; prevention of homophobic bullying, intimate partner violence, and child abuse; and promotion of healthy relationships, social-emotional learning, and media literacy.

Girls Inc. of Worcester implores you to support all Worcester Public School students by voting yes on all four motions advanced by the Standing Committee and in support of Comprehensive Sex Education in Worcester Public Schools. Worcester Public School students deserve medically accurate, nonjudgmental, and consent-based lessons on building healthy relationships, avoiding STIs, and preventing unintended pregnancies.

Sincerely,

Victoria Waterman
CEO

Pamela Daly
Board President