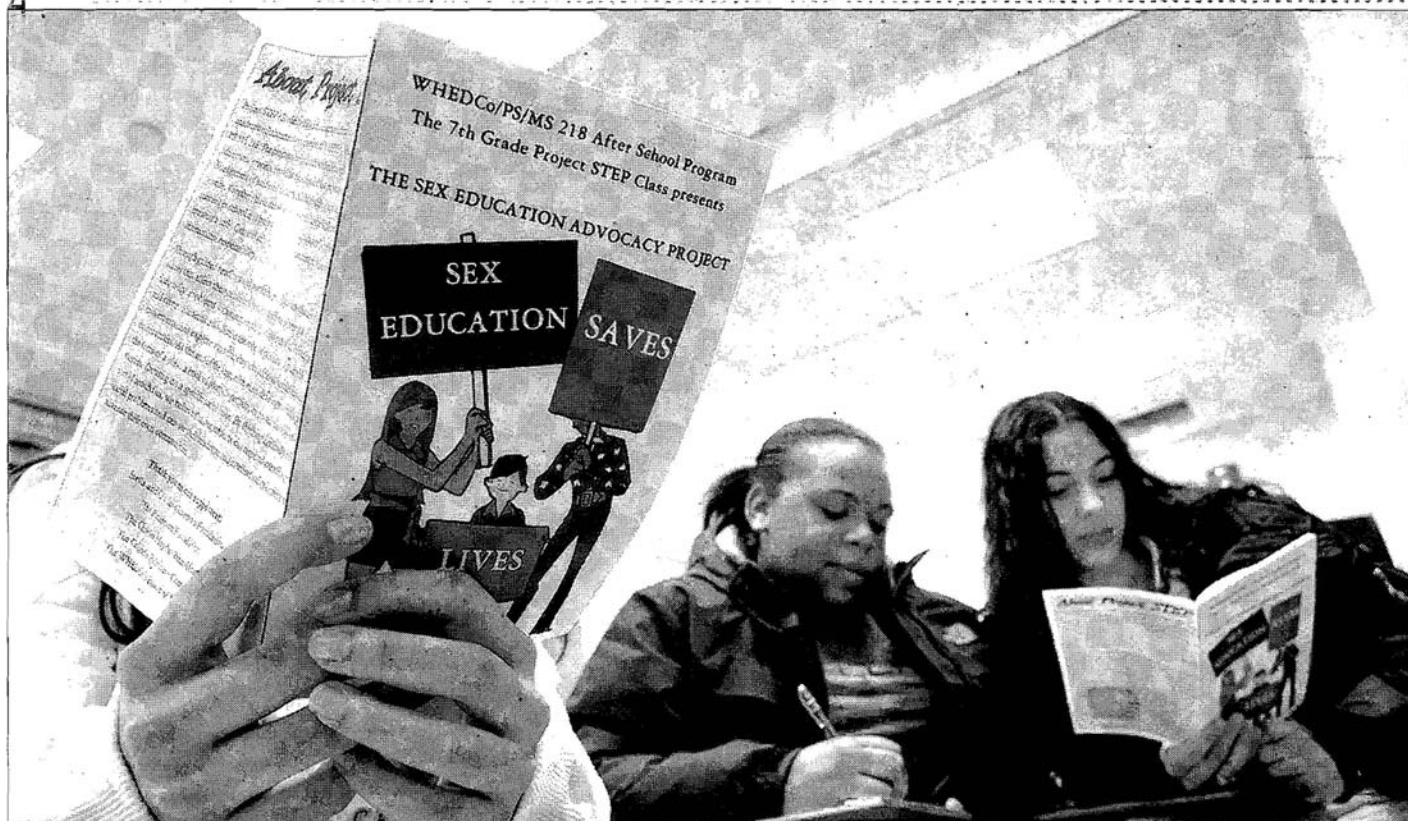


DAILY NEWS

January 8, 2008

SCHOOLS

BW 10



High school students attend Women's Housing and Economic Development Corp.'s after-school sex education program.

Photo by Bryan Pace

Teach us birds & bees, pretty please?

BY TANYANIKA SAMUELS

READING, writing, arithmetic ... sex?

A group of Bronx teens is lobbying to make sex education one of the fundamentals taught in school.

"It's affecting our lives, but we don't know anything about it," said Yanilsa Frias, 14, of Morris Heights.

Frias was among 10 teens who recently testified before the City Council to argue that sex education should be mandatory in the classroom.

The teen pregnancy rate is 137 per 1,000 in the Bronx compared with 99

Teens pushing for more sex education in schools

per 1,000 citywide, according to the city Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

While teen pregnancy rates have dropped in the past decade, Bronx rates remain higher than any other borough's.

The absence of information in schools is "astonishing," said Nancy Biberman, head of the nonprofit Women's Housing and Economic Development Corp.

"Teen parenting is a major reason

why girls drop out of high school and middle school," she said. "There's a vacuum where information should be."

Last fall, the city Department of Education approved a new sex-education curriculum, but school principals may choose whether or not to use it.

While the state does not mandate sex education, the city Education Department "supports curricula that encompass comprehensive health education including sex education," said spokeswoman Margie Feinberg.

The new sex-ed curricula includes lessons on abstinence and puberty, HIV, STD and pregnancy prevention.

The teen activists' fight started three years ago as a community service project for the nonprofit's after-school program. At the time, the girls were middle schoolers at PS/MS 218 in the South Bronx, and all had teenage friends with babies.

The young activists started a petition, created a MySpace page and designed brochures on sex education for teens.

Then, in November, they took their fight to City Hall.

"They have a real sense of ownership about this. They're doing an amazing job," said teacher Nicole Jennings, who guided the girls through their activism.

Their hard work is also paying off in a personal way.

"I'm happy I participated in this project," said Katherine George, 14. "I've learned to voice my opinions and to try to change a situation that's affecting myself and other people around me."

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