Handbook for Stakeholders

Pono Choices

A Culturally Responsive Teen Pregnancy and STI Prevention Program for Middle School Youth

Welcome

Aloha!

This handbook describes the *Pono Choices Culturally Responsive Teen Pregnancy and STI Prevention Program*, the only such prevention program developed specifically for youth ages 11-13 in Hawai‘i. This handbook is meant to aid in decision-making regarding the use of Pono Choices to provide sexual health education for the target population, whether they are reached in middle or intermediate school, a youth program, or some other venue. There is a pressing need to prepare Hawai‘i’s youth with the essential attitudes, skills, and knowledge to avoid teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). According to the national Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) for 2011, about a fourth of Hawai‘i’s public high school students reported being sexually active – but only half of them said they had used contraceptives. Hawai‘i youth ages 15 through 19 have among the nation’s highest rates of STIs.

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Background Information

Pono Choices: A Culturally Responsive Teen Pregnancy and STI Prevention Program consists of 10 modules that require a total of 9.5 hours to complete. The program provides youth ages 11-13 with the attitudes, skills, and medically accurate knowledge they need to reduce their risk of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Pono Choices uses education practices that have been proven to help youth learn new information and skills. Using this knowledge, students are able to manage their own behaviors and become more prepared to live healthy lifestyles in pursuit of their goals and dreams. A unique feature of the program is its use of Hawaiian cultural practices and stories that youth in Hawai‘i typically find to be more interesting and relevant to their own lives compared to Mainland programs. In addition, Pono Choices promotes parental involvement through activities that youth take home to do with their *‘ohana,* or family.

Pono Choices may be delivered anywhere youth ages 11 to 13 gather, such as schools, community centers, or health clinics. The number of sessions can be tailored to fit the schedule of each site. However, it is strongly recommended that all 10 modules be delivered in their entirety and in sequential order.

The Pono Choices program was developed and packaged between 2010 and 2013 with funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Adolescent Health awarded to the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Center on Disability Studies. The program was developed by a partnership of the UH Center on Disability Studies, ALU LIKE, Inc. (a nonprofit Native Hawaiian support and advocacy organization), and Planned Parenthood of Hawai‘i.

Positive Reviews of Pono Choices by Experts

• The U.S. Office of Adolescent Health confirmed that Pono Choices is medically accurate and suitable for the target population of youth ages 11-13.
• The Hawai‘i State Department of Education (DOE) found that Pono Choices meets its Abstinence-Based Policy and sexual health and responsibility standards and benchmarks, and has placed Pono Choices on its approved list of sexual health programs for grades 6-8.

An overview of the Pono Choices curriculum is provided below. As will be described in more detail, those who select Pono Choices to provide sexual health education will be fully supported through the provision of training, a manual, and a comprehensive set of curriculum materials.

The Pono Choices Program

Goals

The overarching goals of the Pono Choices program are to reduce the number of teen pregnancies and the incidence of STIs; increase positive bonding in Hawai‘i schools and communities; increase the sense of self-identity and self-efficacy of youth; and improve youth expectations for the future. Students are introduced to Hawaiian cultural terms and practices that stress positive character development and making *pono* or “right” choices.

Target Audience

Pono Choices is a program for youth ages 11 to 13 (students in grades 6-8).

Setting

The intent is for Pono Choices to be delivered in settings where youth ages 11 to 13 congregate or go to for sexual health education. Such settings may include schools, community centers, or health clinics.

Topics

The curriculum is comprised of 10 modules that convey information on abstinence; sexually transmitted infections; birth control methods; refusal skills (how to refuse unwanted sexual pressure); decision-making skills; goal setting; reproductive anatomy; puberty; and recognition of traits associated with healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationships.

Flexibility of Scheduling

The first module is an introduction to the curriculum and takes 30 minutes to complete; the remaining nine modules each takes 60 minutes. In addition to completing the in-class modules, students are required to complete four take-home *‘ohana* activities. The Pono Choices curriculum has been designed to allow sites to tailor its implementation to fit their schedules. Thus, more than one module may be covered at one time, or the number of modules covered may change from week to week. However, it is ideal for all 10 modules to be delivered in their entirety and in sequential order.

Supports for Facilitators

The Pono Choices Project will be able to support facilitators through August 2015. For support after that, please visit our website http://www.cds.hawaii.edu/ponochoices/ and click on the Facilitators tab.

How Pono Choices Meets Hawai‘i DOE Abstinence-Based Policy

An important merit of the Pono Choices curriculum is that it was developed to meet the Hawai‘i DOE’s Abstinence-Based Education Policy. This policy recognizes that while abstinence is the only sure way to prevent unintended pregnancies and STIs, research shows that sexual health education that promotes *only* abstinence is not effective in impacting the behavior of most youth and does not lead to lower rates of unintended pregnancies and STIs. By contrast, *abstinence-based* sexual health education promotes abstinence but also provides youth with the skills and knowledge they need to protect themselves if they do engage in sex, as so many youth inevitably do. Research shows that abstinence-based programs (such as those on which Pono Choices is modeled) do have the potential to reduce rates of unintended pregnancies and STIs. The DOE’s Abstinence-Based Education Policy is reproduced below.

Title: Abstinence-Based Education
Series: 2100 Series-Curriculum
Policy Number: 2110

In order to help students make decisions that promote healthy behaviors, the Department of Education shall instruct students that abstention from sexual intercourse is the surest and most responsible way to prevent unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and consequent emotional distress. The abstinence-based education program shall:

Support abstention from sexual intercourse and provide skill development to continue abstention;

Help youth who have had sexual intercourse to abstain from further sexual intercourse until an appropriate time; and

Provide youth with information on and skill development in the use of protective devices and methods for the purpose of preventing sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.

Theoretical Framework

It is well known among curriculum developers that curricula are most effective if they are based on a sound theoretical framework. The Pono Choices curriculum draws upon three theories that have shown great value in understanding and addressing a wide range of health-related behaviors: Social Learning Theory, Self-Regulation concepts, and the Developmental Assets - Resiliency Model. These theories are summarized in the table below.

Theory	Focus	Major Concepts
Social Learning Theory	Behavior is a result of "reciprocal determinism," the continuing interaction between a person, the behavior of that person, and the environment within which the behavior is performed	• Reciprocal determinism • Skills, including goal-directedness, emotional coping, and problem solving • Expectations • Intent • Motivation • Self-efficacy • Observational learning • Norms • Reinforcement (intrinsic and extrinsic) • Social support • Structured opportunities for change
Self-Regulation	Individuals operate like feedback systems, constantly regulating their relationships to the environment in order to bring their current states closer to their goal states	• Feedback system of self-regulation • Coping procedures • Problem solving

Theory	Focus	Major Concepts
Developmental Assets - Resiliency Model	Enabling youth to participate in socially useful tasks in order for them to become healthy adults, in spite of adversity, and to promote the positive self-esteem and moral development of youth	• Support (family, friends, school and community) • Empowerment • Motivation • Boundaries • Expectations • Provision of opportunities • Educational commitment • Positive values • Social competencies • Positive identity • Positive school climate • Activities (extra-curricular, religious, and community)

Cultural Foundation

An additional theoretical foundation for the Pono Choices curriculum is the use of a Hawaiian place-based framework that enhances its cultural responsiveness for many students in Hawai‘i. Many studies have shown that culturally responsive teaching approaches promote student learning by engaging students through the use of materials and practices that are relevant to their lives. By making lessons more accessible and enjoyable, culturally responsive teaching also helps foster trusting positive relationships with students as well as with their families.

The Native Hawaiian Education Council recommends that one of the key guidelines for Hawaiian educational success is to strengthen and sustain Native Hawaiian cultural identity and to support the learning, use, and understanding of the Hawaiian language, culture, history, heritage, traditions, and values. A focus of traditional Hawaiian instructional practices was on positive character development that leads to making *pono* or “right” choices.

The Pono Choices curriculum has four cultural components designed to reinforce essential attitudes, skills and knowledge for unintended pregnancy and STI prevention:

- Hawaiian cultural values are introduced in each module and used to explain the importance and value of what is being taught.
- Hawaiian cultural values are illustrated and reinforced through an original cultural story, entitled *The Voyage of the Wa‘a Kaulua*. The story serves as an access point into the curriculum content from the viewpoint of two adolescents preparing for an important journey.
- Cultural practices are embedded in the curriculum through *‘ohana* (family) activities. Students and members of their *‘ohana* have the opportunity to construct a *wa‘a* (canoe), braid cordage, and create a *lei* while reinforcing the message of pregnancy and STI prevention.
- Locally produced videos and historical readings are used throughout the curriculum to connect students to their community. Seeing oneself represented in the curriculum is an essential part of any culturally responsive learning environment.

Activities

Effective culturally responsive education typically employs self-reflections and hands-on activities that students find to be enjoyable and relevant to their lives. Pono Choices activities include:

- **Identifying goals and dreams** - encourages youth to consider their goals for the future and to think about how participating in unsafe sex might get in the way of attaining those goals.
- **Viewing locally produced videos** – youth are depicted in various situations that evoke feelings, thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes about HIV, STIs, and pregnancy that are then processed through classroom discussions or self-reflections in the student workbook. Videos also model refusal skills for unsafe sex, which are then discussed in a group setting.
- **Participating in role-play scenarios** - designed to provide youth the confidence and skills necessary to negotiate and refuse sexual activity. Particular emphasis is placed on the variety of ways in which the prevention skills learned in this program can be implemented and applied in real-life situations.
- **Practicing prevention skills** - effective communication among youth and with their families is modeled and practiced as an essential skill for preventing unintended pregnancies and STIs. In addition, Module 8 includes an exercise in which students learn how to put a condom on a wooden demonstrator. This activity meets the Hawai‘i DOE Abstinence-Based Policy requirement that students be provided with "information on and skill development in the use of protective devices and methods for the purpose of preventing sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy."
- **Participating in a paddling activity** - focuses on having youth consider goals for the future, determine social support networks that will help them achieve their goals, and identify potential barriers they may face in reaching their goals and dreams. It makes clear that their best strategy to prevent unintended pregnancy and STIs is abstaining from sex.
- **Participating in a lei exchange ceremony** - provides a culminating experience for students to identify the key knowledge and skills they have acquired through the Pono Choices program.

Core Curriculum Components

The core components of the Pono Choices curriculum are built around a set of attitudes, skills, and knowledge that were derived from a review of teen pregnancy and STI prevention programs that research has shown to be effective (referred to as *evidence-based* programs). The three core components are described below.

Component one focuses on establishing group agreements; identifying goals; identifying social support networks that can help youth meet their goals; examining healthy relationships; understanding the normal developmental changes that take place during puberty; and grounding students in the definitions of sex and abstinence used in this curriculum.

Component two focuses on knowledge and includes information about the etiology, transmission, and prevention of STIs/HIV and teenage pregnancies. It also covers beliefs and attitudes about abstinence, STIs/HIV, and pregnancy.

Component three focuses on building effective decision-making and negotiation skills and increasing self-efficacy. Students demonstrate knowledge of prevention skills through practice and role-plays.

Pono Choices Key Attitudinal Objectives

Assess attitudes toward abstinence
Assess attitudes towards making *pono* (right) choices
Assess attitudes toward refusing unwanted sexual pressure
Assess attitudes towards impact of pregnancy on future goals
Assess attitudes toward reaching goals and dreams
Assess attitudes toward using prevention techniques to reduce the risk of unintended pregnancy or STIs
Assess attitudes towards the effectiveness and usefulness of the sexual refusal skills known as the 4Rs (Respect, Refuse, Reason, and Redirect)
Assess attitudes towards sexual health decisions

Pono Choices Key Knowledge Objectives

Identify and set goals
Identify social support networks to help youth meet goals
Define abstinence and sex
Identify the reproductive and sexual body parts and their functions
Understand the normal developmental process that occurs during puberty
Identify effective and ineffective communication
Identify characteristics and traits of healthy and unhealthy relationships
Identify steps in refusing unwanted sexual pressure
Assess the impact of pregnancy on future goals
Identify two main types of STIs
Identify the three ways many STIs are transmitted
Identify the four bodily fluids that can transmit HIV and some other STIs
Recognize myth from fact regarding STIs
Identify the correct steps in using a condom to reduce risk of pregnancy or STIs
Identify behaviors that would pose high/low/no risk for contracting HIV
Review essential information about teen pregnancy and STI prevention

Pono Choices Key Skill Development Objectives

- Demonstrate effective communication skills
- Demonstrate ways to refuse unwanted sexual pressure
- Demonstrate prevention skills to avoid an unintended pregnancy and STIs
- Demonstrate correct steps to putting on a condom
- Demonstrate ability to recognize effective use of the 4Rs

Curriculum Objectives

The Pono Choices curriculum was developed to address the key attitudinal, skill, and knowledge objectives commonly used in evidence-based sexual health education programs. These objectives are listed in the chart on the next page.

How Pono Choices Meets Hawai‘i DOE Standards and Benchmarks

Pono Choices is the only sexual health curriculum developed specifically to meet the relevant standards and benchmarks of the Hawai‘i DOE, as shown in the table below.

Objectives	Standards and Benchmarks	Evidence
Key Knowledge Components Assessed in the Pono Choices Curriculum		
Identify and set goals; demonstrate how an unintended pregnancy or STI can affect others	Benchmark HE.6-8.4.1 Explain the influence of internal and external factors on health outcomes	Goals and Dreams Worksheet (Module 2)
Identify support networks to help youth meet their goals	Benchmark HE.6-8.1.9 Identify choices individuals can make to promote or harm their health	Who’s in Your Canoe Worksheet (Module 4)
Define abstinence and three types of sex; assess personal responsibility for personal behaviors	Benchmark HE.6-8.3.2 Explain the importance of assuming responsibility for personal health behaviors	Brainstorm and Messages from Media Activity
Correctly identify the reproductive and sexual body parts and their function	Benchmark HE.6-8.1.8 Describe the body system functions, how they interact with each other, and how they are impacted by health behaviors	Beach Ball Vocabulary Activity (Module 3)
Understand that bodies develop at different rates during puberty as part of the normal developmental process	Benchmark HE.6-8.1.8 Describe the body system functions, how they interact with each other, and how they are impacted by health behaviors	Wa‘a ‘Ohana Activity (Module 3)
Identify effective and ineffective communication	Benchmark HE.6-8.5.1 Use effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills	Healthy/Unhealthy Worksheet (Module 4)
Identify characteristics and traits of “Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships,” which will be assessed through role plays	Benchmark HE.6-8.6.2 Assess health-related decisions for consequences that affect oneself and others	Healthy/Unhealthy Traits Worksheet and Role Plays (Module 4)
Identify the steps of refusing to take part in sexual activities in a pressure situation	Benchmark HE.6-8.5.1 Use effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills Benchmark HE.6-8.5.2 Use effective behaviors that communicate care, consideration, and respect of self and others	Practicing the 4Rs Worksheet (Module 5) Practicing the 4Rs Demonstration (Module 5) ‘Ohana Activity (Module 6)

Objectives	Standards and Benchmarks	Evidence
Identify three types of Birth Control methods (abstinence, barrier, and hormonal); reflect on personal responsibility for sexual decision-making	Benchmark HE.6-8.3.2 Explain the importance of assuming responsibility for personal health behaviors	Costs of Pregnancy 'Ohana Activity (Module 6)
Describe two main types of STIs, the three ways many STIs are transmitted, and the four bodily fluids that can transmit HIV and some other STIs	Benchmark HE.6-8.1.7 Describe short- and long-term effects and consequences of sexual activity	High, Low, and No Risk Activity (Module 7)
Recognize myth from fact regarding sexual health issues, in order to be more knowledgeable and capable of communicating accurate information to others	Benchmark HE.6-8.7.2 Use appropriate methods to communicate accurate health information and ideas	Myth or Fact Worksheet (Module 7)
Demonstrate the correct steps in using a condom to reduce the risk of pregnancy and/or STIs	Benchmark HE.6-8.1.10 Identify proper health care and describe how it can prevent premature death and disability Benchmark HE.6-8.3.2 Explain the importance of assuming responsibility for personal health behaviors	Teacher Checklist to observe student demonstration of Condom Steps (Module 8) Reflection Writing (Module 8)
Key Skills Assessed in the Pono Choices Curriculum		
Increased confidence using effective Communication skills	Benchmark HE.6-8.5.4 Apply appropriate conflict resolution strategies to deal with potentially harmful situations	Healthy/Unhealthy Relationship Worksheet to evaluate Role plays (Module 4)
Increased confidence using Refusal skills in a pressure situation	Benchmark HE.6-8.5.4 Apply appropriate conflict resolution strategies to deal with potentially harmful situations	Practicing the 4Rs Worksheet to evaluate Role plays (Module 5)
Increased confidence using Prevention skills to avoid an unintended pregnancy and/or STIs	Benchmark HE.6-8.5.4 Apply appropriate conflict resolution strategies to deal with potentially harmful situations	Role plays (Module 5, Module 9) Condom Demo (Module 8)
Identified effectiveness of how the 4Rs are used	Benchmark HE.6-8.4.1 Explain the influence of internal and external factors on health outcomes	Explain the influence of internal and external factors on health outcomes
Key Attitudes Assessed in the Pono Choices Curriculum		
Increased positive attitude toward abstinence	Benchmark HE.6-8.6.2 Assess health-related decisions for consequences that affect oneself and others	Reflection Writing (Module 8)

Objectives	Standards and Benchmarks	Evidence
Increased positive attitude toward making *pono* choices for sexual health decisions	Benchmark HE.6-8.6.2 Assess health-related decisions for consequences that affect oneself and others	Easy or Difficult Activity (Module 2)
Increased attitudinal awareness of how pregnancy impacts future goals	Benchmark HE.6-8.4.1 Explain the influence of internal and external factors on health outcomes	Explain the influence of internal and external factors on health outcomes
Increased positive attitude toward refusing unwanted sexual pressure	Benchmark HE.6-8.6.2 Assess health-related decisions for consequences that affect oneself and others	Reflection Writing (Module 5)
Increased positive attitude toward setting goals and dreams	Benchmark HE.6-8.6.2 Assess health-related decisions for consequences that affect oneself and others	Easy or Difficult Activity (Module 10)
Increased positive attitude toward reducing the risk of an unintended pregnancy or STI	Benchmark HE.6-8.6.2 Assess health-related decisions for consequences that affect oneself and others	Easy or Difficult Opinion (Module 5, Module 7) Reflection Writing (Module 8)
Increased attitudinal awareness towards the effectiveness and usefulness of the 4Rs	Benchmark HE.6-8.4.1 Explain the influence of internal and external factors on health outcomes	Explain the influence of internal and external factors on health outcomes
Increased attitudinal awareness of requirements for sexual health	Benchmark HE.6-8.6.2 Assess health-related decisions for consequences that affect oneself and others	Wa‘a Activity (Module 10)

The 10 Curriculum Modules

Each Pono Choices module follows the same format:

- a brief introduction providing a preview of what students are going to learn in that lesson,
- a Hawaiian Cultural Value that reinforces the key prevention message of the lesson,
- a segment of the story, *The Voyage of the Wa'a Kaulua*, which supports the lesson message,
- a student exploration activity of the lesson topic, and
- a summary of what was learned.

The table below summarizes the content of each of the 10 modules.

Goal	Cultural Component	Activities
Module 1: Introduces the Pono Choices program and prepares students for the upcoming Modules.	Description of Hawaiian place-based cultural framework	A. Introduction to the Program B. Cultural Overview C. Workbook Instructions D. Group Agreements E. Conclusion
Module 2: The goal of Module 2 is for students to examine personal goals, values, and beliefs. They will consider how those values are supported in their interaction with their peers, family, and community in order to make *pono* choices.	Pono: The right result of your actions	A. Introduction B. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Pono C. The Voyage of the Wa'a Kaulua D. Making a Pono Choice E. Redefining Messages About Sex F. Setting Short and Long Term Goals G. Conclusion
Module 3: The goal of Module 3 is for students to understand the human body and its functions in order to make *pono* or healthy choices.	Mōhala: To mature physically, emotionally and socially	A. Introduction B. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Mōhala C. The Voyage of the Wa'a Kaulua D. Different Is Normal E. Puberty Beach Ball Toss Vocabulary G. Anatomy and Changes During Puberty Worksheet H. 'Ohana Activity: Building a Wa'a I. Conclusion
Module 4: The goal of Module 4 is for students to have the ability to recognize healthy and unhealthy relationships and to acquire skills in positive communication.	Nohona: How you communicate and relate with others	A. Introduction B. Review 'Ohana Activity: Building a Wa'a C. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Nohona D. The Voyage of the Wa'a Kaulua E. Who's In Your Canoe? F. Healthy, Unhealthy and Abusive Relationships G. Conclusion and Reflection
Module 5: The goal of Module 5 is to develop refusal skills for the prevention of unintended pregnancy and STIs.	Aloha: To have mutual respect for each other	A. Introduction B. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Aloha C. The Voyage of the Wa'a Kaulua D. Introduction to the 4Rs E. Practicing The 4Rs F. Ty and Kiara: Keeping It Pono G. Conclusion H. 'Ohana Activity: Aloha
Module 6: The goal of Module 6 is to understand the emotional, physical, and financial	Hāpai Pono: A pregnancy that is right with the person, physically, emotionally,	A. Introduction B. Review 'Ohana Activity: Cordage/Braiding

Goal	Cultural Component	Activities
responsibilities of pregnancy. Students will also gain knowledge of birth control methods.	spiritually, and financially	C. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Hāpai Pono D. The Voyage of the Waʻa Kaulua E. Birth Control Choices F. Gallery Walk for Pregnancy Costs G. ʻOhana Activity: Hāpai Pono H. Conclusion and Reflection
Module 7: The goal of Module 7 is to gain knowledge about different STIs and how STIs can be transmitted.	Pilina Aʻo: Linking your knowledge to understanding	A. Introduction B. Review ʻOhana Activity: Hāpai Pono C. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Pilina Aʻo D. The Voyage of the Waʻa Kaulua E. Understanding STIs F. You Cannot Get HIV Ladatt! G. Myth or Fact H. Conclusion
Module 8: The goal of Module 8 is to understand protective factors and reinforce knowledge of STIs by learning prevention skills.	Pilina Pono: Linking you knowledge to the right action	A. Introduction B. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Pilina Pono C. The Voyage of the Waʻa Kaulua D. Preventing STIs E. Teacher Demonstration of Correct Condom Usage F. Student Demonstration of Correct Condom Usage G. HIV Risk: High/Low/No H. Conclusion and Reflection
Module 9: The goal of Module 9 is to practice refusal skills and demonstrate the ability to utilize the 4Rs in a sexual pressure situation.	Nā Kūlia: A set of skills to help you make *pono* choices	A. Introduction B. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Nā Kūlia C. The Voyage of the Waʻa Kaulua D. Scripted Role Play: Part 1 Scripted Role Play: Part 2 E. Unscripted Role Play F. ʻOhana Activity: Nā Kūlia G. Conclusion
Module 10: The goal of Module 10 is to review knowledge of teen pregnancy and STI prevention, and help students acknowledge that they are now empowered to make *pono* choices for their sexual health.	Oli Hoʻomana: Empowered to make *pono* choices	A. Introduction B. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Oli Hoʻomana C. The Voyage of the Waʻa Kaulua D. Paddling Toward your Goals and Dreams E. Tic-Tac-Pono F. Conclusion and Reflection: Lei and Certificate Ceremony

The Importance of Parent Night

Part of the online training for facilitators provides guidance on conducting what is called Parent Night. The purpose of this activity, which takes about one hour, is to provide parents with an opportunity to find out exactly what their children will be taught through Pono Choices. Parent Nights are highly recommended for both school and non-school programs. By attending a Parent Night, parents will be better prepared to do the four take-home *'ohana* activities with their children. They will also be better able to reinforce the healthy attitudes, prevention skills, and medically accurate knowledge offered by this program. Research shows that youth are more likely to delay starting sexual activity when their parents are involved in their sexual health education.

For facilitators, holding a Pono Choices Parent Night gives them the opportunity to get to know the concerns of parents and to explain why sexual health education is important for youth ages 11-13 and clarify what is involved in the program. As explained earlier, there has been public controversy over the way that Pono Choices addresses sexual behavior between youth of the same gender. A number of myths have been spread about the program that may be resolved at Parent Nights. Many of these myths are described in the following section along with the actual facts. This section is followed by one that provides numerous testimonials from teachers, students, parents, and the public about the substantial benefits of using Pono Choices.

Myths and Facts about Pono Choices

***Myth**: If a teacher is teaching Pono Choices, all of their students are forced to participate.*

Fact: Students have the "right to pass" on all activities and during any point if they feel uncomfortable.

***Myth**: Pono Choices teaches students that having multiple sexual partners is normal.*

Fact: Pono Choices does not place values or judgments on sexual behaviors. Medically accurate and age appropriate sexual health information is provided should an individual decide to engage in behaviors that may place them at risk for unintended pregnancy or STIs.

***Myth**: Pono Choices has been kept a secret.*

Fact: Pono Choices was implemented in 17 schools across the state during school years 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. All of these schools volunteered to implement the program. It is one of several medically accurate, abstinence-based middle school sexual health programs being conducted in Hawai‘i public schools. It is the only locally developed, culturally responsive sexual health program for grades 6-8.

***Myth:** Pono Choices is being "tested" on our children.*

Fact: Pono Choices is being evaluated for effectiveness in preventing unintended pregnancies and STI transmission in schools where parents consented for their child to participate.

***Myth**: Pono Choices teaches and encourages sex.*

Fact: Pono Choices does not place values or judgments about how students behave, but **provides medically accurate and age appropriate information** about how to abstain from sex, how to refuse unwanted sexual pressures, and how to prevent unintended pregnancies and STIs. Prevention attitudes, skills, and knowledge are encouraged and taught throughout the lessons.

***Myth:** Parents do not know their children are being taught Pono Choices at participating schools.*

Fact: Parents and guardians are invited to a Pono Choices Parent Night through a letter that is sent home with their child. Also, the Pono Choices program includes take home activities that encourage families to discuss and reinforce the message of pregnancy and STI prevention.

***Myth:** Parents have no say if their child is taught Pono Choices.*

Fact: All parents have the right to hold their children out of any sexual health education course offered at Hawai‘i’s public schools. If Pono Choices is being taught at a participating school, we encourage parents and *‘ohana* members to attend Parent Night to learn about the program so that they can make an informed decision.

***Myth:** Pono Choices is not medically accurate.*

Fact: Pono Choices is medically accurate, age appropriate, and aligned with middle school health education standards and benchmarks and state law as confirmed by the U.S. Office of Adolescent Health and the Hawai‘i DOE.

***Myth:** Pono Choices sexualizes youth.*

Fact: Pono Choices provides medically accurate and age appropriate sexual health information for students ages 11-13. Pono Choices is an inclusive program that provides both same sex and different sex examples. Activities focus on the behaviors of the individuals in the examples,

regardless of their gender. The program teaches that you can get an STI from anyone, regardless of their gender and your gender.

Myth: *Pono Choices teaches our youth how to be gay.*

Fact: Pono Choices is an inclusive program that provides both same sex and different sex examples. Activities focus on the behaviors of the individuals in the examples, regardless of their gender. The program teaches that you can get an STI from anyone, regardless of their gender and your gender.

Myth: *Schools and teachers are forced to teach Pono Choices.*

Fact: Schools, principals and teachers can choose if they want to use the program. Pono Choices is one of several DOE approved medically accurate and age appropriate sexual health programs for grades 6-8.

Myth: *Pono Choices targets Hawaiian youth.*

Fact: The culturally responsive Pono Choices program draws upon place-based, theoretical foundations using the Hawaiian culture as the host culture. Many studies have shown that using culturally responsive teaching, which involves a rigorous curriculum that is relevant to students' lives and fosters a trusting relationship with students and families, extends beyond the classroom. Pono Choices is relevant for all youth in Hawai‘i.

Myth: *Pono Choices seeks to undermine the traditional family.*

Fact: Pono Choices encourages parental involvement, which is one of the core components of the program. Studies show that parental involvement in students' sexual health education can delay initiation of sex. A very important part of the program focuses on several take-home *'ohana* activities to help initiate and encourage conversation about this sensitive topic area. They provide an opening for students and their *'ohana* (or trusted adult) to have conversations about puberty, communication skills, relationship issues, and sexual health topics.

Testimonials about Pono Choices

From Teachers:

"As a secondary social studies/health teacher in a small Hawaiian medium charter school, here on the island of Kauai, it is my responsibility to provide my students with the knowledge and skills necessary to survive and thrive in a constantly changing world.

"Pono Choices curriculum provides both knowledge and skills in a culturally appropriate context that when used correctly, allows my students to make Pono Choices regarding their personal and most intimate relationships impacting their lives. Their health, personal well-being and future success greatly depend on choices made at this age and in the near future. Personally and ironically, I gave birth to two children during my 'high school' years. Like many of my former students parenting has been a life goal sometimes achieved too soon. Receiving this curriculum to share with my current students empowers them to delay familial goals until personal goals are achieved.

"Additionally, Pono Choices assists students to gain confidence in communicating effectively with parents and eventually potential partners. The curriculum provides many opportunities for parents to participate in the process of supporting their student's healthy development!

"In retrospect my students refer often if not daily to choices made, good and bad, with the motto 'Pono Choices,' meaning choose wisely! I know they all appreciate the time we spent reviewing this curriculum. They actively engaged, were and are very respectful of the importance of making Pono Choices in their lives for their future, and that of our small community. Mahalo for this opportunity to share our experience." ~ Kae'eonalani Ah Loo, Kawaikini Public Charter School

"PC has definitely changed my understanding of place-based education….It has really got me thinking about what other subject areas can be approached with place-based education." ~ Teacher response on post-implementation survey, 2012-2013

"The program demonstrated how powerful place-based education is as a framework for the health education curriculum." ~ Teacher response on post-implementation survey, 2012-2013

"I am a teacher who has been teaching Pono Choices for about three years. It is well developed. It is an amazing curriculum and it reaches every style learner, but the knowledge is to help the kids and it might be for them, but it might be for their peers because there is a lot of misinformation out there.

"There is a lot of goal settings in this curriculum there are short and long term goals and the things that can get in the way like unintended pregnancy and the condom demonstration, that's a health skill.

"So, it they are going to use it. If they are going to tell friends how to accurately put a condom on that's something that's going to keep them safe. And that's raising their awareness. I think as an educator what we are doing is giving them the knowledge so they can arm themselves." ~ Molly Mair Yates, Hawaii Academy of Arts and Sciences

"I am one of the pilot teachers for the Pono Choices Program and it is one of the best and the finest that teaches sex ed with respect.

"I have had students come up to me and say I can't talk to my parents when I start the curriculum I ask students, you know, give me a show of hands how many of you are uncomfortable talking to your parents about sex. And it's usually about 70% of the class have their hands go up.

"And I say, but by the time we finish this curriculum you are going to be really comfortable and a lot of you are going to be able to talk to your parents when you couldn't talk to them before. And generally that's the case. I mean the numbers go down. By the time we finish the curriculum it's about 20% of the kids who raise their hand.

"The 12 and 13 year olds who are educating their older cousins and teaching them, hey, you are not being safe this is what I have learned in class and I have had many of the students come back and tell me exactly that." ~ Kathie D'Amico, Kealekehe Intermediate, veteran teacher of 20 years

A teacher described what happened when controversy over Pono Choices led to a much larger than usual turnout at Parent Night: *"I went through the whole thing and then I braced myself for all of those questions and they [parents] said so what's the big controversy? And I told them about the same sex scenario. I told them about some of the definitions. And….last semester, I only had two students out of the 150 for an opt-out."* ~ Donna Rodenhurst, King Intermediate

From Students:

"I have chosen abstinence and try to make the best choices for my sexual health thanks to this program. Before I didn't even know what abstinence or STIs were, and now I can make healthy choices." ~ Anonymous student response from the Module 10 reflection worksheet

"I now feel aware about myself and my health because if I decide to have sex in the future, I will know what to do and protect myself from STI's." ~ Anonymous student response from the Module 10 reflection worksheet

From Parents:

"Teaching the four R's to the young teens will provide an excellent tool in life skills."

"Thank you for teaching critical health information with dedication to excellence."

"These four R's will aid the young teens communication skills and life skills."

"They [the 4 R's] are building blocks for life."

"You provide Excellent exercises for the young teens to complete and learn from, and incorporate the family into the learning process and lessons."

"It should be a class that is a mandatory core class and required all year long."

"Your health class is such a wonderful opportunity for <student name> and the young teens to learn and process new health information."

"I am impressed."

"You utilized a whole family approach with making a canoe, and the braid to facilitate learning."

"Thank you for teaching critical health information with dedication to excellence." ~ Iao middle school parent as expressed to the Pono Choices teacher

"My daughter participated in Pono Choices. When I began to hear about the controversy, I asked her what she thought. Her response was along the lines of the content was factual and informative. There were no videos of anyone having sex. The material wasn't graphic — it was factual. Homosexuality wasn't a part of the discussion other than to point out you can get an STI from participating in gay sexual activity. She really liked the lessons about good communication skills. As a parent, I talk to my kids a lot and try to prepare them to deal with pressures that come their way. The curriculum helped open this discussion up even further with the inclusion of the 'ohana activities." ~ K. Mendoza, Hilo

From the Public:

"I commend the work that you guys are doing. I think it's appropriate to inform our teens about the kinds of sexual activities there may be peer pressure to engage in and the stated health risk and the bottom line for me is whether the curriculum is promoting abstinence as the best and healthiest choice." ~ Kim from Honolulu, Town Square program on Hawai'i Public Radio

"As a minister, I am deeply troubled by the recent negative attention on sexuality education here in Hawaii. The idea that we need to withhold valuable and essential health information from our keiki is counterproductive to these youth acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to protect themselves throughout their life journey. Instead, I encourage us all to support early intervention and prevention education, two components that are key to our health, including our sexual health." ~ Reverand Jonipher Kūpono Kwong

Next Steps for Prospective Pono Choices Facilitators

If you feel that Pono Choices may be a good sexual health education program to use, please visit the program website at www.cds.hawaii.edu/ponochoices. There you will find more details about the program.

Keep in mind that to become qualified as a Pono Choices facilitator, you need to complete Pono Choices facilitator training. Please contact Pono Choices at ponochoices12@gmail.com if you are interested in training. A two-day in-person training is available through August 2015. After that, an online facilitator training will be accessible via the program website www.cds.hawaii.edu/ponochoices under the Facilitators tab.

Pono Choices

A Culturally Responsive Teen Pregnancy and STI Prevention Program