

Myths and Facts about Pono Choices

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

Fact: Students have the "right to pass" on all activities and at 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 so youth can protect themselves from risks 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 sexual health programs being conducted in grades 6–8 in Hawai'i public schools. It is the only locally developed, culturally responsive sexual health program for this age group.

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, which also reinforce the fact that abstinence is the only 100% sure way to prevent unintended pregnancies and STIs.

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 curriculum includes take-home activities that encourage families to discuss and reinforce the message of prevention of pregnancy and STIs.

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

Fact: 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 about whether they would like their child to receive the instruction.

Myth: Pono Choices is not medically accurate.

Fact: Pono Choices is medically accurate, age-appropriate, and aligned with health education standards and benchmarks for grades 6–8 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 in grades 6–8. Pono Choices is an inclusive program that provides both different-sex and same-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 different-sex and same-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 curriculum draws upon place-based, theoretical foundations using the Hawaiian culture as the host culture. Many studies have shown that culturally responsive teaching can better engage students and support their learning because it is relevant to their lives and fosters trusting relationships with students and families. 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.