

Sex ed in Virginia: are we doing enough?

In the movie “Mean Girls,” the physical education teacher tells the students “Don’t have sex, because you will get pregnant ... and die.”

It may seem a little far-fetched, but family life education in Virginia—according to the state code—is focused on abstinence education when it comes to sex. That’s a goal we find worthy, but perhaps unrealistic as more than two-thirds of Virginia teens have reported to the Centers for Disease Control that they’ve had their first sexual experience before the age of 18.

If our schools are focusing more on abstinence, are we doing enough to educate and protect teens from sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy and what consent means prior to sexual activity?

The Virginia Standards of Learning identify that contraception methods are to be analyzed in terms of effectiveness for students but “abstinence is emphasized as the only method that is 100 percent effective in preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.”

That’s true, but what about when the choice of sexual activity is taken away from one of them? Is it fair not to have explained contraception?

We’d prefer youth get this information from their parents, but it’s a very difficult conversation for some adults to have with their own children.

While there have been sexual assault allegations at William Monroe High School recently, Greene County is not alone. Throughout Virginia, there have been allegations of rapes on school grounds, hazing of student athletes involving sexual assault and sexting scandals.

According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, one in four girls is sexually abused before her 18th birthday (not always at school). One in 10 adolescents in romantic relationships has reported sexual assault, according to the National Institute of Justice. The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network notes that girls between the ages of 16 and 19 are four times more likely than the general public to experience rape, attempted rape or sexual assault.

It’s not just girls, however. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention notes that nearly 1 percent of boys experience rape or attempted rape by the time they turn 18.

One man was recently charged in Greene County with several counts of forcible sodomy against middle school-aged boys.

Parents are allowed to opt-out of family life education in Virginia schools, but we’d rather see them be part of the conversation.

Before students are permitted to play athletics in Virginia schools, parents and students are required to watch a video and hold a question-and-answer session in relation to concussions. Before sophomores are able to participate in driver’s education, students and parents come together with instructors.

However, when it comes to family life education in Virginia, parents are given only a sheet that glosses over the topics to be studied and then they’re given the chance to withhold their students from the course. We’d love to see a policy change that really offers parents the tools to reinforce with their children the topics of consent, protection and how to avoid dangerous situations.

A sexual education curriculum needs to be current with the world we live in. We concede that abstinence-centered programs are a step-up from the previous abstinence-only sexual education Virginia had until 2007, but there is more that educators and parents can do to create a curriculum with a modern, applicable focus. The majority of the curricula in math and history and English won’t really change but sexual education should.

Quality journalism costs money

Newspaper reporters—and to a lesser extent editors—are not great salespeople. Usually, the sales side of the business—advertising, classifieds, digital, subscriptions—are kept separate from the editorial side of newspapers.

There's a great reason for it, we don't want the influence of advertising dollars impacting our coverage of important news for our neighbors. However, it's also a little bit because we just aren't great at selling ourselves. And that's probably why **only 14 percent** surveyed in a recent poll paid for local news in the past year—through a subscription, donation or membership.

The Pew Research Center polled nearly 35,000 U.S. adults for its state of the media survey, noting that three out of four believe local news outlets—TV, radio and newspapers—are in good financial shape. Often, that's not the case. There's an interesting catch-22 tied into this: newspapers, especially, have had hard-hitting layoffs in the past 20 years shrinking their ability to deep dive into important stories which causes readers to say there isn't enough local news to justify a subscription to the newspaper. It's a lose-lose for residents.

We are often asked to delve deep into what could be incredibly important stories for our local community. However, investigative journalism takes time and resources, financial and human. It's even more than the cost of a salary, which according to a Pew Research poll in 2018, nearly 79 percent of newsroom employees have at least one college degree but are paid much less than the U.S. median average for those who have similar education. There are often fees to obtain the documentation necessary to prove the facts behind a story, something that isn't usually allocated in a newsroom's budget.

The Pew Research poll also noted that many rural residents across the country say local news is very important, but they aren't seeing it in their newspapers. Roughly 57 percent of rural U.S. residents say their news media coverage is from the closest city. That is true for us in Greene County where the television, radio and daily newspaper coverage is centered in Charlottesville. However, at the *Greene County Record* we make it a point to only cover the local community, and that's the way we like it.

We are on social media—Facebook, Twitter and now Instagram—and we're in the community, from a new business ribbon cutting to a special farm day to court trials to government meetings. When local newspapers die, the cost of government borrowing increases, according to a Notre Dame Mendoza College of Business poll from last year. Think about it, how often are there other media outlets beyond the *Greene County Record* at local supervisors, planning commission or school board meetings? Who would take on that job if we no longer existed? At meetings, we often hear residents speak in public session—or even as they're walking out the door—that they didn't know about an important vote or hearing. Yet, it had been covered in both the reporting and advertising sections of our newspaper.

We think it's time you take advantage of the blessing of a local media outlet for our rural area. One that cares about your community as much as you do. Call us for a subscription.

It's now our turn to make Greene County better

Today, Greene County is different and it has nothing to do with the rancor seen during this election season. No, Greene County said goodbye to longtime resident and benefactor Ethyle Giuseppe on Saturday, and now it's changed.

Giuseppe passed away on Oct. 17 at 101 years old—a great, long life for sure—in her home on South River Road, just a couple miles from the home where she was born. While many love Greene County, Giuseppe *loved* it and all who lived here. She used much of her own fortune to make it a better place, both publicly and behind the scenes.

She donated \$500,000 in her late husband's name to get the Greene County campus of Piedmont Virginia Community College in Stanardsville. Dozens of kids from William Monroe High School have had the chance to graduate high school with an associate's degree, as well. Those numbers would be much lower without the local campus and the scholarships she has provided over the years.

She donated money for new scoreboards in the high school gymnasium. She heard there were not bathrooms at the park and immediately made that happen—the Giuseppe Pavilion and basketball courts were given from her heart. She made the greenhouse behind the high school possible, as well as the Linwood Studio behind the Greene County Historical Society, named after her last brother Linwood Rhodes. When she learned the schools would be upgrading the facilities, she donated an additional \$100,000 for that and the Cole Commons, a place for kids to eat outdoors off the new cafeteria, is named in her honor.

But she did more behind the scenes, as well, through her church and volunteering with various groups in Greene County. And she kept that quiet.

Giuseppe is the final of the “Grand Dames” of Greene County to pass on. We lost Eloise Giles, who was almost 98 years old, tragically in a traffic accident earlier this year and we lost Jeraldine Morris McMullen Tata (aka Mama Tata), 90, in fall 2017.

The moniker comes from the “Date with the Grandes Dames” fundraiser for the Art Guild of Greene County in September 2017, but suits this trio well. Each of these ladies gave back to Greene County in outstanding fashion.

While we should grieve these losses it's time for others to step up and take the lead.

During Giuseppe's eulogy, the Rev. Dr. Will Dyer told the audience to live the way she did “full of passion and full of love for the community.”

“Go out and make Greene County, or the world wherever you find it, a better place because that is what she would have wanted from us,” he said.

As we remember those who have passed away, we should also realize it now falls to those of us left to find a way do good in Greene County, to make life better for someone else, to do more and to be better.

And there is no time like the present to begin.