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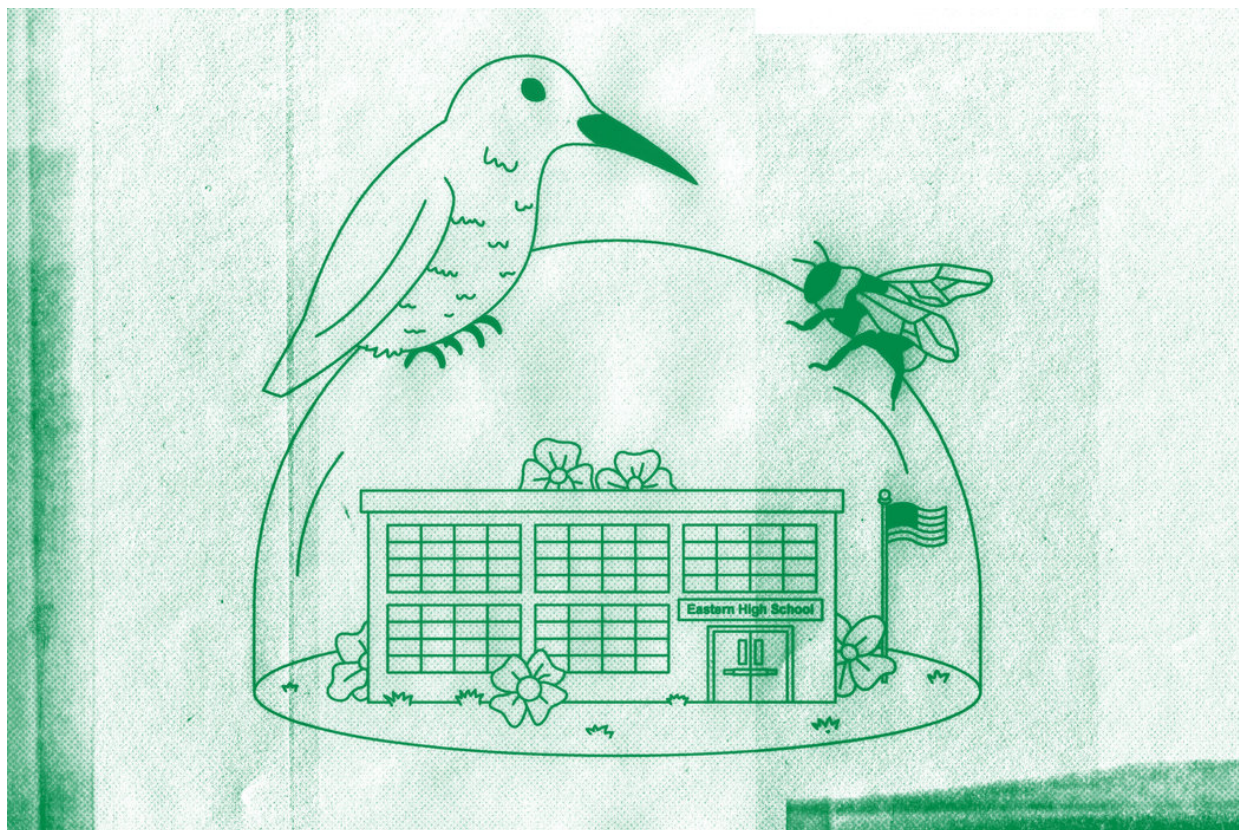
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The New York Times

# The Edit

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George Wylesol

## Let's Talk About Sex Ed



**Kevin Liao**

Contributor to The Edit

“Don’t have sex. Because you will get pregnant and die,” Coach Carr famously tells his health-class students [in “Mean Girls.”](#) It’s absurd and hilarious, but also not that far from what a lot of us think about when we think about sex education.

Is it really that bad? It depends where you live. Earlier this month, [Colorado legislators proposed a bill](#) that outlaws abstinence-only programs and would require sex education courses to teach students about safe sex, consent and sexual orientation. Meanwhile, the Idaho house passed a bill that [would require parents to opt their children into any sex ed classes](#) in the state. Most states [don’t even require sex education](#) to be taught at all. And that’s just the U.S. There’s even more variance around the world.

We’re curious what you learned about sex in school. Email us at [theedit@nytimes.com](mailto:theedit@nytimes.com) with the subject line “Sex Ed,” and we’ll share some of your answers in the coming weeks. (Make sure to include your full name and location.)

To start things off, here’s what sex ed was like for some of us:

### **Joe Jurado**

Arizona law [requires all sex education to be abstinence-based](#), but we did learn about condoms, birth control and even consent. Ultimately my experience in high school felt well-rounded. My teachers were honest about the risks and consequences that can come from having unprotected sex, but it wasn’t made out to be a straight-up horror show. They also went into the emotional effects of having sex, both positive and negative. At that time in your life, your body is changing, and you’re facing unfamiliar impulses. If all you have is a series of adults telling you that what you’re feeling is wrong and unnatural, I can only imagine the problems that could create.

### **Elia Rathore**

I had only heard of sex ed from watching American movies and TV shows before I moved to the U.S. Before that, I attended high school in Pakistan. That experience was many things, but sexually informative was not one of them. [Anything sex-related is usually seen as unsuitable for public discussion](#), so we definitely weren’t talking about it at school. The most we’d get were vague references in our Islamic studies classes to what the religion says about relationships and marriage and a

studies classes to what the religion says about relationships and marriage, and a section or two of discreet lessons on anatomy in biology. Otherwise it was assumed that everyone would remain abstinent until marriage, because premarital sex is against the law. It still happens though, and people are thoroughly unequipped when it does.

When my family moved to Virginia, I was fortunate to go to a high school where I learned about sexually transmitted diseases, common sexual myths and the specifics of all sorts of birth control in health class. Our biology curriculum included in-depth and sometimes uncomfortable discussions (such as one accompanied by a video of a live birth), but I learned a lot. All my stupid questions were answered, too, since our teacher had a box for our anonymous questions. When I moved to Pakistan again after high school, grown men and women would ask me the questions I had asked my teachers in Virginia.

### **Karina Balan Julio**

The sex ed classes I had during high school in Brazil were more focused on anatomy and sexually transmitted infections than about healthy relationships and consent. It's funny that Brazilians are often portrayed as super sexual — we're in the land of Carnival after all. But as a mostly Christian country, religion still plays a significant role in how people think about sex and that means most discussions are constrained by heteronormative ideals. Less than [20 percent of public schools in Brazil](#) offer sex education in school, and some politicians, [including our new president](#), have suggested banning it altogether.

### **Claire Haug**

I went to public school in Berkeley, Calif., where sex education started in fifth grade. It was pretty comprehensive and definitely not abstinence-based. Over the years, we learned about gay and lesbian relationships, birth control, and issues of consent.

My high school also had a great health center, which offered free birth control and emergency contraception, as well as S.T.I. testing and counseling. As freshmen we took a class called Social Living that covered more than the standard “this is how babies are made” talk. We analyzed advertising, broke down sexist messaging and questioned the ways our conceptions of gender and sexuality had been informed by the media. It felt like our teachers recognized that we were smart enough to understand the way that societal structures affected our lives. That kind of trust made all the difference to me and my peers at a time when most people were

inclined to dismiss our opinions.

### **Kevin Liao**

I attended public schools in the suburbs of San Diego, and we started learning about sex in elementary school. Being as young as we were, we all found the topic kind of funny, but our teachers never made us feel as though sex was shameful or unnatural. In middle school and high school, things got more serious, and we began learning about contraception, physiology and, most surprisingly to me, relationships. We were also taught to identify signs of abusive relationships, such as having a controlling partner. I think that having my school teach us these lessons was important and affirming, especially when the relationships we see at home or on TV may not always model what we should strive for in our own lives.

### **Hallie Reed**

When I was in high school in a suburb of Atlanta, I took an online health class that comprised the entirety of my school-sponsored sex education. All I really remember from it was that S.T.I.s were discussed in *a lot* of detail, which was mostly just scary. They also provided information on the changes that happen during puberty, which seemed amusingly irrelevant by that time. Abstinence wasn't necessarily emphasized in the health course, but neither was the choice to be sexually active. I didn't learn about consent in my formal education until college, and it wasn't until my nursing school classes that I was taught much about contraception.

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### Thousands of New Millionaires Are About to Eat San Francisco Alive

By NELLIE BOWLES

As Uber, Lyft, Airbnb and Pinterest plan to go public, California's newly minted rich will be hungry for parties, houses, boats, bikes — and ice sculptures.



Photo illustration by Cristiana Couceiro. Source photograph: Larry Busacca/Getty Images.

### The Top 25 Songs That Matter Right Now

By THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE

Listen to music — from the blockbuster hits, critical darlings and conversation pieces of the moment — few of which take a direct route to the usual joys of pop.





Walter Thompson Hernandez/The New York Times

## How My Southeast L.A. Culture Got to Japan

By WALTER THOMPSON-HERNÁNDEZ

I grew up with Chicano and Chicana culture in Los Angeles and heard it had spread to Japan. I wondered: Is this cultural appropriation?



Eliot Blondet/SIPA, via Associated Press

## Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg Says He'll Shift Focus to Users' Privacy

By MIKE ISAAC

The Facebook chief executive said the next wave of social networking would be to enable private and encrypted discussions.



Illustration by Tomi Um

THE ETHICIST

## I Think My Former Employer Is Underpaying a Black Employee. Should I Tell Her?

By KWAME ANTHONY APPIAH

The magazine's Ethicist columnist on what to do if you suspect racial bias in hiring and compensation.



Katherine Taylor for The New York Times

## Alternative Colleges, and Their 'Radical, Communal Ideas,' Fight for a Future

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

Experimental schools like Hampshire College were once the cutting edge of academia. Now they're struggling to stay open.

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