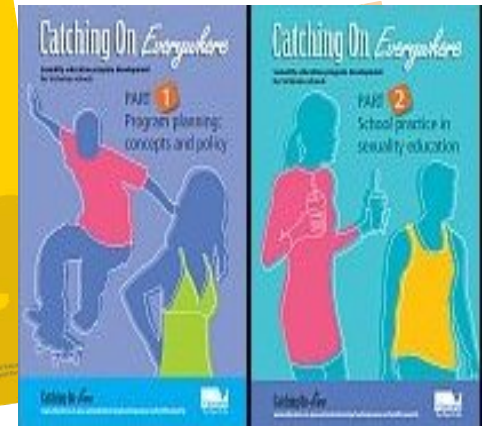
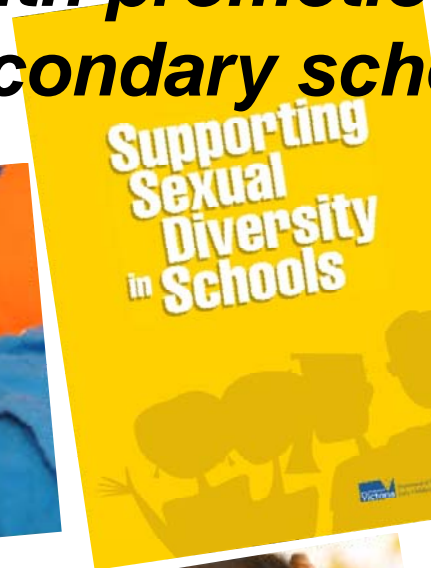


# Sexuality Education in Victoria

Karen McNamara and Ann Sexton

***A sexual and reproductive health promotion conference for primary and secondary school years.***



# Presentation outline

Sexuality education policy in Victoria – past and present

What the Victorian Department currently provides to support this

Future directions



# Sexuality Education, where have we come from..?

- Schools could provide sexuality education
- Always a component of CSFII
- Most likely provided to year 9's
- Teachers feeling uncomfortable, only some teachers could present the sessions
- Parental consent required
- Limited resources and guidance provided



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# Terminology..

- The term ***sexuality education*** reflects the approach our schools take in covering the many areas of this topic, including focusing on love, abstinence, safer sex, respect for others and oneself, diversity, personal rights and responsibilities, relationships and friendships, effective communication, decision-making and risk behaviours.
- The use of the word *sexuality* in sexuality education is preferred to the traditional term *sex education* which has become synonymous with education exclusively focussed on the biology of sex – ‘the birds and the bees’.



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# Overview: currently....

The two most important Gov't education policies sexuality education is integrated into:

- Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide
  - ➔ guides the running of a school
- Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS)
  - ➔ guides learning, teaching and assessment.



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# Overview

- It is **compulsory** for all Victorian government schools to provide sexuality education from prep. to year 10.
- Sexuality education is an essential curriculum component of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards.
- Teachers assess student achievement against the learning standards within the Health and Physical Education, Interpersonal Development and Science domains.
- Parent permission is not required for VELS-based sexuality education.



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# Overview

Where does sexuality education fit within the VELs?

- ❑ Health and Physical Education domain  
Health knowledge and promotion dimension

## Also

- ❑ Interpersonal Development domain  
Building social relationships dimension
- ❑ Science domain  
Science knowledge and understanding dimension



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# Sexuality education compulsory within the Health and Physical Education domain of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards. (VELS)

- Schools are expected to report on sexuality education achievement as with Maths, English, science, and so on, reflecting student learning against the VELS framework.
- Schools develop their own individual learning and teaching programs
- Specific reference to content relevant to sexuality starts at level four (Grade 5 & 6)
- Sexuality education at an earlier level relates to knowledge areas such as protective behaviours, understanding your body and family systems

Section 3.17.2 of Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide.



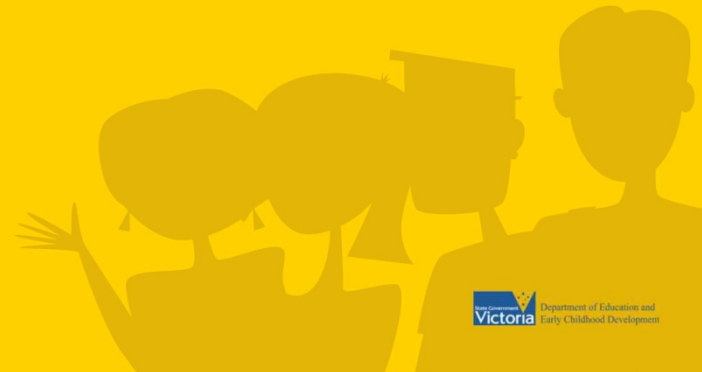
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# Sexuality education plays the lead role in ensuring learning and teaching is inclusive of sexual diversity.

The *Supporting Sexual Diversity in Schools* policy booklet:

<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/student/supportsexualdiversity.pdf>

## Supporting Sexual Diversity in Schools



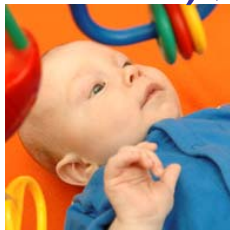
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# Who's responsible for sexuality education?

- Shared responsibility for sexual health:
  - parents
  - school programs (eg. School Nursing, “mother/daughter” nights)
  - local community health.

**The key is to develop effective partnerships of these areas to support school capacity.**

- Supported by experts such as Family Planning Vic. and ARCSHS (The Australian Research Centre In Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe University, Melbourne), CERSH.



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# Who's responsible for sexuality education?

- Parents/Carers
- Schools
- Government – DEECD: policy, teacher support – professional learning, resources, etc
- Local community
- Expert providers



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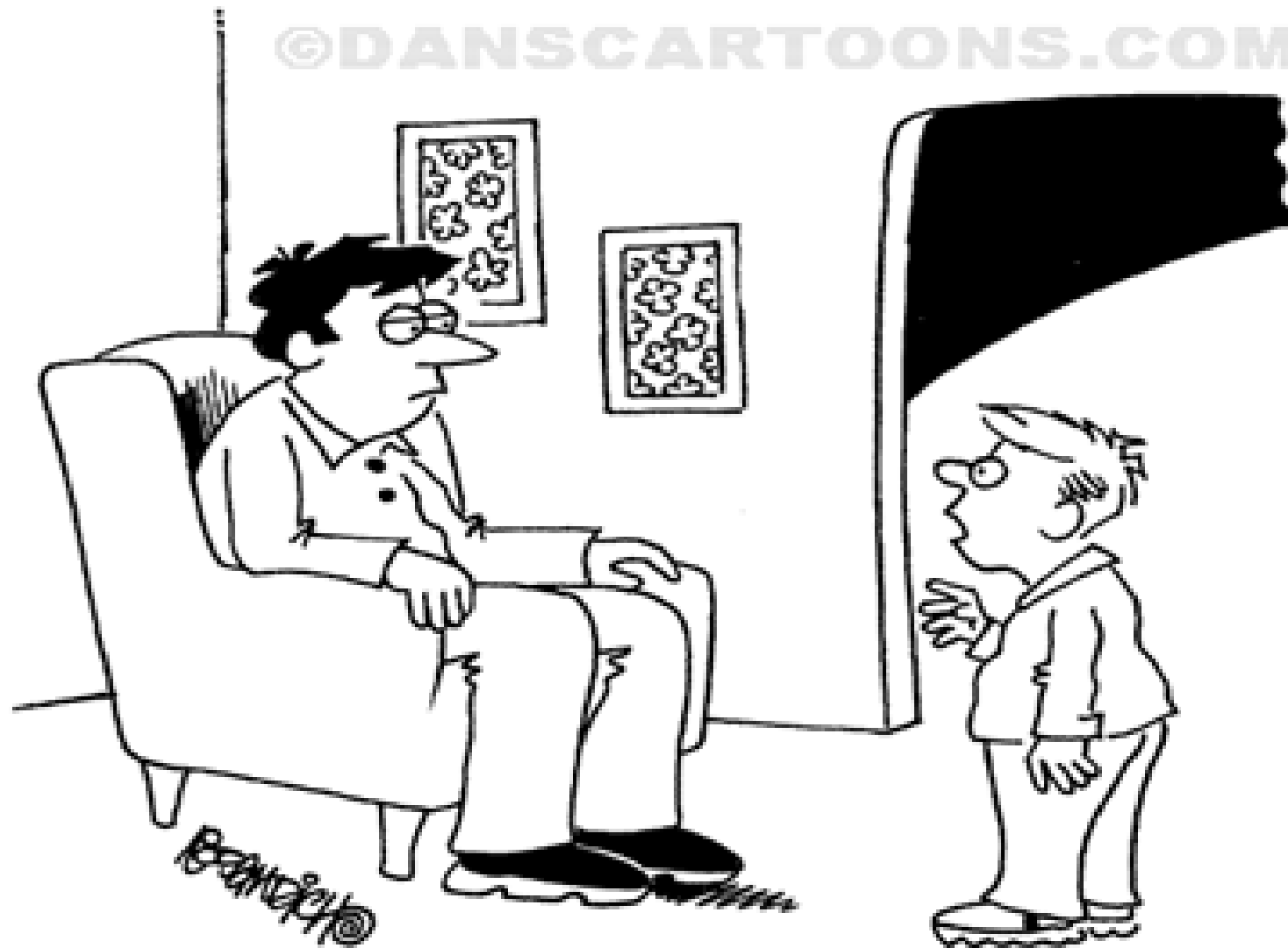
# Who's responsible? – Parents/carers

Parents/Carers provide:

- the family perspective
- opportunistic teaching
- comfort and openness in talking about sex
- open dialogue with the school.



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**“I understand everything except how you get a condom on a bee.”**

# Who's responsible? – Parents/carers

- Parents are educators too.
- Some parents feel that sex education is their sole responsibility.
- Research tells us that young people are more likely to discuss sex issues with a parent after participating in school sexuality education.



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# Who's responsible? - Schools

- Schools should not fall into the trap of believing sexuality education is their sole responsibility.
- Likewise, they should not merely invite/pay external providers to come in and conduct it for them.



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# Who's responsible?

## Government and expert providers:

- DEECD, including Regional Office staff:
  - To provide evidence-based policies supported by projects and training.
  - Stakeholder engagement.
- Expert providers:
  - training, capacity building and evaluation.



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# School Nursing Program – An added Resource..

## Primary School Nursing Program – Hume Region

- 7 PSN's with a 4.8 EFT
- Government and non-government schools approx 174
- Primary role of health assessment
- Secondary role of Health promotion



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# School Nursing Program – An added Resource..

## Secondary School Nursing Program – Hume Region

- 14 SSN's with a 11.5 EFT
- Allocated to 23 Government schools
- Primary role of health promotion
- Considerable experience and expertise



# The evidence behind the shift in direction for Sexuality Education in Victorian schools

- ARCSHS, La Trobe University (Sue Dyson) and DEECD (with DoH support).
- The Whole-school Sexuality Education Project
- We basically asked:  
What would a whole-school approach to sexuality education look like?



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# The evidence behind the shift in direction for Sexuality Education in Victorian schools

## Findings from Sue Dyson's literature review

- Few references to using a whole-school approach in sexuality education.
- Without the consistency of a whole-school approach schools can undermine what they teach.
  - For example, there's no point in teaching about respect for sexual diversity if incidents of homophobia or bullying go unchecked.



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# The evidence behind the shift in direction for Sexuality Education in Victorian schools

## Sue Dyson's literature review

- Short term programs have no measurable impact on behaviour.
- Passive resources are less effective than interactive ones.
- Baby Think It Over resource/virtual babies
  - Popular with teachers, nurses, parents and the media.
  - Evaluation demonstrated that virtual babies had little effect on young people's attitudes towards parents, sexual behaviours or contraceptive use.



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# The evidence behind the shift in direction for Sexuality Education in Victorian schools

- Whole-school *learning*:
  - ➔ Projects with support and involvement of the principal were more successful than those who lacked support.
  - ➔ shifts it from a response to an issue (prevention of something) to ongoing learning for competency and health literacy
  - ➔ places the teacher as the driver and wellbeing staff/external agencies in an important support role.

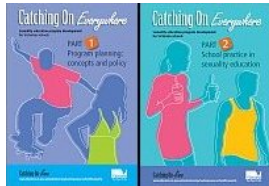


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# The evidence behind the shift in direction for Sexuality Education in Victorian schools

- Professional learning was the most important factor for effective sexuality education programs in schools.
- Important that professional learning address staff comfort, not just knowledge and skills.

*Catching On Everywhere* – program development resource developed from the findings of the Whole School Sexuality Education Project.



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# Whole-school learning in sexuality education (overview)

## Learning and Teaching

- Comprehensive sexuality education (e.g. abstinence, relationships, identity and safer sex).
- Compulsory in H&PE domain and included across curriculum.
- Student achievement assessed and reported against the Victorian Essential Learning Standards.
- Use of government and policy-appropriate external resources to support learning and teaching programs.
- Education materials readily available.
- Respectful of diversity.

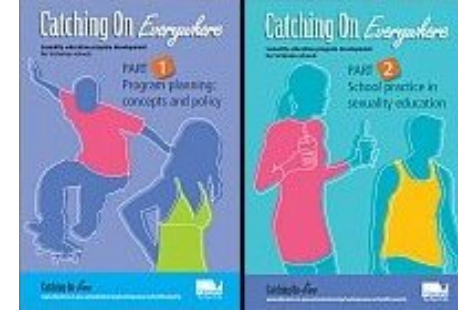
## Community links, partnerships and services

- School promotes a shared responsibility approach with the local community and parents.
- The use of external providers complements the comprehensive, whole-school learning approach.
- School networks with other schools for teacher support and resource sharing.

## School organisation, ethos and environment

- Policy, responses to critical incidents and student discipline procedures reflected in learning and teaching.
- Compliance with relevant legislation (e.g. Equal Opportunity) and policy (e.g. government health policy) reflected in student learning.
- Student wellbeing support and prevention programs inform student learning and teaching.
- Staff role-modelling supports learning.
- Displayed materials support learning.
- Professional learning is available for school staff.
- Student input has been sought.

# What resources DEECD currently provide



- *Catching On Everywhere* – program development resource developed from the findings of the Whole School Sexuality Education Project.
- *Catching On for Years 9 and 10* – secondary school curriculum resource (since 2004).
- **Catching On-line** – extensive sexuality education website for school principals, teachers, parents and stakeholders.  
[www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/teachingresources/health/sexuality](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/teachingresources/health/sexuality)
- Empowering policy.



# ARCSHS, La Trobe University:

- 4th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students Writing Themselves In and Writing Themselves in Again Sexual diversity checklist (DEECD Ethics approval)

These are some of the documents that educators would find useful. They are on ARCSHS website. <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs/>

- They also have the [www.ansellsex-ed.org.au](http://www.ansellsex-ed.org.au) website for teachers.
- In the past ARCSHS provided training for teachers around Catching On for years 9 and 10
- Are currently responsible for the writing of sexuality resources for primary students (Catching On Early) and new materials for years 7 and 8 along with an update of Catching On for Years 9 and 10.



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# Future directions in DEECD

- Primary and secondary school teacher professional learning grants.
- Extension of existing curriculum materials.
- Primary school curriculum resource.
- Some money will be provided to Regions to assist local health agencies and schools when working together.
- Continuing to develop links with community agencies working in this area



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# Future directions – Looking at a culture shift

- Responsive to an identified issue such as unwanted pregnancy, homophobic bullying, sexual assault, chlamydia. That is, prevention of 'XXX'.
- Time limited to the duration of concern about the issue and while funding related to that issue exists.
- Reliance on external providers to do the job.
- Left to one or two passionate people to drive.
- Provided for ethical reasons - not perceived as core business.



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## 4. Future directions – culture shift towards



- Issues-based education placed within a whole-school learning approach.
- Integrated and ongoing across all year levels.
- Developed, monitored and reviewed by a program committee.
- Understood as central to school's function in the same way as education for literacy and numeracy.
- Teacher assesses student achievement in sexuality education and includes it in the student's academic report to parents.



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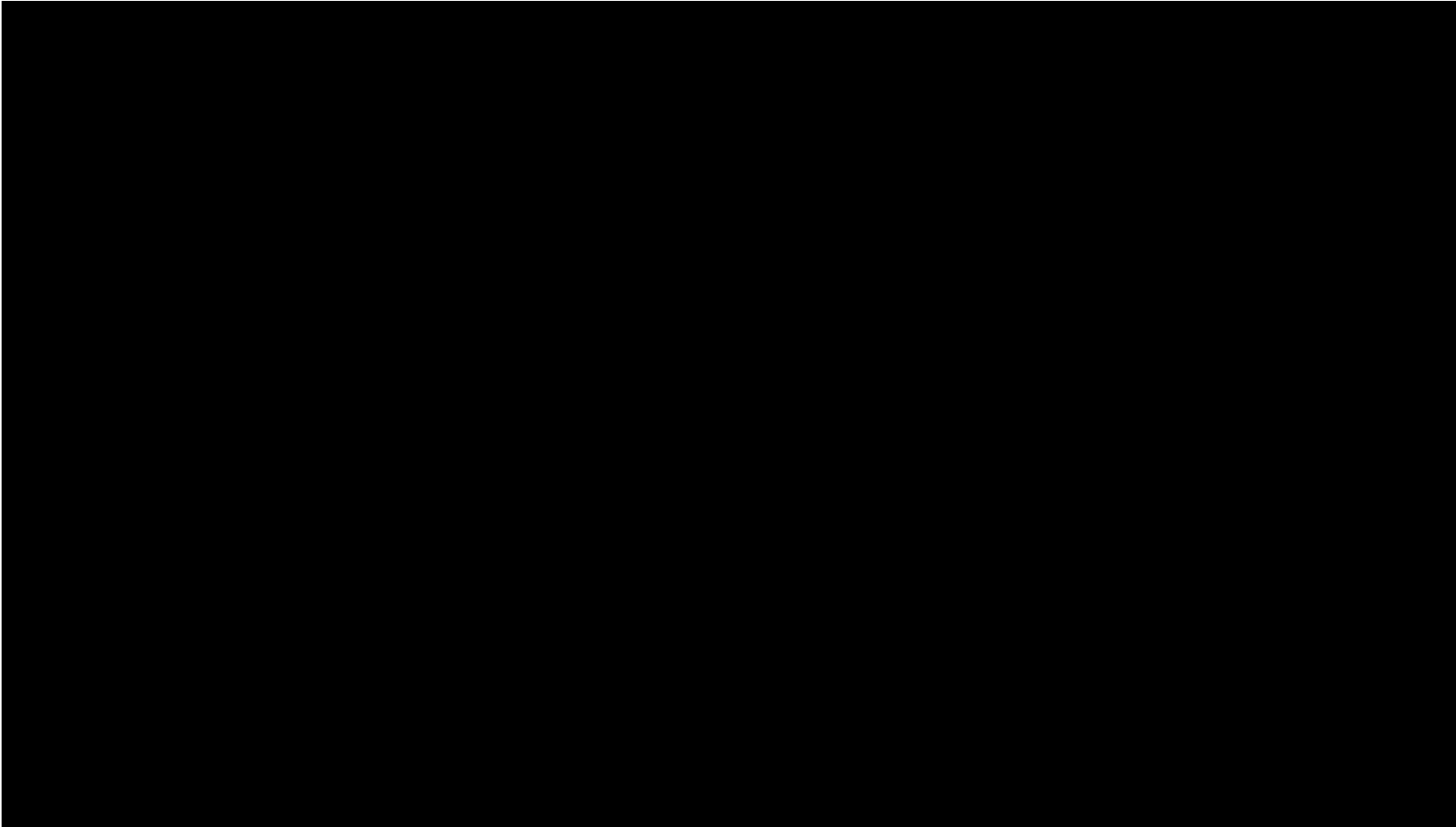
# Final vision

A national framework for sexuality education could give us:

- increased understanding of health education in the public domain
- increased school leadership support
- emphasis on sexual health in university training and within teacher professional standards
- development of student health literacy standards
- state-by-state comparisons of student health literacy rates
- identification of and support to underperforming schools.



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