

CAMPAIGN 2000

Teens get Bush's views on sex

Stresses abstinence lessons in school

By Dave Boyer
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SANTA ANA, Calif. — Presidential candidate George W. Bush told high school students yesterday that abstinence should be taught in any sex-education class and youth must learn early that having children out of wedlock fosters poverty.

"I wish people would understand the consequences of decisions they make in life," Mr. Bush said as the teens pressed for his views on sex education. "I do believe we need to talk about abstinence. It's very important to understand the power and promise of abstinence education."

Campaigning for a second consecutive day in the state where he trails Vice President Al Gore by double digits, Mr. Bush visited with the poor and the wealthy, in posh hotels and ethnic neighborhoods, to trumpet his message that he has not given up on California.

"I'm confident we can carry California," he told big-money donors at a \$1.2 million fund-raiser in Orange County. "I'm counting on you to get elected."

As he has toured Southern California the past two days, the Texas governor has promoted himself as a "new" Republican on issues such as education, immigration and the environment. But he plainly talked about his conservative views on sex education when students at Santa Ana High School, in a predominantly Latino neighborhood, raised the subject in their first three questions to him.



Texas Gov. George W. Bush greets students at Heninger Elementary School in Santa Ana, as the Republican campaigns in California.

"The best sex education takes place at home," Mr. Bush said to applause from the audience in the school's library. "I think schools ought to be focused on reading and writing and adding and subtracting."

The Republican presidential nominee said local school districts should decide whether to offer sex education, based on the wishes of parents.

"That's what 'local control of schools' means," Mr. Bush said. "But I happen to believe a full education course that teaches children right from wrong will include abstinence education as well."

A teen-age girl asked Mr. Bush if he meant that having sex was "wrong."

"I didn't say that," Mr. Bush said. "I think children ought to understand the consequences, and I strongly believe it's important for us to teach our children that there are consequences."

"I'm concerned about it because a cause of poverty is the child born out of wedlock," Mr. Bush added. "I'm concerned about young men walking away and saying these babies aren't their problem. I've got a plan to provide federal money for character education so that young children understand there are right decisions to make and wrong. We'll love babies. We'll try to help the moms as best as we can. But we'd better make it clear to people that having a baby out of wedlock

will make it awfully difficult for the baby and the mom. And we've got to make it clear to the men of society, the definition of a man is not somebody who fathers a child and walks away."

In some of his most extensive comments on an issue that rarely is the subject of questions from the media, Mr. Bush said the problem of teen pregnancy cannot be solved by government decree.

"It can't happen with one law," Mr. Bush said. "It can't happen with somebody running for president saying, 'This is the way it's going to be.' It is a cultural effort by a society as a whole. A society as a whole that says as clearly as we can, make right decisions in life, and you've got a much better chance of realizing the American dream."

Mr. Bush also spoke to an enthusiastic crowd of mostly Vietnamese-Americans in the Little Saigon section of Long Beach, where he praised their culture's family values and predicted victory.

The most recent poll in California showed Mr. Bush trailing Mr. Gore by 13 percentage points. The Bush campaign plans to return to the state with the most electoral votes in two weeks, and aides are saying privately that their effort is aimed as much at forcing the Gore campaign to spend money here as it is at trying to win the state that has voted Democratic in the last two presidential elections.