

## **Mohonasen HS Student Discuss Sex Education**

During the current administration, federal funding for “abstinence-only” sex education programs, which encourage teenagers to refrain from sex outside marriage, has more than doubled. Supporters of more comprehensive sex education programs question the efficacy and effectiveness of these programs, citing information provided in these programs as scientifically inaccurate, distorted or misleading.

On October 26<sup>th</sup>, seniors from Mohonasen High School in Rotterdam (Schenectady County), NY, addressed this conflict in their WAMC Student Town Meeting, entitled: “Abstinence-only sex education: Is ‘Just say NO’ the only way to go for American public schools?” The students and adults on the panel engaged in an honest and candid discussion, taped for radio broadcast on November 9<sup>th</sup>, about sex education in schools.

The panel included community members representing various perspectives of this complex issue, and was moderated by WAMC’s Alan Chartock. Maria Suttmeier, Director of Prevention Programs for Hudson City Schools, discussed Hudson’s “Not Me, Not Now” after-school program offered to students, as well as the district’s more comprehensive in-school program. Candi Griffin, Director of the Liberty Partnership Program at the Center for Women in Government & Civil Society, contributed her expertise working with at-risk adolescents and sex education, as well as her personal experiences as a teenage mother. Blue Carreker, Vice President for Public Affairs & Marketing for the Upper Hudson Planned Parenthood, supported a more comprehensive educational program for adolescents. Tom Hilliard, author of the recent Metroland article, “The Education Censors,” spoke about how federal support of any educational program, including abstinence, affects textbook publishers.

More than a dozen Mohonasen students directly participated as panelists. After listening to opening comments by the adults on the panel, the students eagerly jumped in, offering opinions on the purpose and role of public education in a democratic society; the purpose of sex education; and the advantages and disadvantages of various sex ed curricula. Some students took the corporate entertainment and advertising media to task for using sex as its primary marketing strategy when pitching products to adolescents. The dialogue around the table became noticeably more lively when Candi Griffin asked the young people to define “friends with benefits,” a term used to describe sexual encounters between acquaintances without any emotional attachments or other trappings of relationship. Caitlyn, one of the students, was not only forthright in her description but very vocal in her disdain for this popular form of hooking up between young people.

The students were surprised that many of the panelists, adults and teens, supported a “hybrid” sex education program that offered accurate information and knowledge about contraception, but also emphasized abstinence as a real, acceptable choice for young people to make. Several of the student panelists openly declared that this discussion provided them with new information with which to reassess their previously-held positions. Drew, one such student, explained that he came to the program mostly “with an open mind” but left supporting abstinence programs – much to his surprise.

When asked to reflect on the project, the students in the audience were impressed with how well everyone on the panel was prepared, and the level of civility maintained while discussing a controversial topic. They recognized the need to do more research and acquire relevant data in order to respond extemporaneously to comments and questions presented during the discussion. And, more often than not, student audience members remarked that, if given another opportunity to participate in this project, they would volunteer to be on the panel.

WAMC Northeast Public Radio’s Youth Media Project: Student Town Meetings are made possible through funding from the Educational Foundation of America and Carl E. Touhey. To listen to this and other programs in the series of Student Town Meetings, visit our Web site at [www.wamcstudenttownmeetings.org](http://www.wamcstudenttownmeetings.org).

## **WAMC Teacher Conference**

As part of its *Youth Media Project: Student Town Meetings*, WAMC Northeast Public Radio hosted its first-ever Youth Media Project: Teacher Conference on Thursday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2005 at the WAMC Performing Arts Studio/Linda Norris Auditorium. Entitled “The Media & the News: How much do we really get?,” the conference was open to educators in urban and rural public school districts in the Capital Region. Participants included twenty-six teachers and administrators from Granville, Lake George, Hoosick Falls, Rensselaer, Duanesburg, Mohonasen, Waterford-Halfmoon, Albany, Schenectady, Catskill, Coxsackie-Athens, Greenville and Berne-Knox-Westerlo.

The educators were part of the audience during the taping of *The Media Project*, featuring NewsChannel 13 Anchor Lydia Kulbida, Times-Union Editor Rex Smith and WAMC’s own Dr. Alan Chartock. After the taping of the show, educators engaged in a Q&A session with the Anchor, the Editor and the Professor. Alan Chartock and Clarence Fanto, WAMC’s Vice President for News and Cultural Affairs, later spent an hour with the conference attendees discussing what constitutes news and how it gets “spun” during the delivery. Both portions of the morning were taped and can be listened to on the Student Town Meeting Web site under “Professional Development.”

During lunch, participants watched “Weapons of Mass Deception,” a film that dissects the media’s role in how Americans receive information on the war in Iraq. Throughout the day, the educators learned more about the *Youth Media Project: Student Town Meetings* and worked with WAMC Education Director Maryanne Malecki in preparation for conducting a “Teacher Town Meeting” on media literacy in the afternoon. Moderated by Alan Chartock, the panel included David Galletly, WAMC Senior Vice President for Operations; Clarence Fanto, and Mark McGuire, media critic from the Times-Union. This very special “Teacher Town Meeting” was taped for later broadcast on WAMC’s popular afternoon program, *The Speakers’ Corner*; the audio is available on-line as well.

The participants declared the day to be “outstanding!” They particularly enjoyed having one-on-one time with Alan, and most if not all are interested in bringing the Student Town Meetings into their classrooms. As one educator wrote, “...the authentic modeling done here,...to participate actively in a discussion, is exactly what students need in schools today. Participation creates true motivation to think, organize and define positions. This is critical in education today.” Another wrote, “Bringing educators together to think about this topic in itself was important enough!” And yet another comment: “You guys did a great job at having a mixed and diverse panel that addressed important issues. I feel that as we continue to work together as educators, we can fill some of the loopholes in our school systems.”

The downside of the day? Not enough time – to network, process information and share instructional strategies and techniques. In response to this, WAMC will continue its partnership with public educators with a four-day Teacher Institute at the end of June, 2006. Information and details will be available in the next few months in the Program Guide and on our Web site.

Funding for this project is provided by the Educational Foundation of America and Carl E. Touhey; additional support for the Teacher Conference came from Clarion Hotel Catering and Pie in the Sky Bakery. If you would like to support WAMC’s professional development opportunities for public school teachers and administrators, contact WAMC Education Director Maryanne Malecki at (518) 465-5233 ext. 135, or visit the Web site, [www.wamcstudenttownmeetings.org](http://www.wamcstudenttownmeetings.org).

### **Student Town Meetings scheduled to air in December/January:**

- Waterford-Halfmoon HS
- Albany High School

*Dates and topics TBA; contact [mmalecki@wamc.org](mailto:mmalecki@wamc.org) for air dates as they become available.*