00:00:07:04 [Jen]: From the California Prevention Training Center in San Francisco, this is Speaking Frankly, the State of Sexual Health. We know good sexual health doesn't just happen, it's created. In this series, we're starting the conversations we should already be having. We'll speak with experts in the field about sex, stigma, and all of the other factors that shape our sexual health and our everyday lives. I'm Jennifer Rogers. Today, we're talking with Lidia Carlton, director of community education at planned Parenthood, Pasadena and San Gabriel Valley. She's going to be talking with

00:00:39:11 us about the California healthy youth act, otherwise known as Chaya or assembly bill 329. It passed in 2015 and was first rolled out in 2016. Chaya changes the way sex education is taught in California's public schools. Lidia talks with us about the status of Chaya today four years after its initial rollout, why there is still pushback against it, despite data showing benefits for young people and what health educators should all be talking about more to reduce health inequities in youth. You don't

00:01:10:10 want to miss this one. Thank you so much for joining us. Thanks so much for joining us. Lidia Carlton, can you tell us a little bit about what was your background and kind of education and what drew you to the work and then your most recent role at California department of Public Health?

00:01:25:24 [Lidia]: Sure. Like any good kid who grew up in Los Angeles, I thought I wanted to do film, so [Jen] I love it. [Lidia] Like so many sex educators, I have a film degree. [Jen] Oh do you! Seriously. [Lidia] I do. I do. I love it. My bachelor's is in film. And then after school I was like, Ooh, that's not for me. I'm just not into that. Like boys club was not my, so I went to grad school for public health. After I had like searched, I was kind of

00:01:59:10 looking for jobs that I thought would be cool and interesting. And a lot of Planned Parenthood jobs interested me just from a sort of political perspective. And I saw that public health degrees were what you needed. And so I went back to school for public health at UCLA. And then after I graduated, I did work at a planned Parenthood, a different planned Parenthood, orange and San Bernardino counties.

00:02:21:12 [Lidia]: And after I was there for a few years, that's when I transitioned to working for the California department of public health in the STD control branch. Originally, I started working for the branch as a regional health education coordinator for Southern California, specifically serving the Southern California counties and health jurisdictions in doing STD primary prevention, which was like anything, sex ed and working with young people. That's when I started at the branch and that's like 11 years ago, you know, I had a lot of opportunity to sort of take on new roles and

00:02:53:28 then California healthy youth act passed. And that changed a lot of my work and the way that I was doing work. So I think it just kept me really interested in what I was doing. I switched into this role about a year and a half ago. So it's been like 15 years of sex ed in some way or another.

00:03:11:21 [Jen]: So talking about Chaya, that's California healthy youth act. And that's how we got to know each other. We met at a conference in San Diego, maybe a couple of years after Chaya had been passed and tons of health educators were there. And we were talking about the fact that there are so many States, it was a national conference. And for me as a sex educator at the time in California with the California healthy youth act already or in the process of being rolled out on a widespread kind

00:03:42:13 of level in the state was shocked to encounter other folks from different States like Texas and like States in the Midwest who couldn't acknowledge the identity of trans students. Can't talk about consent by law, but are still tasked with talking about HIV prevention for instance. So that was pretty mind blowing to me. So can you just tell us for our listeners, what is the California healthy youth act and how does that interplay with the

00:04:12:09 education code in California? Because there's a slight distinction.

00:04:15:19 [Lidia]: Yeah. So the California healthy youth act is kind of a modernization of California sex ed law. You know, you're talking about folks in other States who can't talk about certain subjects and in California prior to 2016, the laws around sex ed were not the worst, but they were a little bit unclear and it was a little bit complicated for teachers, for administrators, for health educators. It wasn't very straightforward and I think it's helpful, no matter someone's feelings

00:04:47:20 about comprehensive sex ed, I think it's helpful to have such a clear and directive law. So California healthy youth act is the legislation passed that influences and modified the education codes. So basically education codes are the laws that schools have to follow. California public schools. And that includes charter schools. So Chaya, California, healthy youth act is a definitive law requiring comprehensive sex ed once in middle

00:05:14:17 school, once in high school. And it has specific traits and instructional content requirements basically. I mean, it's basically describing the expectations around sex ed so that it has to be age appropriate, medically accurate. It has to be comprehensive. It has to be gender inclusive. It has to address gender identity, sexual orientation, gender expression. It has to be very comprehensive related to HIV and STIs, including things like needle use and needle sharing, which we never really sort of focused on before. [Jen] Very

00:05:49:00 specific. [Lidia] Yeah, it's really a pretty micro in terms of the content that has to be covered. And it also describes traits of any sex education that a school provides. So a school district is required to provide comprehensive sex ed once in middle school, once in high school. And they can choose to provide it in elementary school or younger grade spans if they want. But

00:06:12:03 Chaya also influences what those younger grade spans should look like.

00:06:16:00 [Lidia]: So it still has to be comprehensive. It still has to be gender inclusive for all kinds of gender identities, but it will still be age appropriate. So it will be for younger students, but you know, nothing different in terms of how we talk about same-sex couples or how we talk about trans folks. So Chaya is all of that and it describes the rights of parents to opt out and to preview materials. It describes also a little bit about teacher training requirements and that teachers have to continue to get trained on all of these topics and guest speakers should also be

00:06:49:18 adhering to Chaya. So there were a lot of little nuts and bolts about implementation that are also included in the law and thus are embedded into the education code. That's like in a nutshell, about Chaya.

00:07:04:19 [Jen]: Small nutshell, it is a lot, it's a lot, [Lidia] it's a lot. Yeah. [Jen] In your role currently then at planned Parenthood, how does your work now interplay with Chaya and rolling out Chaya to all of California's public schools, which is a huge undertaking. What role do you play in that at planned Parenthood?

00:07:25:06 [Lidia]: I think all of the planned Parenthoods across the state provide Chaya compliant education. So we all have educator staff who can go into classrooms and provide supplemental sessions or entire series of sessions that meet the education code requirements. I think every affiliate also provides teacher training on all of the different Chaya topics and instructional requirements. And then also we get a lot of requests for like

00:07:57:28 LGBTQ inclusivity trainings since that's a huge part of Chaya as well. So, you know, I'm part of this sort of affiliate structure that supports implementation of Chaya in that way, like the direct education in a school way. And then I also still in my role at planned Parenthood support statewide initiatives that are a little bit more like systemic and structural around comprehensive sex ed support. So for example, we've done

00:08:26:12 curriculum review processes. So a lot of school districts, the strategy that they use is to adopt curriculum that's published by different organizations that meets all the requirements of Chaya and we as sex ed stakeholders have formed different review groups to look over those different curricula in order to see, does it actually comply with Chaya or not? And so even most well-intentioned programs still sometimes need some

00:08:58:09 tweaking or they've missed a part or the law has also evolved. So sometimes they're just like trying to catch up with new requirements. There's that process that I'm still involved in

00:09:11:02 [Jen]: Try is a lot about consistency. So it's more inclusive, medically accurate, certainly age appropriate. But that previous to this bill wasn't necessarily happening in California, is that right?

00:09:25:18 [Lidia]: Yeah. Prior to Chaya was like basically HIV prevention education was really explicitly required and then [Jen] that's been around since ‘04 or something like that is that [Lidia] yeah. Since 2003. Okay. The other, the related requirement was that if you talk about anything outside of HIV prevention education, then it has to be comprehensive. So basically you're talking about HIV prevention education, and you mentioned condoms. You can, and you can stick to just HIV and STI prevention related to condoms. You

00:10:00:21 can keep your education very narrow about disease prevention. Okay. If you start talking about condoms as a contraceptive method, you have now dipped into the world of contraception and now everything else has to be provided.

00:10:14:23 [Jen]: So then you’re talking about Morena, and you're talking about plan B and you're talking about progesterone based pills or whatever, all of the options. Right. And that's what we're, we're saying is comprehensive.

00:10:24:23 [Lidia]: Yeah. It's a little more defined in Chaya and now it's like all FDA approved methods of contraception have to be covered, but at the time prior, it was basically like, you have to talk about all methods of contraception. It wasn't very well-defined. It was, again, it was complicated because it was a little bit vague. And I think when you leave things fairly vague, it creates a lot of confusion and it creates room like wiggle room that people will use intentionally, but also ways that's like unintentional, just confusion. So, yeah. I'm glad that it's a

00:10:55:13 little bit more clear. There's still a questions that people have all the time about Chaya, but it's a lot better than what we had before.

00:11:02:23 [Jen]: A lot of, I mean, when you say wiggle room, what comes up for me is bias or, or just simply not knowing. So if someone sex educator or just home teacher, right. Like science teachers, I mean, I personally had sex education taught alongside driver's ed, which makes sense. And by my driver's ed teacher. So when you think about that, I mean, that's not that person's area of expertise necessarily. And so kind of thinking about

00:11:34:00 how much influence teachers, educators have over what they choose to share with students, what they choose to hold back. Abortion is a huge one that comes up for me, depending on what their beliefs and how that bias creeps in. Are we going to talk about abortion or are we not going to talk about abortion, what types of contraceptives is that educator think are okay to share with young people, right.

00:11:58:02 [Lidia]: Yeah, definitely Chaya clarified a lot of those points. Like it's very clear, literally says in the law, you have to have an objective discussion, quote, about abortion adoption, prenatal care, safe surrender law. So it's like all legally available pregnancy outcomes have to be discussed by law. So that's like a kind of clarity. That's a great example of the kind of clarity that exists where prior to this law, it was just sort of up to whatever was happening in that classroom with that person,

00:12:29:10 with that teacher. And for sure in California, like health education’s on a graduation requirement. So you have a lot of different people who could potentially be teaching sex ed it's really wild. Like, you know, I had a coach. I also, I grew up in LA I had health education in my high school as a requirement, but still had a coach as a teacher who was clearly very like mean girls like uncomfortable was not like not into it.

00:12:55:00 [Lidia]: Just the stereotype of what you would expect a coach to be like. Um, I kinda don't blame them though. Like a lot of teachers are just, they did not sign up for this. They're a science teacher moseying along with their, like mytosis and then our task to teach like really sophisticated, nuanced topics around gender, gender identity and things that a lot of people didn't grow up with themselves as young people. Like I didn't grow up with any discussions about identity in the nineties that we were not necessarily talking about gender and kind of a nuanced

00:13:28:26 way.

00:13:29:25 [Jen]: I too have the nineties experience and it was not there. So I hear ya. So this is a huge change in a lot of ways, there's a lot of inclusion of new materials, broadening of scope of what sex ed looks like. There's a lot of focus on consistency now, so that folks have a more clear direction of how to teach sex education across the state. Our schools are, we all know limited on funds. So this is an unfunded mandate from the

00:14:00:03 state. So that means schools don't have money to implement this. Is that correct? [Lidia] Yes. [Jen] Or what does that look like? Maybe tell me about that. Like how are they getting this new curriculum? And if the home teachers don't want to teach it, if the science teacher or, or, you know, gym teacher doesn't want to teach it, who comes in, who's paying for it. And how is this being monitored to make sure that it's getting done.

00:14:23:09 [Lidia]: Yeah, those are good questions. So money. [Jen] Yes. [Lidia] Most school districts have folks who are savvy about getting money. There are strategies that lots of school districts use to fund acquisition of curriculum and materials and teacher training. There's a lot of free teacher training from like planned Parenthoods and other organizations and there's free curriculum too. So there's a lot of, they kind of excuses of funding. Don't move me. I'm like, I can give you solutions to that problem.

00:14:54:29 They have access to the block grant. That's a kind of funding category for school districts. There's also ways that you can incorporate sex ed into the LCAP, the local control accountability plan, which is like a way that districts divvy up money within the district based on a lot of different indicators. So if they decide they want to include sort of sexual health outcomes as an indicator, they can also plug it into that funding stream. There are a lot of different strategies. This is the main point. I think

00:15:24:08 the harder part is maybe the accountability piece because you know, the California department of education used to include their sex ed requirements in their federal program monitoring, which is kind of like a way that the department of ed audits, like for lack of a better term, it's like a way that they audit schools to make sure they're doing what they're supposed to be doing. They used to include sex ed in that audit, that kind of auditing process, but they don't have the resources for

00:15:53:15 that right now. And they don't include Chaya in, in that process. So there is no monitoring from the department of education. So it's really like up to local folks to really keep an eye on what's happening at their local school districts, like straight up grassroots efforts, or it requires motivated board members who want to be compliant with the law or motivated parents who want to hold the district accountable for what they're supposed to be providing. Sometimes the ACLU has gotten involved with different

00:16:23:26 districts and written letters, but for the most part, I think there's a lot of work to be done for the districts that want to do this education and want to do it well. And so the efforts to sort of focus on districts that aren't meeting these requirements has been a little bit less of a priority, I would say,

00:16:42:19 [Jen]: Right. And then if it's less of a priority for their community and it's really, it sounds like it's a lot about self-regulation in a lot of ways, community to community. Would it be right to say that that community could very well not be in compliance for a long period of time or,

00:16:58:13 [Lidia]: Yeah, totally. I would bet money today. There are districts that have not implemented Chaya that are just floating along and haven't been held accountable in any way as a stakeholder in the field. It's frustrating and I feel upset about it, whatever, but I think what's really more concerning is just that there are just classes and classes of students going through the system who are missing out on this huge chunk of like really critical information that's related to how they're going to live their lives for the future. Like it's just wild to me that they're not

00:17:31:15 getting what other students are getting. And it's, you know, I don't think people frame it as an equity issue all that often, but it's certainly an equity issue. Especially if you look at schools where you might have parent groups who want to hold a school district accountable, you might have parents who time and resources to really go to board meetings and being loud and rabblerouse, but outside communities, that's just not, what's

00:17:56:26 going to be available to a lot of parents and guardians, you know,

00:18:00:01 [Jen]: language barriers in that to, um, digest the information well, and to be clear, this still rolled out in January, 2015, is that correct? [Lidia] 2016. It

00:18:12:05 [Lidia]: Passed in October, 2015.

00:18:14:13 [Jen]: Yeah. Just in terms of like resources. I know that there were communities in the Bay area that are incredibly affluent on kind of both sides of the matter. If you will. Folks who really want to try it in the schools and understood the value of this comprehensive approach that also takes into the classroom, how do you have healthy relationships? How do I identify unhealthy relationships? How do you talk to your trusted adults and open up the lens of communication, all of that. And then you have other folks who are on the other side and to take that amount of time

00:18:45:06 to go to every board meeting and to write letters to your principal and to rally, that's a lot in a lot of communities just don't have that.

00:18:54:22 [Lidia]: Yeah, totally. It's a really challenging discussion because a lot of, you know, you can have a small group of, of folks who are loud and motivated make change, and that can be really wonderful sometimes, but it can also be really challenging if there are changes impacting entire communities that aren't necessarily on board. So it's difficult. And I think what's been hard about opposition to Chaya is that parents have an incredible amount of freedom to opt their children out of the education.

00:19:24:27 It's very clear, it's very straightforward. So if someone has a problem with having school-based comprehensive sex ed, they can just have their child do an alternate activity, pretty straightforward stuff. And when they don't want any child to have any of that education, that's when it gets way stickier, because we know that comprehensive sex ed is really related to positive behavioral health outcomes. So that's kind of the goal that we're going for here.

00:19:55:04 [Jen]: Can you tell us about what results are we seeing since 2016? And since Chaya has rolled out and like, what have we just seen anecdotally over the years and how comprehensive sex ed is effective?

00:20:08:05 [Lidia]: There's lots of independent research to back comprehensive sex ed as a strategy to improve behavioral health outcomes. So more information gives young people a lot of skills to delay onset of sexual activity, to negotiate healthier sexual situations, use condoms more. If they are engaging in sex, all of those things that we want to see that are protective behaviors, we know from a huge body of research that comprehensive sex ed gets us there. But in terms of Chaya, we don't have specific, there's not specific evaluation. I mean, that's true for most

00:20:42:12 legislative or policy that we have in California. We don't always have like a way to evaluate is it actually working? We make a lot of inferences. So with comprehensive sex ed, what we can look at is the youth risk behavior survey. So YRBS is behavioral data about young people in California. We have those data from prior to Chaya implementation and then post Chaya implementation and California is already doing pretty good compared to our

00:21:11:27 national counterparts in terms of sexual behavioral outcomes. We tend to have young people who their sexual debut, their first time that they have sex tends to be later, or they tend to wait a little bit longer and they tend to use condoms more, these kinds of outcomes in California, but since the onset of Chaya and since the implementation of Chaya, we've seen those numbers get even better and it just continues to improve in California [Jen] only four years. [Lidia] Yeah. [Jen] It's like a significant, pretty wild. [Lidia] And we also have

00:21:41:23 school health profiles data. So this is not like the youth level, but this is the school level. The CDC also collects information from schools, school sites like principals and lead health teachers who report on what they're doing around health ed in the school. And even in those school health profiles, we've seen a lot of change at a school level in terms of how much training is provided to teachers on things like HIV and generally just

00:22:08:26 improvement in terms of what the school is doing. We've seen that also improved since the implementation of Chaya. And that's been really a different data set to look at to kind of parallel with what we're seeing among young people.

00:22:22:00 [Jen]: That's fascinating that in four years, it's a noted a noted difference in California. Yeah. You touched on something that I want to share with folks. You were mentioning negotiation skills and I was talking earlier about like communication with parents around sex and kind of the softer skills, if you will. Can you just talk a little bit about that element of Chaya apart from the physical elements?

00:22:48:09 [Lidia]: Yeah. Chaya is infused with the language in the lot is really built on knowledge and skills. So if you looked at the ed code word for word, you would see throughout the entire section, that it just reads knowledge and skills on this knowledge and skills on that. So there is knowledge and skills about speaking with one's parents or guardians or trusted adults. There is knowledge and skills about risk reduction strategies and refusal strategies. Those are treated separately. It's not just for few of those skills. It's also, you know, negotiation skills. I

00:23:22:13 think those kinds of skill sets that also impact someone's ability to negotiate lots of different situations, not just sexual health, that's impacted, but negotiation risk reduction is really important for like alcohol use or drug use in situations that are just a little bit challenging for young people to figure out what they're going to do. Those kinds of skill sets are really important across different scenarios. So I think Chaya is really explicit in that way. And I think also that that's

00:23:53:08 something that can really depend on who's providing the education, how much expertise or how well defined the resources are that they have a teacher and educator has to facilitate that kind of skill development, because that's not really easy to just teach a young person how to negotiate a difficult situation that in and of itself is a skill. It takes skills to teach skills, it's physical

00:24:17:13 [Jen]: Limitation, right? I mean, not everyone's a facilitator. So asking again, I mean, going back to what we were saying before asking a teacher to suddenly facilitate these really nuanced topic areas is a lot to ask.

00:24:29:02 [Lidia]: Yeah. I mean, I think they just really need practice. And a lot of teachers, you know, for the most part, teachers have a ton of training and expertise on classroom management. They know how to make something interactive. They know when they want it to be didactic. And when that makes more sense, like I really trust teachers to have a lot of expertise in a lot of different things. And so for some of these more sensitive topics, I think it's just a matter of like exposure and practice. They just need to hear like, what are these scary questions I'm going to

00:24:57:21 face? And how can I manage that on the fly

00:25:02:14 [Jen]: That kind of brings up for me. I want folks to understand how teachers are getting supported in the implementation of Chaya in the classroom. So it sounds like one way is for a school district to adopt a, Chaya compliant curriculum. And those teachers implement that. So the science teacher who existed before implements that what are other kinds of models that a school district might choose to employ as they're getting Chaya compliant,

00:25:28:06 [Lidia]: Some school districts purchase a curriculum and pay to have the teachers trained in implementing the curriculums. Um, other school districts will develop their own programs, just have from scratch, which I think is a mixed bag like that could work depending on your population and the teacher motivation, but it's also potentially recreating the wheel. And I think writing curriculum is a ton of work, but some school districts do that. Other school districts totally outsource what they're going to do.

00:25:59:02 And they prefer to have like a planned Parenthood or even contract with different agencies to provide the comprehensive sex ed. And sometimes I think that can be really helpful to sort of outsource to different people. On the other hand, I think a lot of the affiliates in California, the planned Parenthood folks, it's really hard. Like we get a lot of requests for education. And so our capacity is somewhat limited.

00:26:22:22 [Lidia]: So there's a balance to be had there. So yeah, it just, it really depends. There are a lot of school districts that do have health education as a graduation requirement and they have resources existing that they can build on already. And they have health teachers who might be much more equipped to write lesson plans and be ready to take that on and I’ve seen that happen as well. But it really just depends on the flavor of the district. You know, like what, how invested are they, do they want to put time and attention on this topic? Or are they trying to kind of skate by, but you can do both. You can skate by and still be like air quotes

00:26:56:21 compliant, but it's not, it's not my favorite thing, but it's totally, it's possible. [Jen] Tune in next time for the second half of our conversation with Lidia Carlton, as she discusses pushback against Chaya, school bullying, and how we can include more diversity in our sex ed conversations. You don't want to miss it. A special, thank you again to our guest, Lidia Carlton, director of community education at planned Parenthood, Pasadena and San Gabriel Valley

00:27:26:27 speaking frankly, is a production of the California prevention training center in San Francisco, California. It's produced by me, Jennifer Rogers and Laura Marie Lazar and is edited by Nils Myers at 152 West productions.