



On Our Side: Public Support for Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Organizations that support abstinence-only-until-marriage programs portray sexuality education as a controversial issue. Yet, all evidence suggests that comprehensive sexuality education is a mainstream American value. A vast majority of Americans support comprehensive sexuality education—medically accurate, age-appropriate education that includes information about both abstinence and contraception—and believe young people should be given information about how to protect themselves from unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).¹

National surveys of adults demonstrate overwhelming public support for comprehensive sexuality education in American schools:

- 93% of parents of junior high school students and 91% of parents of high school students believe it is very or somewhat important to have sexuality education as part of the school curriculum. In contrast, only 4% of parents of junior high school students and 6% of parents of high school students believe sexuality education should not be taught in school.²
- 95% of parents of junior high school students and 93% of parents of high school students believe that birth control and other methods of preventing pregnancy are appropriate topics for sexuality education programs in schools.³
- 88% of parents of junior high school students and 85% of parents of high school students believe information about how to use and where to get contraceptives is an appropriate topic for sexuality education programs in schools.⁴
- 72% of parents of junior high school students and 65% of parents of high school students stated that federal government funding “should be used to fund more comprehensive sex education programs that include information on how to obtain and use condoms and other contraceptives” instead of funding programs that have “abstaining from sexual activity” as their only purpose.⁵
- More than 6 in 10 voters would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports comprehensive sexuality education.⁶

State surveys from across the country demonstrate overwhelming support for comprehensive sexuality education:

- 97% of parents in Washington State support sexuality education for high school students, and 87% of Washington’s parents believe teens should receive information on sex and sexuality over the claim that sex education encourages sexual activity among teens.⁷
- 90% of adults in Texas favor teaching sex education that includes information about contraceptive methods, the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, and abstinence.⁸
- 83% of Illinois voters agree that students in Illinois should have information about contraception and disease prevention, as well as age-appropriate facts about pregnancy and STDs..
- 81% of registered voters in South Carolina support sexuality education containing information on contraception and abstinence.⁹
- 78% of California residents support programs that teach about abstinence as well as how to obtain and use contraceptives. Furthermore, residents believe that the federal government should pay for this instruction.¹⁰

Americans strongly support including a wide breadth of topics in sexuality education:¹¹

- 100% of parents of junior high school students and 99% of parents of high school students believe HIV/AIDS is an appropriate topic for sexuality education programs in schools.
- 100% of parents of junior high school students and 98% of parents of high school students believe sexually transmitted diseases other than HIV/AIDS, such as herpes, are appropriate topics for sexuality education programs in schools.
- 99% of parents of junior high school students and 97% of parents of high school students believe the basics of how babies are made, pregnancy, and birth are appropriate topics for sexuality education programs in schools.
- 97% of parents of junior high school students and 96% of parents of high school students believe information about how to get tested for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases is an appropriate topic for sexuality education programs in schools.
- 83% of parents of junior high school students and 79% of parents of high school students believe information about how to put on a condom is an appropriate topic for sexuality education programs in schools.¹²
- 71% of parents of junior high school students and 73% of parents of high school students believe informing teens that they can obtain birth control pills from family planning clinics and doctors without permission from a parent is an appropriate topic for sexuality education programs in schools.
- 80% of parents of junior high school students and 73% of parents of high school students believe homosexuality and sexual orientation are appropriate topics for sexuality education programs in schools.

Broad public support for comprehensive sexuality curricula is found across ideological and religious lines:

- A majority of voters in nearly every demographic category, including Democrats, Republicans, and independents, as well as Catholics and evangelical Christians support comprehensive sex education.¹³
- Over four in five anti-choice voters agree that students should receive age-appropriate, medically accurate sexuality education, beginning in the early grades and continuing through 12th grade.¹⁴
- Almost nine in ten self-described Evangelical or born-again Christians support sexuality education being taught in schools.¹⁵
- More than 14 religious denominations and faith-based organizations are members of the National Coalition to Support Sexuality Education. (*See the full list of over 150 supporting organizations at www.ncsse.org.*)

¹ *Sex Education in America: General Public/Parents Survey* (Washington, DC: National Public Radio, Kaiser Family Foundation, Kennedy School of Government, 2004), 5.

² *Ibid.*, 5

³ *Ibid.*, 9

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶ *Mobilizing Support for Sex Education: New Messages and Techniques* (New York, NY: The Othmer Institute of Planned Parenthood of NYC, 2002).

⁷ *Sexual Health Education Poll of Washington State Parents and Voters* (Seattle, WA: Planned Parenthood Public Policy Network of Washington, 2004).

⁸ *August Scripps Howard Texas Poll* (Texas: Scripps Howard, August 9–26, 2004).

⁹ *South Carolina Speaks 2004* (Columbia, SC: South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2004).

¹⁰ Mark Baldassare, *PPIC Statewide Survey* (California: Public Policy Institute of California, 2005), accessed 14 January 2006, <www.ppic.org/content/pubs/S_1205MBS.pdf>.

¹¹ *Sex Education in America*, 9–13.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., “Memorandum: Application of Research Findings,” (Washington, DC: Planned Parenthood Federation of America and National Women’s Law Center, 12 July 2007), accessed 2 October 2007, <<http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/7-12-07interestedpartiesmemo.pdf>>.

¹⁴ *Mobilizing Support for Sex Education: New Messages and Techniques*.

¹⁵ *Sex Education in America*, Table 3.