



ON OUR SIDE: PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR SEX EDUCATION

While abstinence-only-until-marriage proponents might portray sex education as a controversial issue, all evidence suggests that comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a mainstream value in the United States. A vast majority of people in the U.S. support CSE—medically accurate, age-appropriate education that includes information about both abstinence and contraception, among many other topics—and believe young people should be given information about how to protect themselves from unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Public support for sex education in this country is overwhelming—regardless of political affiliation, religion, and/or regional demographics.¹ Yet only 38% of all high schools and 14% of middle schools in the United States provide all 19 topics identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as *critical* sex education topics.²

Parents of middle and high school students and likely voters have demonstrated overwhelming support for sex education over the last 15 years:

2004: 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 sex education as part of the school curriculum.³

2008: 89.3% of parents favored teaching abstinence, contraception, and other strategies for pregnancy prevention in schools. Only 0.9% believed sex education should not be taught in schools at all.¹

2012: 93.9% of parents of young people ages 15–18 reported it is important to teach sex education in middle schools and 95.7% reported it is important to teach sex education in high schools.⁴

2017: 93.5% of parents feel it is important to have sex education taught in middle school, and 96% feel it is important to have sex education taught in high school.⁵

2018: 89% of likely voters believe it is important to have sex education in middle school, and 98% believe it is important to have sex education in high school.⁶

Most people in the U.S. strongly prefer a comprehensive approach to sex education over programs that only focus on abstinence.

- Americans overwhelmingly believe teaching “safer sex practices” is more effective than abstinence at reducing unintended pregnancies (67%) and transmission of STIs (69%).⁷
Only 9% of likely voters support federally funded programs designed to prevent unintended pregnancy that focus on only encouraging teens to postpone sex.⁶
Likely voters strongly support including information in sex education in both middle and high school regarding the following content areas: consent (93% and 96%, respectively), healthy relationships (89% and 96%, respectively), and sexual orientation (69% and 79%, respectively).⁶

Most parents and likely voters overwhelmingly support instruction on abstinence, birth control, STIs, healthy relationships, sexual orientation, and puberty within sex education in both middle and high school.

Table with 5 columns: Topic, Parents 2017 (Middle School, High School), and Likely Voters 2018 (Middle School, High School). Rows include Abstinence, Birth Control, STIs, Healthy Relationships, Sexual Orientation, and Puberty.

Figures in this table reflect nationally representative survey results that identified the percentages of parents and likely voters who expressed support for each item of instruction in middle and high school respectively.

The majority of parents and likely voters support federal funding for programs that both encourage teens to postpone sex and provide information on birth control and STIs.

- 74% of adults and 73% of parents support federal money going to programs proven to delay sex, improve contraceptive use, and/or prevent unintended pregnancy.⁸
- 69% of likely voters support federally funded programs designed to prevent unintended pregnancy that both encourage teens to postpone sex *and* provide information about birth control and protection from STIs.⁶

Sex education is supported by people regardless of political party affiliation.

	Middle School	High School
Republicans	90.1%	93.9%
Democrats	96.1%	98.5%

The vast majority of Republicans and Democrats surveyed agree: sex education is important to teach in middle and high school.⁵

Surveyed Republicans and Democrats agree that “safe sex education is more effective than abstinence” at reducing the number of both unintended pregnancies and STIs among young people.⁷

	Unintended Pregnancies	STIs
Republicans	55%	57%
Democrats	77%	80%

Parents of both major political parties also strongly support including a wide range of topics in sex education.⁵ The vast majority of parents who identify as Republican or Democrat support instruction on abstinence, birth control, STIs, healthy relationships, sexual orientation, and puberty within sex education.

People support sex education nationwide—no matter their geographic location or the political leaning of their state:⁹

- **North Carolina:** 72% of parents favor teaching students about birth control and 74% favor teaching students about condoms.
- **South Carolina:** 90% of residents support CSE in public schools and 71% support access to contraception.
- **Texas:** 80% of likely voters support teaching about contraception, condoms, and abstinence in high schools.
- **Utah:** 64% of adults favor comprehensive sex education in public schools.

¹ Eisenberg, Marla, Debra Bernat, Linda Bearinger, and Michael Resnick. "Support for Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Perspectives from Parents of School-age Youth." *PsycEXTRA Dataset*, April 2008. Accessed May 30, 2018. doi:10.1037/e456032008-005.

² Brener, Nancy, et al. "School Health Profiles 2016: Characteristics of Health Programs Among Secondary Schools." CDC. November 2017. Accessed May 30, 2018.

³ "Sex Education in America: General Public / Parents Survey." National Public Radio. January 01, 2004. Accessed May 30, 2018.

⁴ "Let's Talk Parents and Teens Talk About Sexuality: A National Poll." Planned Parenthood Federation of America. June 2012. Accessed May 22, 2018.

⁵ Kantor, Leslie, and Nicole Levitz. "Parents' Views on Sex Education in Schools: How Much Do Democrats and Republicans Agree?" *Plos One* 12, no. 7 (July 03, 2017). Accessed May 30, 2018. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0180250.

⁶ Kantor, Leslie and Amelia Holstrom. "Sex Education: New Findings on Terminology, Messaging, and Support." Planned Parenthood Federation of America. February 2018. Accessed May 30, 2018.

⁷ Davis, Carolyn, Daniel Cox, Rob Griffin, and Robert Jones. "Young People Set to Impact the Debate on Women's Health Issues." PRRI. April 17, 2018. Accessed May 30, 2018.

⁸ "Survey Says: Investing in Results." Power to Decide. January 2015. Accessed May 30, 2018.

⁹ "Parent Poll Shows Bipartisan Support for Sex Education, Pregnancy Prevention." SHIFT NC. March 07, 2013. Accessed May 30, 2018.; Kershner, Sarah H., Sara Corwin, Mary Prince, Alyssa Robillard, and Robert Oldendick. "Support for Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Adolescent Access to Condoms and Contraception in South Carolina." *American Journal of Sexuality Education* 12, no. 3 (2017): 297-314. Accessed June 8, 2018. doi:10.1080/15546128.2017.1359803.; Scharrer, Gary. "Poll Shows Most Texans Support Sex Education." San Antonio Express-News. July 13, 2010. Accessed May 30, 2018.; Bernick, Bob. "Poll: Utahns Want Comprehensive Sex-Ed Instead of Abstinence Only." Utahpolicy.com. February 19, 2016. Accessed May 30, 2018.