

What do parents think?

about sex education



The investment

Minnesotans

make in the health and well-being of young people strengthens our community – now and for the future.

As young people become contributing members of the community we ask that they take greater personal responsibility.

As adults we support their journey by sharing skills, knowledge and opportunities that meet their developmental needs.

Healthy Youth Development •
Prevention Research Center

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Adolescence marks the transition into adulthood – the experiences, relationships and connections a young person has will shape who they are and who they will become. One aspect of adolescent development consistently challenges our adult perspective: sexual development.

Just as many parents struggle to discuss sex with their children, our community conversation about sex education in schools provokes many questions: What kind of education is most appropriate for our young people? How can we respect the values that families instill? What

will keep our young people safe from disease and unintended pregnancy? How can we support our young people to make healthy decisions about their lives?

In 2007, the University of Minnesota's Prevention Research Center explored these questions through a survey of 1,605 Minnesota parents from a variety of communities, income and education levels, ethnicities and religious beliefs.

81%
of parents think that sex ed classes DO NOT cause more students to have sex

Minnesota Parents Agree

A substantial majority of parents surveyed believe that young people should be taught in school how to prevent pregnancy and disease while also being encouraged not to have sex.

Their opinions match those of health researchers who have demonstrated that sex education has had positive effects on teen sexual behavior.¹ This is not the

case for programs that only promote abstinence.²

At present, the wishes of Minnesota parents are not reflected in the actual use of state resources. Sex education programs receive no state funding and are not required for graduation. So there is no guarantee our children will receive effective sex education.

What should young people be taught?

Information about abstinence only

10%

Sex education that includes information about abstinence and prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)

89%

¹ *Emerging Answers, 2007: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases.* Douglas Kirby, Ph.D and the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. November, 2007. p. 14

² *Ibid*, p.15

100%

of parents think that the information young people receive should be medically accurate

What is sex ed? Does it work?

Large percentages of parents agreed that young people should receive broad and medically accurate sex education in school.

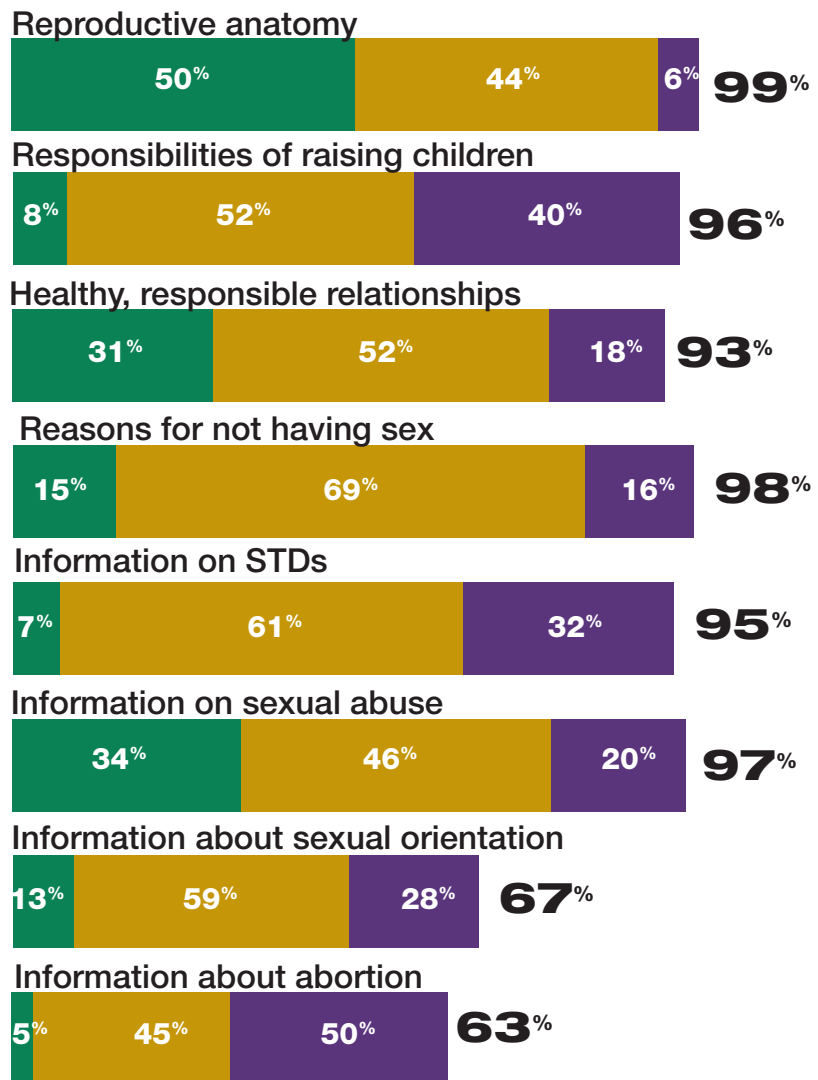
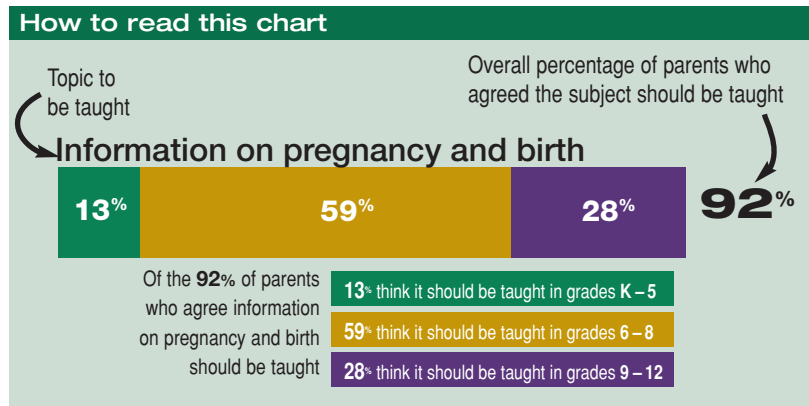
They believe this education should be provided no later than middle-school, and that it should be presented in developmentally appropriate ways.

The opinions of Minnesota parents mirror the current state of scientific evidence that shows that accurate, developmentally appropriate sex education paired with instruction on how and when to say no to sex can help delay a young person’s first sexual experience and help prevent unintended pregnancies and STDs by improving condom and contraceptive use.³

In contrast to effective sex education are abstinence-only programs. These programs offer no information about how to prevent disease and pregnancy except to avoid having sex. To date there is no strong evidence demonstrating their effectiveness. Abstinence-only programs have not been shown to delay the initiation of sex, increase the return to abstinence or decrease the number of sexual partners.⁴

What Parents Want

Minnesotans believe sex education in schools should include ...



³ Bearinger LH, Sieving RE, Ferguson BJ, Sharma V (2007). *Global perspectives on the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents: Patterns, prevention, and potential*. *Lancet*. 369(9568), 1220-1231.

⁴ *Emerging Answers, 2007: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases*. Douglas Kirby, Ph.D and the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. November, 2007, p. 15

Parents Who Support Sex Ed

No matter how you group them, Minnesota parents overwhelmingly support sex education in schools.

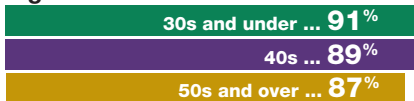
The following charts show demographic and geographic groupings of Minnesota parents who believe:

Young people should receive sex education in school that includes information about abstinence and prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Gender



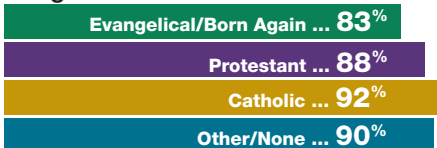
Age



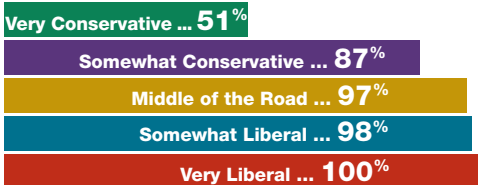
Race



Religion



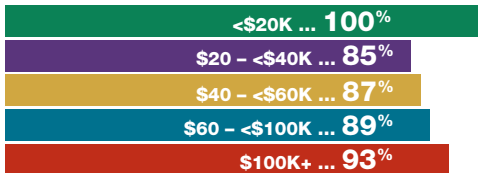
Political Orientation



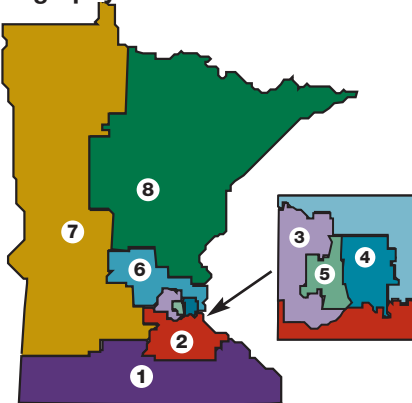
Education



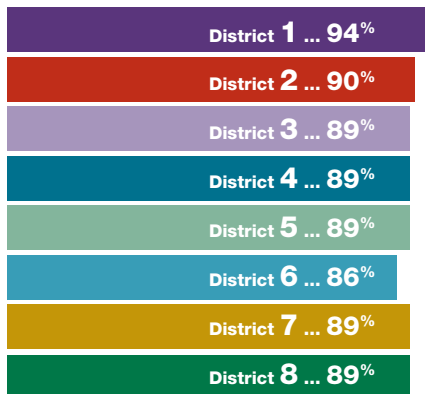
Income



Geography



Minnesota Congressional Districts



Resources

Check out these organizations to learn more about sex ed programs that have been rigorously evaluated and shown to have results.

Community

Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting (MOAPPP)
www.moappp.org

National

National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy
www.teenpregnancy.org
 The Guttmacher Institute
www.guttmacher.org

The state of sex education

The sex education that our young people receive varies dramatically from school district to school district and school to school.

Local decision making has an important function. We can better equip and inform young people about what it takes to be healthy by ensuring that resources, support and guidance from our state public health and education systems contribute to the efforts of communities, parents and schools.

Sex Education in Minnesota

- No dedicated state funding source
- No state-wide health instruction standards
- No state graduation health requirement
- No consistent monitoring
- No state-required health teacher training

State

Minnesota Coordinated School Health
www.health.state.mn.us/schools/csh/6behaviors98ee.html

Federal

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Division of Reproductive Health
www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/AdolescentReproHealth/index.htm

What can you do?

The health of our young people depends on our willingness to discuss difficult topics that can make us feel uncomfortable. By simply talking about sex education, we can all contribute to the health and welfare of our young people – and our community.

- **Talk to your children!**
Parents are the best sex educators and young people really want to know what you think. For tips on how to talk with young people, go to www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents/index.htm
- **Talk to your local school!**
Find out what sex education programs or topics are being taught and whether they have shown results. Programs that are proven to work can be found at <http://etr.org/recapp/programs/index.htm>
- **Talk to your neighbors!**
Minnesotans may assume that all our young people are getting the information they need to stay healthy. Share what you know.
- **Talk to your PTA, school board or policy makers!**
Most decisions about sex ed are made at the school or school district level – your opinion matters to these critical decision makers.

Who was surveyed?

This phone survey was conducted from September, 2006 through March, 2007. In total, 1,605 parents were interviewed. Care was taken to ensure that equal numbers of parents from every congressional district in the state were sampled.

The characteristics of the final sample are similar to, although not entirely representative of, the Minnesota population of parents.

Gender

Female.....73%
Male27%

Race

White96%
People of color4%

Religion

Protestant55%
Catholic32%
Other/no religion13%

Education

HS or less14%
Vocational/tech/business12%
Some college or AA degree24%
Bachelor's degree.....34%
Graduate school.....16%

Political orientation

Very conservative.....10%
Somewhat conservative29%
Middle-of-the-road33%
Somewhat liberal20%
Very liberal8%

Income*

<\$20,0001%
\$20,000-<\$40,0008%
\$40,000-<\$60,00022%
\$60,000-<\$100,00038%
\$100,000 or more32%

*Rounded figures = 101%

100%
of parents think that students should be encouraged to talk to a parent or guardian about sex and sexuality

What is a PRC?



For over 20 years, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have worked to eliminate health disparities and create healthy communities by funding *Prevention Research Centers (PRCs)* throughout the United States.

The Healthy Youth Development • Prevention Research Center, housed at the University of Minnesota, Department of Pediatrics, is one in a network of 33 academic centers whose main objective – as a PRC – is to link science to practice through collaborations with public health agencies and community-based organizations.

Contact the PRC

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