What U.S. parents think about SEX EDUCATION in schools

Planned Parenthood conducted national research, including focus groups and a nationally representative survey, to better understand parents’ views of school-based sex education in 2023. We learned that parents are largely very supportive of sex education that is rooted in facts, covers a wide variety of topics, and helps young people grow up to be safe, healthy, and confident.

FINDINGS FROM NATIONAL FOCUS GROUPS

Parents see VALUE in sex education to help:

- prevent unintended pregnancy and STIs/HIV
- young people grow up to be respectful, kind, and confident adults
- all young people feel safe at school and proud of who they are
- protect against mis/disinformation, both online and from peers

Parents want REASSURANCE that sex education is:

- age-appropriate
- comprehensive (covers a range of topics), including topics like self-esteem and body image, staying safe online, and consent and healthy relationships
- fact-based and free of bias

Parents want to BE INVOLVED in sex education with:

- resources from experts to help them have conversations at home
- the chance to communicate values around topics learned at school

17 SEX EDUCATION TOPICS INCLUDED IN POLL OF PARENTS:

- Abstinence
- Anti-bullying
- Birth control methods
- Consent and setting boundaries
- Gender identity and stereotypes
- Healthy and unhealthy peer relationships/peer pressure
- Healthy and unhealthy romantic relationships
- How to access health care
- How to stay safe online
- Media literacy skills
- Pregnancy options, including abortion
- Puberty
- Reproduction
- Self-esteem/body image
- Sexual orientation
- Sexually transmitted infections and safer sex
- Understanding all kinds of families
Parents support sex education, NOT Sexual Risk Avoidance. (AKA abstinence-only-until-marriage programs)

The vast majority of parents believe it’s important to teach sex education in:

- **96%** high school
- **84%** middle school

**TOP 3** qualities parents want in sex education:
- ✔️ age-appropriate
- ✔️ comprehensive
- ✔️ fact-based

Parents want experts, like Planned Parenthood, to TEACH sex education in schools.

A strong majority of parents are **comfortable** with Planned Parenthood teaching sex education in their local school. This is true in all regions of the country.

- **64%**

A significant majority of **Democrats (76%)** and **Independents (63%)** are comfortable with Planned Parenthood teaching sex education in their local school, and nearly half of **Republicans (49%)** are too.

Parents support a WIDE RANGE of sex education topics across elementary, middle, and high school.

- **67%** or more agreed that all 17 topics should be taught in **high school**
- More than **95%** of parents want topics like **STIs, consent, self-esteem**, and how to access health care to be taught in high school
- **57%** or more agreed that all 17 topics should be taught in **middle school**
- More than **85%** of parents want topics like **healthy relationships**, how to stay safe online, and anti-bullying to be taught in middle school
- More than **60%** of parents want **sexual orientation and gender identity** taught in middle and high school
- **50%** or more agreed that sex education topics like consent and boundaries, self-esteem, anti-bullying, healthy and unhealthy relationships, puberty, and how to stay safe online should be taught in **elementary school**