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PARENTS SPEAK OUT:

Survey Reveals Nearly 9 out of 10 Republican Parents and 8 out of 10 Democratic Parents Support Abstinence Education

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Executive Summary

Sex education continues to be a contentious issue in the public square, but a survey, commissioned by the National Abstinence Education Foundation (NAEF), found that there is little debate among parents regarding their support for abstinence education. The findings demonstrate that the majority of American parents, whether Democrat or Republican, with children aged 9-16, support abstinence education, with similar enthusiasm. Also, parents, regardless of party, gender, or race, agreed with all the major themes presented in an abstinence education class, indicating a strong endorsement of Abstinence Education for their children. The primary findings include the following:

- Nearly 9 out of 10 Republican parents and almost 8 out of 10 Democratic parents support abstinence education.
- Almost 60% of Democrats and more than 70% of Republicans oppose President Obama's efforts to eliminate all funding for SRA Abstinence Education.
- Democrats and Republicans alike support more equality in funding between Abstinence Education and "Comprehensive" Sex Education, with Democrats most supportive. (The funding disparity is now 1: 16, in favor of "Comprehensive"). [D: 67%/ R: 64%]
- More than 8 of 10 parents, but especially women and African Americans, support the dominant themes of Abstinence Education.
- Eighty-five percent of parents believe that all youth, including homosexual youth, benefit from skills that help them choose to wait for sex.
- Nearly 9 in 10 parents strongly support their children knowing the limitations of condoms for preventing pregnancy and disease.

Critics of abstinence education portray Abstinence Education as a religious issue or a political issue that has no place in our public schools. But the results of this survey show abstinence education is a women's issue, a Hispanic issue, an African-American issue, a health issue and a common-sense issue with strong support for abstinence education across ethnic groups, age demographics, religious beliefs and political affiliation.

Background

Parents Speak Out is a survey of American parents commissioned and released by the National Abstinence Education Foundation (NAEF). The survey asked parents a series of questions that revealed their general views on sex education, with specific questions designed to ascertain support or lack of support for topics commonly covered in the Sexual Risk Avoidance (SRA) approach of Abstinence Education. In addition, it asked parents to give their opinions on recent sex education policy decisions recommended and implemented by the Obama Administration, as well as policy initiatives introduced by Members of Congress.

The purpose of *Parents Speak Out* is to clarify the views of parents regarding the sex education of their children so that policy-makers at the local, state and national levels can be responsive to the opinions of this very important constituency. NAEF wanted to know if support for the SRA Abstinence Approach generally divided along party lines or if parents spoke in unanimity for the type of sex education information they want for their children.

The unprecedented elimination of abstinence education programs by the Obama Administration marked a stunning departure from bipartisan approval of abstinence education funding in previous Democratic and Republican Administrations. The anti-abstinence actions by the Obama Administration also sharpened the brewing political divide in Washington, DC over sex education. However, NAEF has long held that support for SRA Abstinence Education programs crosses party lines – and that the anti-abstinence policies of the Obama Administration are out of step not only with best health outcomes for America’s youth, but also with what their political base wants for their own children.

Since both Sexual Risk Reduction (SRR) “Comprehensive” Sex Education and SRA Abstinence Education regularly provide information on contraception to teens (particularly condom information), NAEF wanted to know which approach for giving this information was most in line with how parents wanted the information to be communicated. Specifically, do they favor the typical SRA Abstinence Education approach, which informs teens that while condoms reduce their risk of acquiring Sexual Transmitted Diseases (STD) and pregnancy,

condoms have limitations and that even sex with a condom carries intrinsic risk? Or do they favor the SRR “Comprehensive” Sex Education approach, which sometimes cautions teachers against sharing any of the limitations of condoms, for fear that teens will then be less likely to use them if they do become sexually active?¹

NAEF was also interested in knowing if race or gender affected a parent’s support or opposition to a genuine abstinence message for their children. We wondered if the recent election flash point over a presumed “war on women” was accurate when it came to gender views on reproductive health messaging, particularly as it pertains to sex education - or if it was merely a symptom of a hotly contested presidential race. Further, since there is a disproportionate risk to both young women² and certain racial minorities³ for negative consequences related to teen sex, we wanted to know if parental views on sex education differed among these demographics. Similarly, since anti-abstinence advocacy groups insist that “at risk” teens will not benefit from the information and skills provided in an SRA Abstinence Education program, we wondered if parents of “at risk” teens agreed.

NAEF was also interested in knowing if parents thought that the “M” word – marriage – was the appropriate time and context for sexual initiation. Critics argue that “abstinence until marriage” offers proof that SRA Abstinence Education is outdated. They also argue that since many teens grow up in families and neighborhoods where marriage is rare, rather than the norm, parents would be offended if sex education classes shared the social science benefits both to the couple and the resulting children, of waiting until marriage for sex.

Finally, anti-abstinence advocacy groups insist that the SRA Abstinence Education message is irrelevant for gay teens, and often contend that this approach is harmful to this vulnerable population. We wanted to know if parents agree with this view, since they have a more personal concern for their children’s sexual health than anyone else. Are teens that identify themselves by their sexual identity benefitted or harmed by classes that encourage them to delay sex?

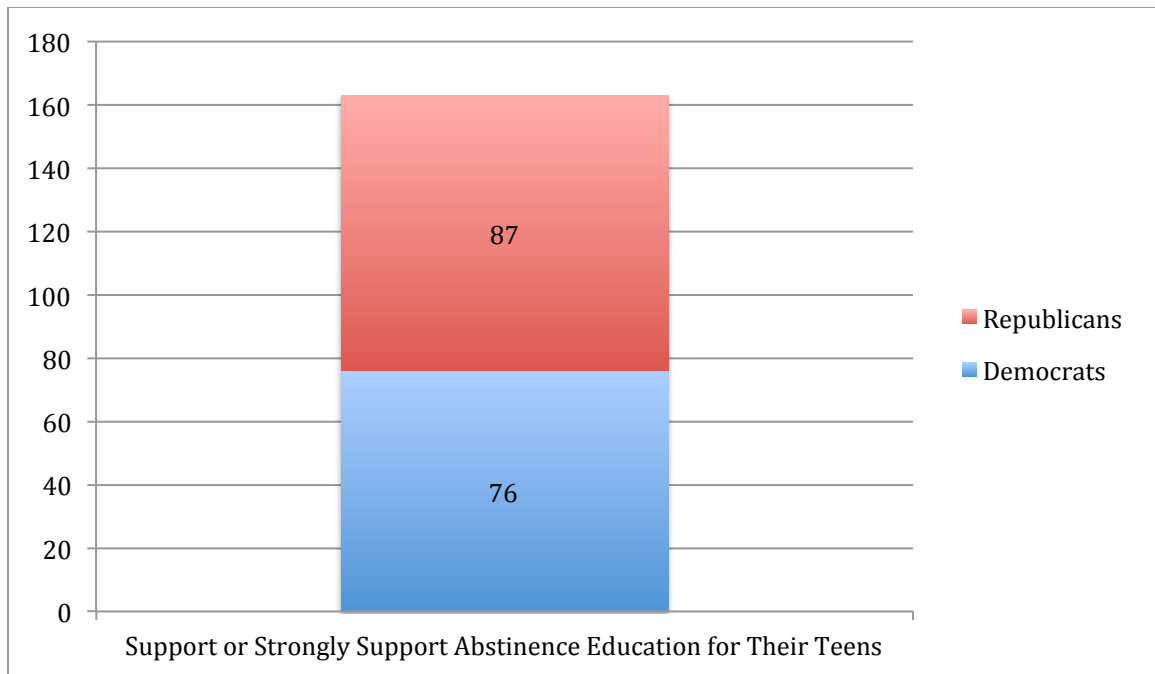
These were the main questions we wanted answered in the *Parents Speak Out* survey and we felt reasonably sure that most of America would also like to know,

so that perhaps.....finally.....sex education policy would reflect what parents want and encourage them in the important job of being primary sex educators for their children; that sex education classes would be mindful of, and strengthen, the unique parent/child relationship; and that sex education decisions and policies would be predicated on delivering information and skills to teens that best empower them to achieve optimal sexual health outcomes.

Key Findings

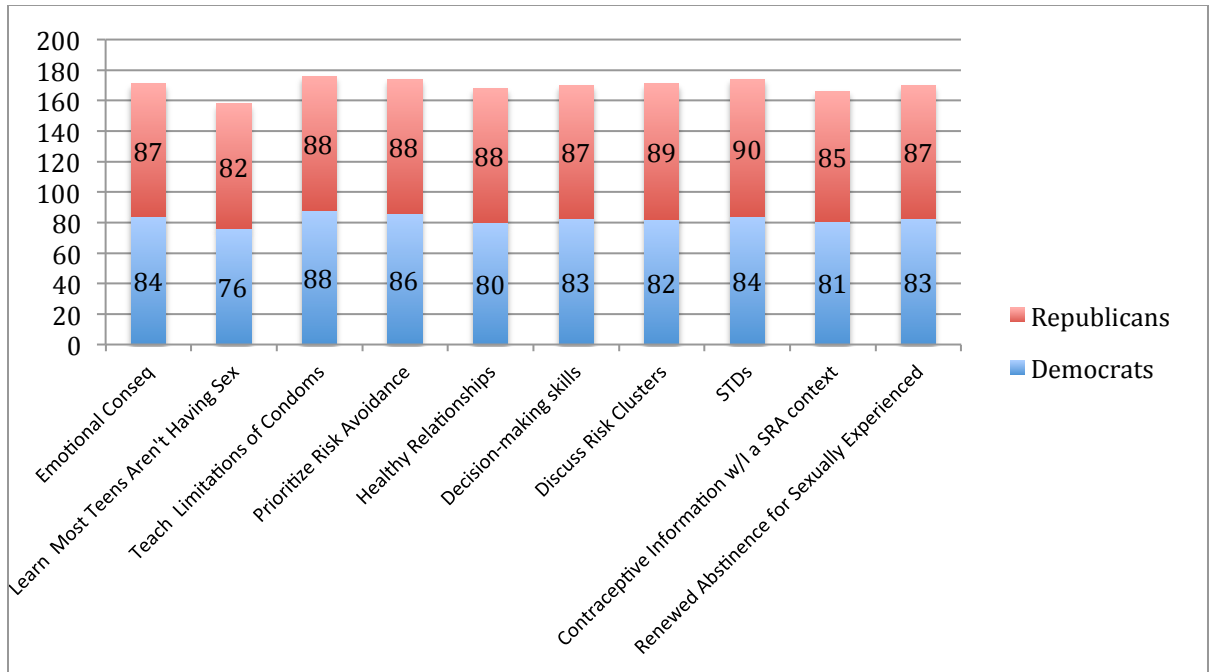
NAEF was not surprised that this most recent survey of parents' beliefs about their children's sex education showed widespread support for the tenets of SRA Abstinence Education. Earlier surveys, conducted by both NAEF and the US Department of Health and Human Services, indicated strong support for the abstinence until marriage message by parents.⁴ However, we were surprised at how widespread the support was among all the major demographics that were studied in the survey. Specifically, the answers to the questions we posed at the outset of the survey were answered in an astonishing and overwhelming pro-SRA Abstinence Education manner. The wordings of all questions, together with overall responses by participants are included in the *About This Survey* section of this report. Nevertheless, it is helpful to look at specific categories of respondents in order to obtain the nuanced significance of these responses. Those key findings are specifically described below:

- **Support for the SRA Abstinence Approach transcends party lines.**
Parents from both parties favor SRA Abstinence Education for their teens.

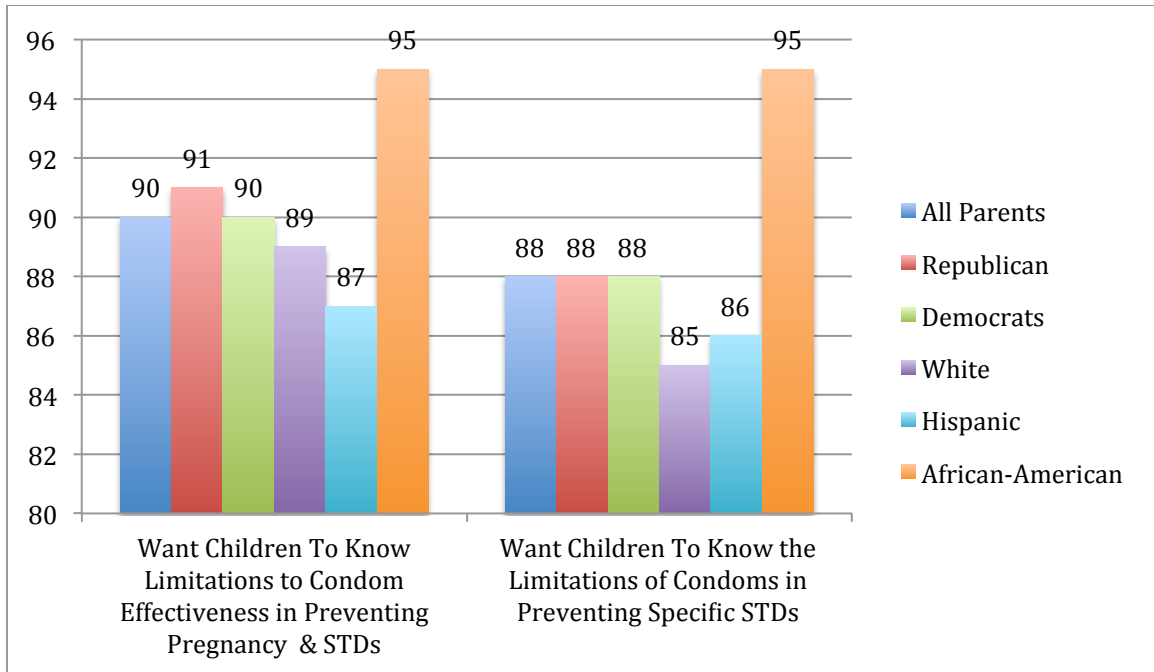


Republicans and Democrats support the way that Abstinence Education addresses key topics. They want sex education to place a priority on encouraging teens to avoid sex in order to avoid all sexual risk and they think it is important that teens know that most of their peers are *not having sex*. Parents believe that sexually experienced students deserve to know that they can still benefit by choosing abstinence again. They favor sex education classes that teach students about the limitations of condoms, as well as the causes, symptoms and best way to avoid the transmission of STDs, which of course, is abstinence.

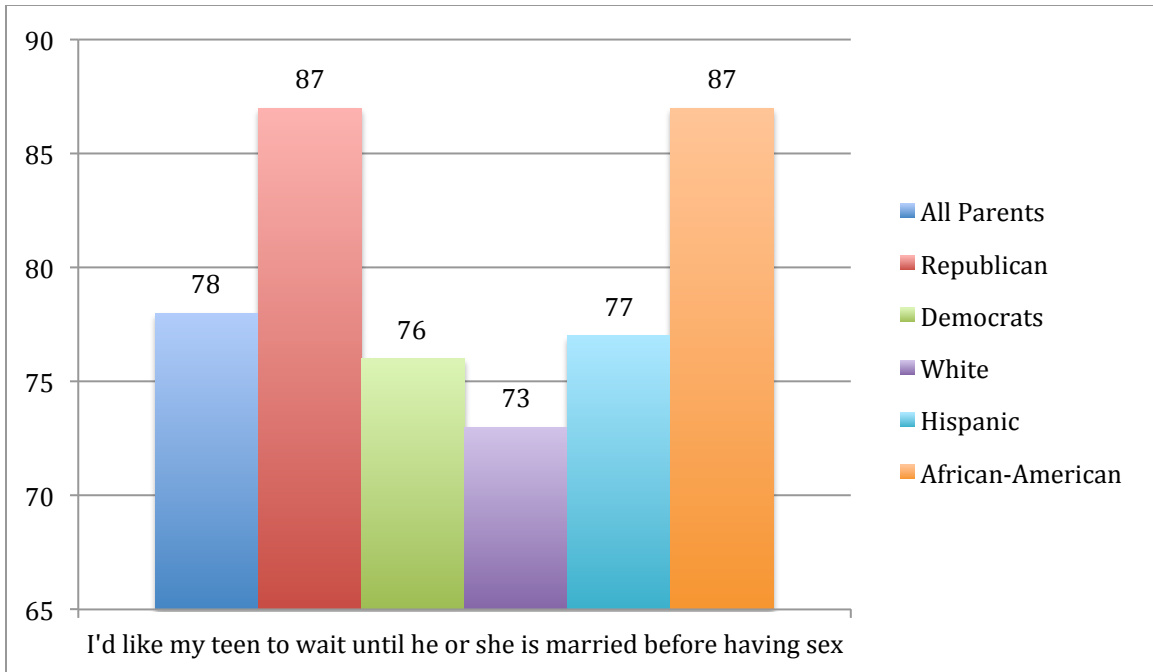
Democrats and Republicans alike want sex education classes to address holistic topics typically included in a SRA Abstinence Education class. Therefore, as the survey findings indicate, they believe it is important for discussions to go beyond dialogs about the physical consequences of teen sex. They want their children to know about the potential emotional consequences that can accompany teen sex, the practical skills associated with healthy decision-making and skills to develop healthy relationships. They also believe it is important for students to know that if they engage in risk behaviors, such as smoking or teen sex, students may have more difficulty reaching their goals.



- Parents **support the manner in which SRA Abstinence Education discusses condom information** with teens rather than the manner in which many SRR “Comprehensive” Sex Education programs discuss condoms. Parents overwhelmingly want their children to know about the limitations of condom effectiveness – information that is often not shared in a typical SRR “Comprehensive” Sex Education program.⁵ In fact, parents feel so strongly about this key component of sex education, that they scored this response higher than any other question on the survey. It is also of interest to note that both Democrats and Republicans score this question very similarly.

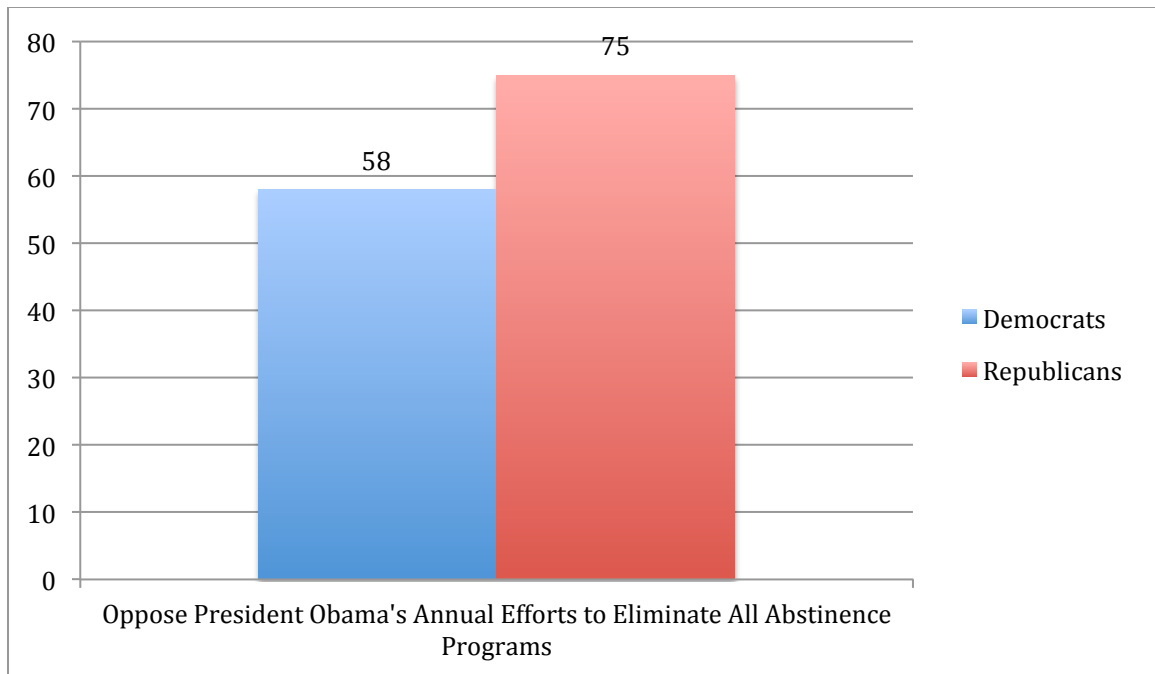


- Most **parents want their children to wait until marriage** before they engage in sex. Parents overwhelmingly indicated a desire that their children wait until they marry before engaging in sex. Despite the fact that abstinence education critics insist that “abstinence until marriage” is outdated, parents do not agree. Perhaps they know that social science research clearly supports this context for sex as offering the best outcomes for both child and couple. Critics also argue that since marriage is not the norm for some subsets of society, especially in the African American population, “abstinence until marriage” is an unrecognizable and unrealistic goal marker for sexual initiation. The survey results suggest that the opposite is true. While all demographic groups support the concept of “abstinence until marriage” by a large margin, African American parents appear to overwhelmingly desire that their children wait for marriage to initiate sex.



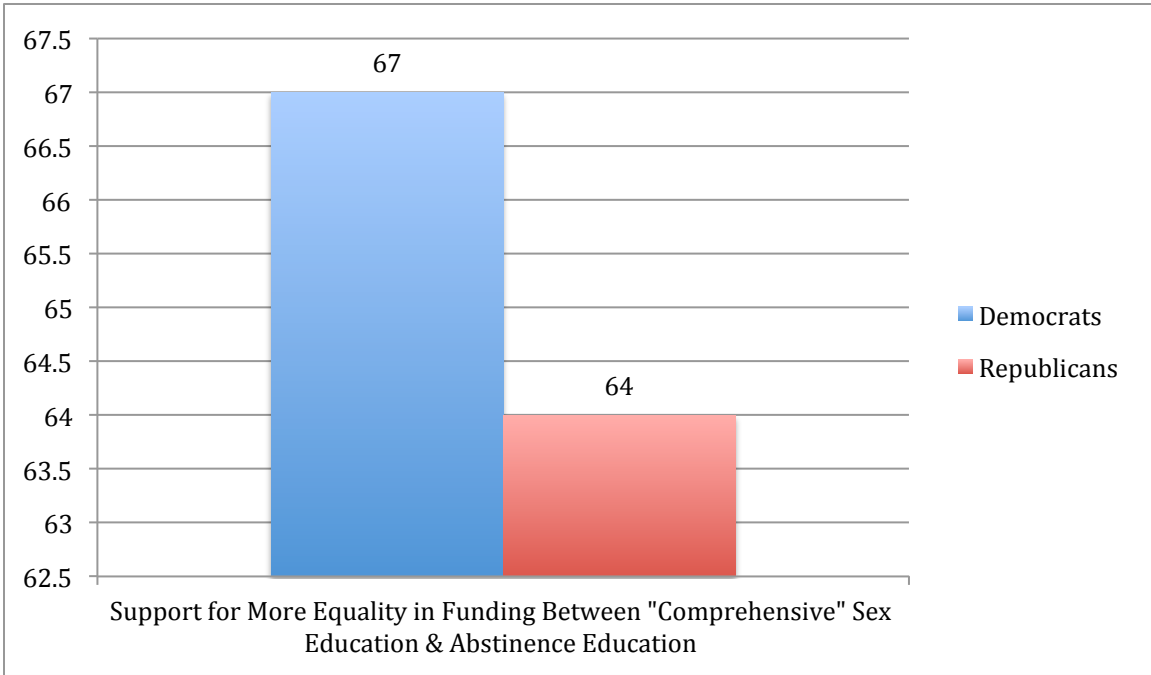
- Democrats and Republicans alike oppose President Obama’s efforts to eliminate all funding for SRA Abstinence Education.**

Beginning with the first fiscal budget President Obama sent to Congress and continuing through his current FY 2013 request, the call has been the same – the defunding of every abstinence education program. His efforts succeeded in FY 2010, but bipartisan efforts in Congress slowly restored a small portion of abstinence programs, despite the President’s opposition. Most Americans do not support the wholesale removal of programs that focus on Sexual Risk Avoidance Abstinence Education. One parent indicated that she would be writing to her Member of Congress to express disapproval for the elimination of abstinence education programs. Another was upset that “funding has been cut to a very important and vital program for the teens of the United States.”

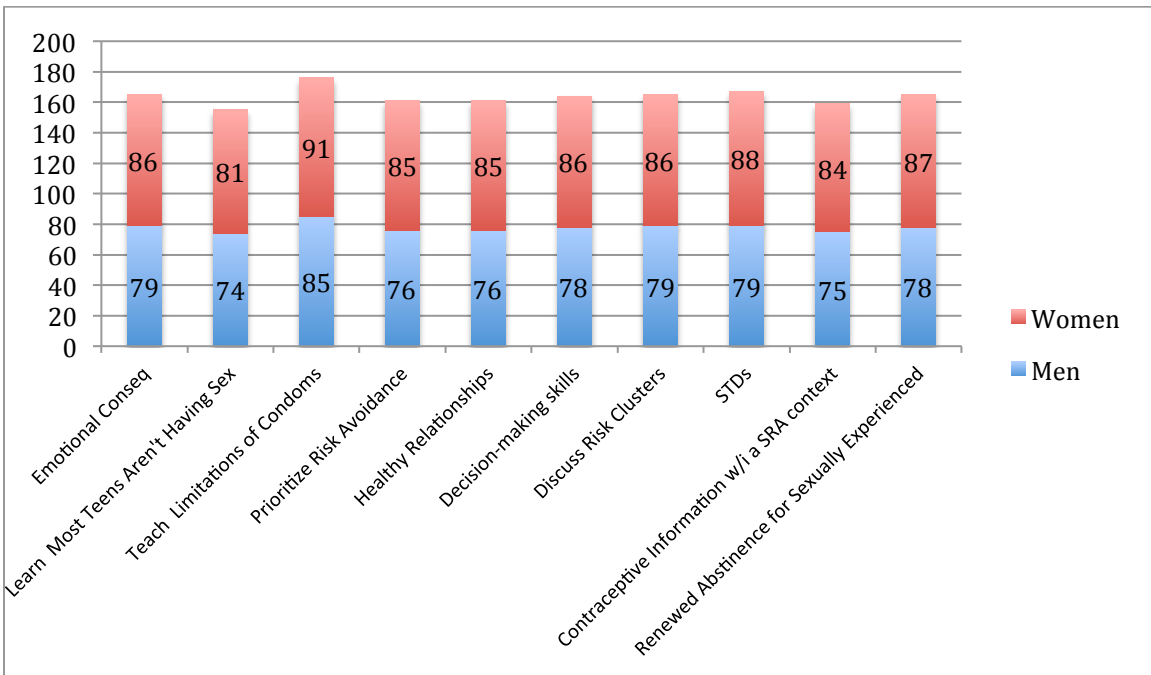


Further, when American parents learned that the current funding disparity between SRA Abstinence Education programs and SRR “Comprehensive” Sex Education programs currently stands at 1:16, they expressed a desire to see more parity established between the two approaches. It was somewhat surprising that Democrats supported parity even more than did their Republican colleagues. One parent summarized the majority opinion: “The funds should be divided equally to teach comprehensive and abstinence. “ Another added: “There’s not enough money [currently in the federal budget] to support

abstinence education.”



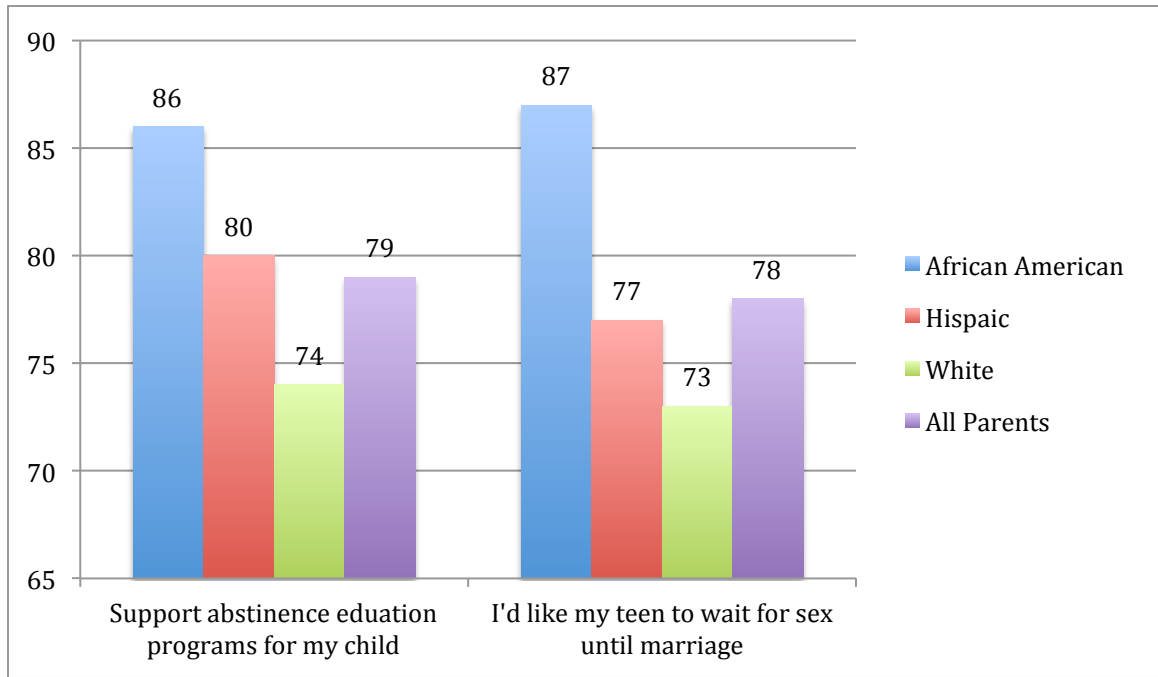
- Compared to men, support for SRA Abstinence Education is much **stronger among women**. Although the majority of both men and women expressed support for abstinence education, in almost each measure, women voiced stronger support than men.



- **African American parents are most supportive** of the essential tenets of SRA Abstinence Education. One African American respondent offered this sentiment: “I have been very opposed to sex education classes, the way they are being taught, because I do not feel it teaches enough about abstinence or the consequences behind it. So I am strongly in support of more funding and more education that focuses on [abstinence] education.” Another African American parent added: “There’s not enough information being given to the kids about abstinence. “

Support for abstinence education crossed all racial lines, but support among African American parents was especially striking. Unfortunately, teen pregnancy rates among African American girls are high and the CDC estimates that one in two African American teen girls has *at least* one STD, compared to one in four teen girls overall.⁶ Not surprisingly, concern for teen sexual activity is of special concern among African American parents. One parent supported abstinence education as the most effective pregnancy prevention program: “I wish the government would help support [abstinence education] so we would have less child-on-child pregnancies, because it’s difficult to raise a child at a teen age. It destroys their life and it makes them where they cannot finish school or proceed.” Parents agreed that abstinence is the best choice for their children and hoped they would wait until married before becoming sexually active. White and Hispanic parents agreed, and one Hispanic parent noted: “Abstinence is very good for our youth.” However,

the level of support was highest among African American parents.

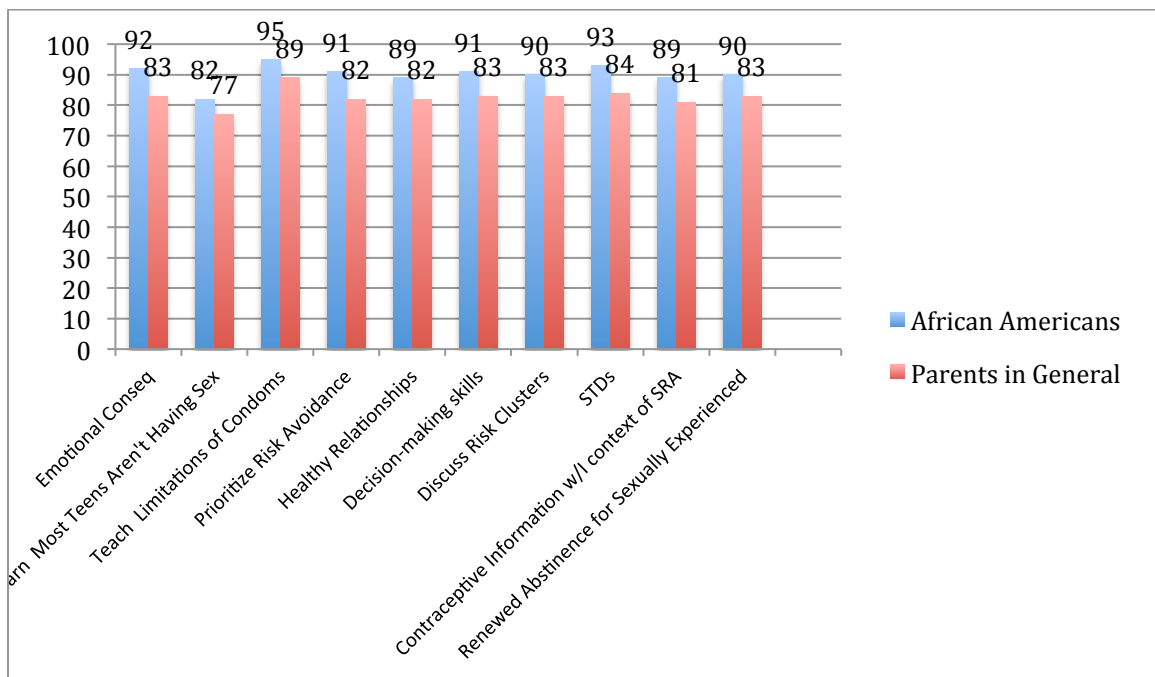


Similar response trends persisted for most questions, although the trend did not endure without exceptions. To illustrate this point, we are including a breakdown of specific responses by race with the percentages given denoting answers that represented support for abstinence education.

Question by Question Comparison of Pro Abstinence Support by Race				
Survey Questions (See end of report for wording)	Overall Support for Abstinence Education by Parents in General on all Questions.	White	Black	Hispanic
1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	86	85	84	88
3	85	84	85	84
4	78	73	87	77
5	83	81	92	81
6	77	76	82	77
7	88	85	95	86
8	82	78	91	82

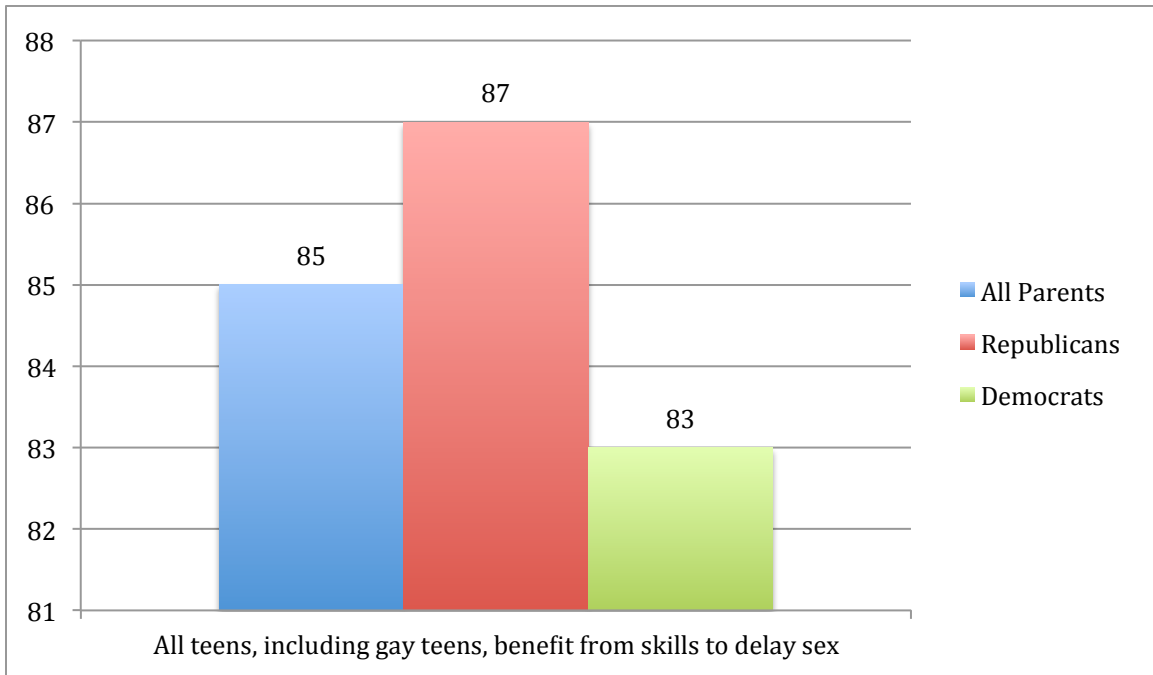
9	90	89	95	87
10	85	81	93	85
11	82	77	89	83
12	83	78	91	84
13	83	77	91	83
14	83	80	90	84
15	84	79	93	85
16	81	78	89	80
17	70	68	77	73
18	83	79	90	84
19	65	65	55	70
20	56	59	46	58
21	64	61	64	61
22	50	51	45 (represents a plurality)	51
23	79	74	86	80

When asked about their support for specific abstinence education themes, African American parents, in general, were more supportive than parents, overall.



- Most parents believe **homosexual youth can benefit from abstinence education**. Parents believe it is important for all teens to receive the information and skills to wait for sex, regardless of their sexual orientation.

Unfortunately, few programs that target gay teens center on risk avoidance, a policy that is out of step with the desires of most parents. Democrats typically communicate that they have a unique concern for the health of homosexual youth. Yet this survey indicates that Republican parents were very supportive of protecting *all teens* from the inherent risks associated with teen sex, without regard to their sexual orientation. More so, in fact, than their comparative Democratic counterparts.



Observations and Recommendations

Regardless of the outcome of the November 6, 2012 election, the results of the *Parents Speak Out* survey should inform the general sex education debate and be used to advise public policy regarding sex education. Respondents among the many subgroups oppose President Obama’s perennial call for the elimination of SRA Abstinence Education programs. Whoever earns the right to serve as Chief Executive in 2013 should work to re-establish a more balanced sex education policy, with SRA as a priority in all sex education related messaging. Parents - Republican and Democrat, Black, Hispanic, and White - all favor this policy revision.

Regardless of the balance of power in Congress, more parity in funding between the SRR “Comprehensive” Sex Education and SRA Abstinence Education approaches should be established. Republicans and Democrats favor this

funding approach, with Democrats even slightly more supportive than Republicans. The FY 2013 House Appropriations LHHS bill passed earlier this year serves as an excellent model. It has been our experience that when lawmakers understand the true content and effectiveness of the SRA approach, they are willing to offer support. Efforts at correcting the misinformation and distortions promoted by anti-abstinence groups need to be pursued if sound policy decisions are to be enacted by elected officials.

In their anonymous responses, parents opened a window into their views for sex education for their children. Policy makers would be wise to listen, for no other voice is more invested in the success of teens than their parents. Their responses are among the most guileless available because, in most cases, their only agenda is the well being of their children.

The results suggest that the current “war on women” campaign ignores a key component of reproductive health, expressly, SRA Abstinence Education. Women support this approach even more than men, yet current policy ignores the empowerment factor intrinsic in the themes and messages of an abstinence program. Women appear to recognize these themes as supporting their optimal health and future success.

Some responses broke inaccurate stereotypes that have been used for years to implement discriminatory practices among at-risk populations – practices which censored best-health SRA Abstinence Education messages. Such practices must end immediately.

The broad support for providing all teens, regardless of sexual orientation with skills to help them avoid sexual risk should speak to HIV/AIDS activists who spurn abstinence education under the mistaken pretense that the messages have no relevance to this important subgroup. Parents have come alongside conventional public health priorities that encourage the best health outcomes for all targeted populations. Current policies that ignore the need to include a clear priority on risk avoidance to all teens, regardless of sexual orientation, should be immediately amended. Such amendments can be implemented with confidence knowing that public health protocols should demand such a change and that parents also support these messages for their children.

The benefits of encouraging teens to wait until marriage before engaging in sex is widely supported by parents. Perhaps parents see, as social science supports, that the goals for SRA Abstinence Education provide a true opportunity to improve the advantage their children will have for future success. Abstinence until marriage is overwhelmingly supported by social science research. Policymakers should refuse to be intimidated by special interest groups who are willing and all-too-eager to ignore the benefits of bearing children in marriage.

The *Parents Speak Out* survey results should provide a wake-up call to policy leaders in Washington, DC, and across that nation. The results clearly reveal that many leaders are out of touch with what parents and *their own constituency and support* base favor for sex education. The results clearly communicate that the political divide over sex education is misguided. Bipartisan support for SRA Abstinence Education should increase and champions on both sides of the aisle should share these findings with their colleagues. These survey results provide a strong endorsement of SRA Abstinence Education as a preferred choice for sex education. And parents and policymakers alike should be encouraged that this support is in good company with a deep bench of research informed practices, theories and implementation strategies that offer the best sexual health outcomes for America's youth.

About the Survey

The content of this report, *Parents Speak Out*, is based on a national telephone survey of 1683 likely voters with children 9 to 16 years of age and was conducted by Pulse Opinion Research on September 16-17, 2012. Pulse Opinion Research, LLC is an independent public opinion research firm using automated polling methodology and procedures licensed from Rasmussen Reports, LLC. Pulse Opinion Research provides the fieldwork for all Rasmussen Reports. An analysis of polls conducted by Fordham University cited Rasmussen Reports as the most accurate in predicting the margin of Obama's victory in 2008.⁷ In addition, Pulse Opinion Research is regularly used by non-partisan groups such as *The Hill* and others to measure public opinion on a variety of issues.

The margin of sampling error for the full sample is +/- 2.0% percentage points with a 95% level of confidence. This means that an identical survey conducted under the same circumstances would generate a result within the margin of sampling error 19 times out of 20. The survey was conducted using an

established automated polling methodology. Calls were placed to randomly selected phone numbers through a process that insures appropriate geographic representation. After the calls were completed, the raw data was processed through a weighting program to insure that the sample reflects the overall population in terms of age, race, gender, political party, and other factors. This step was required because different segments of the population answer the phone in different ways. For example, women answer the phone more than men, older people are home more and answer more than younger people, and rural residents typically answer the phone more frequently than urban residents.

The population targets were based upon recent census bureau data, a series of screening questions to determine likely voters, and other factors. Pulse Opinion Research determines its partisan weighting targets through a dynamic weighting system that takes into account voting history, national trends, and recent polling.

The following table shows the sample sizes for different groups in the survey:

Group	Sample Size
Total Sample	1683
White	811
Black	349
Hispanic	441
Other	82

Questions and aggregate results of the National *Parents Speak Out* Survey of 1683 Likely Voters with Children 9 to 16 Years of Age

1* How would you rate the job Barack Obama has been doing as President... do you strongly approve, somewhat approve, somewhat disapprove, or strongly disapprove of the job he's been doing?

- 39% Strongly approve
- 11% Somewhat approve
- 5% Somewhat disapprove
- 43% Strongly disapprove
- 2% Not sure

2* I'm now going to read you a series of statements about your views of sex education for your child. For each please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with that statement.

Being sexually abstinent is best for my child's health and future.

70% You strongly agree with that statement

16% Somewhat agree

6% Somewhat disagree

5% Strongly disagree

3% Not sure

3* All teens, regardless of their sexual orientation, can benefit from skills that help them delay having sex.

67% You strongly agree with that statement

18% Somewhat agree

7% Somewhat disagree

5% Strongly disagree

4% Not sure

4* I'd like my teen to wait until he or she is married before having sex.

54% You strongly agree with that statement

24% Somewhat agree

13% Somewhat disagree

8% Strongly disagree

2% Not sure

5* In my child's sex education classes, I would like him or her to learn about potential negative emotional consequences, such as worry and regret, that can occur as a result of becoming sexually active.

65% You strongly agree with that statement
18% Somewhat agree
7% Somewhat disagree
7% Strongly disagree
2% Not sure

6* It is important for teens to know that most of their peers have never had sex

52% You strongly agree with that statement
25% Somewhat agree
10% Somewhat disagree
8% Strongly disagree
5% Not sure

7* According to the Centers for Disease Control, condoms do not offer 100% protection against any sexually transmitted disease or STD. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree that your child should be instructed on the limitations of condoms in preventing specific STDs?

67% You strongly agree with that statement
21% Somewhat agree
6% Somewhat disagree
5% Strongly disagree
1% Not sure

8* The CDC's National Center for Health Statistics reports that nearly 75% of 15-17 year olds have never had sex. How important is it that Abstinence Education classes reinforce the decisions by these teens not to have sex?

66% Very important
16% Somewhat important
9% Not very important
8% Not at all important
2% Not sure

9* One comprehensive sex education curriculum, now in use, warned teachers not to "provide information on failure rates" of condoms. How important is it for

teens to know that there are limitations to condom effectiveness in preventing pregnancy and STDs?

- 79% Very important
- 11% Somewhat important
- 5% Not very important
- 3% Not at all important
- 2% Not sure

10* Most public health messages that address negative youth risk behaviors, such as smoking and underage drinking, strongly encourage teens to avoid or discontinue these activities. How important is it that a similar approach be followed for the risk behavior of teen sex?

- 67% Very important
- 18% Somewhat important
- 7% Not very important
- 6% Not at all important
- 2% Not sure

11* Would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose Abstinence Education if you knew that it helps students understand how to develop healthy relationships.

- 63% Strongly support
- 19% Somewhat support
- 7% Somewhat oppose
- 9% Strongly oppose
- 2% Not sure

12* Would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose Abstinence Education if you knew that it helps teens learn good decision-making skills?

- 66% Strongly support
- 17% Somewhat support

6% Somewhat oppose
9% Strongly oppose
2% Not sure

13* Would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose Abstinence Education if you knew that studies show that students who complete an Abstinence Education program are more likely to delay sex than their peers.

66% Strongly support
17% Somewhat support
7% Somewhat oppose
10% Strongly oppose
1% Not sure

14* Would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose Abstinence Education if you knew that Abstinence Education discusses how activities such as illicit drugs, underage drinking, and teen sex could make it more difficult for them to reach their goals?

68% Strongly support
15% Somewhat support
5% Somewhat oppose
10% Strongly oppose
2% Not sure

15* Would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose Abstinence Education if you knew that it helps teens understand the causes, symptoms and best way to avoid contracting a Sexually Transmitted Disease?

70% Strongly support
14% Somewhat support
5% Somewhat oppose
9% Strongly oppose
1% Not sure

16* Would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose Abstinence Education if you knew that it teaches facts about contraception but always promotes delaying sex as the best choice.

62% Strongly support
19% Somewhat support
7% Somewhat oppose
10% Strongly oppose
2% Not sure

17* Would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose Abstinence Education if you knew that studies show that students who complete an Abstinence Education program are no less likely to use a condom than their peers, if they do become sexually active.

45% Strongly support
25% Somewhat support
10% Somewhat oppose
11% Strongly oppose
9% Not sure

18* Would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose Abstinence Education if you knew that it lets teens know that even if they have had sex in the past, they can still benefit from choosing abstinence now?

67% Strongly support
16% Somewhat support
6% Somewhat oppose
10% Strongly oppose
2% Not sure

19* For the past several years, the executive budget sent to Congress calls for the elimination of all Abstinence Education programs.. Do you strongly support,

somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the decision to eliminate all Abstinence Education programming?

- 19% Strongly support
- 12% Somewhat support
- 15% Somewhat oppose
- 50% Strongly oppose
- 4% Not sure

20* One comprehensive sex education text tells this to teens: “Touching and stroking can lead to orgasms for both males and females. It is a safe way to avoid pregnancy and STD.” Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose this as an effective pregnancy prevention message for your teen?

- 18% Strongly support
- 20% Somewhat support
- 18% Somewhat oppose
- 38% Strongly oppose
- 6% Not sure

21* Federal documents show that Comprehensive Sex Ed receive 16 times more funding than Abstinence Education. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose sex education funding that is more equally divided between the two approaches?

- 42% Strongly support
- 22% Somewhat support
- 10% Somewhat oppose
- 20% Strongly oppose
- 7% Not sure

22* Do you think that more government funding should be given to teaching Abstinence Education or Comprehensive Sex Education?

50% Abstinence Education
37% Comprehensive Sex Education
13% Not sure

23* Knowing what you know now, how would you describe your support of Abstinence Education programs for your teen? Do you strongly support, support, oppose or strongly oppose Abstinence Education?

58% Strongly support
21% Somewhat support
8% Somewhat oppose
11% Strongly oppose
2% Not sure

NOTE: Margin of Sampling Error, +/- 2 percentage points with a 95% level of confidence

¹ Add reference here

² add reference here for risks to women

³ add risks to minorities here (preg, STD)

⁴ cite Zogby and HHS parent survey

⁵ examples of CSE texts here

⁶ 1 in 4 teens data

⁷ Analysis found at

http://www.fordham.edu/images/academics/graduate_schools/gsas/elections_and_campaign_poll%20accuracy%20in%20the%202008%20presidential%20election.pdf