

COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH EDUCATION ACT (1988)

Enacted in 1988, South Carolina's Comprehensive Health Education Act requires schools to take an abstinence-based, age-appropriate approach to reproductive health education and pregnancy prevention education. Specifically, the act states that sex education should "stress the importance of abstaining from sexual activity," and "explain the methods of contraception and the risks and benefits of each method."³ Other topics required to be included in sex education instruction are human physiology, relationships, human development, criminal sexual conduct, peer pressure and responsible behavior.³

- **Research has shown that sex education which includes information on abstinence and contraception does not hasten the onset of sexual activity and, in fact, delays the onset while increasing the use of contraception when young people do become sexually active.**⁴
- There is no research to date supporting the effectiveness of an abstinence-only approach to sex education.⁴
- In unison with the state's Comprehensive Health Education Act, and in line with scientific research, South Carolina's registered voters support an approach to sex education that is age-appropriate and includes information on a variety of topics including abstinence and contraception.

FACT:

81% of South Carolina registered voters support sex education containing information on abstinence and contraception.

FACT:

Only **1 in 10** registered voters in South Carolina feels that sex education should not be taught in the state's public schools.

FACT:

71% of South Carolina high school students report having had sexual intercourse before they graduate.²

FACT:

South Carolina has the **8th highest** birth rate in the nation among 15-17 year old females.¹

Respondent Demographics: Of the 547 total respondents:

- 44% were male and 56% were female.
- 14% were 18-29 years old, 33% 30-45, 34% between 46-64; and 19% 65+.
- 72% of respondents were white, 26% African American, and 2% other.
- 37% of respondents lived in the Upstate, 31% Midlands, and 31% Lowcountry.
- 37% of respondents were Republican, 30% Democrat, 22% Independent, 11% Other.
- 38% of respondents reported they were Baptist. 39% reported they were "other" Protestants (Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, other).
- 40% of respondents were the parent (or legal guardian) of a child under the age of 18.
- 79% of respondents voted in the November 2002 election.

About the South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy:

The Campaign is a private, not-for-profit organization committed to reducing the incidence of teen pregnancy in South Carolina through the provision of education, technical assistance, public awareness, advocacy and research.

References:

- 1) Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2004 Kids Count Data Book Online. www.aecf.org/kidscount/databook.
- 2) USC School of Public Health & State Department of Education, 2003 South Carolina Youth Risk Behavior Survey Report. Not yet published.
- 3) South Carolina Code of Laws, Title 59 Chapter 32. "Comprehensive Health Education Program."
- 4) Kirby, D. (2001). *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

Acknowledgements:

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Suggested Citation:

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Survey Methodology:

Data for this study were collected by the University of South Carolina's Institute for Public Service and Policy Research (IPSPR) through telephone interviews with registered voters in the State of South Carolina. Topics to be included in this survey were identified by the staff of the South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. IPSPR staff provided technical consultation on the design of the questionnaire and conducted a pretest of the instrument.

Respondents were selected from a random sample of households with telephones in the state. Within these households, a respondent was randomly chosen from among those registered to vote. Data presented have been weighted to correct any potential biases in the sample on the basis of age, race, gender, region, and number of registered voters in the household.

Interviewing for this study was done between February 16 and April 7, 2004. A total of 501 fully completed interviews and 46 partially completed interviews were conducted. For all questions that were answered by five hundred (500) or so respondents the potential for sampling error is +/- 4.4% at the 95% confidence level.

For more information:

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South Carolina Speaks! 2004

South Carolina's registered voters have spoken...

81% think that sex education in public schools should contain information on BOTH abstinence and contraception.

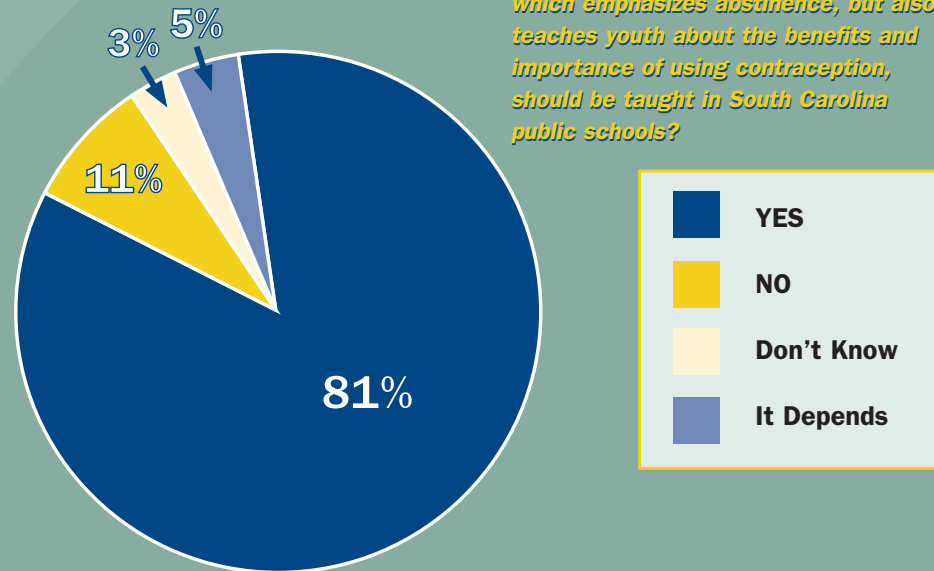
SURVEY RESULTS

Age-appropriate sex education should be taught in SC public schools.

Survey respondents show overwhelming support for comprehensive sex education in SC public schools.

- **81 percent** of South Carolina registered voters believe that sex education which “emphasizes abstinence, but also teaches youth about the benefits and importance of using contraception should be taught in SC public schools.”
- **7 out of 10** South Carolina registered voters agree that “comprehensive sex education in the schools decreases rates of pregnancy and disease.”
- The strongest support for school-based comprehensive sex education was from registered voters under age 30 (**95%**) and residents of the Midlands (**85%**).

Do you think that sexuality education which emphasizes abstinence, but also teaches youth about the benefits and importance of using contraception, should be taught in South Carolina public schools?



What Topics Should Sex Education Include?

Registered voters in South Carolina support the teaching of a variety of topics as part of a school-based, comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education program.

- **70 percent** of registered voters support a majority (9 or more) of the individual topics included in the survey.
- Further supporting a comprehensive approach to sex education, **91 percent** of voters support instruction on abstinence and **82 percent** support instruction on contraception.
- **93 percent** of respondents support instruction on sexually transmitted diseases.
- As depicted in the following chart, nine of the topics included in the survey garnered support from at least **80 percent** of respondents.

| TOPIC | % Support |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| Sexually transmitted diseases | 93% |
| Abstinence | 91% |
| Sexual abuse/rape/sexual assault | 90% |
| Parenting responsibilities | 88% |
| Physical / social growth changes | 86% |
| Reproductive anatomy | 85% |
| Contraception | 82% |
| Pregnancy and childbirth | 82% |
| Responsible relationships | 80% |

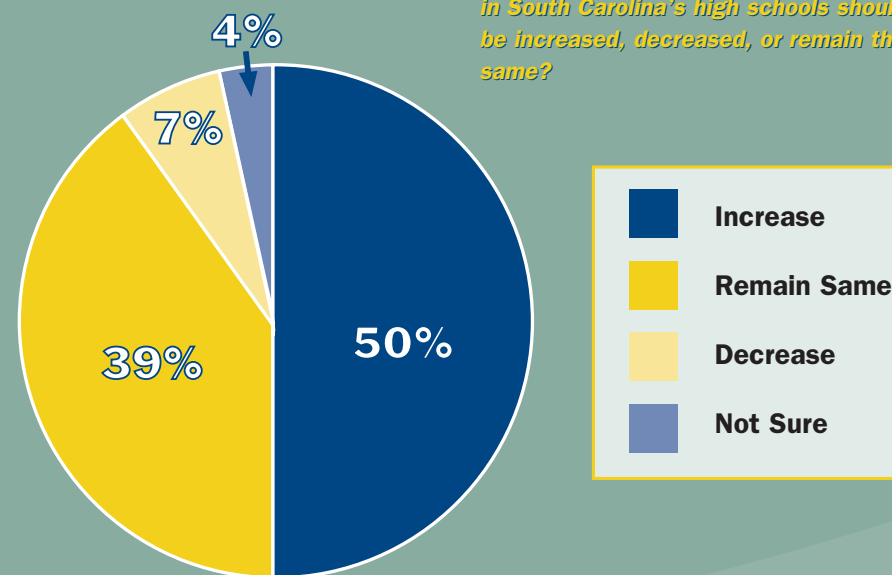
How much sex education should be taught?

Currently the SC Comprehensive Health Education Act requires that each student receive a minimum of **750 minutes, or 12.5 hours**, of comprehensive sex education instruction some time in grades nine through twelve.

Survey respondents were asked if instruction time should **increase, decrease** or **remain the same**:

89 percent of respondents felt that the current time requirement should **increase** or **remain the same**. Of these, **50 percent** said that the time requirement should **increase**.

Do you think the amount of time required for sex education instruction in South Carolina's high schools should be increased, decreased, or remain the same?



Support for a comprehensive, community-wide approach

While South Carolina's registered voters support school-based sex education and feel it plays a fundamental role in the development of healthy children, they also value the roles of parents and other community members in the development of sexually healthy young people. South Carolinians are committed to the belief that parents should be the primary sex educators for their children, and also support funding for community based pregnancy prevention programs.

- **85 percent** of respondents said that parents should be the number one source of sex education/information for their children. However, just over half of the parents in the survey (**55%**) indicated they have educated their children on how to prevent pregnancy or HIV/AIDS.
- **70 percent** of respondents favor an increase in state funding for teen pregnancy prevention programs in their community.

At What Age Should Sex Education Begin?

A majority of South Carolina's registered voters believe that comprehensive sexuality education should begin in the middle school years – grades 6, 7, 8.

- A majority of respondents indicate that instruction on **sexually transmitted diseases, abstinence, contraception, physical and social growth changes associated with puberty, sexual decision making, pregnancy and childbirth and responsible relationships** should begin no later than middle school.
- **60 percent** of respondents feel that instruction on *sexually transmitted diseases* should begin by the 7th grade, and **50 percent** feel that instruction on *contraception* should begin in the same year.

Average Grade Level That Registered Voters Believe Sex Education Should Begin

| Sex Education Topic | Average Grade |
|---|---------------|
| Reproductive anatomy | 6th grade |
| Sexual abuse, rape, statutory rape, assault | 6th grade |
| Physical and social growth changes | 6th grade |
| Importance of responsible relationships | 7th grade |
| Sexual decision making | 7th grade |
| Pregnancy and childbirth | 7th grade |
| Abstinence | 7th grade |
| Contraception | 7th grade |
| Sexually transmitted diseases | 7th grade |
| Parenting responsibilities | 8th grade |