Executive Summary
Backgrounder
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What Do Parents Want Taught in Sex Education Programs?

Robert E. Rector, Melissa G. Pardue, and Shannan Martin

A newly released, nationally representative poll conducted by Zogby International shows that American parents overwhelmingly support the themes and messages of abstinence education programs. On many themes, parental support is nearly unanimous. By contrast, parents overwhelmingly reject the main messages in safe sex or "comprehensive sex-ed" curricula. Specifically, the poll shows that:

- Some 79 percent of parents want teens to be taught that they should not engage in sexual activity until they are married or at least in an adult relationship leading to marriage.
- Some 91 percent of parents want teens to be taught that "the best choice is for sexual intercourse to be linked to love, intimacy, and commitment. These qualities are most likely to occur in a faithful marriage."
- Some 68 percent of parents want sex education programs to teach that "individuals who are not sexually active until they are married have the best chances of marital stability and happiness."
- 91 percent of parents want schools to teach that "adolescents should be expected to abstain from sexual activity during high school years."

These themes are central to abstinence education curricula. Abstinence programs teach the following tenets: Human sexuality is primarily emotional and psychological, not physical, in nature; in proper circumstances, sexual activity leads to long-term emotional bonding between two individuals; and sexual happiness is inherently linked to intimacy, love, and commitment—qualities found primarily within marriage.

Abstinence programs strongly encourage abstinence throughout the teen years, and preferably until marriage. They teach that casual sex at an early age not only poses grave threats of pregnancy and infection by sexually transmitted diseases, but also can undermine an individual's capacity to build loving, intimate relationships as an adult. The programs therefore encourage teen abstinence as a preparation and pathway to healthy adult marriage. Additional poll questions show strong parental support for these themes.

Parents Reject "Comprehensive Sexuality Education." In contrast to abstinence programs, comprehensive sex-ed curricula are focused almost exclusively on teaching about contraception and encouraging teens to use it. These curricula neither discourage nor criticize teen sexual activity as long as "protection" is used. In general, they exhibit an acceptance of casual teen sex and do not encourage teens to wait until they are older to initiate sexual activity. For example, these curricula do not encourage teens to abstain until they have finished

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high school. "Protected" sex at an early age and sex with many different partners are not treated as problems. Sexuality is presented primarily as a physical phenomenon; the main message is to use condoms to prevent the physical problems of sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. The vital linkages between sexuality, love, intimacy, and commitment are ignored. There is no implication that sex is best within marriage.

The new poll reveals that parents overwhelmingly oppose the messages contained within comprehensive sex-ed curricula. For example:

- Comprehensive sex-ed curricula focus almost exclusively on contraception and include little or no material on abstinence. However, only 2 percent of parents believe abstinence is not important; only 7 percent believe teaching about contraception should have more emphasis than teaching about abstinence.
- Over 90 percent of parents want sex education programs to teach teens to abstain at least until they have finished high school. Comprehensive sex-ed programs do not contain this message, and much of their material implicitly undermines it.
- Comprehensive sex-ed programs convey the clear message that teen sexual activity is okay as long as contraception is used; only 7 percent of parents agree with that message.

Government Spending Does Not Match Parental Priorities. The new poll shows that 85 percent of parents believe that teaching about abstinence should be emphasized as much as, or more than, teaching about contraception. Only 8 percent believe that promoting contraception is more important. Regrettably, government spending priorities directly contradict parental priorities. Currently, the government spends at least $4.50 promoting teen contraceptive use for every $1.00 spent to promote teen abstinence.

The new poll shows an apparent divergence between abstinence education and parental attitudes in only one area: Some 75 percent of parents want the schools to teach teens about both abstinence and contraception. Abstinence curricula in general do not teach about contraceptive use, except to explain contraceptive failure rates. However, schools that teach about abstinence usually also teach the basic biological facts about reproduction and contraception in a separate class such as health. This arrangement has widespread parental support. Some 56.4 percent of parents believe that abstinence and contraception should not be taught in the same class. This figure includes 21.7 percent who believe that contraceptive use should not be taught at all and another 35 percent who believe abstinence and contraception should both be taught, but in separate classes. Only 39.9 percent of parents believe that abstinence and contraception should be taught together in the same class.

Overall Findings. Parents show strong (in many cases, nearly unanimous) support for the major themes of abstinence education. Overall, the values and objectives of the overwhelming majority of parents can be met by providing teens with a strong abstinence program while teaching basic biological information about contraception in a separate health or biology class. This arrangement appears to be common in schools where abstinence is taught.

By contrast, only a tiny minority (less than 10 percent) of parents support the values and messages taught in comprehensive sex-ed curricula. Since the themes of these courses (such as "It's okay for teens to have sex as long as they use condoms") contradict and undermine the basic values parents want taught, these courses should be deemed unacceptable, even if combined with other materials.

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What Do Parents Want Taught in Sex Education Programs?

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Debates about sex education have focused on two different approaches: "safe sex" courses, which encourage teens to use contraceptives, especially condoms, when having sex, and abstinence education, which encourages teens to delay sexual activity.

In recent years, advocacy groups such as SIECUS (the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States) and Advocates for Youth have promoted another apparent alternative, entitled "comprehensive sexuality education" or "abstinence plus." These curricula allegedly take a middle position, providing a strong abstinence message while also teaching about contraception. In reality, this claim is misleading. Comprehensive sexuality education curricula contain little or no meaningful abstinence material; they are simply safe-sex programs repackaged under a new, deceptive label.

Abstinence programs teach that:

- Human sexuality is primarily emotional and psychological, not physical, in nature;
- In proper circumstances, sexual activity leads to long term emotional bonding between two individuals; and
- Sexual happiness is inherently linked to intimacy, love, and commitment—qualities found primarily within marriage.

Abstinence programs strongly encourage abstinence during the teen years, and preferably until marriage. They teach that casual sex at an early age not only poses serious threats of pregnancy and infec-

Talking Points

Although the government currently spends at least $4.50 promoting teen use of contraception for every dollar it spends to promote teen abstinence, a recent poll reveals that this contradicts the desires of parents. An overwhelming majority of the parents of teens:

- Show strong (in many cases, nearly unanimous) support for the major themes of abstinence.
- Reject "comprehensive sex-ed" curricula, which teach that teen sex is okay as long as contraception is used.
- Want sex education programs to teach teens to abstain from sex until they are married or in an adult relationship that is close to marriage.
- Believe that sex at an early age, casual sex, and sex with many partners are likely to have harmful consequences, and want their teens to be taught to avoid these behaviors.

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tion by sexually transmitted diseases, but also can undermine an individual's capacity to build loving, intimate relationships as an adult. These programs therefore encourage teen abstinence as a preparation and pathway to healthy adult marriage.

By contrast, comprehensive sex-ed curricula focus almost exclusively on teaching about contraception and encouraging teens to use it. These curricula neither discourage nor criticize teen sexual activity as long as "protection" is used. In general, they exhibit an acceptance of casual teen sex and do not encourage teens to wait until they are older to initiate sexual activity. For example, the curricula do not encourage teens to abstain until they have finished high school. "Protected" sex at an early age and sex with many different partners are not treated as problems. Sexuality is treated primarily as a physical phenomenon; the main message is to use condoms to prevent the physical problems of sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. Comprehensive sex-ed curricula ignore the vital linkages between sexuality, love, intimacy, and commitment. There is no discussion of the idea that sex is best within marriage.

Determining Parental Attitudes Toward Sex-ed Curricula

This paper presents the results of a recent poll on basic issues concerning sex education. The poll questions seek to measure parental support for the themes and values contained in abstinence curricula as well as support for the values embodied in comprehensive sex education.

The data presented are drawn from a survey of parents conducted by Zogby International in December 2003. Zogby conducted telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,004 parents with children under age 18. Parents were asked 14 questions concerning messages and priorities in sex education; the questions used were designed by Focus on the Family. The margin of error on each question is plus or minus 3.2 percent points. The responses to the questions showed only modest variation based on region, gender of the parent, or race.[1] The poll questions were designed to reflect the major themes of abstinence education. The descriptions of the messages contained in abstinence and comprehensive sex-ed curricula in the following text are based on a forthcoming content analysis of major sex-ed curricula conducted by The Heritage Foundation.

The exact wording of and responses to each of the 14 poll questions are presented in Charts 1 through 14. Overall, the poll shows that parents are extremely supportive of the values and messages contained in abstinence programs. By contrast, very few parents support the basic themes of comprehensive sex-ed courses. Responses to the individual questions are discussed below.

"Sex Should be Linked to Marriage; Delaying Sex until Marriage is Best"

Abstinence education curricula stress a strong linkage between sex, love, and marriage. The Zogby poll shows strong parental support for this message.

Parents want teens to be taught that sexual activity should be linked to marriage.

Parents want teens to be taught to delay sexual activity until they are married or close to marriage.

Some 47 percent of parents want teens to be taught that "young people should not engage in sexual activity until they are married." Another 32 percent of parents want teens to be taught that "young people should not engage in sexual intercourse until they have, at least, finished high school and are in a relationship with someone they feel they would like to marry."

When these two categories are combined, we see that 79 percent of parents want young people taught that sex should be reserved for marriage or for an adult relationship leading to marriage. Another 12 percent of parents believe that teens should be taught to delay sexual activity until "they have, at least, finished high school." Only 7 percent of parents want teens to be taught that sexual activity in high school is okay as long as teens use contraception. (See Chart 1.)

These parental values are strongly reinforced by abstinence education programs, which teach that sex should be linked to marriage and that it is best

1. Responses to individual questions categorized by region, gender, and race are available upon request.

to delay sexual activity until marriage. By contrast, comprehensive sex-ed programs send the message that teen sex is okay as long as contraception is used; the underlying permissive values of these programs have virtually no support among parents.

Parents want teens to be taught that sex should be linked to love, intimacy, and commitment and that these qualities are most likely to occur in marriage.

Some 91 percent of parents want teens to be taught this message about sexuality. (See Chart 2.)

This is a predominant theme of all abstinence curricula. By contrast, comprehensive sex-ed programs do not discuss love, intimacy, or commitment and seldom mention marriage. Casual sex is not criticized; sex is presented largely as a physical process; and the main lesson is to avoid the physical threats of pregnancy and disease through proper use of contraception. Comprehensive sex-ed programs do not present sexuality in a way that is acceptable to most parents.

Parents want teens to be taught that it is best to delay sex until marriage.

Some 68 percent of parents want schools to teach teens that "individuals who are not sexually active until marriage have the best chances of marital stability and happiness." (See Chart 3.)

This theme is strongly supported by abstinence programs, all of which urge teens to delay sexual activity until marriage. It is ignored completely by comprehensive sex-ed courses, which do not criticize casual sex and seldom mention marriage.

General Support for Abstinence

The poll shows overwhelming parental support for other abstinence themes as well.

Parents want teens to be taught to abstain from sexual activity during high school years.

Some 91 percent of parents support this message. (See Chart 4). However, for most parents, this is a minimum standard; 79 percent want a higher standard taught: abstinence until you are married or near marriage. (See Chart 1.)

All abstinence curricula strongly encourage abstinence at least through high school, and preferably until marriage. By contrast, comprehensive sex-ed curricula do not encourage teens to delay sex until they have finished high school; most do not even encourage young people to wait until they are older.

Parents want teens to be taught that abstinence is best.

Some 96 percent of parents support this message. (See Chart 5.)

Abstinence curricula obviously support this theme. Comprehensive sex-ed programs may claim to support this message, but in reality they do not. They teach mainly that abstinence is the "safest" choice, but that teen sex with protection is safe. Their overall message is that abstinence is marginally safer than safe sex. Beyond this, they have little positive to say about abstinence.

"Sex at an Early Age, Sex with Many Partners, and Casual Sex Have Harmful Consequences"

Parents believe that sex at an early age, casual sex, and sex with many partners are likely to have harmful consequences. They want teens to be taught to avoid these behaviors.

Parents want teens to be taught that the younger the age an individual begins sexual activity, the greater the probability of harm.

Some 93 percent of parents want teens taught that "the younger the age an individual begins sexual activity, the more likely he or she is to be infected by sexually transmitted diseases, to have an abortion, and to give birth out-of-wedlock." (See Chart 6.)

Abstinence programs strongly support this message; they teach teens to delay sex until they are older, preferably until they are married. Comprehensive sex-ed programs teach about the threat of unprotected sex, not about the harm caused by sex at an early age. They do not urge young people to delay sex until they are older; voluntary sex at any age is depicted as okay as long as "protection" is used.

Parents want teens taught that teen sexual activity is likely to have psychological and physical effects.

Some 79 percent of parents want teens to be taught this message. (See Chart 7.)

Abstinence curricula clearly teach this message; comprehensive sex-ed curricula do not. Comprehensive sex-ed curricula focus on encouraging condom use; they do not criticize or discourage teen sex as long as "protection" is used.

Parents want schools to teach that teens who are sexually active are more likely to be depressed.

Some 67 percent of teens who have had sexual intercourse regret it and say they wish that they had waited until they were older. (The figure for teen girls is 77 percent).[2] Sexually active teens are far more likely to be depressed and to attempt suicide than are teens who are not sexually active.[3] Nearly two-thirds of parents support the message that sexually active teens are more likely to be depressed; a quarter of parents oppose it. (See Chart 8.)

Abstinence curricula inform teens about the basic facts of regret and depression; comprehensive sex-ed curricula ignore this topic.

Parents want sex education to teach that the more sexual partners a teen has, the greater the likelihood of physical and psychological harm.

Some 90 percent of parents want this message taught to teens. (See Chart 9.)

Abstinence curricula emphasize the harmful effects of casual teen sex; comprehensive sex-ed curricula do not.

Parents want teens taught that having many sexual partners at an early age may undermine one's ability to develop and sustain loving and committed relationships as an adult.

Some 85 percent of parents want teens to be taught that "having many sexual partners at an early age may undermine an individual's ability to develop love, intimacy and commitment." (See Chart 10.) Another 78 percent of parents want teens to be taught that "having many different sexual partners at an early age may undermine an individual's ability to form a healthy marriage as adult." (See Chart 11.)

These are major themes of abstinence programs. They teach that teen sexual relationships are inherently short-term and unstable and that repeated fractured relationships can lead to difficulties in bonding and commitment in later years. This perspective is accurate; women who begin sexual activity at an early age will have far more sexual partners and are less likely to have stable marriages as adults.[4] Comprehensive sex-ed curricula ignore this topic completely.

"What's More Important, Abstinence or Contraception?"

Parents believe that abstinence should be given emphasis that is more than, or equal to, that given to contraception. Some 44 percent of parents believe that teaching about abstinence is more important than teaching about contraception; another large group (41 percent) believe that abstinence and contraception should be given equal emphasis. Only 8 percent believe that teaching about contraception is more important than teaching about abstinence. (See Chart 12.)

Regrettably, government spending priorities directly contradict parental priorities. Currently, the government spends at least $4.50 promoting teen contraceptive use for every $1.00 spent to promote teen abstinence.[5]

Parents Overwhelmingly Reject Main Values and Messages of Comprehensive Sex Education

Despite the claims of advocacy groups such as SIECUS and Advocates for Youth, comprehensive sex education curricula contain weak to non-existent messages about abstinence. These programs focus almost exclusively on (1) explaining the threat

2. National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, *America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy*, December 2003, p. 17.
3. Robert E. Rector, Kirk A. Johnson, Ph.D., and Lauren R. Noyes, "Sexually Active Teenagers Are More Likely to Be Depressed and to Attempt Suicide," Heritage Foundation *Center for Data Analysis Report* No. 03–04, June 3, 2003.
4. Robert E. Rector, Kirk A. Johnson, Lauren Noyes, and Shannan Martin, *The Harmful Effects of Sexual Activity and Multiple Sexual Partners Among Women: A Book of Charts*, The Heritage Foundation, June 23, 2003, pp. 4, 10.
5. Melissa G. Pardue, Robert E. Rector, and Shannan Martin, "Government Spends $12 on Safe Sex and Contraceptives for Every $1 Spent on Abstinence," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1718, January 14, 2004.

of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases and (2) encouraging young people to use contraception, especially condoms, to combat these threats. Many of these curricula appear to be written from a limited health perspective. Sexuality is treated as a physical process (like nutrition), and the goal is to reduce immediate health risks.

While comprehensive sex-ed curricula do not explicitly and directly encourage teen sexual activity, they do not discourage it either. As long as "protection" is used, teen sexual activity is represented as being rewarding, normal, healthy, and nearly ubiquitous. While "unprotected" sex is strongly criticized and discouraged, "protected" teen sex is presented as being fully acceptable. There is little or no effort to encourage young people to wait until they are older before becoming sexually active. By presenting "protected" teen sex activity as commonplace, fulfilling, healthy, and unproblematic, comprehensive sex-ed courses send a strong implicit anti-abstinence message to teens.

The new poll of parental attitudes shows that less than 10 percent of parents support the main values and messages of comprehensive sex education programs. Specifically:

Parents oppose teaching that teen sex is okay if condoms are used.

In comprehensive sex-ed curricula, "protected" teen sex is neither criticized nor discouraged. These courses explicitly or implicitly send the strong message that "it's okay for teens in school to engage in sexual intercourse as long as they use condoms." Only 7 percent of parents support this message; 91 percent reject it. (See Chart 1.)

At a minimum, parents want teens to be taught to abstain from sexual activity until they have finished high school.

Some 91 percent of parents want teens to be taught this minimum standard; most want a far higher standard. But comprehensive sex-ed curricula do not teach that teens should abstain until they have finished high school; in fact, these courses do not provide any clear standards concerning when sexual activity should begin. For the most part, they do not even encourage young people to wait until they are vaguely "older;" they are simply silent on the issue.

Comprehensive sex-ed courses are silent on vital issues such as casual sex, intimacy, commitment, love, and marriage.

As Charts 1 through 11 show, parents overwhelmingly support the main themes of abstinence education and want these topics to be taught to their children. These themes are conspicuously absent from comprehensive sex-ed. These courses therefore fail to meet the needs and desires of most parents.

Should Abstinence Programs Teach About "Safe Sex" or Contraception?

The poll shows an apparent divergence between abstinence education and parental attitudes on only one issue: Some 75 percent of parents want teens to be taught about both abstinence and contraception. Except for describing the likely failure rates of various types of birth control, abstinence curricula do not teach about contraception.

However, the fact that abstinence programs, per se, do not include contraceptive information does not mean that teens will not be taught this material. Abstinence and sex education are seldom taught as stand-alone subjects in school; they are usually offered as a brief part of a larger course, most typically a health course.[6]

In addition, sex education is usually taught not once, but in multiple doses at different grade levels as the student matures. When students are taught about abstinence, in most cases, they will also receive biological information about reproduction and contraception in another part of their course work. By 11th or 12th grade, some 91 percent of students have been taught about birth control in school.[7]

There is no logical reason why contraceptive information should be presented as part of an abstinence curriculum. Not only would this reduce the

6. Some 85 percent of the sex education taught in the United States is part of a larger course on a broader subject, most typically a health or biology class. See *Sex Education in America* (Menlo Park, Cal.: Kaiser Family Foundation, 2000), p. 90.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

limited time allocated to the abstinence message, but nearly all abstinence educators assert that it would substantially undermine the effectiveness of the abstinence message.

In general, parents tend to agree that abstinence and contraceptive instruction should not be directly mixed. As Chart 14 shows, some 56 percent of parents believe either that contraception should not be taught at all or that, if both abstinence and contraception are taught, they should be taught separately. (Some 22 percent believe that contraception should not be taught, while 35 percent want the two subjects taught separately.)

Although most parents want teens to be taught about both abstinence and contraception, there is no strong sentiment that these topics must be combined into one curriculum. The stronger a parent's support for abstinence, the less likely he or she is to want abstinence and contraception merged into a single curriculum.

The fact that 75 percent of parents want both abstinence and contraception taught to teens should not, in any way, be interpreted to mean support for comprehensive sex-education. Comprehensive sex-ed curricula are focused almost exclusively on promoting contraceptive use and contain little or no mention of abstinence, yet only 8 percent of parents believe that schools should give greater emphasis to contraception than to abstinence. (See Chart 12.)

Moreover, parents have reservations concerning the type of contraceptive education these curricula contain. While 52 percent of parents want schools to provide "basic biological and health information about contraception," only 23 percent want schools "to encourage teens to use condoms when having sex, teach teens where to obtain condoms, and have teens practice how to put on condoms." (See Chart 13.) The latter aggressive type of contraceptive promotion is typical of comprehensive sex-ed curricula, though it lacks wide support among parents.

In general, parents want teens to be taught a strong abstinence message as well as being given basic biological information about contraception. The polls suggest that most parents would be satisfied if young people were given a vigorous abstinence course and were taught about the basics of contraception separately. This is probably the typical situation in most schools where authentic abstinence is taught. On the other hand, extremely few parents (7 percent to 8 percent) would be happy if abstinence education were to be replaced by comprehensive sex-ed.

Conclusion

The newly released poll shows strong (in many cases, nearly unanimous) support for the major themes of abstinence education. Abstinence programs provide young people with the strong, uplifting moral messages desired by nearly all parents.

Multiple evaluations show that abstinence programs are effective in encouraging young people to delay sexual activity.[8] The effectiveness of these programs is quite remarkable, given that they typically provide no more than a few hours of instruction per year. In those few hours, abstinence instructors seek to counteract thousands of hours of annual exposure to sex-saturated teen media, which strongly push teens in the opposite direction.

Most parents not only want vigorous instruction in abstinence, but also want teens to be taught basic biological information about contraception. Such information is not contained in abstinence curricula themselves but is frequently provided in a separate setting such as a health class. Overall, the values and objectives of the overwhelming majority of parents can be met by providing teens with a strong abstinence program while teaching basic biological information about contraception in a separate health or biology class. This arrangement appears common in schools where abstinence is taught.

In recent years, groups such as Advocates for Youth and SIECUS have sought to eliminate funding for abstinence or to replace abstinence education with comprehensive sex-ed. This is always done under the pretext that comprehensive sex-ed contains a strong abstinence message and, thereby, renders traditional abstinence superfluous. In reality, comprehensive sex-ed curricula have weak to nonexistent abstinence content. Replacing abstinence education with these programs would mean elimi-

8. Robert E. Rector, "The Effectiveness of Abstinence Education Programs in Reducing Sexual Activity Among Youth," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1533, April 8, 2002.

nating the abstinence message in most U.S. schools; nearly all parents would object to this change.

Only a tiny minority (less than 10 percent) of parents support the values and messages taught in comprehensive sex education curricula. Since the themes of these courses (such as "It's okay for teens to have sex as long as they use condoms") contradict and undermine the basic values parents want their children to be taught, these courses would be unacceptable even if combined with other materials.

The popular culture bombards teens with messages encouraging casual sexual activity at an early age. To counteract this, parents want teens to be taught a strong abstinence message. Parents overwhelmingly support abstinence curricula that link sexuality to love, intimacy, and commitment and that urge teens to delay sexual activity until maturity and marriage.

Regrettably, this sort of clear abstinence education is not taught in most schools. As a result, the sexual messages that parents deem to be most important are not getting through to today's teens.

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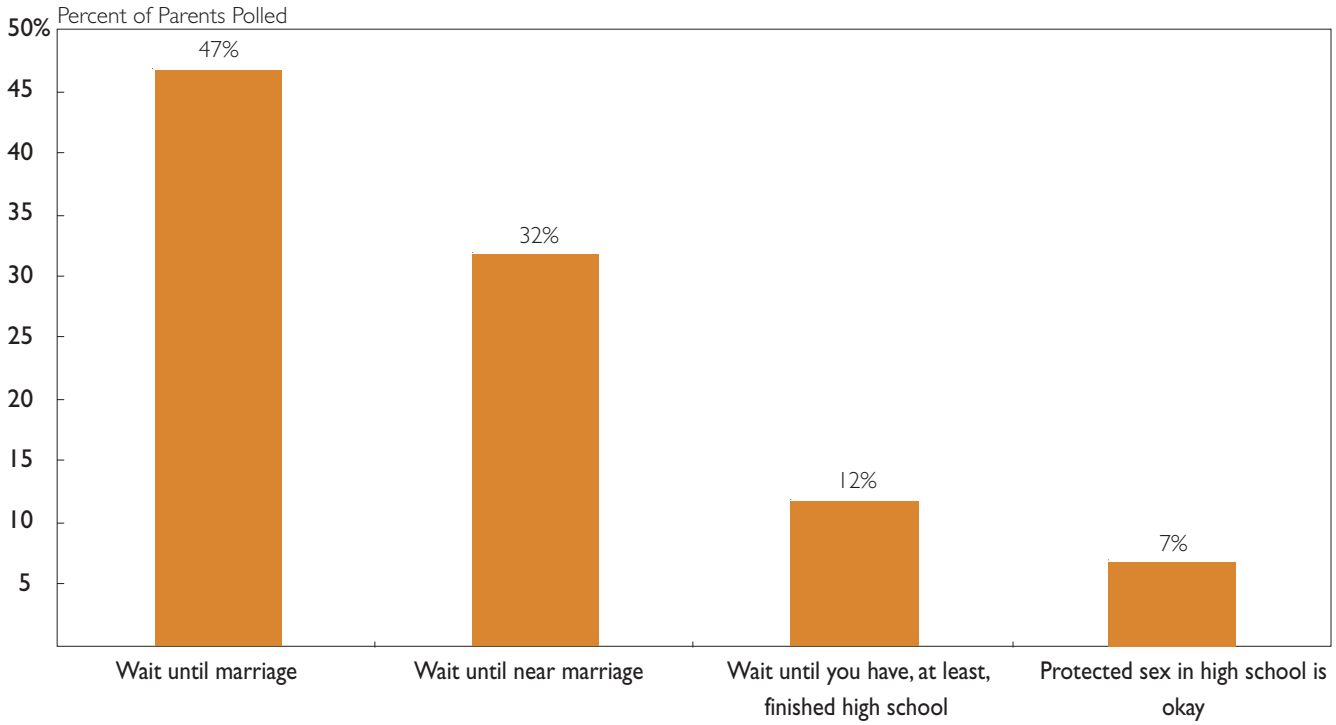
Chart 1 B 1722

Sex Education: When Should Sexual Activity Begin?



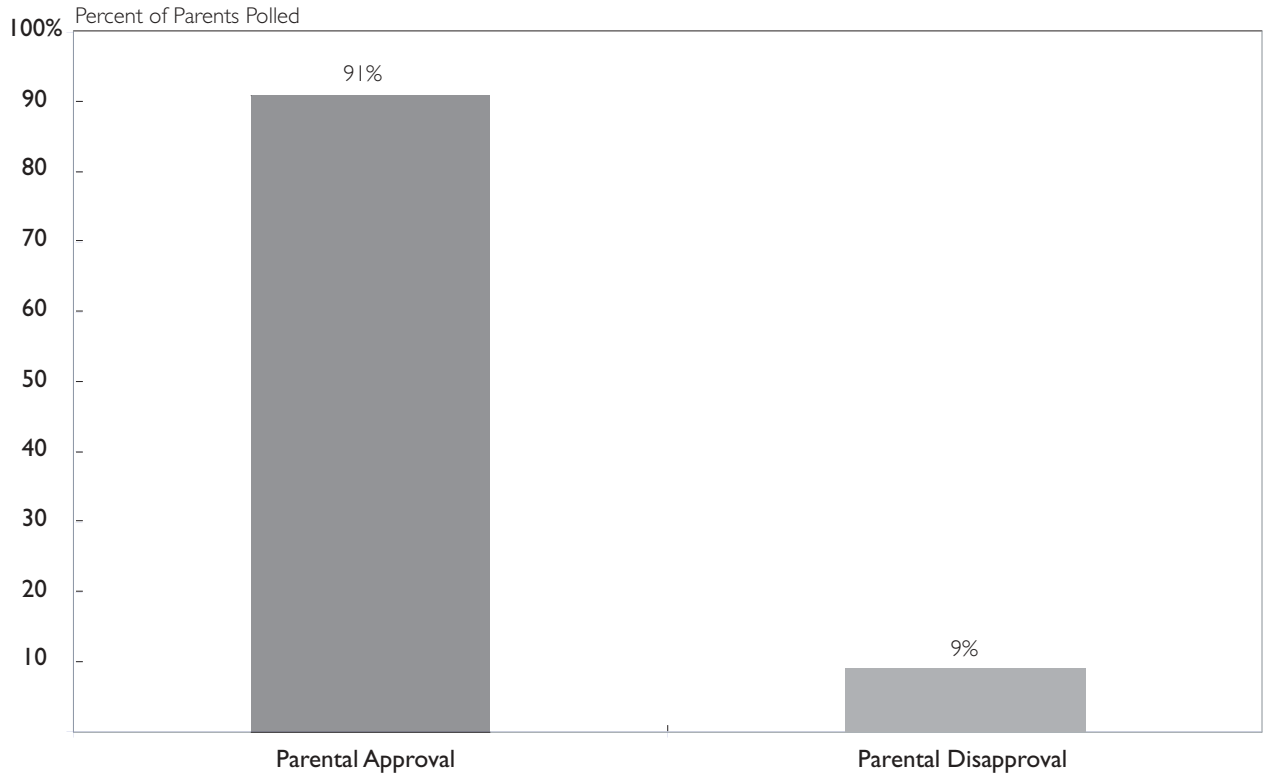
Question: Thinking about your own children, what do you believe is the best message for sex education programs to send to young people in grades 9 to 12?

Young people should not engage in sexual intercourse until they are married.	47%
Young people should not engage in sexual intercourse until they have, at least, finished high school and are in a relationship with someone they feel they would like to marry.	32%
Teens should not engage in sexual intercourse until they have, at least, finished high school.	12%
It's okay for teens in school to engage in sexual intercourse as long as they use condoms to protect against sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.	7%
Not Sure	3%

Source: Zogby International Poll, 2004, of a representative national sample of parents with children 17 or younger.

Chart 2 B 1722

Parental Approval of Sex Education Messages: The Best Choice Is for Sexual Intercourse to Be Linked to Love, Intimacy, and Commitment. These Qualities Are Most Likely to Occur in a Faithful Marriage



Question: The following is a list of topics that might be included in sex education classes for high school students. Assuming that a high school has sex-ed classes, please tell me do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that the class should teach the following to teen students:

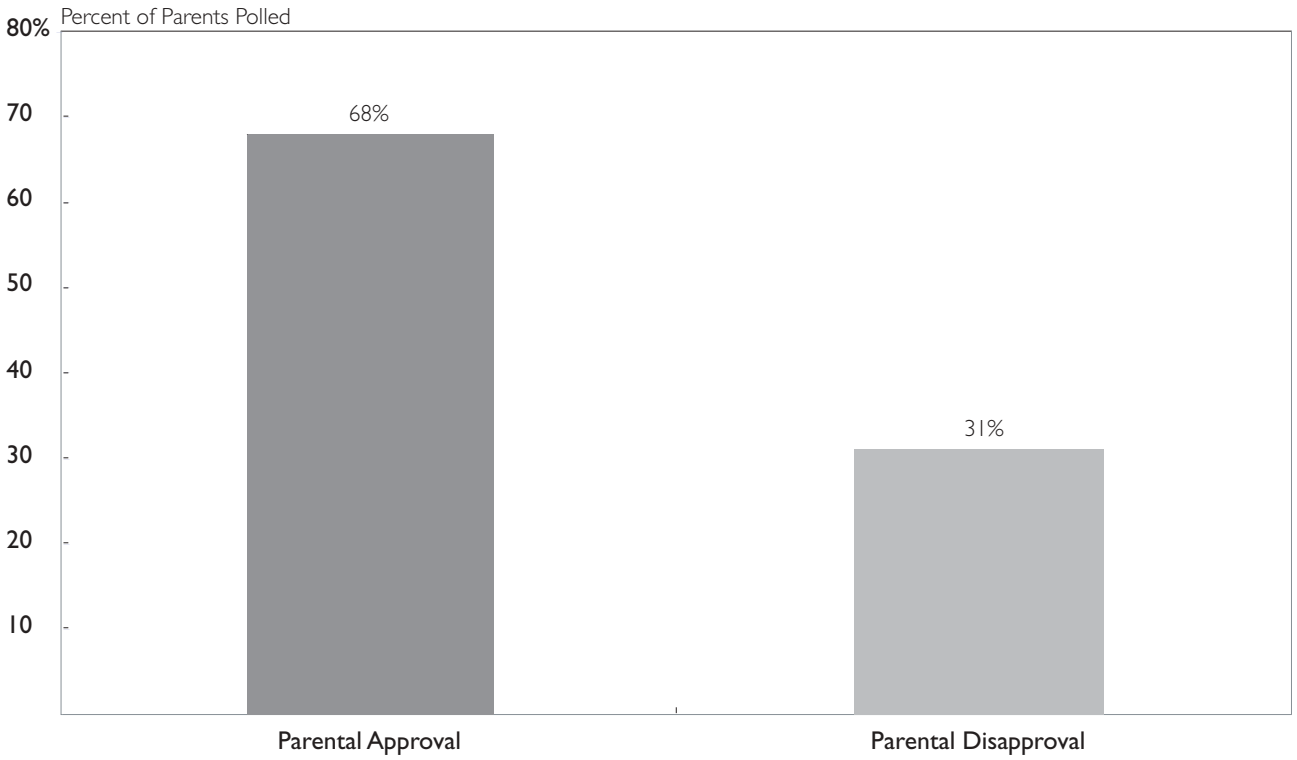
The best choice is for sexual intercourse to be linked to love, intimacy, and commitment. These qualities are most likely to occur in a faithful marriage.

Agree Strongly	79%	
Agree Somewhat	12%	**91%**
Disagree Somewhat	5%	
Disagree Strongly	4%	**9%**

Source: Zogby International Poll, 2004, of a representative national sample of parents with children 17 or younger.

Chart 3 B 1722

Parental Approval of Sex Education Messages: Individuals Who Are not Sexually Active Until They Are Married Have the Best Chances of Marital Stability and Happiness



Question: The following is a list of topics that might be included in sex education classes for high school students. Assuming that a high school has sex-ed classes, please tell me do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that the class should teach the following to teen students:

Individuals who are not sexually active until they are married have the best chances of marital stability and happiness.

Agree Strongly	42%	
Agree Somewhat	27%	**68%**
Disagree Somewhat	15%	
Disagree Strongly	16%	**31%**

Source: Zogby International Poll, 2004, of a representative national sample of parents with children 17 or younger.

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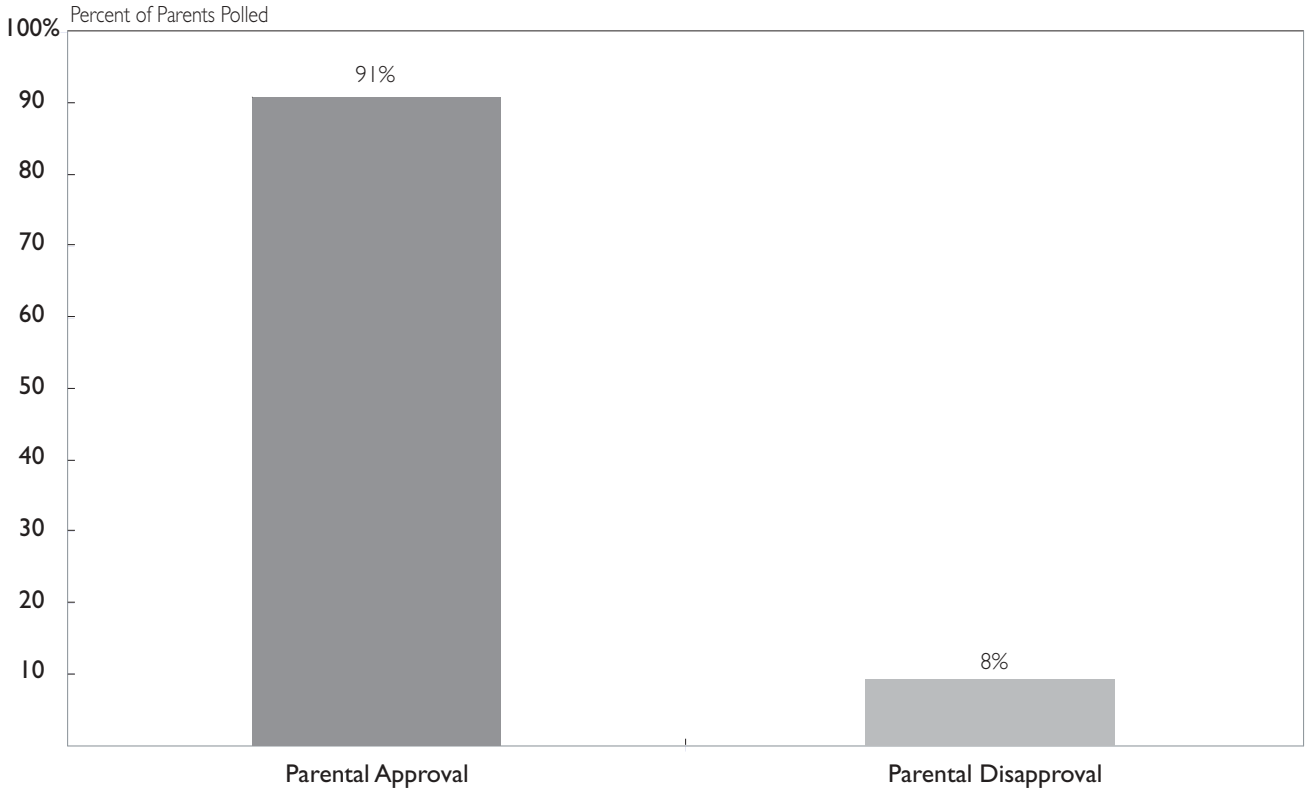
Chart 4 B 1722

Parental Approval of Sex Education Messages: Adolescents Should Be Expected to Abstain from Sexual Activity During High School Years



Question: The following is a list of topics that might be included in sex education classes for high school students. Assuming that a high school has sex-ed classes, please tell me do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that the class should teach the following to teen students:

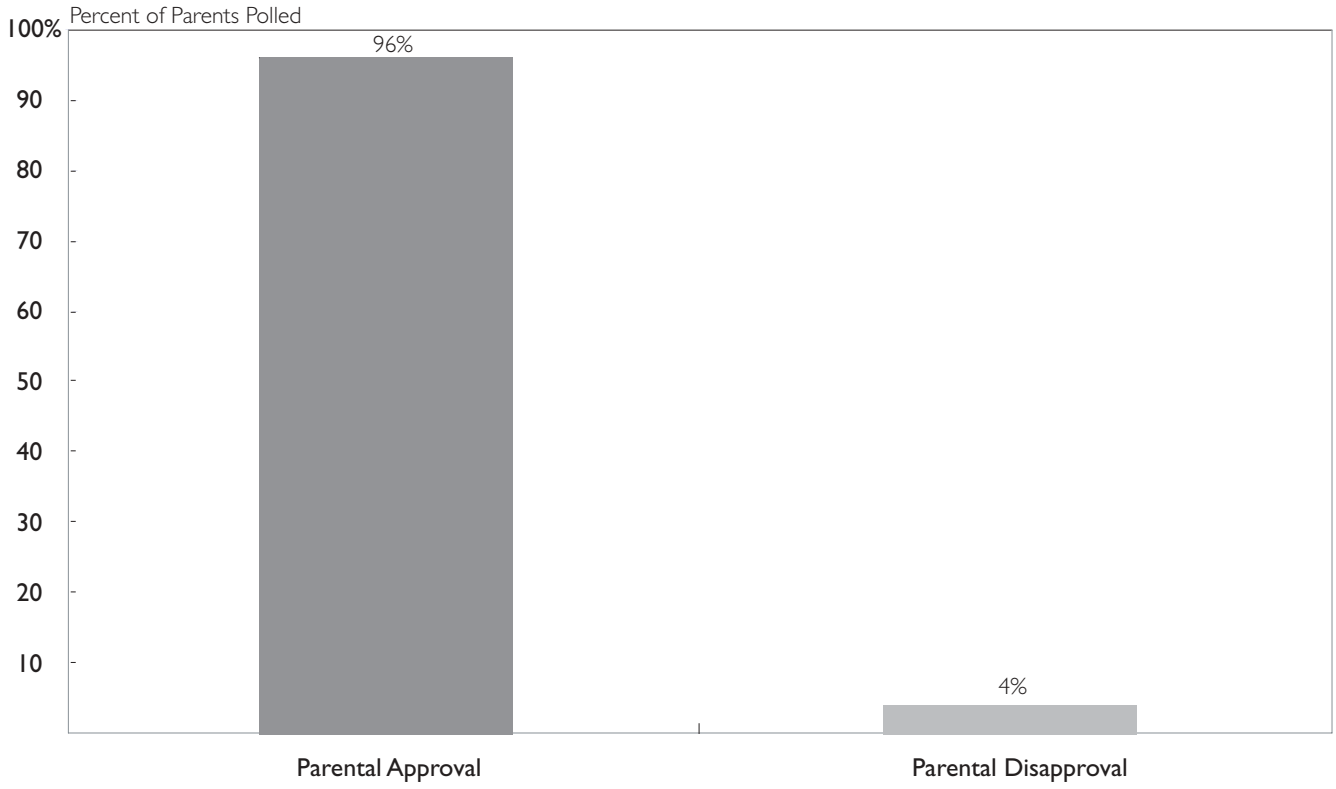
Adolescents should be expected to abstain from sexual activity during high school years.

Agree Strongly	73%	91%
Agree Somewhat	18%	
Disagree Somewhat	5%	8%
Disagree Strongly	3%	

Source: Zogby International Poll, 2004, of a representative national sample of parents with children 17 or younger

Chart 5 B 1722

Parental Approval of Sex Education Messages: Abstinence from Sexual Activity Is Best for Teens



Question: The following is a list of topics that might be included in sex education classes for high school students. Assuming that a high school has sex-ed classes, please tell me do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that the class should teach the following to teen students:

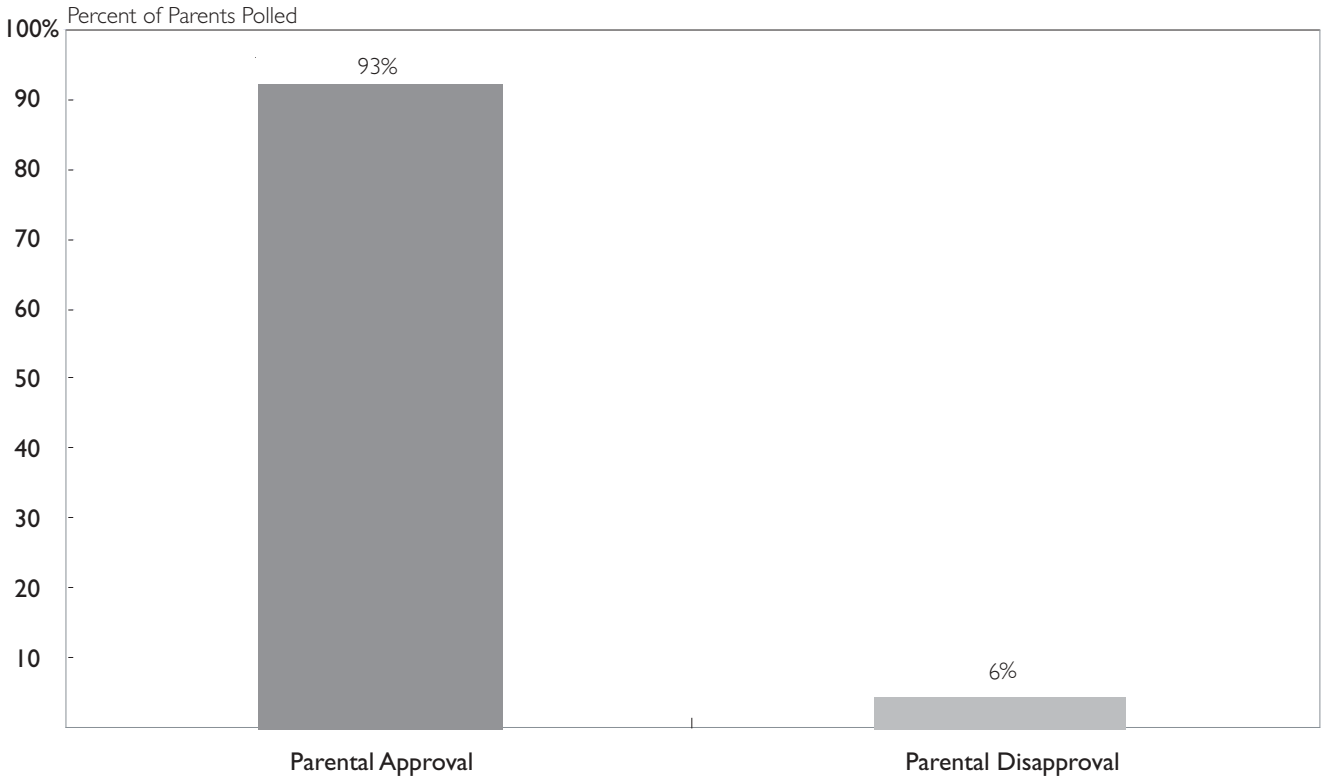
Abstinence from sexual activity is best for teens.

Agree Strongly	85%	**96%**
Agree Somewhat	11%	
Disagree Somewhat	2%	**4%**
Disagree Strongly	2%	

Source: Zogby International Poll, 2004, of a representative national sample of parents with children 17 or younger.

Chart 6 B 1722

Parental Approval of Sex Education Messages: The Younger the Age an Individual Begins Sexual Activity, the More Likely He or She Is to Be Infected by Sexually Transmitted Diseases, to Have an Abortion, and to Give Birth Out-of-Wedlock



Question: The following is a list of topics that might be included in sex education classes for high school students. Assuming that a high school has sex-ed classes, please tell me do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that the class should teach the following to teen students:

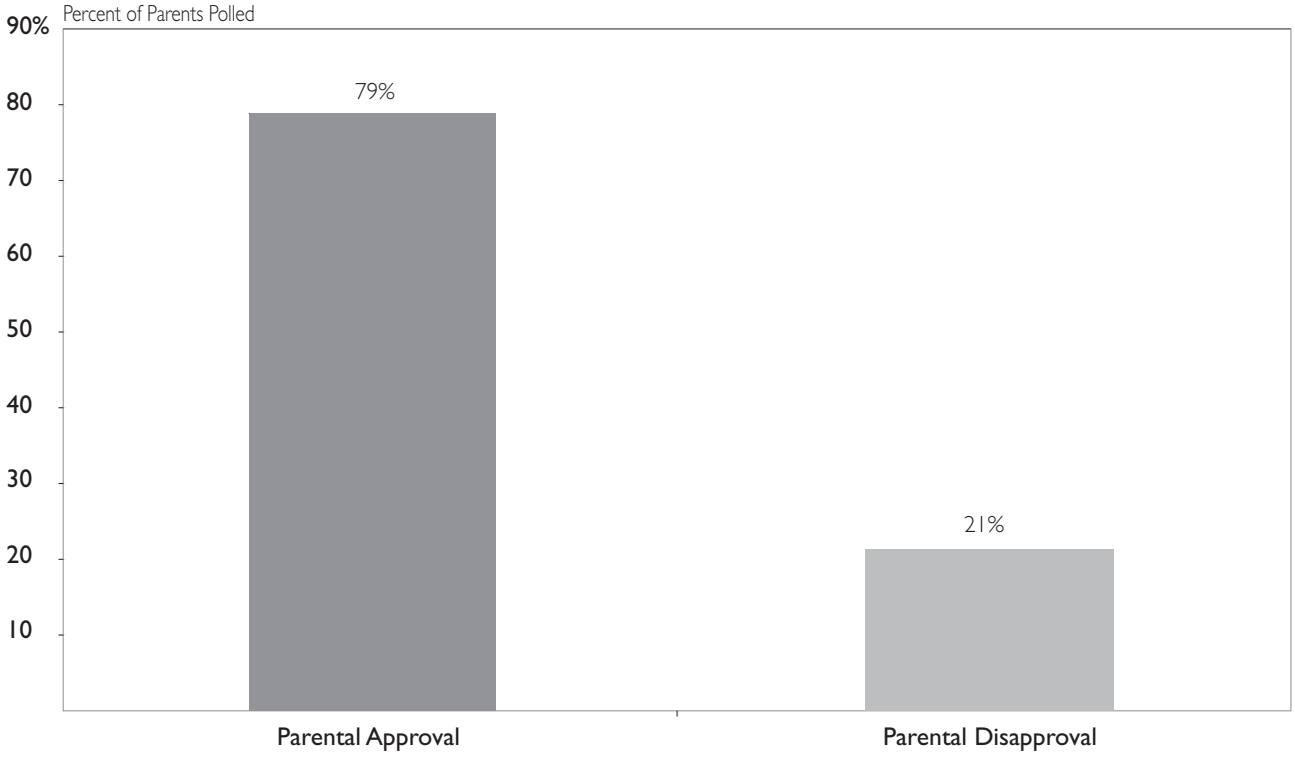
The younger the age an individual begins sexual activity, the more likely he or she is to be infected by sexually transmitted diseases, to have an abortion, and to give birth out-of-wedlock.

Agree Strongly	82%	93%
Agree Somewhat	12%	
Disagree Somewhat	2%	6%
Disagree Strongly	3%	

Source: Zogby International Poll, 2004, of a representative national sample of parents with children 17 or younger.

Chart 7 B 1722

Parental Approval of Sex Education Messages: Teen Sexual Activity Is Likely to Have Harmful Psychological and Physical Effects



Question: The following is a list of topics that might be included in sex education classes for high school students. Assuming that a high school has sex-ed classes, please tell me do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that the class should teach the following to teen students:

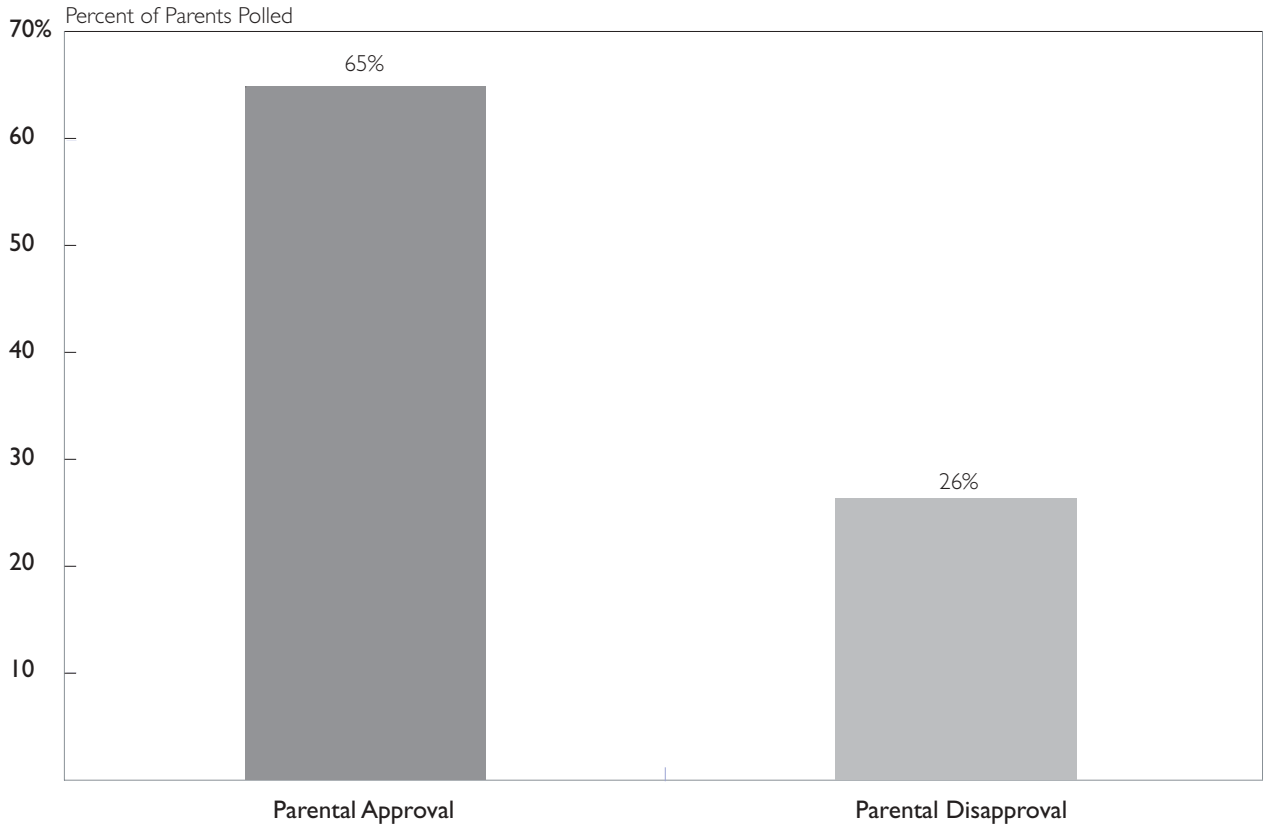
Teen sexual activity is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects.

Agree Strongly	57%	**79%**
Agree Somewhat	22%	
Disagree Somewhat	12%	**21%**
Disagree Strongly	9%	

Source: Zogby International Poll, 2004, of a representative national sample of parents with children 17 or younger.

Chart 8 B 1722

Parental Approval of Sex Education Messages: Teens Who Are Sexually Active Are More Likely to Be Depressed



Question: The following is a list of topics that might be included in sex education classes for high school students. Assuming that a high school has sex-ed classes, please tell me do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that the class should teach the following to teen students:

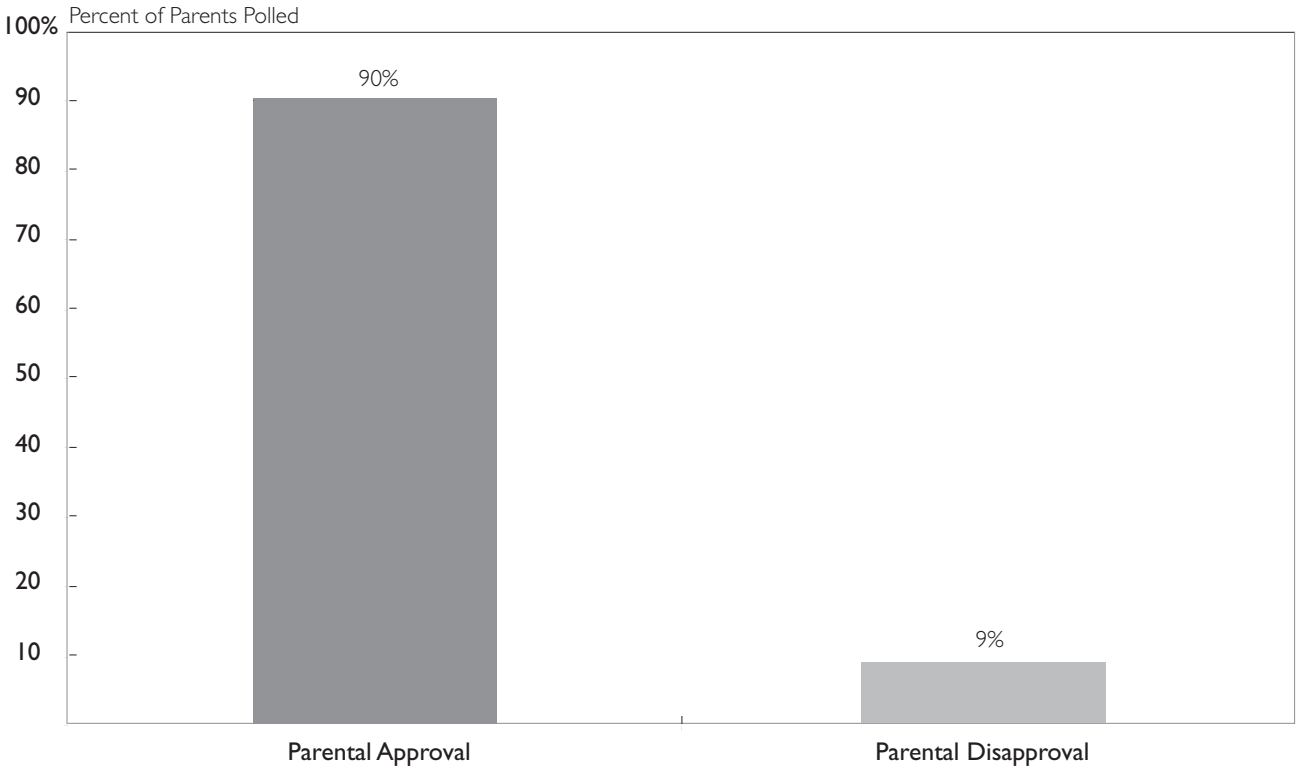
Teens who are sexually active are more likely to be depressed.

Agree Strongly	38%	65%
Agree Somewhat	26%	
Disagree Somewhat	15%	26%
Disagree Strongly	11%	

Source: Zogby International Poll, 2004, of a representative national sample of parents with children 17 or younger.

Chart 9 B 1722

Parental Approval of Sex Education Messages: The More Sexual Partners a Teen Has, the Greater the Likelihood of Physical and Psychological Harm



Question: The following is a list of topics that might be included in sex education classes for high school students. Assuming that a high school has sex-ed classes, please tell me do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that the class should teach the following to teen students:

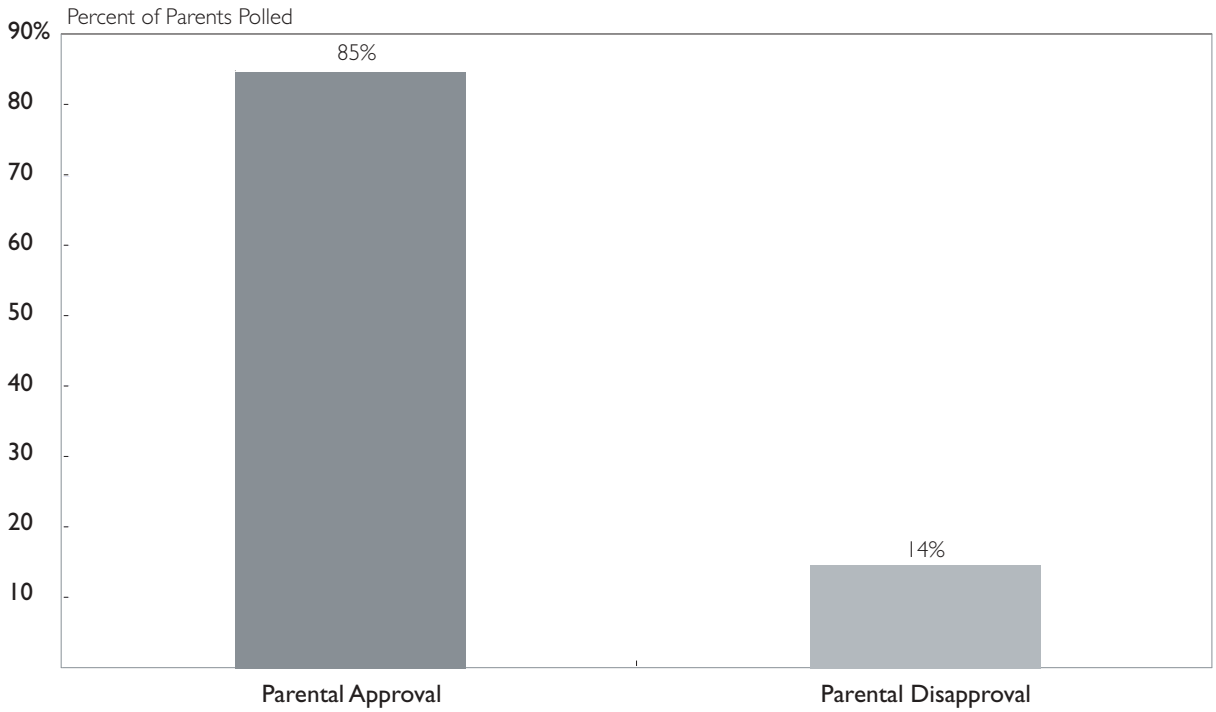
The more sexual partners a teen has, the greater the likelihood of physical and psychological harm.

Agree Strongly	70%	90%
Agree Somewhat	19%	
Disagree Somewhat	5%	9%
Disagree Strongly	4%	

Source: Zogby International Poll, 2004, of a representative national sample of parents with children 17 or younger.

Chart 10 B 1722

Parental Approval of Sex Education Messages: Having Many Sexual Partners at an Early Age May Undermine an Individual's Ability to Develop Love, Intimacy, and Commitment



Question: The following is a list of topics that might be included in sex education classes for high school students. Assuming that a high school has sex-ed classes, please tell me do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that the class should teach the following to teen students:

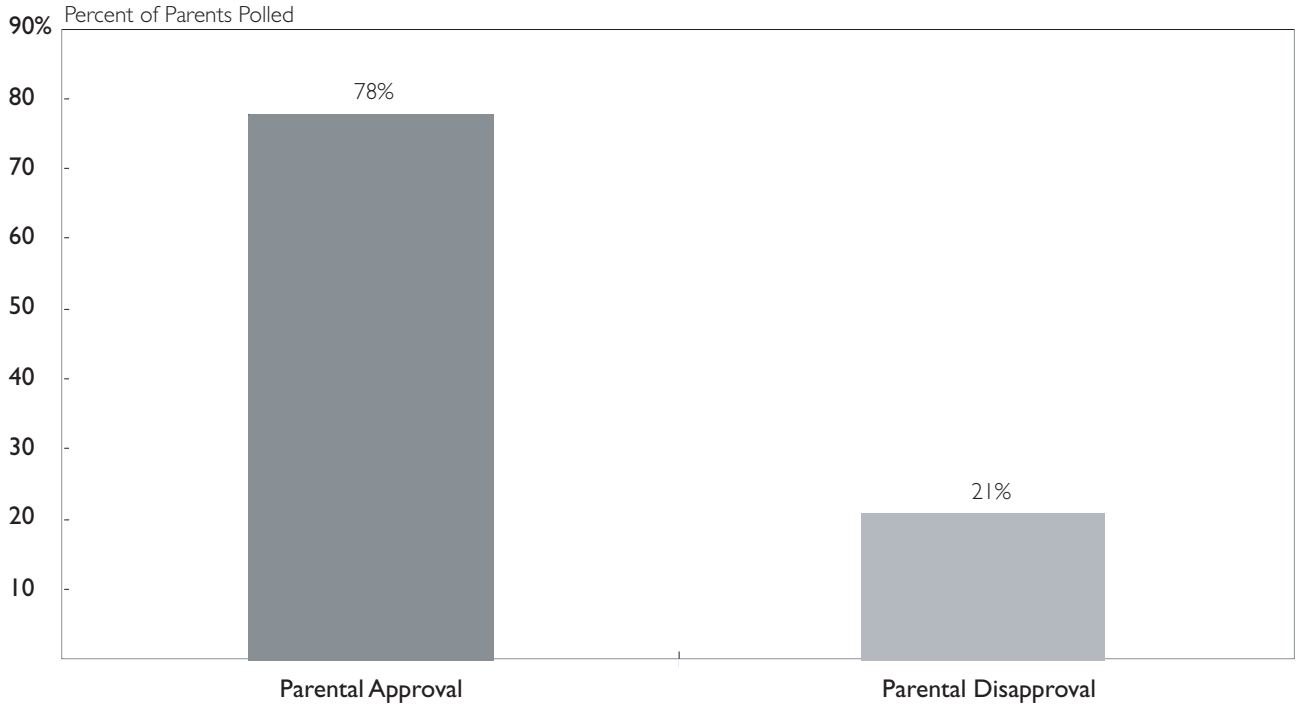
Having many sexual partners at an early age may undermine an individual's ability to develop love, intimacy, and commitment.

Agree Strongly	66%	
Agree Somewhat	19%	**85%**
Disagree Somewhat	7%	
Disagree Strongly	7%	**14%**

Source: Zogby International Poll, 2004, of a representative national sample of parents with children 17 or younger.

Chart 11 B 1722

Parental Approval of Sex Education Messages: Having Many Different Sexual Partners at an Early Age May Undermine an Individual's Ability to Form a Healthy Marriage as an Adult



Question: The following is a list of topics that might be included in sex education classes for high school students. Assuming that a high school has sex-ed classes, please tell me do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that the class should teach the following to teen students:

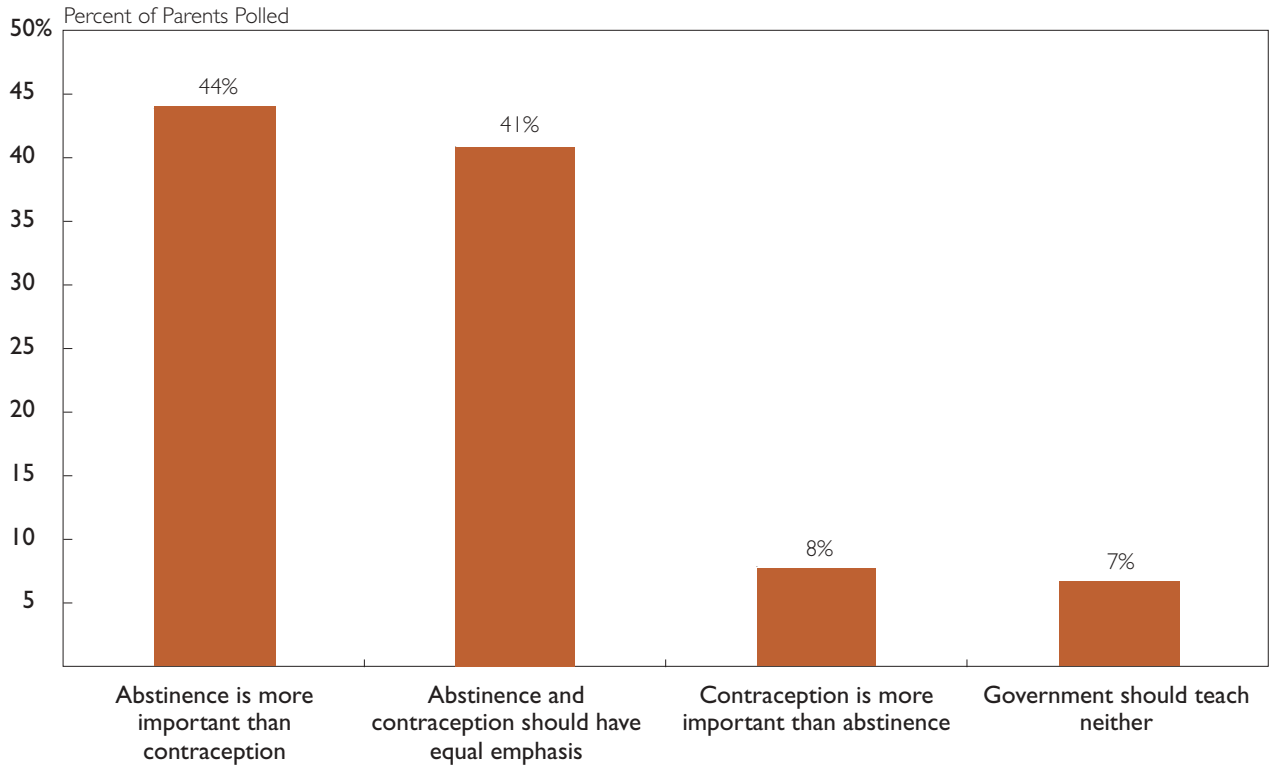
Having many different sexual partners at an early age may undermine an individual's ability to form a healthy marriage as an adult.

Agree Strongly	55%	78%
Agree Somewhat	23%	
Disagree Somewhat	12%	21%
Disagree Strongly	9%	

Source: Zogby International Poll, 2004, of a representative national sample of parents with children 17 or younger.

Chart 12 B 1722

Sex Education: What's More Important, Abstinence or Contraception?



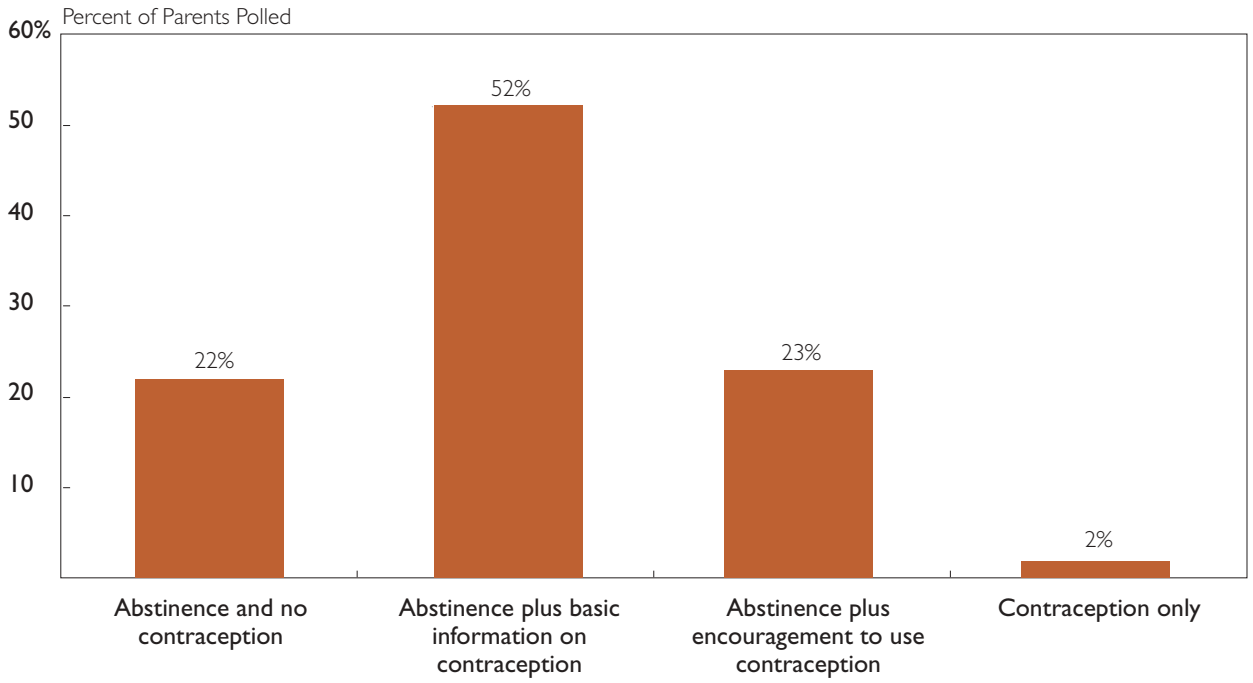
Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Teaching teens to abstain from sexual activity is more important than teaching teens to use condoms when having sex.	44%
Abstinence for teens and condoms for teens should have equal emphasis.	41%
Teaching teens how to use condoms when having sex and providing free contraceptives to teens is more important than teaching about abstinence.	8%
Government and the schools should promote neither abstinence for teens nor condoms for teens.	7%
Not Sure	1%

Source: Zogby International Poll, 2004, of a representative national sample of parents with children 17 or younger.

Chart 13 B 1722

Sex Education: What Should Young People Be Taught?



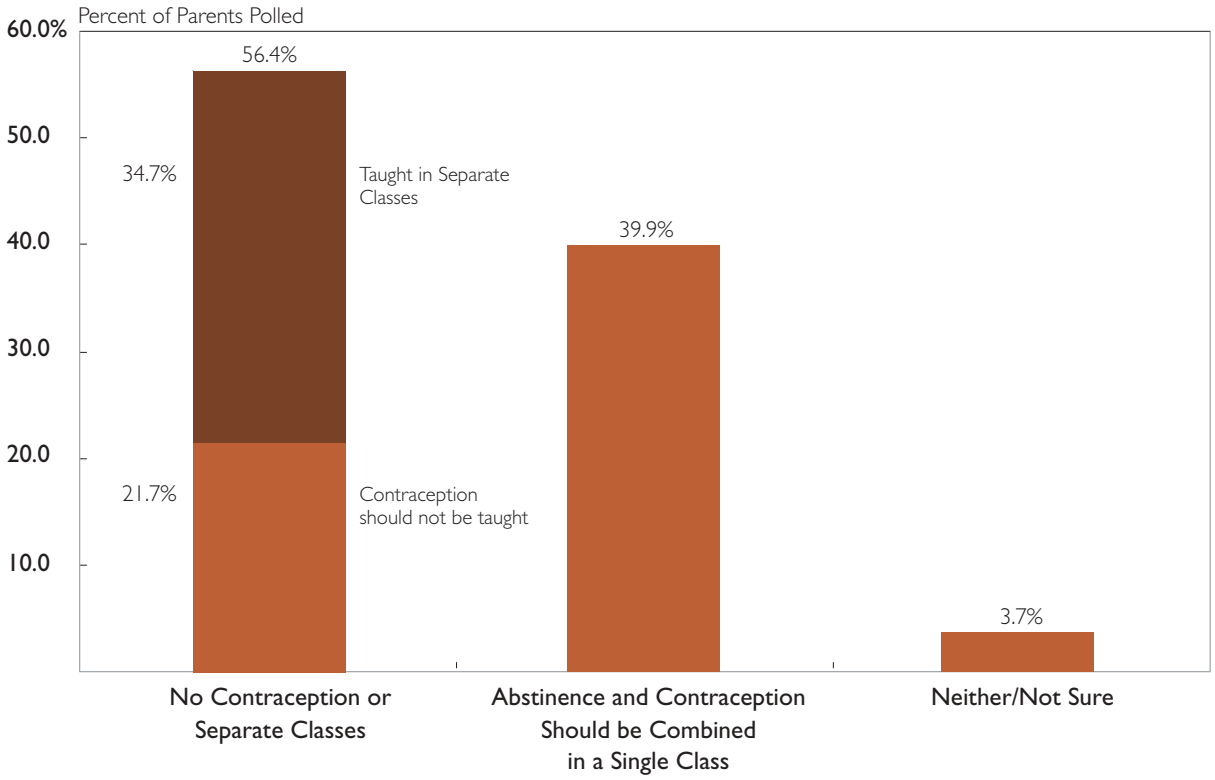
Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view on what is the best approach to sex education for young people?

Abstinence from sexual intercourse is the best choice for teens. Sex ed classes should not provide information about how to use and obtain condoms.	22%
Abstinence from sexual intercourse is the best choice for teens, but schools should provide basic biological and health information about contraception.	52%
Abstinence from sexual intercourse is best for teens, but schools should also encourage teens to use condoms when having sex, teach teens where to obtain condoms, and have teens practice how to put on condoms.	23%
Abstinence from sexual intercourse is not important. Sex ed classes should focus on teaching teens how to use condoms when engaging in sex activity.	2%
Not sure	1%

Source: Zogby International Poll, 2004, of a representative national sample of parents with children 17 or younger.

Chart 14 B 1722

Sex Education: How Should Abstinence and Contraception Be Taught?*



Sex education classes should not provide information about how to use and obtain condoms.	21.7%
Many believe that, in a class devoted to teaching abstinence, encouraging teens to use condoms will undermine the abstinence message. Abstinence should be taught in an abstinence class, but facts about contraception should be taught in a separate class, such as a health class.	34.7%
Teens should be encouraged to be abstinent and to use contraceptives in the same class.	39.9%
Neither/Not sure	3.7%

*This chart combines data from two poll questions.

Source: Zogby International Poll, 2004, of a representative national sample of parents with children 17 or younger.