Coalition for Adolescent Sexual Health
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Zogby International 2003 Survey on Parental Opinions of Character-Based, Abstinence-Until-Marriage Sex Education vs. Comprehensive ("Abstinence-First," Then Condoms) Sex Education

Summary of Key Findings

February 13, 2003

Coalition members: Christian Coalition of America, Concerned Women for America, Eagle Forum, Family Research Council, Focus on the Family, National Abstinence Clearinghouse, Traditional Values Coalition

Background

- Zogby International conducted the survey on behalf of the Coalition for Adolescent Sexual Health, an ad hoc association formed exclusively for the purpose of conducting the poll.

- Private foundations that wish to remain anonymous paid for the cost of the survey.

- The random sample survey was conducted January 11 to 15. A total of 1,245 adult parents of children ages 5 to 18 were interviewed with an over-sampling of African Americans. The margins of error were:

  -Total MOA = +/- 2.8 percent
  -Whites MOA = +/- 3.3 percent
  -All non-whites MOA = +/- 5.5 percent
  -Blacks MOA = +/- 6.3 percent
  -Born again Christians = +/- 5.6%

- The total sample was approximately evenly split among fathers of children in grades K-6, fathers of children in grades 7-12, mothers of children in grades K-6 and mothers of children in grades 7-12.

Need for Zogby survey

- Previous surveys by groups such as Alan Guttmacher Institute, Planned Parenthood, Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), and Advocates for Youth have had serious flaws.

  -Biased sample selection
  -Leading questions
  -Deceptive questions
  -Biased interpretation of results

- Such surveys have been used to claim that parents support comprehensive sex education (also known as “safer-sex” or “abstinence-first” sex education) and that parents oppose character-based, abstinence-until-marriage sex education.

- Such surveys describe comprehensive sex education using innocuous, vague, euphemistic, and almost compassionate wording designed to convince parents that such education is needed for their children’s health and well being.

How the questions in the Zogby poll were developed

- Five types of questions were included in the Zogby survey. All 29 questions in the survey were developed to introduce a minimum level of bias.

- Fourteen questions asked parents their level of approval for comprehensive sex education. The questions asked verbatim components of the Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education. These guidelines, developed in 1990 by the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], the National School Boards Association, Planned Parenthood and others) represent the foundation of comprehensive or abstinence-first sex education. In short, these guidelines detail what comprehensive sex education wants children and adolescents to learn. When organizations such as Planned Parenthood, SIECUS, the Alan Guttmacher Institute, and Advocates for Youth lobby Congress, state legislatures and school boards on behalf of comprehensive sex education, it is these guidelines that they have in mind. (See questions 7 through 20.)

- Six questions asked parents their level of approval for character-based, abstinence-until-marriage sex education. These questions asked verbatim portions from the National Guidelines for Sexuality and Character Education. These guidelines, developed in 1996 by the Medical Institute for Sexual Health, are considered by many abstinence groups to represent the foundation for abstinence education. (See questions 1 through 6.)

- Four questions asked parents their level of approval for comprehensive sex education curricula promoted for years by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The questions paraphrased teaching material from these curricula. (See questions 25 through 28.)

- Four questions reflect different aspects of comprehensive sex education not specifically covered by other questions. (See questions 21, 23, 24 and 29.)

- One question asked parents their level of approval for comprehensive sex education using the type of vague, innocuous wording typically used in the past by groups attempting to show parental approval for comprehensive sex education. This question was included for benchmark purposes. (See question 22.)

<u>Major findings</u>

- Parents overwhelmingly reject comprehensive sex education when they are asked questions that deal specifically with the topics included in comprehensive sex education.

	% of parents who approve or strongly approve	% of parents who disapprove or strongly disapprove
Comprehensive or abstinence-first sex education guidelines	25.0%	61.1%
Character-based, abstinence-sex education guidelines	73.5%	16.3%
CDC-promoted comprehensive sex education curricula	13.9%	75.3%

Misc. aspects of comprehensive sex education	22.4%	68.1%

- By a 4.6 to 1 margin, parents approve or strongly approve of abstinence sex education.

- By a 2.4 to 1 margin, parents disapprove or strongly disapprove of comprehensive sex education.

- By a 5.3 to 1 margin, parents disapprove or strongly disapprove of the information contained in comprehensive sex education curricula that have been promoted by the CDC.

- All demographic groupings strongly disapprove of comprehensive sex education, although the strongest opposition was found among non-white minority parents (Hispanics and Asians) and among parents who identified themselves as born-again Christians.

- All demographic groups disapprove of comprehensive sex education curricula that have been promoted by the CDC.

Findings on specific questions

- By a 4.4 to 1 margin, parents disapprove or strongly disapprove of teaching young people that homosexual love relationships can be as satisfying as are heterosexual relationships. (See question 14.)

- It appears that parents have a more mixed opinion on the matter of having children taught factual or biological information (see questions 13, 18 and 19, for example). However, opposition from parents seems to increase substantially if a connection is perceived between *their* children and sexual activity.

- When it comes to allowing teens to obtain contraception without parental approval, parents much more strongly disapprove when *their own* children are involved. About 46 percent of parents either strongly disapprove or disapprove of the idea that teens could obtain contraception without the permission of a parent. (See question 27.) However, when this question was personalized, about 70 percent of parents either strongly disapprove or disapprove of *their child* being able to obtain contraception without *their* knowledge or approval. (See question 29.)

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