Most Voters in Both Political Parties Support Sex Ed in Schools

But there's one topic Republicans don't want included, according to a national survey.

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Here's a surprising topic that both Democratic and Republican voters agree on: the importance of including sex education in middle and high schools.

A national poll of likely voters found that they support government funding of sex ed and want the programs to teach abstinence and contraception as ways to prevent pregnancy. What's more, these voters support teaching students about sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV.

Results of the Rutgers-led national survey, which included nearly 1,000 participants, were published in the journal Sex Education.

"Sex education remains a vital component to reducing unintended teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases among young people as well as providing young people with the information and skills they need to build healthy relationships," professor Leslie M. Kantor, chair of the department of urban-global public health at the Rutgers School of Public Health and the lead researcher, told Newswise. "Recent attempts by the government to shift funding away from evidence-based pregnancy prevention programs and back to abstinence-only-until-marriage approaches are out of alignment with what likely voters want."

The researchers write that their study adds to a growing body of literature showing a "high level of support in the USA for providing sex education in middle in high school."

Among other questions, the survey asked whether respondents supported including these seven key topics in sex education for middle and high school:

- Abstinence
- Birth control methods
- Consent
- Healthy relationships
- Puberty

- Sexual orientation
- Sexually transmitted infections, including HIV

The results? “The only topic for which there was not strong support among all groups is sexual orientation,” according to the study. “Less than half (48.1%) of Republicans compared to 83.8% of Democrats supported including information about sexual orientation in middle school sex education. For high school, 63.1% of Republicans and 91.3% of Democrats supported including information about sexual orientation in sex education. Levels of support among both Democrats and Republicans for including each of the other sex education topics were strong.”

In addition, Republicans were more likely than Democrats to want abstinence included in sex education and less likely to want information about healthy relationships, birth control and consent.

The researchers note that since 2009, federal funding for sex ed has shifted from predominantly abstinence-only-until-marriage programs to more evidence-based approaches. Under the Trump administration, there have been and will likely continue to be efforts to shift funding back to sex ed programs that stress abstinence.

“Thus,” write the researchers, “understanding that likely voters, regardless of identifying as Republicans or Democrats, want federal funding to exist for pregnancy prevention programs and want the approach to include both abstinence and information about birth control and how to prevent sexually transmitted infections has important policy salience. Policy makers should consider the perspectives of likely voters as they decide on funding approaches to teenage pregnancy prevention.”

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