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Myths Around Sex Education: Is an Emphasis on Abstinence-Only Best for our Youth?

Education for Service

Indiana School Health Network Annual Conference
June 22-23, 2021

Learning Objectives

- Participants will understand the challenges surrounding accurate perception of expectations regarding sex education curriculum across Indiana
- Participants will review survey data from Indianapolis university students regarding their sex education experiences in middle/high school
- Participants will explore implications of this research study to promote further development of sex education in Indiana

Agenda

- Framing the Debate
- Landscape of sex ed in Indiana
- Statutes in Indiana regarding sex ed
- Key literature
- Purpose of this study
- Results - quant and qual
- Addressing myths around sex education
- Next steps

Framing the Debate - What are Both Sides Saying?

For abstinence-based

- Providing information about sex to students may encourage those behaviors
- Parents should be responsible for sharing this information with their children

For comprehensive

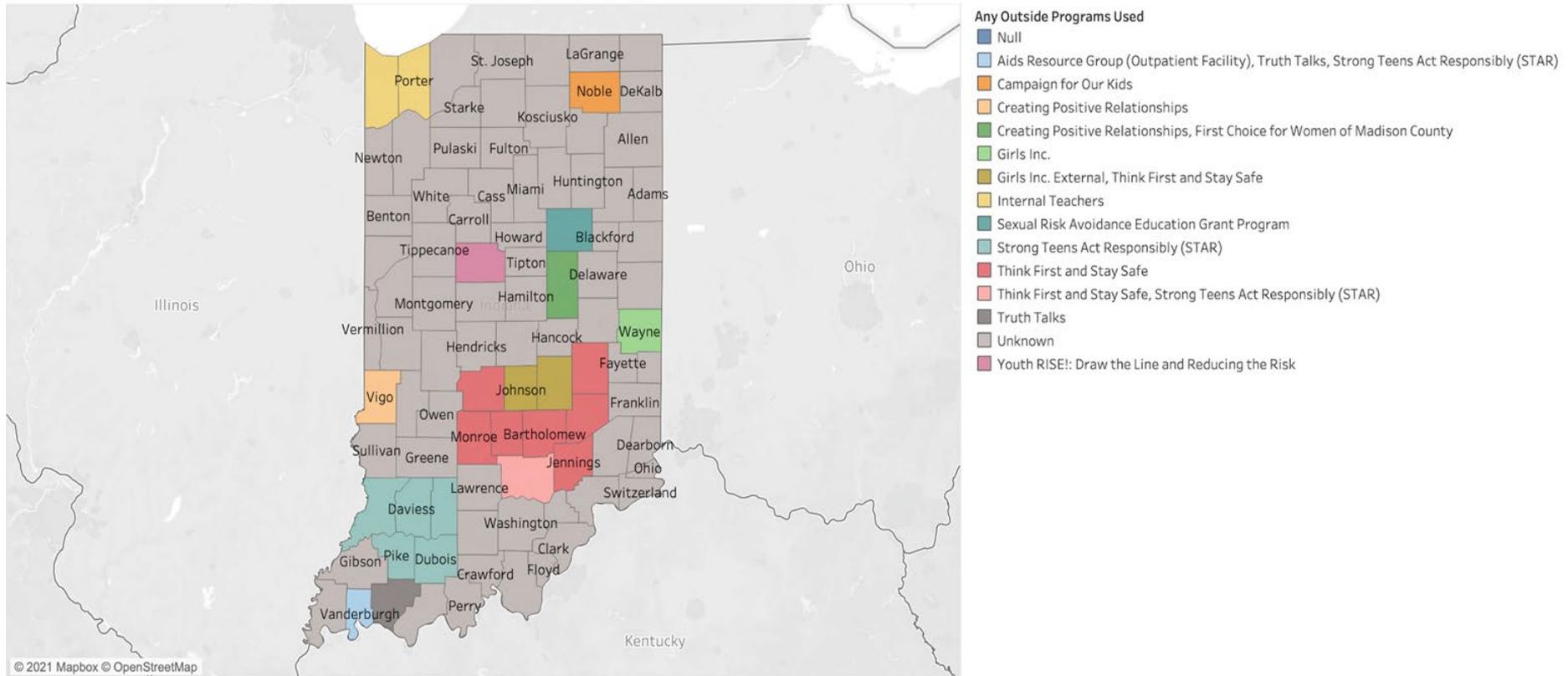
- Abstinence based education does not cover LGBTQ populations
- Data shows that students are engaging in sexual behaviors anyway

Needs in Indiana

- Teen pregnancy rate is higher than the national average
- Infant mortality rate for mothers 19 and younger (CDC, 2020)
- Sexually-transmitted disease rate surged in the last decade, reaching an all-time high in 2018 (IN.gov, 2020)
- Comprehensive sex education has been consistently linked to the reduction of sexual and reproductive health issues

Grasping the Landscape in Indiana

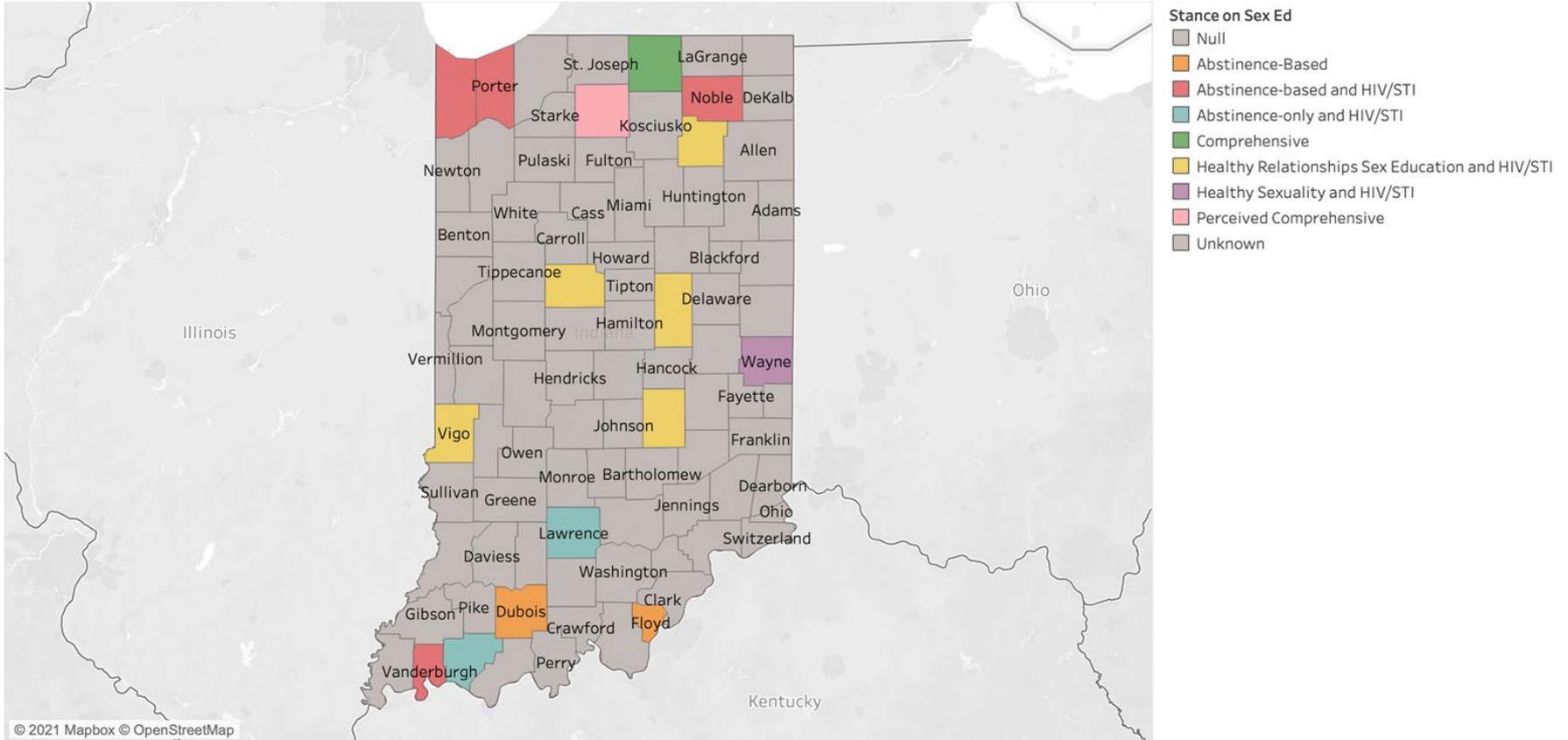
Sheet 1



Map based on Longitude (generated) and Latitude (generated). Color shows details about Any Outside Programs Used. The marks are labeled by County Name. Details are shown for County Name.

Grasping the Landscape in Indiana

Sheet 2



Map based on Longitude (generated) and Latitude (generated). Color shows details about Stance on Sex Ed. The marks are labeled by County Name. Details are shown for County Name.

Purpose of the Study

- Collect information from UIndy students on sex education experiences in middle/high school
 - Level of knowledge of sexual health behaviors
 - Childhood residence (rural, suburban, or urban areas)
- Gain comprehensive & comparative understanding of sex education approaches youth are exposed to in Indiana, as well as other states
- Target gap in literature combining social media and sexting with the topic of sex education
- Explore possible gaps between parents & educators think teens need related to sex education
- Drive policy and education development in our technologically-driven day and age

Indiana Statutes

IC 20-30-5-13 Instruction on human sexuality or sexually transmitted diseases

Sec. 13. Throughout instruction on human sexuality or sexually transmitted diseases, an accredited school shall:

- (1) require a teacher to teach abstinence from sexual activity outside of marriage as the expected standard for all school age children;
- (2) include in the instruction that abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other associated health problems; and
- (3) include in the instruction that the best way to avoid sexually transmitted diseases and other associated health problems is to establish a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage.

Indiana Statutes - Public Law 154

c) Before a school may provide a student with instruction on human sexuality, the school must provide the parent of the student or the student, if the student is an adult or an emancipated minor, with a written request for consent of instruction. A consent form provided to a parent of a student or a student under this subsection must accurately summarize the contents and nature of the instruction on human sexuality that will be provided to the student and indicate that a parent of a student or an adult or emancipated minor student has the right to review and inspect all materials related to the instruction on human sexuality.

State Sex Education Policies and Requirements

- Indiana schools are **not** required to teach sex education. However, schools are required to provide instruction on AIDS.
- Curriculum is not required to be comprehensive.
- Curriculum must stress abstinence as the expected social standard.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on consent.
- Schools are required to make two attempts to receive written permission from parents or guardians for students to participate in sex education. If permission is not confirmed or is not denied, students will be automatically enrolled in the instruction. Parents may subsequently withdraw students from instruction.
- Indiana has no standard regarding medically accurate sex education instruction.

Critical Sexual Health Education Topics - CDC (2015-16)

Reported teaching all 19 critical sexual health education topics

- 10.9% of 6, 7, 8 students
- 31.5% of 9, 10, 11, 12 students

Reported teaching about the benefits of being sexually abstinent

- 82.7% of 6, 7, 8, students
- 95.9% of 9, 10, 11, 12 students

Reported teaching how to access valid and reliable information, products, and services related to HIV, other STDs, and pregnancy

- 70.9% of 6, 7, 8 students
- 92.6% of 9, 10, 11, 12 students

Critical Sexual Health Education Topics - CDC (2015-16)

Reported teaching how to create and sustain healthy and respectful relationships

- 85.4% of 6, 7, 8 students
- 95.9% 9, 10, 11, 12 students

Reported teaching about preventive care that is necessary to maintain reproductive and sexual health

- 61.5% of 6, 7, 8 students
- 88.3% of 9, 10, 11, 12 students

Reported teaching how to correctly use a condom

- 20.2% of 6, 7, or 8 students
- 40.8% of 9, 10, 11, or 12 students

Reported teaching about methods of contraception other than condoms

- 31.7% of 6, 7, or 8 students
- 62.1% of 9, 10, 11, or 12 students

Critical Sexual Health Education Topics - CDC (2015-16)

Reported teaching about sexual orientation

- 32.5% of 6, 7, or 8 students
- 50.1% of 9, 10, 11, or 12 students

Reported teaching about gender roles, gender identity, or gender expression

- 35.5% of 6, 7, or 8 students
- 50.2% of 9, 10, 11, or 12 students

Reported providing curricula or supplementary materials relevant to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) youth

- 41.3% of all students.

Key Literature - Efficacy of Programs

- Assessment of peer-reviewed, published research reveals no evidence that abstinence-only programs delay sexual initiation or reduce STIs or pregnancy. Credible research does however, clearly demonstrate that some comprehensive sex education can achieve positive behavioral changes among young people and reduce STIs. Furthermore, credible research demonstrates that some comprehensive sex education do not encourage young people to initiate sexual activity earlier or have more sexual partners. (Collins, Alagiri, and Summers, 2002)
- According to the research, critical gaps exist in the types of information (practical types on “where to get birth control” and “how to use condoms” were lowest) and the mistiming of information (most adolescents received instruction after sexual debut) received. Given the insufficient state of sex education in the United States in 2016, (Hall, Sales, Komro, and Santelli, 2016) conclude that existing gaps are opportunities. They are opportunities for more ambitious, forward-thinking strategies that cross-cut levels to translate an expanded evidence base into best practices and policies. The authors also conclude that expanded, integrated, multilevel approaches that reach beyond the classroom and capitalize on cutting-edge, youth-friendly technologies are needed to improve and advance sex education.

Key Literature - What the Stakeholders Want

- Dent and Maloney (2017) conducted interviews in a medium-sized Texas city among a group of Evangelical Christians. The results from this study revealed a group of evangelical Christian parents who felt explicit opposition to abstinence-based sex education in schools. These parents believe that their opposition aligns with a silent majority of evangelical Christians.
- Researchers conducted telephone surveys from 2006-2007 in Minnesota, with one thousand six hundred five parents of school-age children respondents. The survey included items regarding general sexuality education, 12 specific topics, the grade level they should be taught, and attitudes on sexuality education. The large majority of parents supported teaching about both abstinence and contraception. Researchers highlight a mismatch between parents' expressed opinions and preferences, and actual sexuality education content as currently taught in the majority of public. (Eisenber, Bernat, Bearinger, and Resnick, 2008)

Key Literature - What the Stakeholders Want

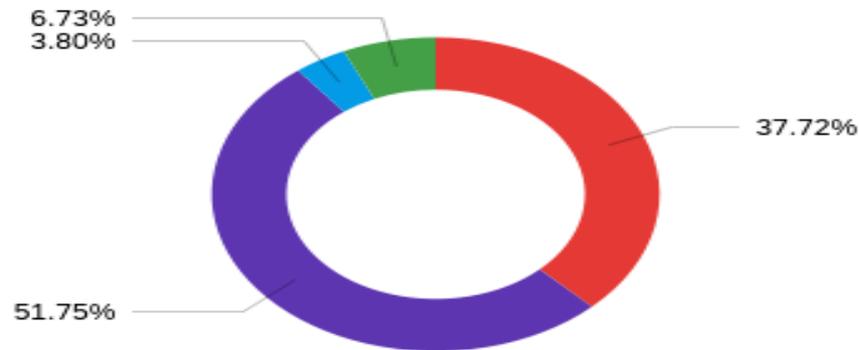
- Hoefer and Hoefer (2017) examined the impact of abstinence only education curricula utilizing a non-randomly selected group of young adults from various locations across a large Southwestern state. Results from this study indicated that respondents felt insufficient information and resources were provided and that sexist and heterosexist stereotypes were promoted. Furthermore, results from this study showed that participants did not feel safe in their sex education classes and that the curricula relied on fear and shame.
- 1306 parents of North Carolina public school students in grades K-12 were surveyed to assess opinions on sex education.. Results from this study indicate that of these respondents, the majority (89%) support comprehensive sexuality education and less than a quarter of parents oppose teaching any specific topic, including those typically viewed as more controversial, such as discussions about sexual orientation, oral sex, and anal sex. Finally, results from this study found that more than 90% of respondents felt that parents and public health professionals should determine sexuality education content and opposed the involvement of politicians. (Ito, Gizlice, Owen-O'Dowd, Froust, Leone, and Miller, 2006)

Key Literature- Social Media/Sexting

- One in seven teens report that they are sending sexts, and one in four are receiving sexts, according to our study of over 110,000 teens. -2018 Journal of American Medicine of Pediatrics.
- One study examined sexting in middle school. Results from this study found twenty percent of students with text-capable cell phone access reported receiving a sext. 5% reported sending a sext. Furthermore, results from this study found that students who text at least 100 times per day were more likely to report receiving and sending sexts, as well as to be sexually active. Researchers found that students who sent sexts and received sexts were more likely to report sexual activity, and excessive texting and receiving sexts were associated with both unprotected sex and with condom use. Researchers concluded that sexting and associated risks should be considered for inclusion in middle school sex education curricula. (Rice, Gibbs, Winetrobe, Rhoades, Plant, Montoya, and Kordic, 2014)

Survey Data- Sex Education Programs

Type of Sex Education Received (n=400)



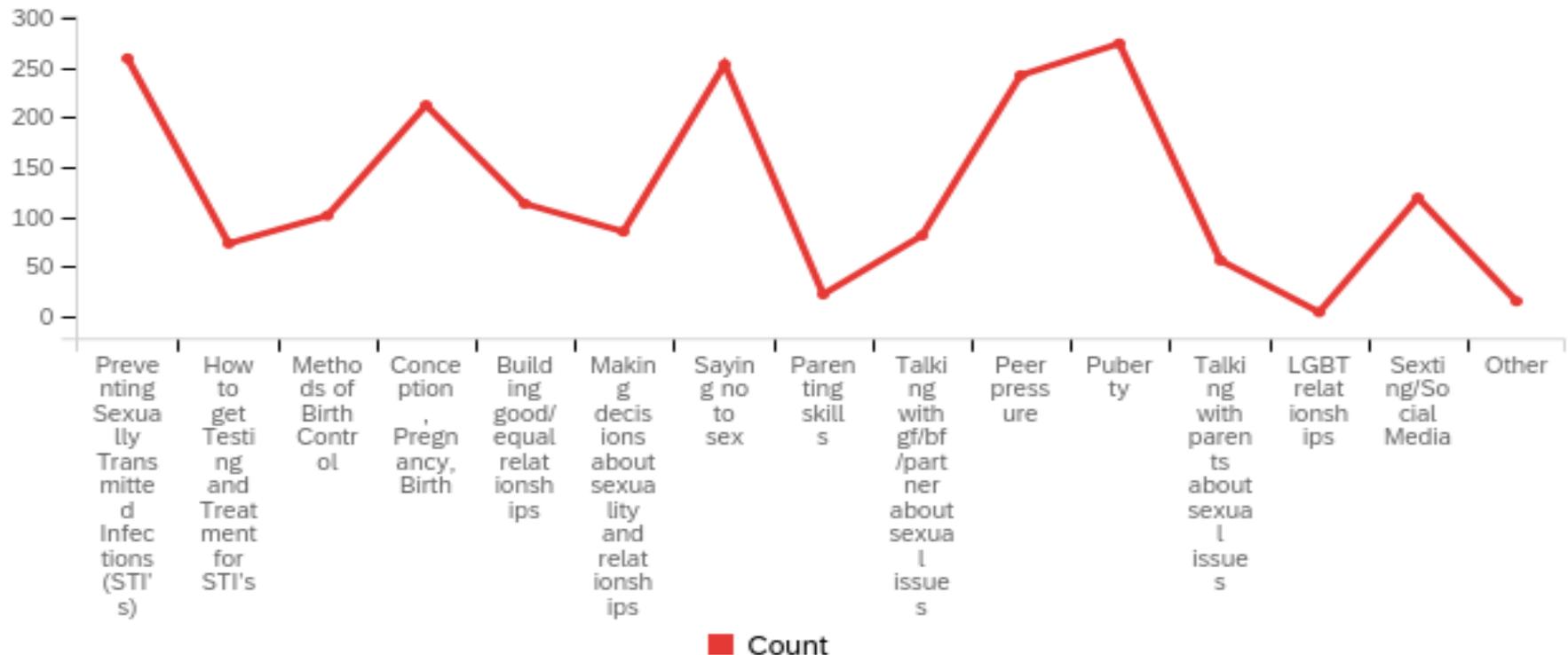
■ Abstinence only (Taught to abstain from sexual activity outside of/until marriage)

■ Comprehensive (Provided scientifically accurate information about human development, anatomy and reproductive health, as well as information about contraception, childbirth and sexually transmitted infections)

■ None ■ Unsure

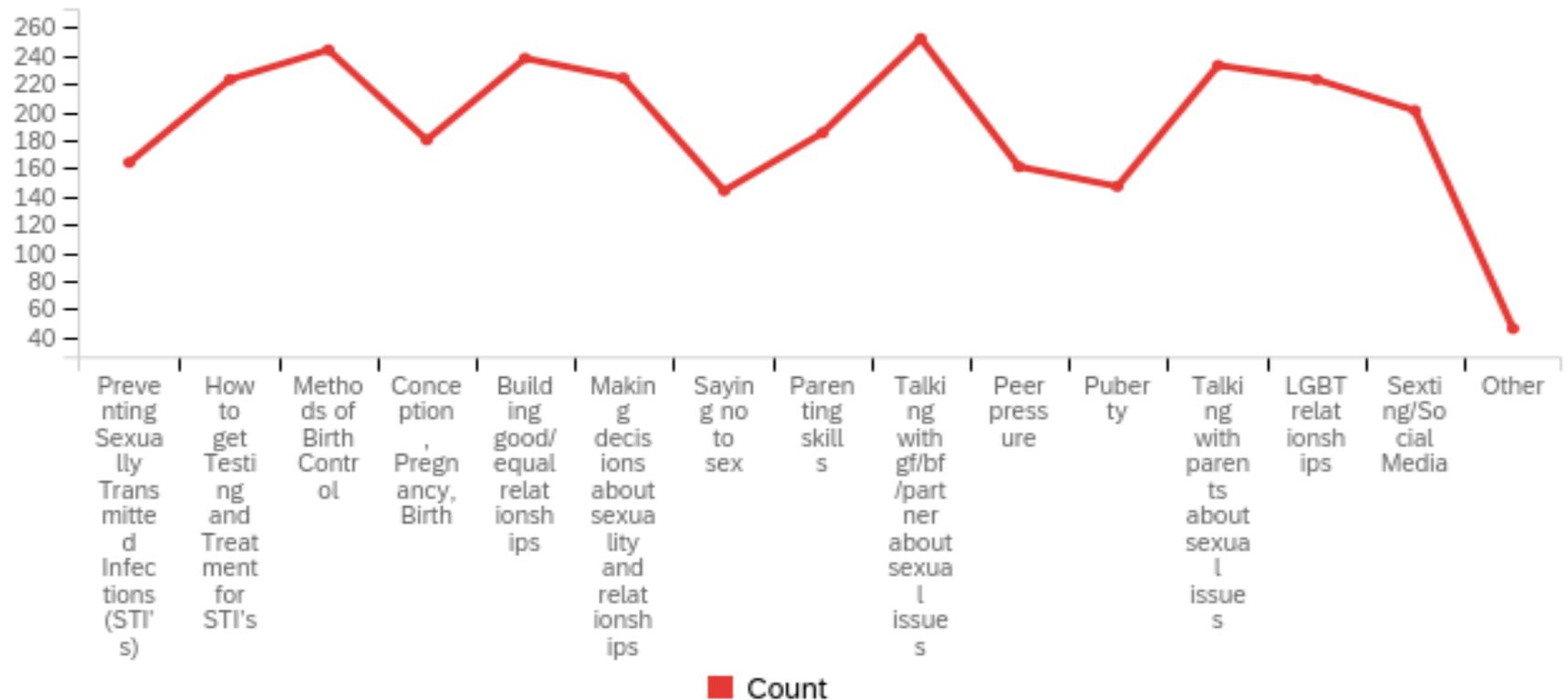
Topics Learned in Sex Ed

Topics Covered in Sex Ed (n=400)



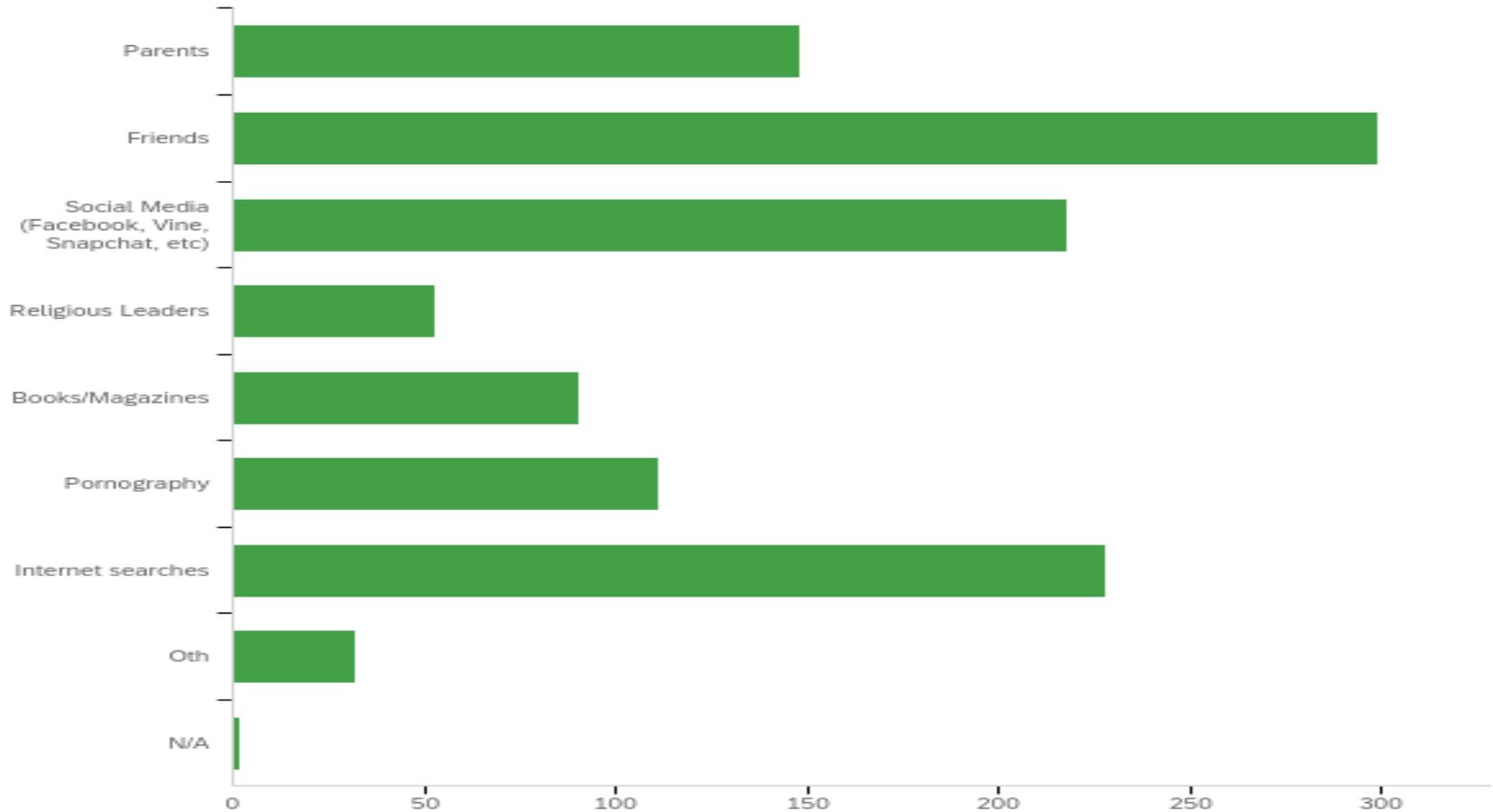
Topics People Wish They Had Learned

Topics Students Wish Were Covered in Sex Ed (n=400)



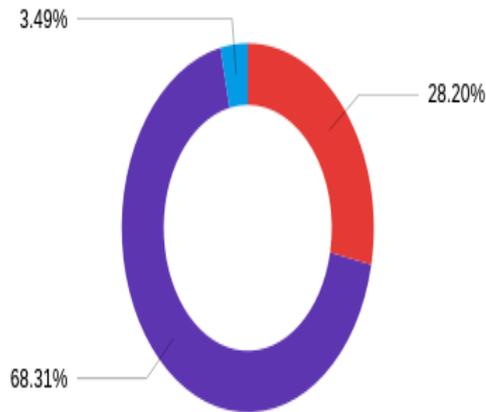
Where do kids get their info?

Other Sources for Information on Sex, Sexuality, and Sexual Health

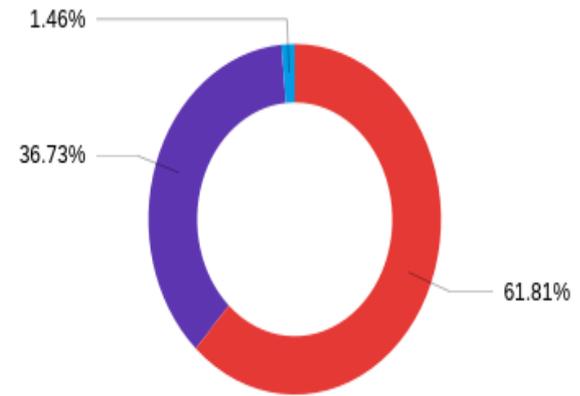


Social Media and Sexting

Percentage of Students Who Sent or Received Sexually Explicit Texts in Middle School Percentage of Students Who Sent or Received Sexually Explicit Texts in High School



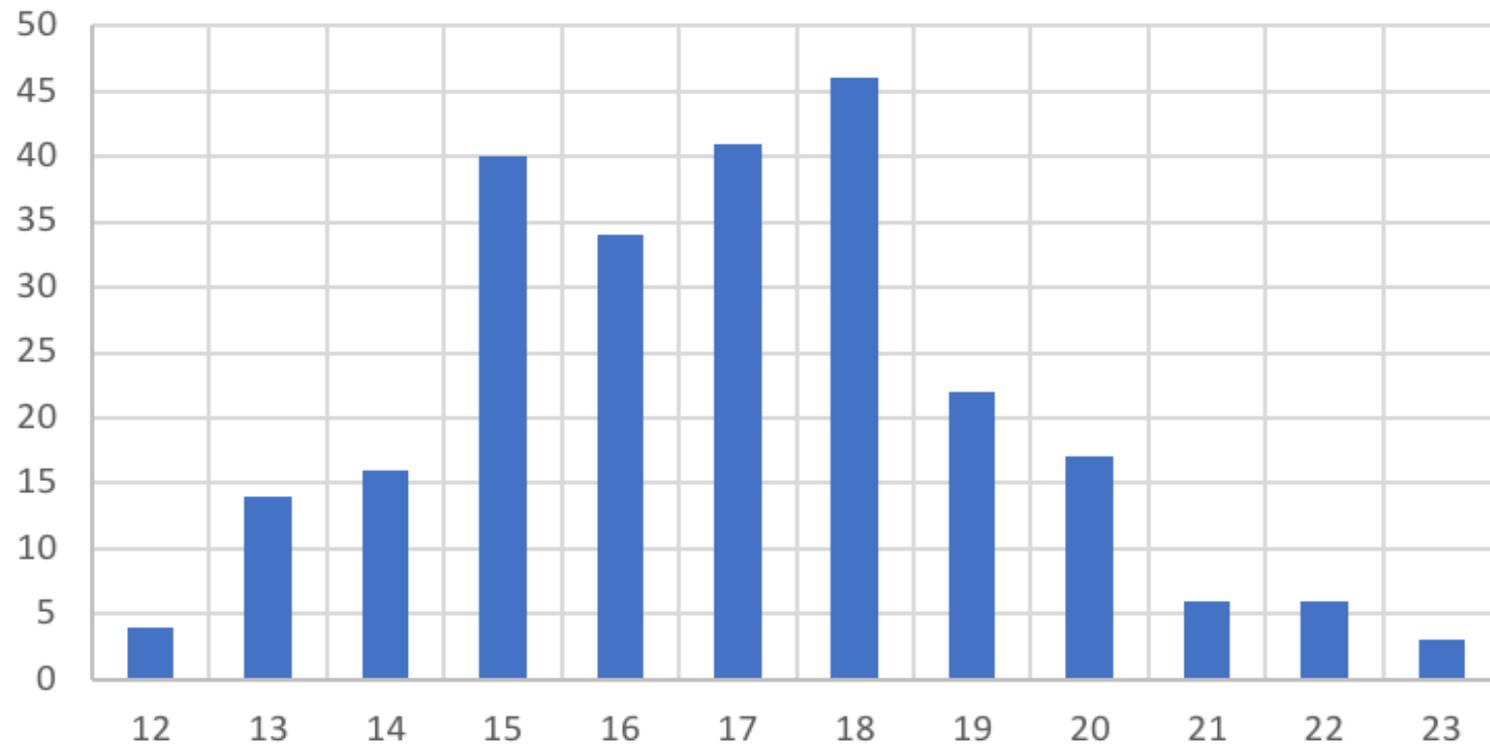
Yes No Unsure



Yes No Unsure

Sexual Activity in Middle/High School

Age at First Sexual Activity (n=249)



Qualitative Themes - Preparation

Lead me to engage in safe sex practices - Indiana

Everyone was excited for our sex educator to come to health class. Although we were young and it was an awkward topic, she was hilarious and formed a comfortable environment in the classroom to talk about the topic of sex. I think this taught me from a young age that it is a topic that can be talked about openly and that I shouldn't be embarrassed or uncomfortable discussing it with others (friends, family, partners, etc). -Lake County

Helped me understand my and others bodies and how to respect and protect them. -Indiana

Yes. I waited till I was out of high school to be sexually active. I started birth control as well and used condoms until I got IUD. -Marion County

It absolutely lead to safe sex practices. My parents didn't discuss hardly anything besides using contraception. Most of my sexual knowledge in my teens came from my sex ed. It gave me a a base knowledge to rely on that was scientifically backed. Gave me confidence to engage in sex in a healthy manner. - Los Angeles County

Having sex education made me more wise about sexual decisions. I have waited to engage in sexual activities until I knew how my body would respond and know what to do when I am uncomfortable or something happens. - Randolph County

Qualitative Themes - Confusion

Confused me and didn't really tell me anything I need to know - St. Joseph County

It really confused me about sex/sexuality. It made me feel like the feelings I had about sex and my sexuality were bad, but really aren't. Felt like if I engaged in sex before marriage I was a "hoe" or a "slut". - Indiana

My sex education impacted my life because I have been confused about sex as well as my sexuality. - Marion County

Our sex education focused a lot on abstinence and on sexually transmitted infections. I think that this just made me unsure of my decisions overall. I lacked confidence in my education and knowledge, and so I was never confident in my decisions. I have always practiced safe sex, but I don't credit that to my sex education in the school system. - Ohio

I think that my sex education confused me about sex. It seemed as though adults wanted to beat around the bush and joke about sex/sexuality. There was little to no discussion in regards to same-sex relationships. Furthermore, as a result of receiving poor sex education, I thought I was dying when I started my period in 7th grade! I look back on it now and laugh, but at the time, I was in pain and scared for my life. Lastly, my poor experiences in regards to sex education most likely lead me to be promiscuous in my middle and high school years. I did not engage in safe-sex practices, and unfortunately was a victim of sexual assault at 15. No one taught me about the dangers of sexual assault during my sex-ed courses, and now I look at sex completely differently as a result of my experiences. - Indiana

It didn't really do anything for me. My mom was big in telling me truth and she had already started teaching me about the body when I was younger with this book by the American girls dolls. However, Catholic school made me very confused, ashamed, and scared about being queer. -Marion County

Qualitative Themes - Shame

Made me feel gross, internalized homophobia for the longest time, I had to be secretive, get use to men being pushy, neglect my own body telling me to run. Let men do what they wanted sexually in hopes that I would be "cured" - Marion County

My initial sex education was abstinence-only and it had disastrous effects on my life. I lost my virginity to someone who raped me and didn't tell anyone because I thought it was my fault and that I would be shamed by everyone because I had lost my "purity". This led to out-of-control sexual behaviors, depression, and drug addiction. - Shelby County

It made me feel shame in regards to my sexuality. I felt that if I engaged in I would be less valuable. - Noble County

Sex education led me to stay in the closet about my sexuality for longer, because I really didn't have a clue that same sex couples existed or could have sex (and didn't know what sex with same sex couples means). It also led me to be really anxious during sex and have trouble relaxing because of all the stress it caused me. - Cook County

I had a lot of shame about my sexual activity, and I didn't ask for help from parents and doctors when I needed it. - Marion County

I had to turn towards friends or online sources to get answers. I felt inner guilt or fear of sex for the longest time even though I don't actually believe I lose value for having sex because it was instilled in me to. What I did learn through supportive sources were how to take care and love me body! Over time, I've learned to forget the old lessons. -Kosciusko County

Qualitative Responses - Thoughts on Sex Ed

Sex education is very important. Many schools don't do good job on teaching kids about sex and in the case where kids have restrictive parents, they end up not learning anything about sex and hence, they end making a mistake or staying way far away from sex like I did. I wish there was a session help by WHO or any government health organization at every school to help educate kids about sex and teach them about birth controls, STI, consent, safe sex, etc. It's not okay to just rely on internet. It should be an education thing. Not "go figure out yourself" thing - International

Looking back at it I laugh at how bad it was and how the sayings used to describe things were terrible examples. I also laugh at how they always made sure to do it on valentines week so it was always awkward with the couples in middle school. - Indiana

Abstinence-based sex education is NOT a viable way to teach. It's unlikely that students will learn anything from that teaching. Sex education should be a resource and an informative experience for situations to come, not to stop them all together. - Indiana

I think a lot is wrong with sex education today. I think we teach abstinence only, which doesn't help people who don't obey and plan to have sex anyway. And even with teaching about safe sex practices, we don't here about what sex actually does to a person-such as emotionally and not just physically. - Indiana

Qualitative Responses - Thoughts on Sex Ed

I think that the sex education I received was sub-par. Sex education should have been talked about in a respective manner, not in a joking way where adults use cut-outs of frogs and jump to different leap pads in order to mimic the stages of a healthy relationship. I also wish sex education could have included a discussion about same-sex relationships, parenting, and sexual assault. While sexual assault is a serious, heavy topic for middle and high schoolers, some of the students in the classroom have already experienced sexual assault. Providing resources for those who have experienced sexual assault may help students find support, no matter how young or old they are. Indiana

It was awful. Low quality and low effort information. Same-sex couples, LGBTQ issues, basically anything that isn't heterosexual and genderconformative was not covered. - Indiana

I know that I received a much broader sex education due to my outsourcing, but I would say that what I learned from the school system was pretty basic. I think most schools NEED to go more in-depth on how STIs are contracted, how to look for STIs, provide real resources for testing and information, the different types of birth control (not just barrier methods and the pill), and go into queer sex. -Indiana

Overall I think it scared me away from having sex. The pictures of SDIs and the negative effects along with lifelong repercussions scared me as a kid and still scare me now. -Indiana

Qualitative Responses - Thoughts on Sex Ed

Indiana's needs to grow up with the times and stop horseshoeing in abstinence when it comes to sex. It just doesn't work and saying that you'll go to hell if you have pre-marital sex is just plain psychological abuse. - Elkhart County

It is really important to me as a future educator to see improvements made to the sex ed. curriculum in Indiana. It's unfortunate that this is a political issue more than a safety issue, but I would like to see the focus back on the practical information that young people need. - Boone County

The most important thing they should have taught us is how to create our own boundaries and recognize unsafe situations (grooming, being offered drugs, sexting, strangers online, etc) NOT don't have sex or your first time with your spouse won't be ✨special✨ Sorry that may have been a lot lol hope y'all are having a good day! - Marion County

Sex ed needs to be presented with care and love so the children that have experienced sexual trauma could actually feel safe. -Indiana

As I stated before, I think sexual assault needs to be discussed especially in the case that women can also rape and for men, just because they had an erection, it is not that they "enjoyed" what was happening to them. Intimate partner violence needs to be more reinforced within the curriculum. I also want to note that it needs to be taught that just because you are in a relationship with your partner, it does not justify them doing a sexual act towards you that you are not comfortable with and have said "no" about. I also want to include that sex education in some shape or form needs to be in elementary schools as well, there are too many children that have been sexually assaulted and it not be none, simply because they were unaware of what was actually happening, and by the time they realize it, some feel it is "too late" to do anything about it. I apologize if this is rambling and not helpful for the research, but the topic of sex education and relationships and intimate partner violence is something I am passionate about and like to be an activist for. -Elkhart County

Next Steps: Vigo County Survey

1. (For Teacher) What subject do you teach? What level of school? Have you ever had to teach sex ed curriculum?
2. What are your experiences with sex ed in VCSC?
3. What went well in your experiences?
4. What would you change?
5. Are you familiar with sexting? How would you define it?
6. Do you think high school students in VCSC sext? Do you think middle school students in VCSC sext?
7. Do you think high school students engage in sexual activity (oral, anal, vaginal)? Do you think middle school students in VCSC engage in sexual activity (oral, anal, vaginal)?
8. How do you think social media impacts sex ed and/or choices kids about sex?
9. Who do you think should be in charge of sex education?
10. What age should sex education begin?
11. How do you think VCSC should approach sex education?
12. (For Parent/Guardian) Do you ever talk to your child about sex education? Have they expressed what they think would be beneficial in regards to sex education?
13. (For Teacher) Have students ever expressed to you what they think/would prefer about sex education?

Concluding Remarks

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