

LOUISIANA PARENT SURVEY

What Louisiana parents know, believe,
and perceive about school-based
sex education

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SEX EDUCATION IN LOUISIANA

KEEPING LOUISIANA'S YOUTH HEALTHY THROUGH LOWER STD RATES AND REDUCED UNPLANNED PREGNANCIES IS A COMMUNITY ISSUE.

Louisiana youth have some of the **highest rates** of teen births and STDs in the nation.

Despite poor health outcomes among its youth, **Louisiana state law does not require schools to offer sex education.** This means there is no guarantee that schools across the state offer sex education.

#1 FOR ADOLESCENT SYPHILIS DIAGNOSES

#2 FOR ADOLESCENT GONORRHEA & CHLAMYDIA DIAGNOSES

#3 FOR ADOLESCENT HIV DIAGNOSES

#6 FOR BIRTHS TO TEENAGE MOTHERS

COMPREHENSIVE SEX EDUCATION PROVIDES THE INFORMATION THAT TEENS NEED TO MAKE GOOD DECISIONS AND BE SUCCESSFUL IN SCHOOL.

Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) is an evidence-based approach to sex education that includes age-appropriate, medically accurate information on a broad set of topics related to sexuality, including human development, healthy relationships, decision making, abstinence, contraception, cyber safety, sexual assault, and disease prevention. CSE provides young people with facts on topics they will likely encounter and reinforces the conversations families may already be having at home. **Sex education lowers the risk of pregnancy, delays sexual activity, and reduces the number of sexual partners. It does not increase young people's sexual activity.**

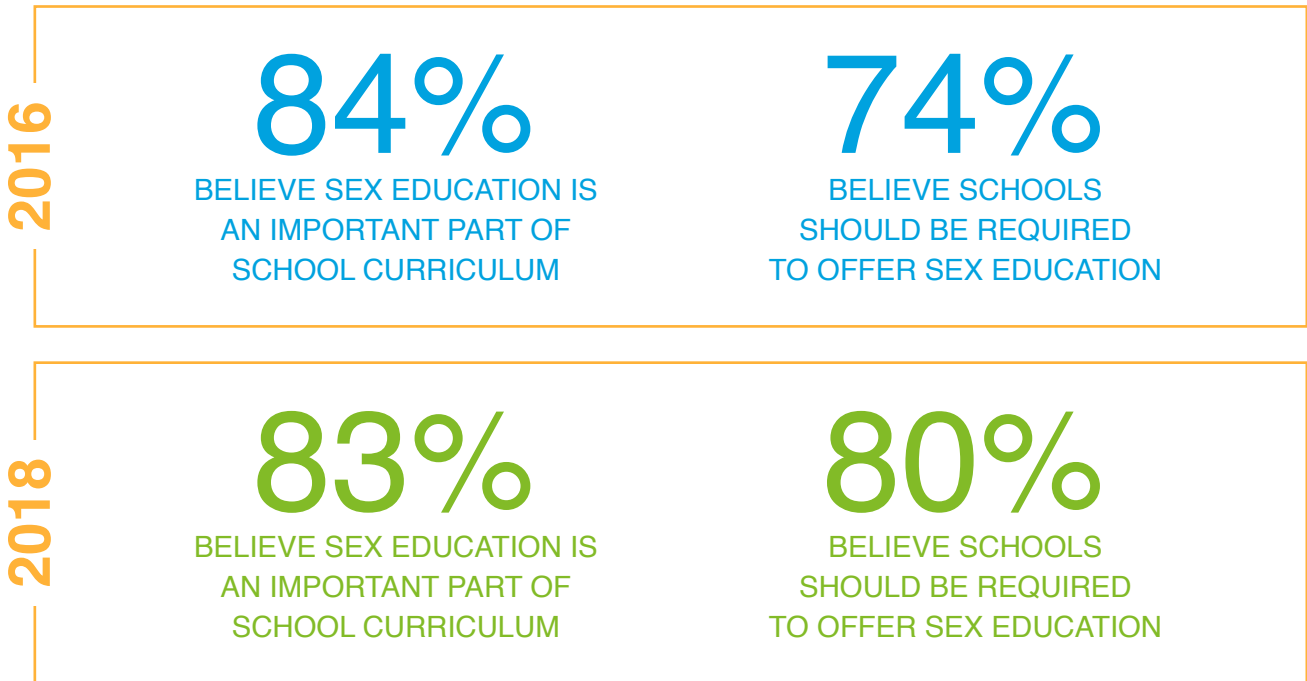
Sex education is currently allowed in Louisiana schools for grades 7-12. However, it is not required. Some students receive sex education in school, but there is no way to track the quality of instruction. A state-wide SE law would make sure all students receive quality sex education to help make informed decisions about their health.

LOUISIANA PARENTS' OPINIONS ON SEX EDUCATION

To find out what parents across Louisiana think about sex education, the Louisiana Public Health Institute (LPHI) carried out a representative survey of 1,197 parents across the state in 2018. We also conducted 32 in-depth interviews with parents, young people, faith leaders, and educators in the Greater New Orleans area (Public Health Region 1), the River Parishes area (Public Health Region 3), Northwest Louisiana (Public Health Region 7), and Northeast Louisiana (Public Health Region 8). The follow up survey was designed to confirm our [2016 parent survey](#) findings, and the interviews to better understand the relationship between parents' support for sex education and their religion, faith, and political identity.

LOUISIANA PARENTS OVERWHELMINGLY SUPPORT SEX EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS.

Statewide, the majority of Louisiana parents surveyed in 2018 believe sex education is an important part of school curriculum, and schools should be required to offer it. [This confirms what we found during our 2016 parent survey.]



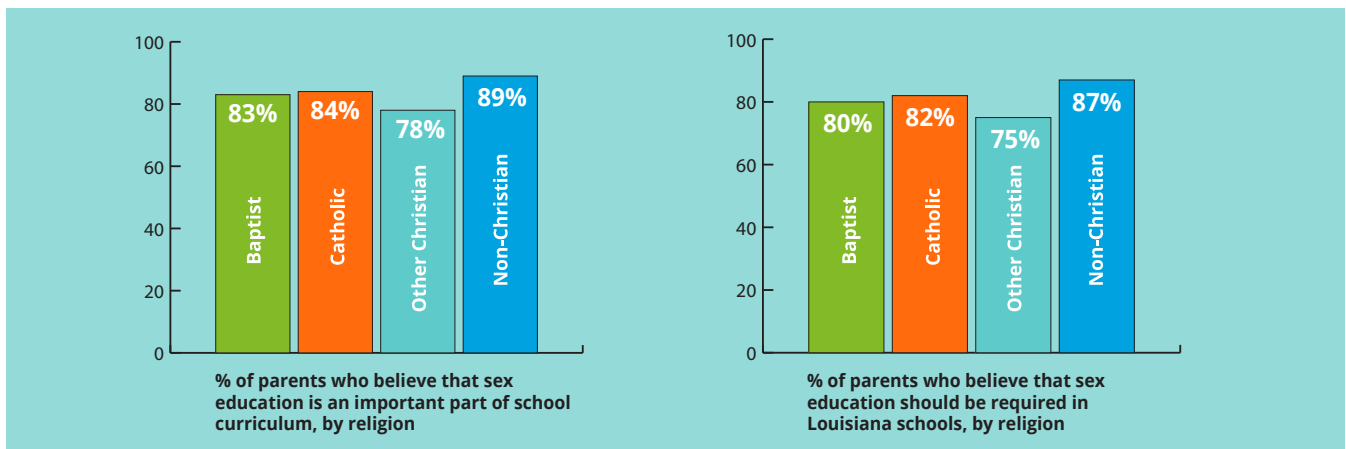
All of the parents interviewed confirmed that they are in favor of sex education being taught in schools. They see school-based sex education as valuable

because school is where young people spend most of their time, and not all parents are able to talk with their children about sex. Parents who were interviewed also expressed concern about the abundance of misinformation and lack of information that youth have regarding sex.

“ [Sex education] needs to be at the school, I really think so. ‘Cause a lot of kids they ain’t hearing it from their parents, a lot of them don’t even know really what they are out there doing. ~ Parent in Northwest Louisiana ”

PARENTS ACROSS LOUISIANA, REGARDLESS OF RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION OR BELIEFS, RECOGNIZE THE VALUE OF SEX EDUCATION.

We asked survey participants about their religious denomination and beliefs. Our findings reveal that regardless of religious identity, Louisiana parents support sex education in schools.



We interviewed parents, educators, and inter-faith leaders of diverse religious traditions including Baptist, Pentecostal, Christian, Catholic, Methodist, and mixed faith. **Regardless of religious affiliation, participants agreed that parents play a critical role in educating young people about sex and supported sex education in schools.** Parents explained that schools should be responsible for teaching the facts, while parents and faith leaders have a role to play teaching young people about values. They view school-based sex education as providing extra support for the primary role parents have in educating their own children about sex and personal values.



I believe that **you give facts...that's what I believe sex ed should be**. About facts. I think opinion should be out and facts definitely... I think they need that. They need statistics. ~ Parent in Southeast, Louisiana

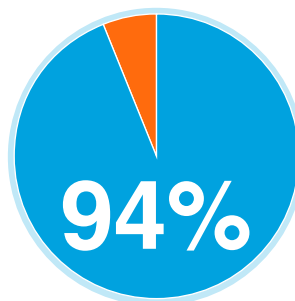
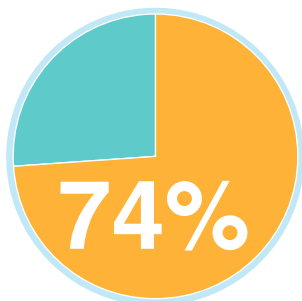


Sex and religion...are two super sensitive subjects and people are not as open about what they would want their children learning because they want to be the ones to tell them or, you know, to discuss sex with them, **but that discussion may never happen and that's my thing, our kids get everything else at school.** I personally talk to my children about it because I don't want them to be in the dark about it. **I need them to know what's going on or what may happen and how to respond.** ~ Parent in Northwest Louisiana



LOUISIANA PARENTS HOPE THEIR CHILDREN WILL WAIT TO HAVE SEX UNTIL MARRIAGE BUT BELIEVE THEIR CHILDREN SHOULD KNOW HOW TO PREVENT PREGNANCY AND STDs.

Almost two-thirds of Louisiana parents surveyed tell their children that they should wait until marriage to have sex before marriage. Of those parents, more than 90 percent agree that if their child has sex before marriage, they should be taught how to prevent STDs and/or pregnancy.



Of parents who tell their children that they should wait to have sex until marriage, 94 percent agree that if their child has sex before marriage they should be taught about how to prevent STDs and/or pregnancy

74 percent of Louisiana parents tell their children that they should wait to have sex until they are married

Parents who were interviewed explained that while their religious and moral beliefs lead them to hope that their children do not have sex before marriage, they are aware that religion and moral ideals do not always match up with reality. Many parents discussed that while they do not encourage it, they would not shame their child for having sex before marriage. They explained that people make mistakes, and that both they and their God hold a place for forgiveness. **Parents are more concerned with their child being safe than waiting until marriage to have sex.**



“

*I teach that you should stay abstinent until God send you the person for you...but if they choose to slip up...I have an 18 year old so I tell him I don't know what you're doing, **but if you do something I rather you come to me and talk to me about it so you can get the proper things you need to protect yourself and stuff like that.** Just having an open dialogue... most people don't want to talk about sex and especially in the church.*

~ Parent and Faith Leader in the River Parishes, Louisiana

”

“

*We don't emphasize it [to our son] in a sense that you're going to burn in hell if you have sex before [marriage]. We're honest with him that before marriage, we were sexually active. Was it pleasing to God? It was not, but at the same time, many things that we do are not pleasing, but just know that he's a sovereign God...**It's for married people, but at the same time God gives us grace because he already knows us as humans.** Most people are not going to wait until they're married so [we tell him] the truth about it biblically that that's what it is for, but at the same [time], that we are human. ~ Parent in Southeast Louisiana*

”

An overwhelming majority of Louisiana parents surveyed agree that a sex education program which emphasizes abstinence (not having sex) and also includes information on birth control, including condoms, should be taught in schools in Louisiana. A majority of parents agree with this statement regardless of their race, the current age of their child, how religious they consider themselves, or which region of the state they reside.

76% AGREE THAT A SEX EDUCATION PROGRAM WHICH EMPHASIZES ABSTINENCE, BUT ALSO PROVIDES INFORMATION ON BIRTH CONTROL, SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN LOUISIANA SCHOOLS

LOUISIANA PARENTS THINK THEIR CHILDREN RECEIVE SEX EDUCATION IN SCHOOL, HOWEVER...

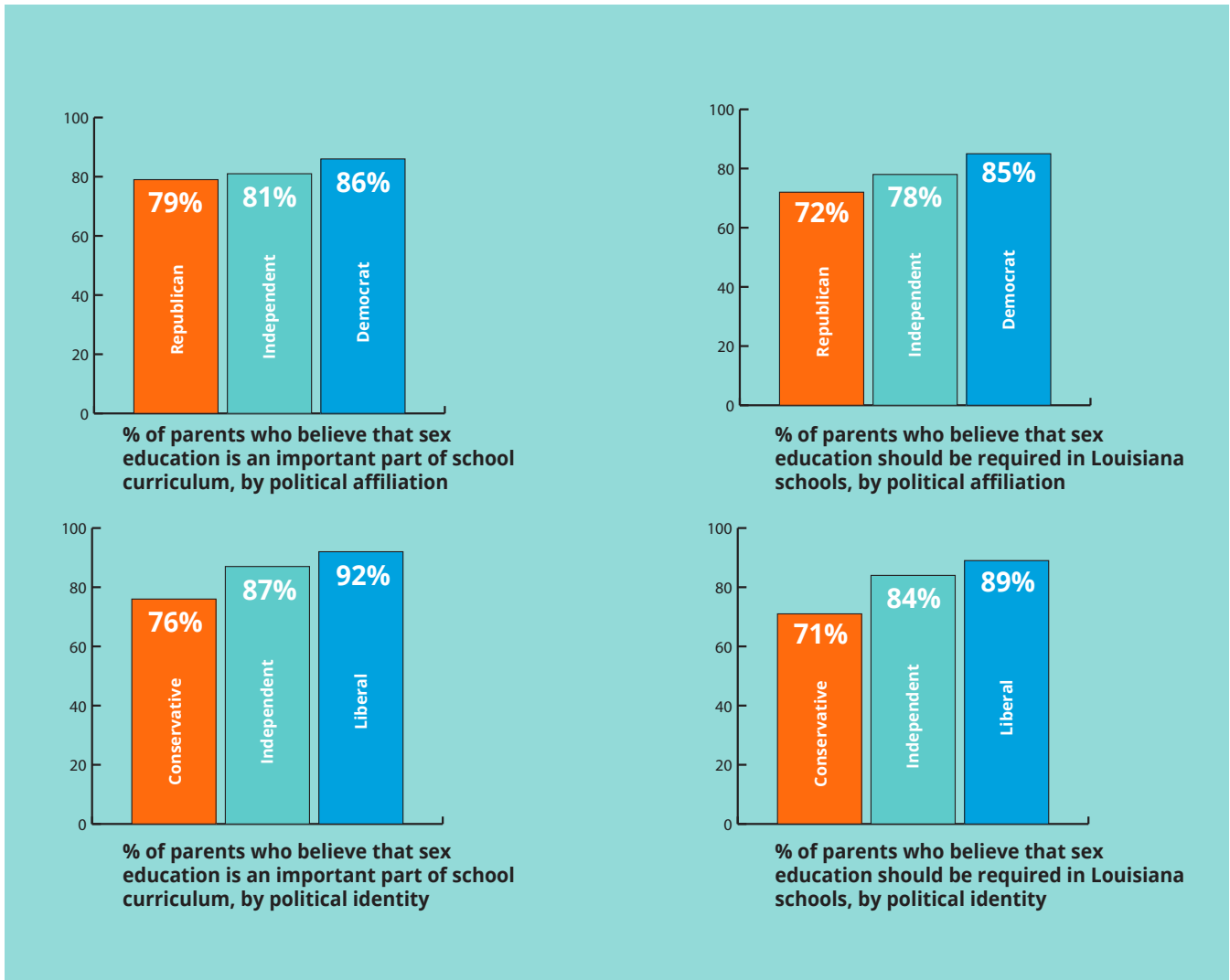
Louisiana law does not currently require that schools offer sex education. This means that students may or may not receive any type of instruction about sex education.

60% BELIEVE THEIR CHILD HAS RECEIVED OR WILL RECEIVE SEX EDUCATION IN SCHOOL **BUT** LOUISIANA LAW DOES NOT REQUIRE OR MONITOR SEX EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

While Louisiana state law **does not require** instruction about sex education at any grade level, it does allow sex education to be taught in grades 7–12. The law states that sex education must emphasize abstinence, but **can cover other risk reduction methods, such as contraception and condoms.**

PARENTS ACROSS LOUISIANA, REGARDLESS OF POLITICAL IDENTITY OR AFFILIATION, RECOGNIZE THE VALUE OF SEX EDUCATION.

We also asked survey participants about their political identity and affiliation. Similarly to our findings about religion, regardless of political identity, Louisiana parents support sex education in schools.



LOUISIANA PARENTS THINK THAT SEX EDUCATION SHOULD BEGIN BEFORE HIGH SCHOOL.

Of surveyed parents who agree that sex education should be required in schools, a majority (Fifty-nine percent) believe that sex education should begin during middle school (grades 6-8). Thirty percent indicated that sex education should begin between grades K-5, and eleven percent stated that it should begin between grades 9-12. Our interviews with parents confirmed the importance of sex education that is age and developmentally appropriate.



*I think from [age] ten on up. Some people might say that ten [years old] is too young, but I think...probably even younger as far as like the function of your body starting with the basic biology. I have seen kids that have been in sexual situations as early as the age of five....Usually it's someone taking advantage of them so I think that the simple, basic training about how to conduct yourself sexually can start earlier than ten but **comprehensive lessons should start at [age] ten.** ~ Parent in the River*

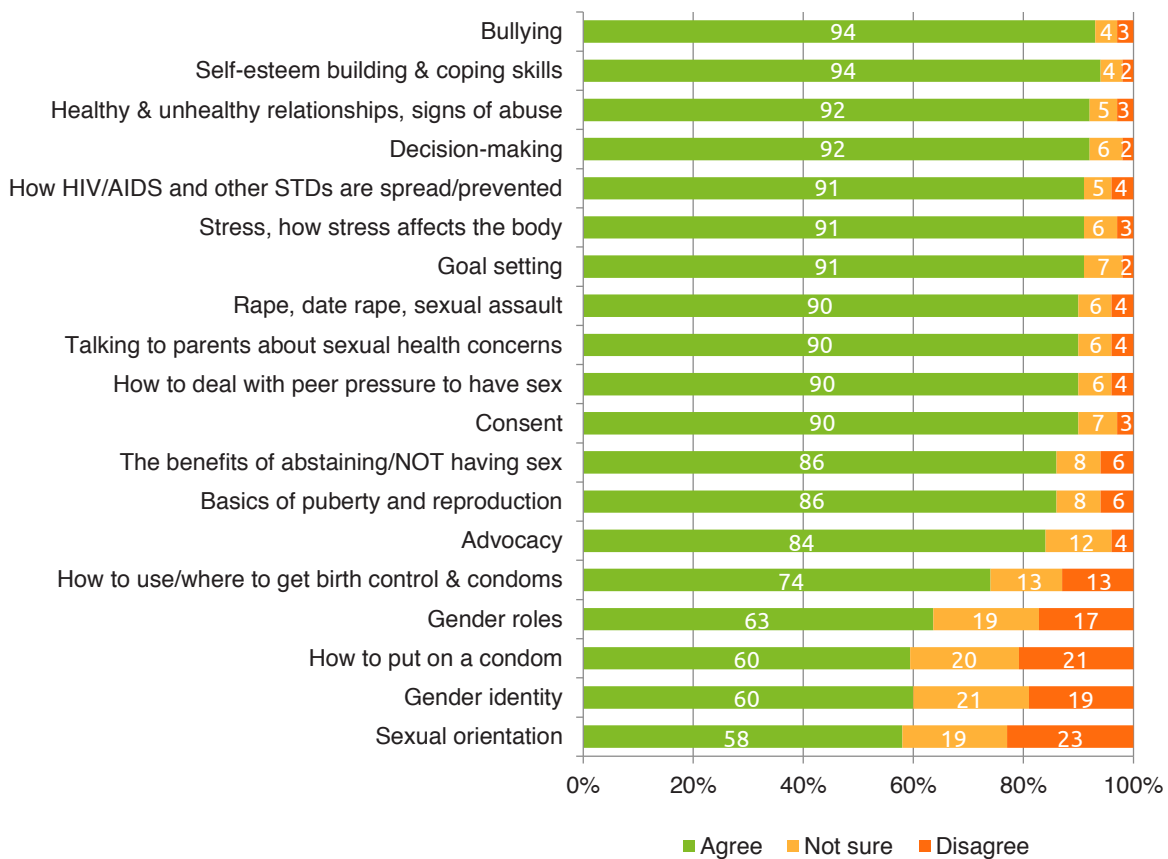
Parishes, Louisiana



LOUISIANA PARENTS ENDORSE THE TEACHING OF SEX EDUCATION TOPICS ALIGNED WITH THE NATIONAL SEXUALITY EDUCATION STANDARDS.

Surveyed parents agree that sex education topics that align with the **National Sexuality Education Standards** should be taught in schools (see Figure 1). Parents are most supportive of schools teaching about self-esteem and coping skills (94 percent), bullying (94 percent), decision making (92 percent), and healthy relationships (92 percent). Although less supportive of schools teaching about how to access contraceptives or put on a condom, a majority of parents still agree that schools should teach about these topics (74 and 60 percent, respectively). Louisiana parents are less supportive of schools teaching about sexual orientation and gender, although a majority do support discussing these topics (58 percent).

Figure 1: Louisiana parents' agreement that sex education topics should be taught in schools



Interviews with parents confirmed that sex education must go beyond the basic medical facts to include topics such as healthy relationships and decision-making.



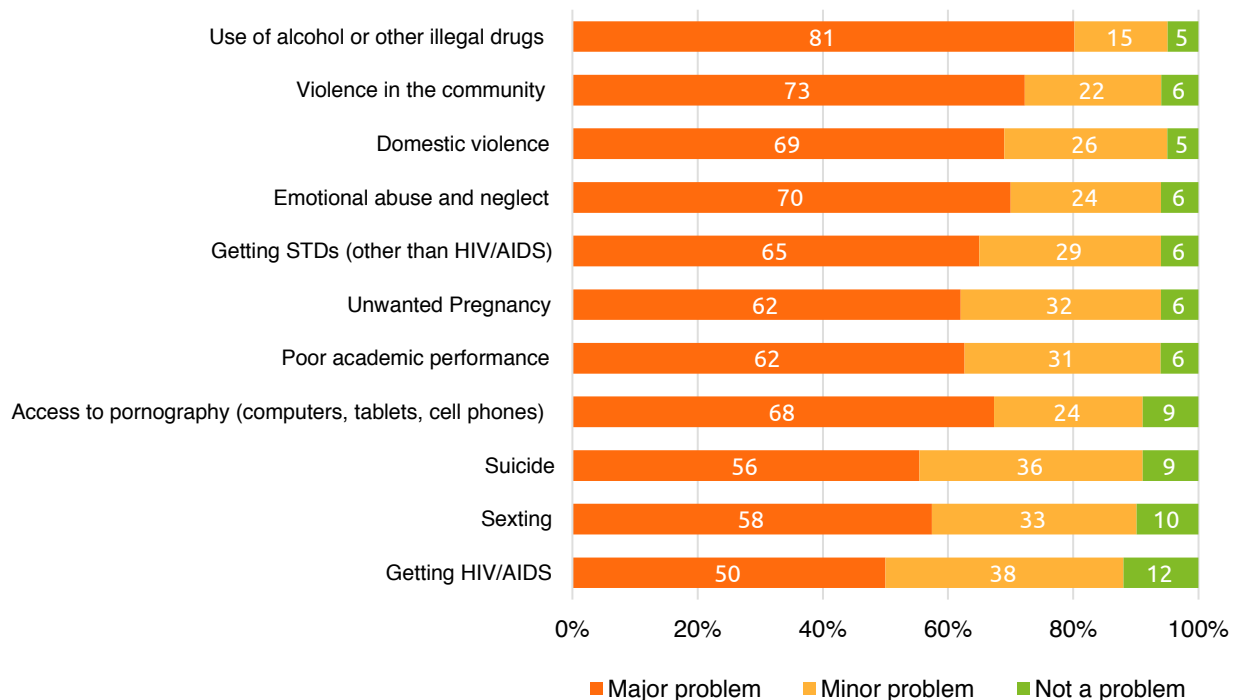
I would like it to be factual medical [as far as sex and reproduction and health go], but [also cover] relationship[s]... because you can't have one without the other. You got to touch on STDs and different things like that [but also] cover...healthy sex, unhealthy sex and results. ~ Parent in Northeast Louisiana



LOUISIANA PARENTS ARE WORRIED ABOUT KEY ISSUES FACED BY THEIR CHILDREN.

The vast majority of parents surveyed believe that **Louisiana youth face both major and minor problems related to sexual health** (see Figure 2). At least 90 percent of surveyed parents believe that domestic violence, emotional abuse and neglect, getting STDs, and unwanted pregnancy are problems faced by youth – all topics that are addressed by sex education.

Figure 2:
Louisiana parents' level of concern about key issues



REPORT SUMMARY

The Louisiana parent survey confirms that across Louisiana, parents overwhelmingly support sex education in schools. Regardless of religious or political affiliation, a majority of parents surveyed believe that sex education is an important part of school curriculum and that schools should be required to offer it.

While a majority of surveyed parents believe their child has received or will receive sex education in school, Louisiana law does not currently require that schools offer sex education. Of surveyed parents who agree that sex education should be required in schools, a large majority believe that sex education should begin during middle school. Surveyed parents are concerned about major and minor problems related to sexual health that are faced by their children, including traumatic experiences, and agree that sex education topics that align with the National Sexuality Education Standards should be taught in schools. An overwhelming majority of Louisiana parents surveyed agree that a sex education program which emphasizes abstinence and also includes information on birth control, including condoms, should be taught in Louisiana schools.

AN APPROACH THAT WORKS.

Research confirms that sex education programs which provide accurate, comprehensive, and age and developmentally appropriate information on sexual health result in healthy behaviors among youth. These healthy behaviors include delayed initiation of sexual activity, increased contraceptive and condom use, and monogamy among youth who choose to be sexually active. In addition to emphasizing abstinence and including discussions on other risk reduction methods, such as contraception and condoms, CSE teaches young people the skills they need to avoid negative health consequences. The National Sexuality Education Standards provide a roadmap for CSE by defining seven topics as the minimum, essential content and skills for K–12 sex education: Anatomy & Physiology; Puberty & Adolescent Development; Identity; Pregnancy & Reproduction; Sexually Transmitted Diseases & HIV; Healthy Relationships; and Personal Safety.

Although 80 percent of surveyed Louisiana parents believe that schools should be required to offer sex education, Louisiana state law does not require sex education instruction at any grade level. However, state law allows sex education to be taught in grades 7–12 and permits the use of SE curricula that emphasize abstinence. Since sex education is allowed — but not required — in Louisiana, there is great variation in what schools offer.

Parents who believe that sex education should be taught in schools can talk to their child's school about the topics they would like covered or they can also contact familyhealth@lphi.org for assistance. For more information, visit GeauxTalk.org.

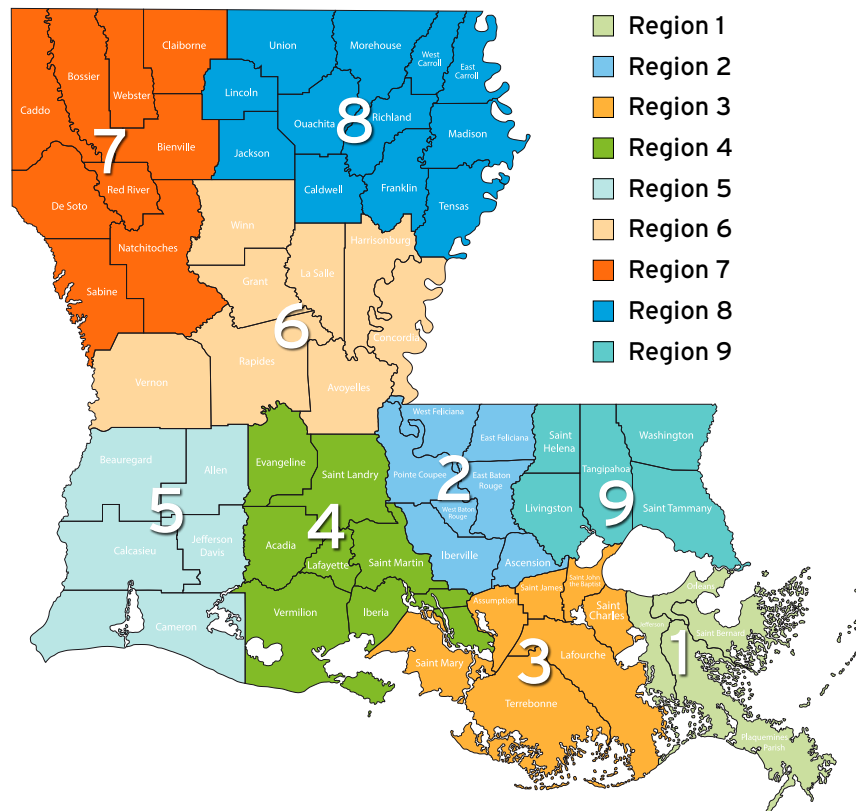
APPENDIX

METHODOLOGY

LPHI developed a statewide internet panel survey of parents and caregivers of Louisiana children grades K-12. The survey was created using standardized survey questions identified from similar studies conducted in other states, as well as nationally. Survey respondents' religious identity was established following [PEW's methodology for determining religious composition](#). Data collection took place during 2018. The project team utilized quota sampling to achieve a statewide sample of n=1,197, that was reflective of the Louisiana population on the basis of race and income at the state and regional levels (see Figure 3).

Online survey panels are increasingly used to conduct quantitative research. Panel participants for this project were: recruited to complete surveys in exchange for points to use toward goods; contacted and invited to take the survey online via computer or mobile device; and screened to confirm that they were a Louisiana resident and parent/caregiver of a school-age child. Incomplete surveys and those identified as “speeders” were disqualified.

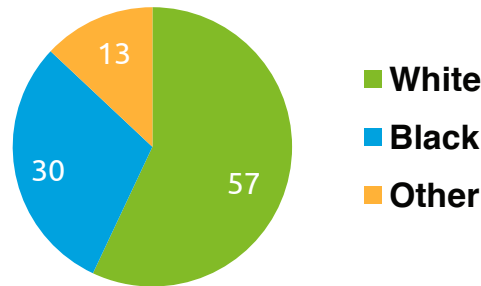
Figure 3: Map of Louisiana Public Health Regions



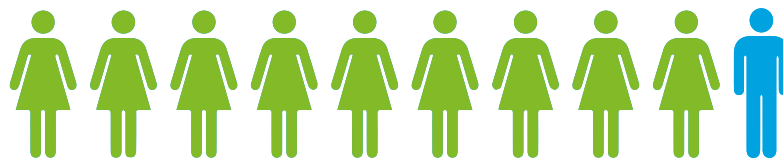
OVERVIEW OF THE SURVEY SAMPLE

Demographics for the representative survey sample (n=1,197) are shown below. Our sampling methodology produced a survey sample representative of the state of Louisiana on the basis of race and income (see Figure 4). Half of the sample was above the regional median income and half was below.

**Figure 4: Survey Demographics
- Race (n=1,197)**



The survey sample is overwhelmingly female, with a mean household size of four. The mean age of respondents is 38. On average, respondents had two children in grades K-12 living in their household. A majority of respondents reported that their oldest child attends public school, and 52 percent of parents stated that their oldest child is male. Just under half of the survey participants report that they attend religious services monthly, weekly, or more than once a week.



87% FEMALE 13% MALE

38

MEAN AGE

87%

OF RESPONDENTS SAID
THEIR OLDEST CHILD
ATTENDS PUBLIC SCHOOL

48%

OF RESPONDENTS SAID
THEIR OLDEST CHILD IS
FEMALE

With regards to religious affiliation, 29 percent of respondents identified as Baptist, 23 percent Roman Catholic, 30 percent other Christian, and 17 percent non-Christian (see Figure 5). With regards to political identity and affiliation, 29% of respondents identified as politically conservative, 35 percent independent, and 11 percent liberal (see Figure 6); 33 percent identified as Republican, 23 percent as Democrat, 17 percent Independent, 18 percent had no political preference, and nine percent were not certain with which political party they identified (see Figure 7).

Figure 5: Survey Demographics - Religious Affiliation (n=1,197)

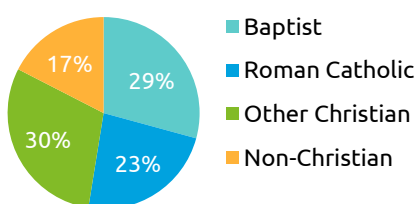


Figure 6: Survey Demographics - Political Identity (n=1,197)

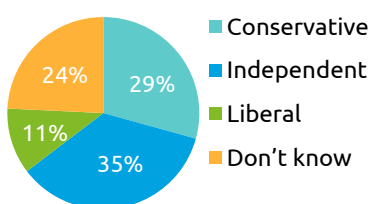
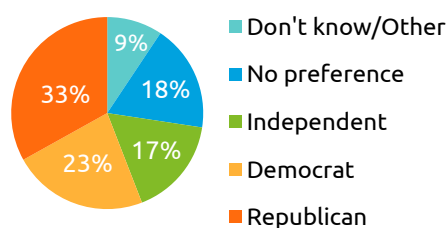


Figure 7: Survey Demographics - Political Identity (n=1,197)



ABOUT LPHI

LPHI, founded in 1997, is a statewide 501(c)(3) nonprofit and public health institute that translates evidence into strategy to optimize health ecosystems. Our work focuses on uncovering complementary connections across sectors to combine the social, economic, and human resources needed to align action for health. We champion health for people, within systems, and throughout communities because we envision a world where everyone has the opportunity to be healthy. For more information, visit www.lphi.org.

CONTRIBUTING PARTNERS

Other contributing partners include the Ouachita Youth Coalition, the Children’s Coalition of Northeast Louisiana, and the Youth Empowerment Project in St. Charles Parish.

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