



## District Parents Speak: Sex Education in Schools

DC Parents Mandate Comprehensive Sex Education in DC Schools!

**WHAT:** Across the District, parents are overwhelmingly concerned with the growing rates of HIV and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs). Regardless of race or level of religious practice, DC parents support comprehensive sex education in DC schools that starts before youth become sexually active.

**BACKGROUND:** DC has the highest AIDS rate of any U.S. metropolitan area. With a rate of 128.4 new reports out of every 100,000 people, DC's AIDS rate is almost 10 times higher than the national average. In DC, 1 of every 100 young people between the ages of 13 and 24 is believed to be HIV-positive<sup>1</sup>. With the clear threat of HIV/AIDS to young people in the District, it is crucial that youth receive education on HIV, including how to prevent transmission, before they become sexually active.

In DC overall rates of STDs among teens are steadily increasing. Between 2003 and 2007, reported syphilis cases among adolescents ages 15 to 24 increased by 233%, and reported Chlamydia cases in that age group increased by 94%. The teen pregnancy rate in the District is also extremely high, with 64.4 teen pregnancies for every 1,000 girls aged 15 to 19.

**ABOUT THE SURVEY:** Zogby International conducted telephone interviews with a sample of 652 DC parents. The survey asked parents' opinions on the growing rate of HIV and STDs in the District, school-based sex education, and health resources in schools. The poll has a +/-3.9% margin of error.

This report seeks to highlight the opinions of all parents of DC students, especially African American parents who represent the majority of the city's residents, the majority of parents of DC public and charter school students, as well as the demographic most burdened by the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

### KEY FINDINGS

- Regardless of race, the majority of DC parents are concerned with the growing prevalence of HIV and STDs in the District, and believe that preventing unintended pregnancies and HIV begins with comprehensive sex education.
- Parents believe that DC schools are responsible for teaching their children age-appropriate HIV prevention and sex education; and 90% believe that the parent's role is distinct from the school's role in providing that information.
- Regardless of race or level of religious practice, DC parents strongly believe that comprehensive sex education that emphasizes abstinence but also teaches about contraception should be taught in the schools. Parents also want to be informed about what their children are learning in school about these topics
- Nearly all parents agree that youth should receive HIV and sex education before they begin having sex, with the majority of parents indicating that this education should begin in 6th grade or earlier.

Regardless of race or level of religious practice, DC parents support comprehensive sex education in DC schools that starts before youth become sexually active.

**WHY:** In December 2007, the State Board of Education passed new Health Learning Standards that include HIV and sex education. DC schools are now preparing new health education curricula to meet the standards. Metro TeenAIDS and the DC Healthy Youth Coalition felt it important for DC's leaders in the education and health sectors to understand what parents expect from DC Schools on these important topics.

<sup>1</sup> "The District had the highest AIDS case rate nationally (128.4 cases per 100,000 population in the District compared to 14.0 cases per 100,000 population in the United States)." - District of Columbia, Department of Health. 2007 HIV Surveillance Report.

<sup>2</sup> District of Columbia, Department of Health, STD Control. 2008 Syphilis Morbidity Five-Year Trend Data and District of Columbia, Department of Health. 2008 Chlamydia Morbidity Five-Year Trend Data. Available.

<sup>3</sup> DC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. "Current DC Teen Pregnancy Rate." Available at [www.dccampaign.org](http://www.dccampaign.org). Accessed September 10, 2008.

Nine out of ten parents (90%) said that, while they are responsible for providing their children with moral and ethical guidance, schools are responsible for teaching the children age-appropriate HIV prevention and sex education.

## DETAILED FINDINGS

**Finding 1:** Regardless of race, the majority of DC parents are concerned with the growing prevalence of HIV and STDs in the District, and believe that preventing unintended pregnancies and HIV begins with comprehensive sex education.

- Parents polled were nearly unanimous (98%) in their concern about the rates of HIV and STDs in Washington, DC.
- Almost all (93%) of the parents polled think that preventing unintended pregnancies and HIV begins with comprehensive sex education that includes information on refraining from sex.

**Finding 2:** Parents believe that DC schools are responsible for teaching their children age-appropriate HIV prevention and sex education, and that the role of parents is to provide their children with moral and ethical guidance.

- The large majority of parents polled (83%) believe that DC schools are responsible for teaching their children age-appropriate HIV prevention and sex education.
- Parents polled see a clear difference between their role and the role of the school in terms of teaching students about sex. Nine out of ten parents (90%) said that, while they are responsible for providing their children with moral and ethical guidance, schools are responsible for teaching the children age-appropriate HIV prevention and sex education. Parents also expressed belief that schools are more effective in providing the biological and scientific aspects of sex education

**Finding 3:** Regardless of their race or level of religious practice, DC parents strongly believe that comprehensive sex education that emphasizes abstinence but also teaches about contraception needs to be taught in schools. Parents also want to be informed about what their children are learning in school.

- The large majority (83%) of all parents strongly agree that DC schools should ensure that every young person receives all the information he or she needs to make responsible health-related decisions.
- Similarly, 85% of parents believe that HIV education is important and that it needs to be included in all grades (K–12). There were no statistically significant differences in response between African American and other parents.

- Among African American parents who attend their place of worship once a week or more, 81% believe that age-appropriate HIV prevention and sex education is important. For African American parents who self-identified as “evangelical” Christians, 85% believe that age-appropriate sex education is important in their child’s K–12 education.
- 98% of parents agreed that the schools should have clear guidelines for sex and HIV prevention education, and that those guidelines should be available to parents.
- Parents also indicated that they would like more resources to help them talk to their children about sex. Three out of four parents (75%) report interest in receiving training on how to better communicate with their kids about sex and HIV/AIDS.

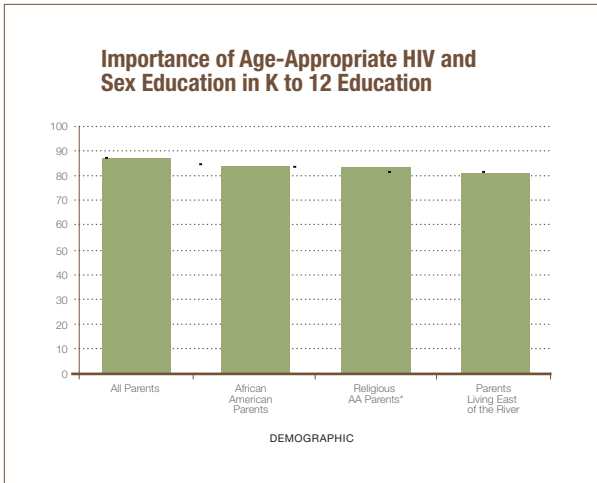
**Finding 4:** Nearly all parents agree that youth should receive HIV prevention and sex education before they begin having sex, with the majority of parents indicating that this education should begin in 6th grade or earlier.

- Almost all parents (96.5%) believe that sex education should occur before youth are sexually active. Local data from the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey shows that 30.6% of students in middle school stated that they have already had sex and 10.0% said they first had sex before the age of 11.
- A majority of parents polled (77%) believe that schools should first begin to teach HIV prevention and sex education in 6th grade or earlier.
- Overwhelmingly, 83% of African American parents polled agree that age-appropriate information about condoms and birth control should be given once lessons on puberty have started.

### POLL QUESTION

“How important do you think it is to have age-appropriate HIV and sex education as part of your child’s kindergarten through grade 12 education?”

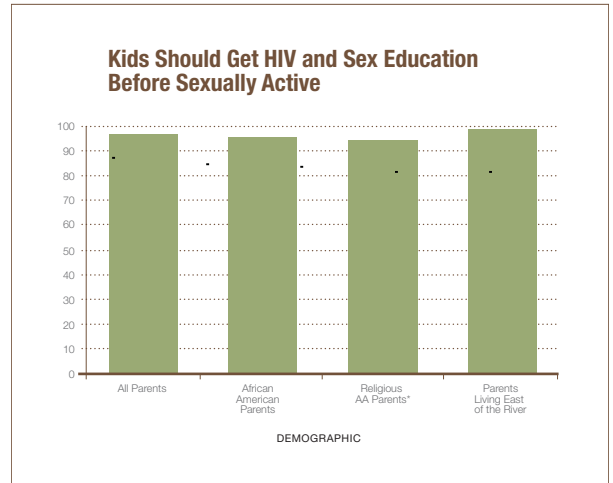
Parent Response:



### POLL QUESTION

“Kids should get age-appropriate HIV and sex education before they begin to be sexually active.”

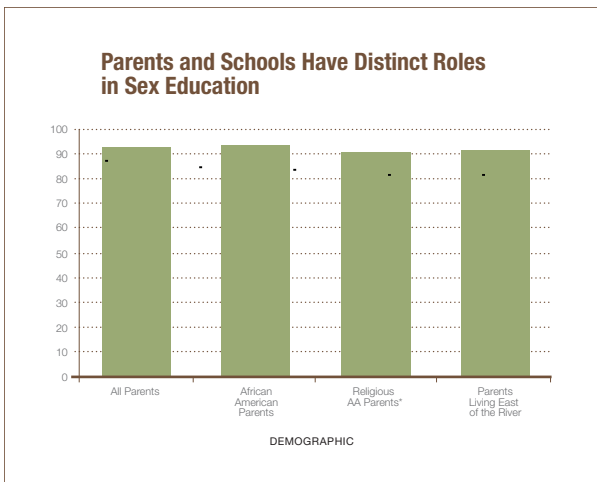
Parent Response:



### POLL QUESTION

“Schools can do a good job, probably better than most parents, on the biological and scientific aspects of sex education, but it is a parent’s job to provide the moral and ethical guidance.”

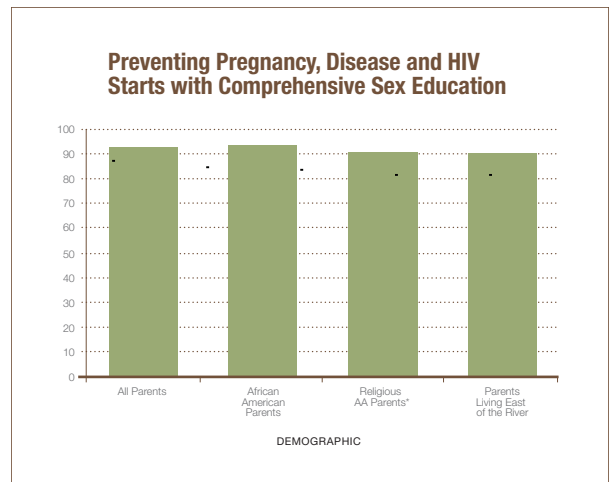
Parent Response:



### POLL QUESTION

“Preventing unintended pregnancies, disease, and HIV infection among teens starts with comprehensive sex education including refraining from sex.”

Parent Response:





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#### DC HEALTHY YOUTH COALITION

The DC Healthy Youth Coalition is an alliance of individuals and organizations dedicated to ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic among youth in Washington, DC. The Coalition seeks to support the right of every young person to access the information and health services necessary to make safe and responsible choices about their health. The Coalition supports:

- medically accurate, age-appropriate HIV and sex education for youth in all Washington, DC public and charter schools;
- in-school access to health services such as non-invasive diagnosis and care for pregnancy, STIs, and HIV as well as the availability of barrier technologies; and
- public policies which support our efforts and campaign goals.

Data analysis conducted by Zogby International and Sarah Berger, MPP.

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#### METRO TEENAIDS

Metro TeenAIDS is the only local community health organization dedicated to supporting young people in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Through education, support, and advocacy, MTA prevents the spread of HIV; promotes responsible decision-making; and improves the quality of life for young people infected with, or affected by, HIV/AIDS.

To learn more, contact Metro TeenAIDS at 202.543.8246 or visit our website at [www.metroteenaids.org](http://www.metroteenaids.org).