

Comprehensive Sex Education Versus Abstinence-Only

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Introduction

Sexuality education is known as “education which increases the knowledge of the functional, structural, and behavioral aspects of human reproduction” (Medical Webends, n.d.). It was in 1940 when the “U.S. Public Health Service strongly advocated sexuality education in the schools,” and finally in the late 1970’s began offering it to students throughout the United States (Pardini, 2002). Statistics indicate that “each year in the U.S., 800,000 – 900,000 adolescents become pregnant” (CDC, 2000). In addition “about one in four sexually active teens acquire a sexually transmitted disease (STD) every year” (The Power of SADD, 2003). These alarming statistics prompted researchers to explore the importance behind sex education and to complete a comparative analysis of sex education’s two main educational messages, abstinence-only versus abstinence-plus. Research has brought attention to the possible lack of effectiveness with abstinence-only education. Therefore, the research questions include:

“Is comprehensive sex education more effective than abstinence-only with young people (aged ≤19 years) today,” and “what grade level is the most effective and appropriate to begin sex education with adolescents?”

Methodology

Study # 1: Quantitative Research including...

- Survey Instruments randomly distributed to voluntary students and faculty grades 6 - 12 in a rural Minnesota public school district.

Data included...

- Views on the most appropriate and effective grade level to begin sex education
- Views on the most effective message for young people (aged ≤19 years) today: abstinence-only *versus* abstinence-plus (CSE).

Study # 2: A classical experimental design including...

- A pretest and posttest with a control group, along with treatment group of students grades 9 -12 from a rural Minnesota public school district willing to participate
- Control group receiving classroom only education with the message of abstinence-only
- Treatment group receiving additional education focusing on CSE, lasting over two weeks
- Treatment group program promoting abstinence, *plus* information on sexually transmitted diseases and contraceptives for prevention purposes.

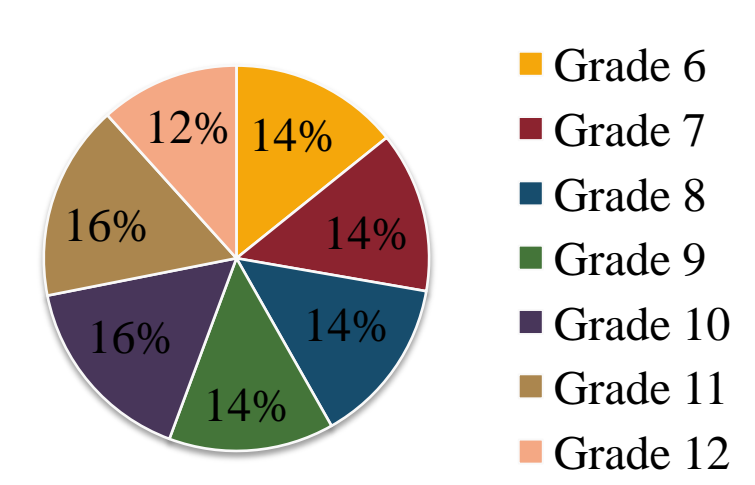
Study # 2 was not completed out of respect to administration.

The author was informed immediately before beginning the program that administration was hesitant to follow through with the program. Out of respect, *the author created a CSE program, instead, for them to consider in the future* and encouraged them to review the author’s additional research on faculty, students, and especially parents views as that is who they were in fear of contacting for this specific program.

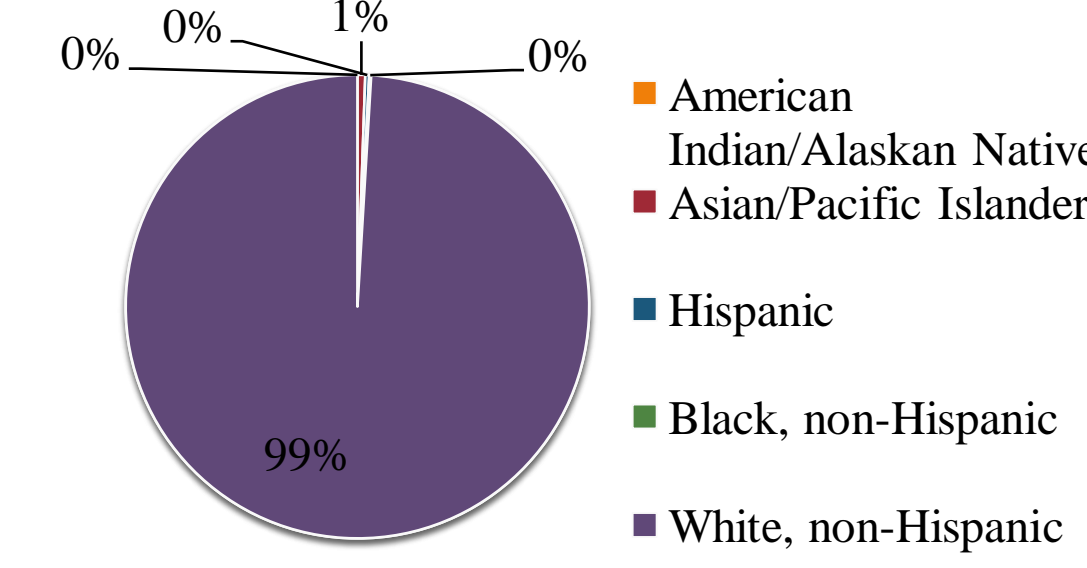
Results

- Based on demographic information, there was an equal amount of male (47.62%) and female (52.38%) students surveyed as well as male (50%) and female (50%) faculty members surveyed. In addition, majority of students (95.24%) and faculty (100%) surveyed were Caucasian. Student’s median age was 15 years, while faculty’s median age was 40.5 years.
- Sex education begins in 10th grade with the message of abstinence-only for the rural MN students surveyed.
- The majority of students (47.62%) and faculty (72.22%) surveyed in grades 6 – 12 believed that sex education, **abstinence-only** should begin in 6th grade.
- Majority of faculty believed that sex education, **abstinence-plus** should begin in either 6th grade (38.89%) or 7th grade (33.33%). In relation, students (28.57%) believed abstinence-plus should begin in 7th grade, while 19.04% believed in 8th grade, and 23.81% believed in 9th grade.
- Majority of faculty believed that topics, such as abstinence (100%), birth control prevention (72.22%), STDs/HIV (66.67%), unhealthy/healthy relationships (100%), condom use (72.22%), and pregnancy (83.33%) should begin in middle school, except abortion (55.56%) which should begin in high school.
- Majority of students believed topics, such as abstinence (90.48%), birth control prevention (61.90%), STDs (71.43%)/ HIV (80.95%), unhealthy/healthy relationships (95.24%), condom use (66.67%), and pregnancy (61.90%) should begin in middle school, except abortion (52.38%) which should begin in high school.
- Majority of faculty (83.33%) and students (47.62 %) indicated that a more comprehensive approach to sex education is necessary for prevention purposes.

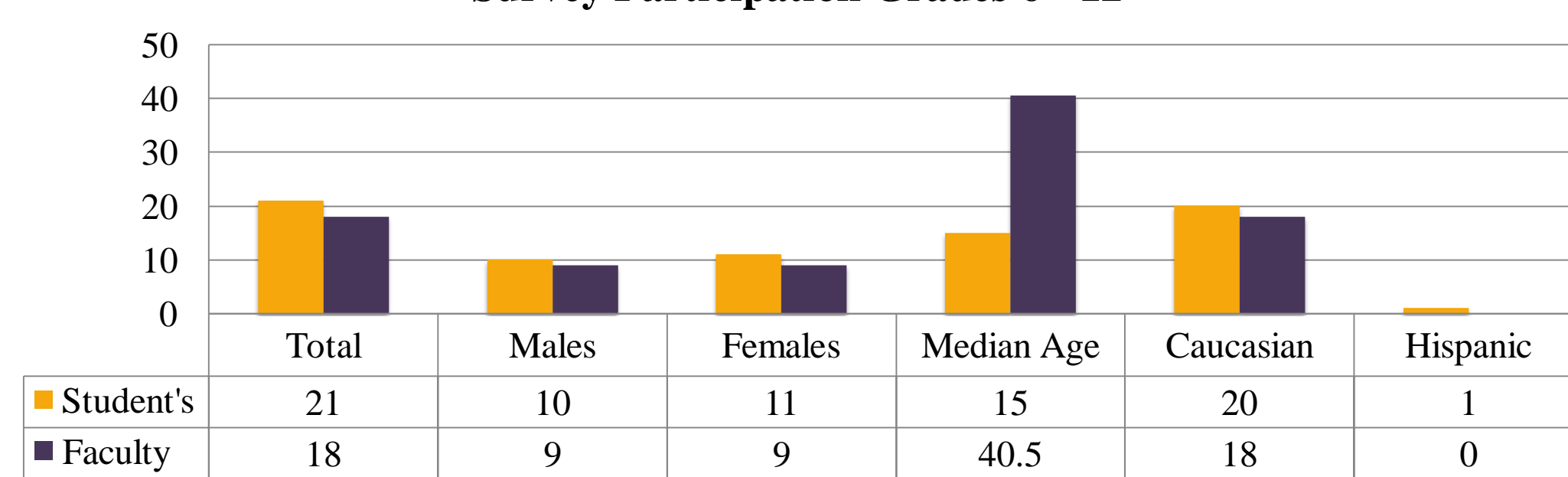
Middle School and High School Student Enrollment



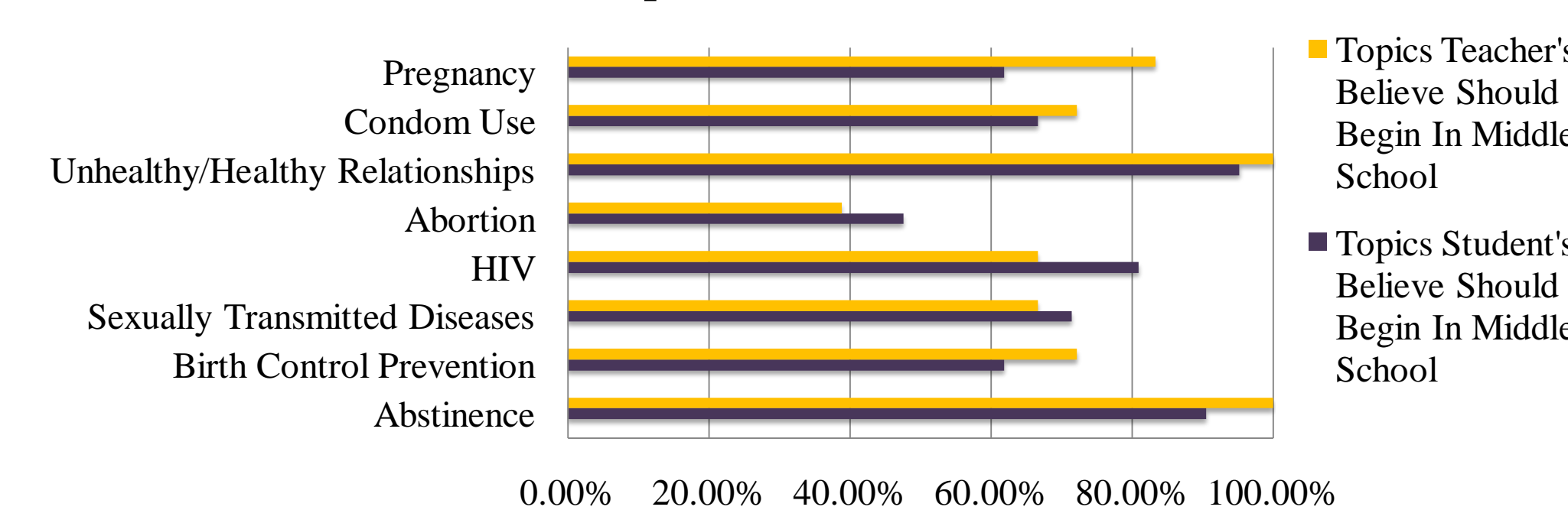
Student Demographic Enrollment



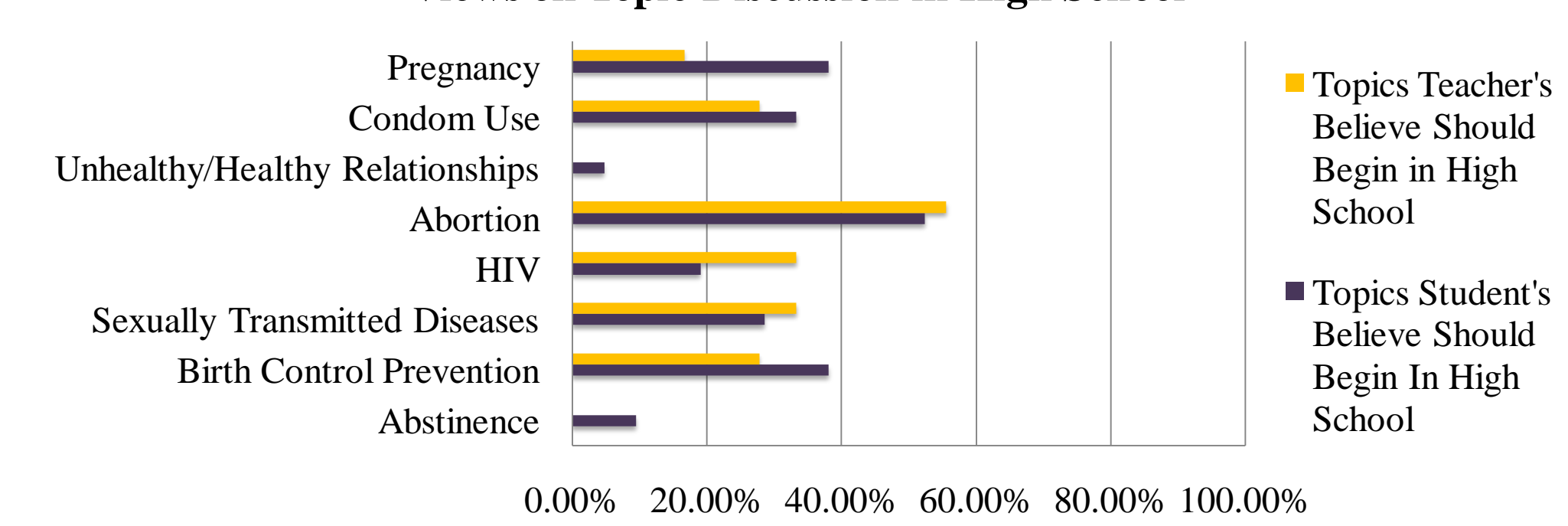
Survey Participation Grades 6 - 12



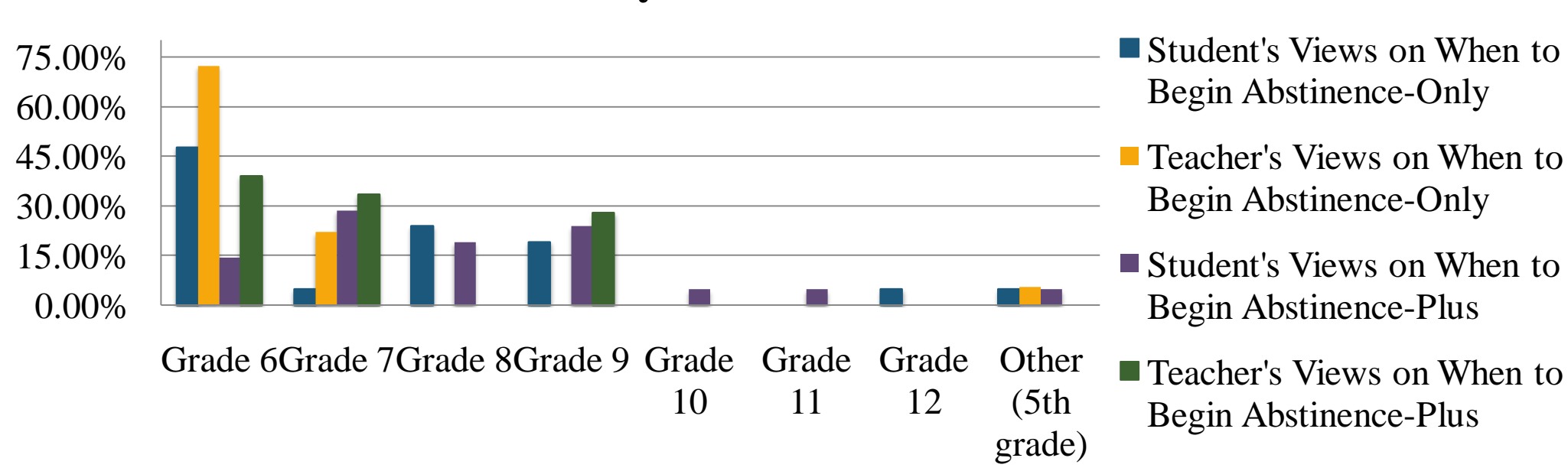
Views on Topic Discussion in Middle School



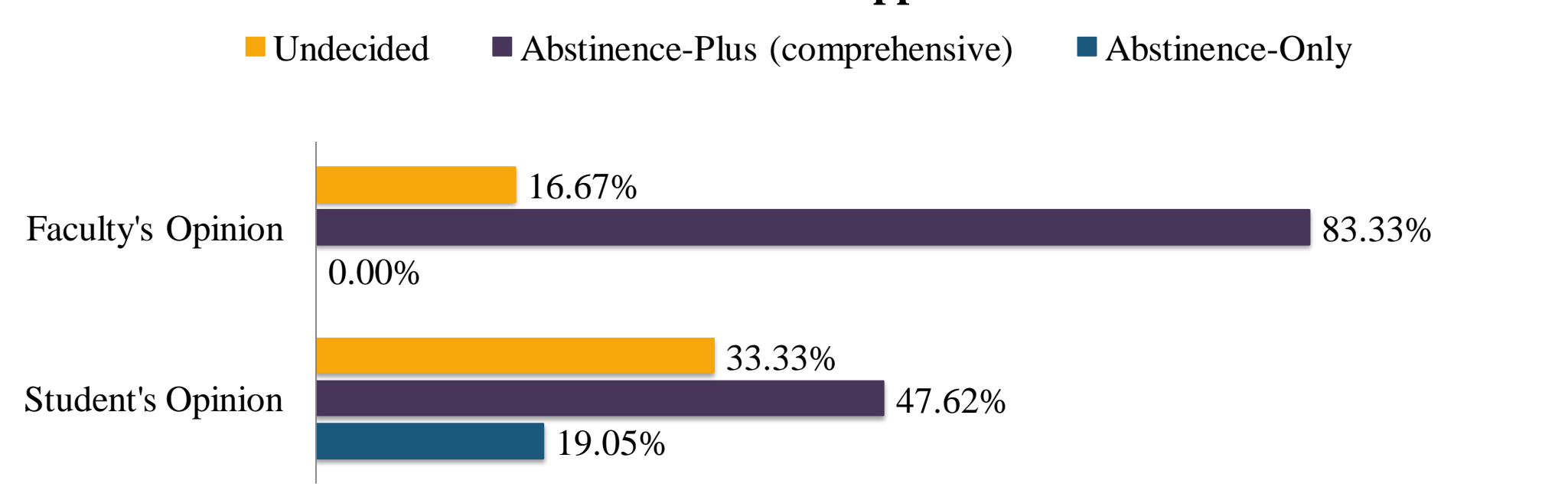
Views on Topic Discussion in High School



Views on the Most Appropriate and Effective Grade Level to Begin Abstinence-only and Abstinence-Plus



Views on the Most Preventative Approach to Sex Education



Recommendations

- Additional research on abstinence-only and CSE program involvement with students is highly recommended, along with parental views.
- Students, who “have the initial insights into the programs currently used” are encouraged to collaborate with teachers in approaching the “school board to advocate official adoption of a comprehensive pre-written curriculum” (Eisenberg, 1997, p.323 & 327).
- Parents, due to parental consent, are especially encouraged to “express their opinions on sexuality education to teachers, administrators, and school boards regarding the importance of including a variety of topics and beginning instruction during middle school years or earlier” (Eisenberg, 2008, p.352).

Literature Review

Research is finding that...

- Public schools are “increasingly focused on abstinence and less likely to present students with comprehensive teaching” (Darroch, 2000, p.205; Eisenberg, 1997).
- “69% of districts had a policy of teaching sexuality education, while the remainder left the decision up to the principal or teachers” (Darroch, 2000, p.205).
- Students (34%) are engaging in sexual activity by ninth grade, and are not learning about it in the classroom until tenth grade (Eisenberg, 1997, 2008).
- “63% of students have engaged in sexual activity by 12th grade” (Eisenberg, 1997, 2008).
- Majority of students (Eisenberg, 1997), teachers (two-thirds) (Darroch, 2000), and “parents (89.3%) ... support teaching both abstinence and contraception (CSE)” (Eisenberg, 2008, p.325).
- Majority of parents “likely to object to CSE were supportive (e.g., Catholics, 92.3%, Born Again Christians, 83.2%, politically ‘very conservative’ parents, 50.6%)” (Eisenberg, 2008, p.357).
- “Majority of students support sex education beginning in the elementary grades,” and “sexuality topics being thoroughly covered by 8th or 9th grade” to be preventative (Eisenberg, 1997, p.326).
- “Teachers (78 – 98%) supported (abstinence and STD’s) being covered in grade seven or earlier,” and birth control being covered between grades 7 and 12 (51.0%) (Darroch, 2000, p.208).
- “Majority of parents... indicated instruction should begin during the middle school years (grades 6 – 8) for almost all topics” except abortion (Eisenberg, 2008, p.357).

Acknowledgements

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