



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Does New Jersey make the grade on sex ed? New report gives state mixed grades**

*Despite overwhelming support of parents, there's more work to be done in sex ed delivery*

**TRENTON, NJ** – Today, the Sex Ed Subcommittee of the [Thrive NJ Coalition](#) — a diverse group of parents, community members, and advocacy groups — released “New Jersey’s Sex Ed Report Card,” an evaluation of the status of sex education in New Jersey. While giving the state a passing grade, the report identifies many barriers to accessing sex education.

“We must listen to students, parents, and educators, who are telling us that we can and must do better when it comes to sex education,” said **Kaitlyn Wojtowicz, Vice President of Public Affairs for Planned Parenthood Action Fund of New Jersey**. “One of the best ways to improve sexual health is to deliver high-quality sex education. New Jersey is missing the mark in some areas; we must correct course.”

“At Answer, we hear too often that parents think sex education is being taught in schools; schools think parents are having conversations about sexual health with their children. This leaves young people in the middle, without the information and skills they need to become sexually healthy adults,” said **Dan Rice, M.Ed., Interim Executive Director, Answer**. “Simply put, when we do not provide sex education that is age-appropriate, medically accurate and inclusive of LGBTQ identities, we are failing young people. New Jersey’s Sex Ed Report Card should be a call to action for all parents, teachers, school administrators and professionals in the field of sex education to work together and ensure ALL young people in New Jersey are receiving high-quality comprehensive sex education across their entire school careers.”

The coalition surveyed New Jersey public school parents and guardians, teachers and school administrators, and students — using three separate surveys. Just over half of the students surveyed find their sex education classes to be useful. More than 60 percent of parents give sex education a “C.” According to the report, parents “feel that their children are getting average sex education — better than nothing — but it needs to be improved.” More than three-quarters of students and parents indicated that more time needs to be devoted to sex education instruction.

The surveys revealed six overarching themes:

1. Sex education is not provided in a consistent manner from district to district, school to school, or even teacher to teacher.
2. Schools are still using ineffective and stigmatizing materials that promote abstinence.
3. Teachers want more training, guidance, and resources to teach effective sex ed.

4. Parents and students want more time spent on sex education in school.
5. Parents overwhelmingly support sex education and want more involvement in their children's sex education at school.
6. Sex education programs must cover a wider range of topics than currently covered, especially LGBTQ identities and sexual assault and consent.

The report authors note that New Jersey has strong sex education policy, compared to other states. But they also find some areas of the state law troubling, including the requirement to stress abstinence and highlight failure rates of contraceptives. According to the report, stressing abstinence can shame young people and be ineffective at deterring risk behaviors. Likewise, highlighting failure rates of contraceptives can stigmatize and also is an ineffective scare tactic.

"Scaring and stigmatizing young people is not only ineffective, it's also dangerous," said Wojtowicz. "All students have the right to medically accurate, comprehensive sexuality education that gives them the knowledge they need to make healthy decisions."

The state also needs to ensure that sex education is more inclusive, the report finds. Curricula must be improved to cover gender identity and sexual orientation more thoroughly. The report finds a need for schools to implement a trauma-informed approach in sex education, and all content areas, to ensure that students who have survived childhood trauma feel safe and able to learn.

"Early education about sex – particularly on the topic of consent – is an absolutely critical piece of the puzzle to prevent sexual violence," said **Patricia Teffenhart, executive director of the New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA)**. "We're heartened to see parents overwhelmingly agree – 94 percent of surveyed parents responded that they want their children to receive consent education in school. But the survey also showed just 47 percent of students reported that their classes covered sexual violence or consent education. We look forward to continue working towards full implementation of New Jersey's consent education requirement to close that gap between what parents want and what students receive in classrooms."

The report makes eleven recommendations to improve sex education in the state:

1. Remove the requirement in state statute that sex education programs and curricula must stress abstinence.
2. Remove the requirement in state statute that sex education programs and curricula must highlight failure rates of contraceptives.
3. Provide recommended curricula for sex education for all schools at each grade level, and strengthen accountability measures for sex education standards.
4. Establish a database or widely accessible source of high-quality sex education materials.
5. Establish a system to monitor and assess the actual content being delivered in classrooms.
6. Allow for more classroom hours on a regular basis dedicated to teaching sex education.
7. Increase financial resources for sex education teacher training and professional development.
8. Collaborate with parents and partner to advocate for increased funding and resources for sex education programming.

9. Provide statewide standards that include specific content guidelines about LGBTQ issues at age-appropriate grade levels.
10. Utilize a trauma-informed framework throughout sex education programs, and train all school staff in educating with a trauma-informed approach.
11. Ensure that all students in all schools are receiving sex education, including students with differing abilities.

“New Jersey’s students deserve comprehensive, accurate sex education in order to make safe and healthy decisions for themselves,” said **Sarah Fajardo, Policy Director, ACLU-NJ**. “New Jersey’s Sex Education Report Card contains critical insight into areas where we can improve and safeguard young peoples’ well-being. ACLU-NJ looks forward to helping advance these recommendations with our community and government partners.”

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*Planned Parenthood Action Fund of New Jersey (PPAFNJ) is a nonpartisan 501(c)(4) non-profit social welfare organization, and the advocacy arm of the Planned Parenthood Affiliates in New Jersey. We advocate for access to essential health care through education, activism, voter engagement, grassroots organizing and legislative advocacy. For more information, visit [www.ppactionnj.org](http://www.ppactionnj.org).*