

**OBJECTIVE:** The purpose of this study was to explore support for sex education (SE) among Louisiana (LA) parents, focusing on how religiosity may influence that support. Sex education is important in Louisiana because...

- LA adolescents rank 45<sup>th</sup> in the nation for teen pregnancy, and LA consistently ranks in the 5 states with the highest rates of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and primary & secondary syphilis.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Research shows that SE delays initiation of sexual activity and increases contraceptive and condom use among youth who are sexually active.<sup>3,4,5</sup>
- LA state law does not require SE be taught in public schools and recent efforts by the state legislature to mandate SE have failed.
- In LA and nationally, religious identity and beliefs are often invoked to oppose access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and education.

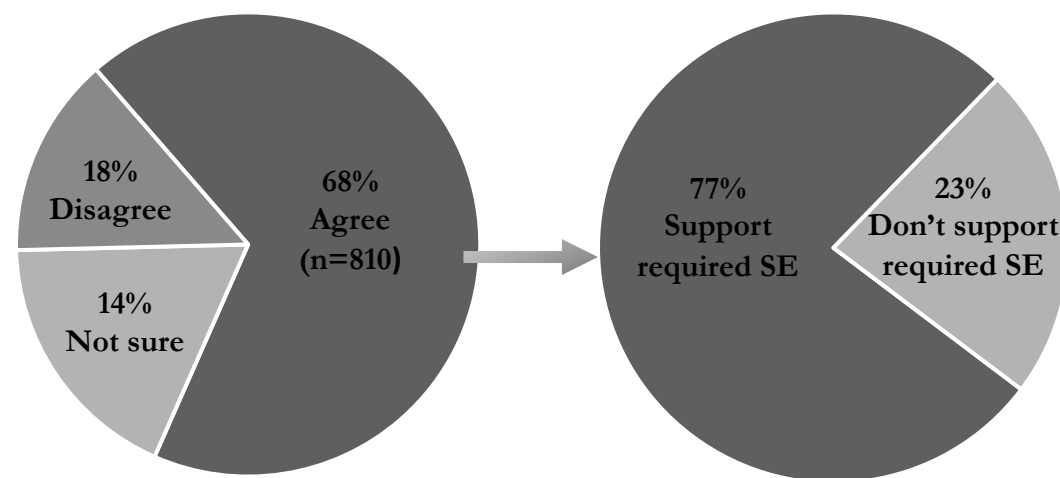
**METHODS:** A subset of Louisiana parents and care-givers of children in grades K-12 were invited to complete a web-based survey.

- 1,197 participants, representative of LA in terms of income, race and state public health region.
- Outcome of interest: Belief that SE should be required in schools.
- Respondent religiosity categorized according to the self-reported salience of religion in the participants life as indicated by agreement with the statement, "My whole approach to life is based on my religion/faith".
- Bivariate tests of association were performed between selected covariates and the outcome of interest (Table 1). Multivariate logistic regression analysis was used to determine associations between covariates & support for SE.
- In a post-hoc analysis, key-driver analysis was performed to further explore drivers of support for SE among parents of faith (Graphic 2).

**RESULTS:** Sixty-eight percent of parents reported their entire approach to life was based on religion/faith. Of those parents, 77% supported required SE (see Graphic 1). In the apriori multivariate regression analysis<sup>‡</sup>, high degree of parent religiosity was not significantly associated with support for SE (aOR 0.74, 95% CI 0.44-1.24). The post-hoc key driver analysis is presented in Graphic 2.

**Table 1. Characteristics of parents/caregivers by support for required SE, n=1197**

Characteristic	Support required SE n=956, n (row%)	Don't support required SE n=241, n (row%)	P value
Parent age, mean number of years	38.1	39.2	0.09
Parent gender			
Female	838 (80.9)	198 (19.1)	0.03
Male	117 (73.6)	42 (26.4)	
Parent income			
Below median regional income	493 (82.2)	107 (17.8)	0.05
Above median regional income	463 (77.6)	34 (22.4)	
Parent education			
No college education	400 (82.5)	85 (17.5)	0.06
At least some college education	556 (78.1)	156 (21.9)	
Parent race/ethnicity			
Non-Hispanic White	545 (79.8)	138 (20.2)	0.6
Black	279 (78.8)	75 (21.2)	
Other	132 (82.5)	28 (17.5)	
Parent history of SE			
Received SE in school	646 (84.3)	120 (15.7)	<0.001
Did not receive SE in school	310 (71.9)	121 (28.1)	
Child history of SE			
Believe child(ren) has or will receive SE	611 (85.3)	105 (14.7)	<0.001
Don't believe child(ren) has or will receive SE	345 (71.7)	136 (28.3)	
"My whole approach to life is based on my religion/faith"			
Agree	626 (77.3)	184 (20.7)	0.01
Not sure	143 (84.6)	26 (15.4)	
Disagree	187 (85.8)	31 (14.2)	
Political Ideology			
Conservative	248 (70.7)	103 (29.3)	<0.001
Moderate	351 (83.8)	68 (16.2)	
Liberal	119 (88.8)	15 (11.2)	
Uncertain	238 (81.2)	55 (18.8)	
"I tell my child(ren) to wait until marriage to have sex"			
Agree	700 (79)	186 (21)	0.21
Disagree/Not Sure	256 (82.3)	55 (17.7)	
"Sex-education encourages sexual activity in youth"			
Agree	130 (61.9)	80 (38.1)	<0.001
Not sure	230 (71.4)	92 (28.6)	
Disagree	569 (89.6)	69 (10.4)	
"Sex-education helps decrease rates of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections"			
Agree	661 (91.7)	60 (8.3)	<0.001
Not sure	224 (72.4)	93 (27.6)	
Disagree	51 (36.7)	88 (63.3)	



Parent Religiosity: "My whole approach to life is based on my religion/faith."

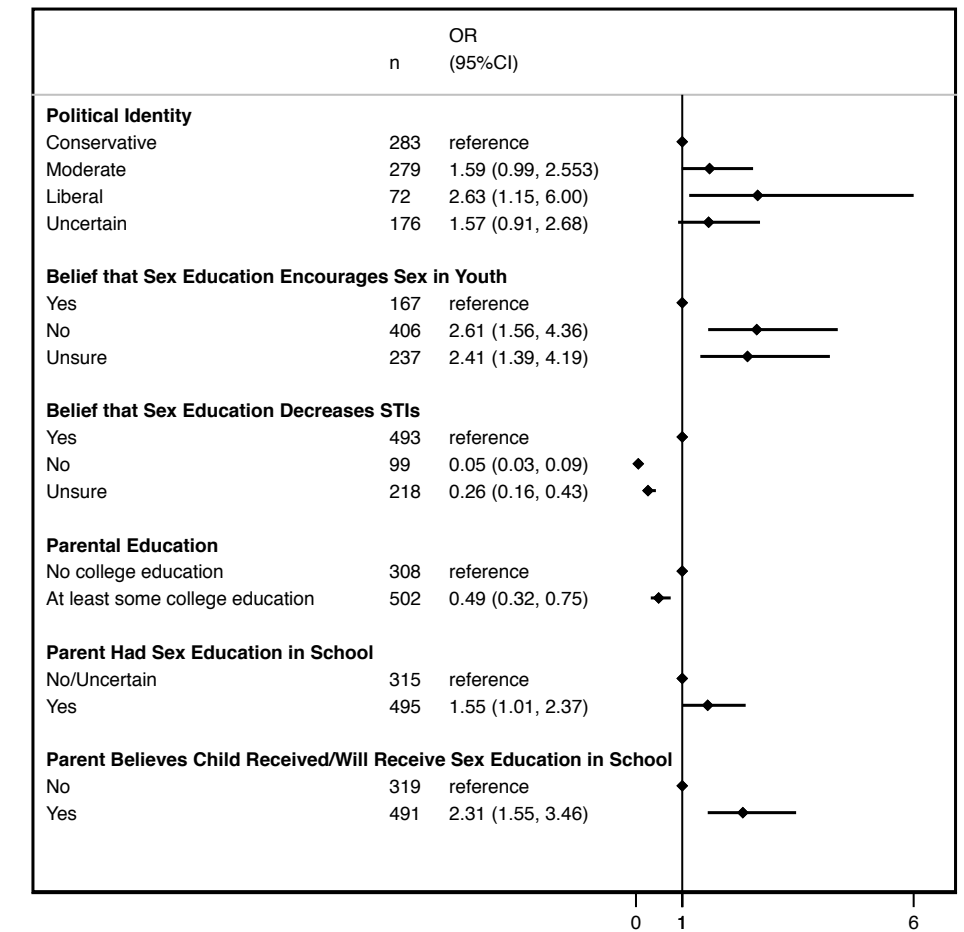
Support for SE among those whose whole approach to life is based on their religion/faith

### Key drivers of support for required SE among parents of faith:

- Non-conservative political identity
- Belief that SE decreases rates of STIs
- Belief that SE doesn't encourage sexual activity among youth
- Lack of college education
- Having received SE in school themselves
- Having a child receive (or plan to receive) SE in school

**Graphic 2:** Post-hoc multivariable logistic regression model

Covariate associations with support for required SE among parents who reported their whole approach to life was based on their faith/religion, n=810



**DISCUSSION:** Contrary to opposition claims, strong support for sex education exists among Louisiana parents and caregivers of faith.

Parents and leaders of faith may be engaged as partners in advocacy for SE as well as other sexual and reproductive health issues for adolescents. Our study highlights that parents of faith familiar with the content, impact and efficacy of SE are more likely to be supportive of required SE in Louisiana public schools. **Educating parents and caregivers about SE curricula, its impact on sexual activity in teens and on rates of unintended teen pregnancy and STIs are potential avenues to galvanize further support from parents of faith who do not currently support required SE.** Faced with alarming rates of teen pregnancy and STDs in the state of Louisiana, now is an important time to cultivate political will to support required SE in Louisiana schools. Engaging communities of faith may be one such way to gather support.

### REFERENCES:

- Centers for Disease Control, 2017.
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  - Kirby DB. The Impact of Abstinence and Comprehensive Sex and STD/HIV Education programs on Adolescent Sexual Behavior. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 2008;5(3): 332-338.
  - Lindberg LD, Maddow-Zimet I. Consequences of Sex Education on Teen and Young Adult Sexual Behavior and Outcomes. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 2008;51:332-338.
  - American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. ACOG Committee Opinion: Comprehensive Sexuality Education. 2016.
- ‡Adjusted for: Parent religiosity, age, gender, education, race, political identity; index child gender, grade level; whether parent tells child to wait till marriage to have sex, parent belief whether SE encourages sex, parent belief whether SE decreases STIs, parent receipt of SE in school, child receipt of SE in school (or plans for such). Total number of observations: 1191; overall model X<sup>2</sup> <0.001; Constant 3.19, p=0.05 (95%CI 0.98-10.32).