The United States has a high rate of teen pregnancies. Each year, about 400,000 teenage girls become pregnant. Many teens also get sexually transmitted diseases. One in four young people gets a sexually transmitted disease before turning 21.

Some people say schools have the *capacity* to make a difference. They think sex education can help students make better choices. For example, students can learn how to resist the peer pressure that leads to having sex too early. They can practice saying no if they are not ready. Some schools also distribute information about *methods* for safer sex.

Other people think sex education should be the parents’ responsibility. They believe that sex education is not a health issue, but a moral issue. Parents can do a better job of teaching *morality* than schools. Furthermore, different families want their children to learn very different things about sex, and schools cannot cover all viewpoints.

Teachers may also be reluctant to distribute information about different methods for safer sex. Many teachers would rather avoid the topic of sex education completely and believe the parents should be responsible for this topic. However, schools and teachers are then often held accountable for “not doing enough.”

Some people believe schools should only teach students to *abstain* or stay away from sex until marriage. They think teaching students about safer sex is like saying that sex at a young age is okay.

In 2008, the government spent $214 million on programs that focus on abstinence without clear evidence that such programs are effective. It seems like students need more information, but where should they get it? Should schools try to help prevent teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases? Or should sex education just be left to parents?
USE THE FOCUS WORDS

capacity (noun) ability

Sample Sentence: Some people say schools have the capacity to make a difference.

Turn and Talk: Who has more of a capacity to change the world: children or adults? Explain your answer.

distribute (verb) to give out

Sample Sentence: Some schools also distribute information about ways to have safer sex.

Turn and Talk: What kinds of supplies should be distributed to people after a natural disaster?

method (noun) a way of doing something

Sample Sentence: One method for making new friends at school is to join a club.

Turn and Talk: Is there a game or sport that you are good at? What is your method for winning?

morality (noun) a sense of right and wrong; values

Sample Sentence: Many kids learn morality by watching the actions of their family members.

Turn and Talk: Does the music you listen to affect your morality? If so, how?

abstain (verb) to choose not to do something

Sample Sentence: Some people believe schools must only teach students to abstain from sex until marriage.

Turn and Talk: What is the best way to get young people to abstain from smoking?
The graph shows the results from a 2004 poll. In this poll, parents were asked which method of sex education they preferred. They chose from these three methods:

- **Abstinence-Only**: Students are taught that abstaining from pre-marital sex is the only safe choice that upholds their morality.
- **Abstinence-Plus**: Abstinence is presented as the safest, most moral option. However, Abstinence-Plus programs distribute information about safer sex as well.
- **Comprehensive**: The Comprehensive approach does not suggest that teen sex is immoral. It provides lots of information about safer sex in an effort to help students develop the capacity to make good choices.

**Option 1**: What percent of parents prefer Abstinence-Only?

A. 36%
B. 49%
C. 15%
D. 100%

**Option 2**: Based only on the information in the graph, is the following statement true or false, or does the graph not tell you enough information to decide?

"85% of parents prefer sex education programs that provide safer sex information."

**Discussion Question**: Without changing the distribution of opinion, we can make things look very different. This means pollsters and politicians have the capacity to manipulate how information will be interpreted. For example, only a small percentage of parents prefer the Abstinence-Only method. But both Abstinence-Only and Abstinence-Plus are based on the idea that abstinence is the most moral option. So both of these statements are true:

1. Only 15% of parents favor Abstinence-Only sex education.
2. Over 60% of parents favor sex education that encourages abstinence.

If you were in favor of Abstinence-Only programs, which statistic would you probably use? If you were in favor of Abstinence-Plus or Comprehensive programs, which statistic would you probably use? What does this suggest about statistics in general?
Ms. Kahn’s class is preparing for a debate about what students should learn in health education classes. Students have to defend a position about who is responsible for teaching kids about sex, so they’re doing research looking for studies with scientific data on the topic. They talk while they search.

“Sex education is really an issue of morality. It should be left up to parents to teach their kids about sex,” says Briana.

“No way!” exclaims Valerie, “What if parents are scared to talk to their kids about sex? My dad freaks out every time my sister and I even mention dating. Schools need a method for teaching kids what they don’t learn at home.”

“I know, right?” says Erick, “I think kids and teens have the capacity to learn about the topic and still uphold their personal beliefs. But people at my church think that if a school distributes information about sex, it’s like saying sex before marriage is okay. They think teaching kids to abstain from sex is the best choice.”

Ms. Kahn checks in with the group. “Try searching for studies about Abstinence-Only education programs. You’ll need to compare them with Comprehensive programs.”

“I found something! It’s a research study that compares the risk of teen pregnancy with the type of sex education teens received,” says Valerie. “I bet if kids get comprehensive information about sex, they’ll be better off.”

“Okay, Valerie, you sound like you have a position. Let’s find out if you can support it with evidence from a reliable source,” says Ms. Kahn.

| Respondents who reported “No teen pregnancy” received what type of sex education? |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| No formal sex education         | 8.6%               |
| Abstinence-Only sex education   | 23.6%              |
| Comprehensive sex education     | 67.8%              |

Is Valerie’s position on sex education supported by the data table? Why or why not?

Is there information about Erick’s church’s position on the data table? What about Briana’s position?

besides pregnancy, are there other behaviors or outcomes that you would like to consider when deciding what type of sex education is most effective?
DEBATE THE ISSUE

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

☐ Public schools should not teach sex education.

OR

☐ Public schools should provide sex ed classes.

OR

☐ ____________________________
☐ ____________________________
☐ ____________________________
☐ ____________________________
☐ ____________________________

Jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

________________________________________________________________________
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Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:

"Can you show me evidence in the text that..."

"I believe that..."

"You make a good point, but have you considered..."

"I agree with you, but..."
TAKE A STAND

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

capacity | distribute | method | morality | abstain

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