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**New Jerseyans Favor Sex Education in Middle and High School, But Split on Elementary School**

***About 6 in 10 Think Course Content Should Be Standardized, Parents Should Have Choice to Opt Child Out***

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. (September 21, 2022) – As New Jersey’s new health and sexual education standards take effect, large majorities of Garden State residents are in favor of such content being taught in middle (71 percent) and high school (88 percent) but are pretty evenly divided when it comes to elementary school, according to the latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll.

Forty-six percent favor having health and sexual education taught to elementary school students, while 51 percent oppose it.

An emphasis on “age appropriateness” makes little difference; when this phrase is included in the question, similar numbers favor health and sexual education in each level of schooling as they did without the additional wording.

“Sex ed has become a major flashpoint this year in New Jersey, especially now as midterm elections approach,” said Ashley Koning, an assistant research professor and director of the [Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling](#) (ECPIP) at [Rutgers University–New Brunswick](#).

“Within the state, the issue is echoing the broader, national narrative of sharp partisan division over things like sex, gender and reproductive rights. Yet, according to these numbers, those who have been most vocal in New Jersey do not necessarily reflect a majority of residents’ – or even parents’ – views.”

Sixty-three percent of New Jerseyans believe the content of health and sexual education courses should all be the same throughout the state, while 33 percent feel each district should be allowed to decide the content of their courses.

Sixty percent think parents should have the option of keeping their children out of health and sexual education classes, whereas 37 percent think every student should have to take them.

“Sex education has historically had support among New Jerseyans when it comes to middle and high school, but interestingly, the desire for a standardized curriculum, as well as parental choice, have increased by double digits since 1980,” said Koning. “The salience of the issue and deep partisan divides in today’s political climate, along with solid support from independents on having standardization yet also parental choice, are likely responsible for these notable increases.”

Parents and guardians feel about the same as residents overall when it comes to sex education in terms of when it should be taught and if it should be standardized throughout the state. Parents and guardians are much more likely than nonparents, however, to say parents should be able to opt their child out of it – 70 percent versus 56 percent, respectively.

Unsurprisingly, there are stark partisan differences on sex education as well. When it comes to teaching it in elementary school, a majority of Democrats favor it (69 percent), while independents (56 percent) and especially Republicans (83 percent) oppose it. Republicans are slightly more likely to oppose teaching sex education in middle school than support it (55 percent to 41 percent, respectively). A majority of Republicans, on the other hand, favor teaching it in high school (70 percent), but to a lesser extent than do independents (87 percent) or Democrats (98 percent).

Republicans are more split when it comes to whether curriculums should be standardized throughout the state (50 percent supporting standardized versus 45 percent saying individual districts should decide), whereas Democrats and independents are much more in favor of standardization (69 percent and 64 percent, respectively). Nearly nine in 10 Republicans (87 percent) want parents to have the choice to keep their child out of health and sexual education classes, compared with 44 percent of Democrats and 61 percent of independents.

“It remains to be seen who can use this issue more effectively to rally their base and get voters to turn out for Election Day,” Koning said. “While public support for parental choice bodes well for Republicans, general favorability toward teaching sex ed – and the support for it from independents, in particular – does not.”

Women, Black residents, and people with higher levels of education also are more favorable of health and sexual education being taught in elementary school compared to their respective counterparts. These margins dissipate, however, when asked about middle and especially high school.

“Opposition to sex ed won’t play well with a key voting bloc like women, who are already dissatisfied with other issues like abortion this midterm cycle,” said Jessica Roman, a research associate at ECPIP.

Results are from a statewide poll of 1,006 adults contacted by live interviewers on landlines and cell phones from Aug. 30 to Sept. 8, 2022. The full sample has a margin of error of +/- 3.8 percentage points.

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**Broadcast interviews:** Rutgers University–New Brunswick has broadcast-quality TV and radio studios available for remote live or taped interviews with Rutgers experts. For more information, contact John Cramer at [john.cramer@rutgers.edu](mailto:john.cramer@rutgers.edu).

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*Home of the Rutgers-Eggleton Poll, the Eggleton Center for Public Interest Polling (ECPIP) was established in 1971 and is the oldest and one of the most respected university-based statewide polling operations in the United States. Now in its 50<sup>th</sup> year and with the publication of over 200 polls, ECPIP’s mission is to provide scientifically sound, non-partisan information about public opinion. To read more about ECPIP and view all of our press releases, published research and data archive, please visit our website: [eggletonpoll.rutgers.edu](http://eggletonpoll.rutgers.edu). You can also visit our [Facebook](#) page and [Twitter](#) profile.*

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**QUESTIONS AND TABLES START ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE**

Questions and Tables

The questions covered in this release are listed below. Column percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding. Respondents are New Jersey adults; all percentages are of weighted results. Interpret groups with samples sizes under 100 with extreme caution.

**S1A. Generally speaking, please tell me if you favor or oppose having health and sexual education taught to students in each of the following:**

**S1B. Generally speaking, please tell me if you favor or oppose having age-appropriate health and sexual education taught to students in each of the following:**

*Note: These questions were part of a split sample. Half of respondents received S1A and half received S1B. There was no statistically significant difference between the two versions. The below tables reflect their combined results unless otherwise noted.*

Elementary school

	COMBINED	VERSION A	VERSION B
<b>Favor</b>	46%	41%	51%
<b>Oppose</b>	51%	56%	46%
<b>Don't know</b>	3%	3%	3%
<b>Unweighted N=</b>	983	494	489

	Party ID			Gender		Race or Ethnicity				Age			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Man	Woman	Wht	Blk	Hisp	Other	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
<b>Favor</b>	69%	40%	15%	41%	50%	46%	63%	39%	38%	49%	44%	42%	50%
<b>Oppose</b>	28%	56%	83%	55%	48%	50%	35%	58%	60%	47%	54%	56%	45%
<b>DK</b>	4%	3%	2%	4%	2%	4%	2%	3%	2%	3%	2%	2%	5%
<b>Unwt N=</b>	397	388	186	521	451	593	105	158	102	222	239	305	207

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	Income				Region					Education			
	<\$50K	\$50K- <\$100K	\$100K- <\$150K	\$150K+	Urban	Suburb	Exurban	Phil/ South	Shore	HS or less	Some college	College grad	Grad work
<b>Favor</b>	58%	39%	44%	48%	52%	48%	46%	48%	34%	43%	41%	47%	58%
<b>Oppose</b>	38%	59%	54%	48%	44%	49%	48%	50%	66%	54%	56%	48%	39%
<b>DK</b>	4%	3%	2%	3%	4%	3%	6%	3%	1%	3%	3%	4%	2%
<b>Unwt N=</b>	142	281	182	272	159	347	134	173	170	129	227	360	263

	Parent/Guardian	
	Parent	Non-Parent
<b>Favor</b>	43%	47%
<b>Oppose</b>	55%	49%
<b>DK</b>	2%	3%
<b>Unwt N=</b>	263	711

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**Middle school**

	<b>COMBINED</b>	<b>VERSION A</b>	<b>VERSION B</b>
<b>Favor</b>	71%	70%	73%
<b>Oppose</b>	25%	27%	23%
<b>Don't know</b>	3%	3%	4%
<b>Unweighted N=</b>	985	494	491

	<b>Party ID</b>			<b>Gender</b>		<b>Race or Ethnicity</b>				<b>Age</b>			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Man	Woman	Wht	Blk	Hisp	Other	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
<b>Favor</b>	89%	70%	41%	67%	75%	71%	87%	64%	69%	79%	74%	64%	68%
<b>Oppose</b>	10%	26%	55%	29%	22%	26%	11%	31%	30%	17%	23%	33%	28%
<b>DK</b>	1%	4%	4%	4%	2%	3%	2%	5%	1%	4%	3%	2%	3%
<b>Unwt N=</b>	399	388	187	522	452	593	105	160	103	222	239	306	208

	<b>Income</b>				<b>Region</b>					<b>Education</b>			
	<\$50K	\$50K- <\$100K	\$100K- <\$150K	\$150K+	Urban	Suburb	Exurban	Phil/ South	Shore	HS or less	Some college	College grad	Grad work
<b>Favor</b>	74%	68%	70%	77%	76%	72%	72%	75%	62%	64%	72%	76%	78%
<b>Oppose</b>	21%	28%	27%	21%	22%	25%	23%	21%	36%	32%	25%	21%	20%
<b>DK</b>	4%	3%	4%	2%	2%	3%	4%	5%	2%	4%	3%	3%	2%
<b>Unwt N=</b>	143	282	182	273	160	347	135	174	169	128	231	359	263

	<b>Parent/Guardian</b>	
	Parent	Non-Parent
<b>Favor</b>	71%	72%
<b>Oppose</b>	27%	25%
<b>DK</b>	2%	3%
<b>Unwt N=</b>	265	711

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**High school**

	COMBINED	VERSION A	VERSION B
<b>Favor</b>	88%	88%	88%
<b>Oppose</b>	10%	10%	10%
<b>Don't know</b>	2%	3%	2%
<b>Unweighted N=</b>	989	496	493

	Party ID			Gender		Race or Ethnicity				Age			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Man	Woman	Wht	Blk	Hisp	Other	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
<b>Favor</b>	98%	87%	70%	87%	88%	87%	94%	84%	86%	93%	90%	84%	83%
<b>Oppose</b>	2%	11%	23%	10%	10%	9%	6%	13%	13%	5%	10%	12%	13%
<b>DK</b>	0%	2%	8%	3%	2%	3%	0%	2%	1%	1%	1%	4%	4%
<b>Unwt N=</b>	401	389	187	523	455	595	105	161	103	221	240	308	210

	Income				Region					Education			
	<\$50K	\$50K- <\$100K	\$100K- <\$150K	\$150K+	Urban	Suburb	Exurban	Phil/ South	Shore	HS or less	Some college	College grad	Grad work
<b>Favor</b>	94%	85%	89%	87%	86%	89%	87%	89%	84%	83%	89%	90%	90%
<b>Oppose</b>	4%	13%	8%	10%	13%	9%	7%	10%	12%	13%	9%	9%	9%
<b>DK</b>	2%	2%	3%	3%	1%	2%	6%	1%	4%	4%	2%	1%	1%
<b>Unwt N=</b>	144	281	182	276	160	347	137	174	171	129	231	360	265

	Parent/Guardian	
	Parent	Non-Parent
<b>Favor</b>	87%	88%
<b>Oppose</b>	11%	9%
<b>DK</b>	2%	3%
<b>Unwt N=</b>	264	716

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**S2. Should [ROTATE: the content of health and sexual education courses all be the same across the state], or should [each district be allowed to decide the content of their courses]?**

<b>All the same</b>	63%
<b>Districts decide</b>	33%
<b>Don't know</b>	4%
<b>Unweighted N=</b>	1000

	Party ID			Gender		Race or Ethnicity				Age			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Man	Woman	Wht	Blk	Hisp	Other	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
<b>All same</b>	69%	64%	50%	61%	64%	64%	56%	63%	71%	70%	61%	62%	57%
<b>Districts decide</b>	28%	31%	45%	35%	32%	32%	40%	33%	24%	27%	36%	33%	36%
<b>DK</b>	3%	6%	4%	4%	4%	5%	4%	4%	5%	2%	3%	6%	7%
<b>Unwt N=</b>	403	392	192	528	461	603	103	164	105	227	241	313	208

	Income				Region					Education			
	<\$50K	\$50K- <\$100K	\$100K- <\$150K	\$150K+	Urban	Suburb	Exurban	Phil/ South	Shore	HS or less	Some college	College grad	Grad work
<b>All same</b>	63%	63%	67%	63%	58%	65%	61%	68%	59%	60%	62%	65%	65%
<b>Districts decide</b>	29%	33%	31%	33%	39%	29%	35%	28%	37%	32%	36%	31%	32%
<b>DK</b>	8%	4%	2%	3%	4%	5%	4%	4%	3%	8%	2%	3%	3%
<b>Unwt N=</b>	143	286	182	281	161	354	137	173	175	130	237	362	267

	Parent/Guardian	
	Parent	Non-Parent
<b>All same</b>	61%	64%
<b>Districts decide</b>	36%	31%
<b>DK</b>	3%	5%
<b>Unwt N=</b>	269	722



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**S4. Do you think parents should have the option of keeping their children out of health and sexual education classes, or should every student have to take the classes?**

<b>Parents have option</b>	60%
<b>Every student has to take</b>	37%
<b>Don't know</b>	2%
<b>Unweighted N=</b>	989

	Party ID			Gender		Race or Ethnicity				Age			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Man	Woman	Wht	Blk	Hisp	Other	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
<b>Parent option</b>	44%	61%	87%	63%	58%	64%	41%	64%	51%	46%	68%	68%	59%
<b>All take</b>	54%	36%	12%	35%	39%	34%	54%	32%	48%	51%	31%	30%	37%
<b>DK</b>	3%	3%	1%	2%	3%	2%	4%	4%	2%	3%	1%	2%	4%
<b>Unwt N=</b>	396	390	190	522	456	599	102	160	103	225	239	310	205

	Income				Region					Education			
	<\$50K	\$50K- <\$100K	\$100K- <\$150K	\$150K+	Urban	Suburb	Exurban	Phil/ South	Shore	HS or less	Some college	College grad	Grad work
<b>Parent option</b>	47%	62%	72%	59%	53%	59%	62%	62%	67%	60%	63%	58%	60%
<b>All take</b>	49%	36%	27%	40%	44%	37%	37%	37%	31%	37%	34%	41%	39%
<b>DK</b>	4%	2%	0%	1%	3%	4%	0%	1%	1%	3%	3%	1%	1%
<b>Unwt N=</b>	140	284	182	275	160	350	135	172	172	129	231	362	263

	Parent/Guardian	
	Parent	Non-Parent
<b>Parent option</b>	70%	56%
<b>All take</b>	29%	41%
<b>DK</b>	1%	3%
<b>Unwt N=</b>	264	717

**Methodology**

The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted by telephone using live interviewers August 30 to September 8, 2022, with a scientifically selected random sample of 1,006 New Jersey adults, 18 or older. Persons without a telephone could not be included in the random selection process. Respondents within a household are selected by asking randomly for the youngest adult male or female currently available. If the named gender is not available, the youngest adult of the other gender is interviewed. This telephone poll included 291 adults reached on a landline phone and 715 adults reached on a cell phone, all acquired through random digit dialing; 327 of the cell phone completes were acquired through one-to-one SMS text messaging by live interviewers that led respondents to an online version of the survey. Distribution of phone use in this sample is:

<b>Cell</b>	39%
<b>Text to Web</b>	33%
<b>Landline</b>	29%

The data were weighted to be representative of the residential adult population of New Jersey. The weighting balances sample demographics to target population parameters. The sample is balanced, by form and overall, to match parameters for sex, age, education, race/ethnicity, region and phone use. The sex, age, education, race/ethnicity, and region parameters were derived from 2019 American Community Survey PUMS data. The phone use parameter was derived from estimates provided by the National Health Interview Survey Early Release Program.<sup>1</sup>

Weighting was done in two stages. The first stage of weighting corrects for different probabilities of selection across the telephone samples associated with the number of adults in each household and each respondent’s telephone usage patterns. This adjustment also accounts for the overlapping landline and cell sample frames and the relative sizes of each frame and each sample.<sup>2</sup>

The final stage of weighting balances sample demographics, overall and by form, to match target population benchmarks. This weighting was accomplished using SPSSINC RAKE, an SPSS extension module that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables using the GENLOG procedure. Weights were trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on survey estimates. The use of these weights in statistical analysis ensures that the demographic characteristics of the sample closely approximate the demographic characteristics of the target population.

A series of weight variables was computed. One weight for estimates based on the total sample (“weight”), plus separate weights for each of the split samples.

Post-data collection statistical adjustments require analysis procedures that reflect departures from simple random sampling. We calculate the effects of these design features so that an appropriate adjustment can be incorporated into tests of statistical significance when using these data.

All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. Sampling

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<sup>1</sup> NCHS, National Health Interview Survey, 2017–2019; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017–2019.

<sup>2</sup> Buskirk, T. D., & Best, J. (2012). Venn Diagrams, Probability 101 and Sampling Weights Computed for Dual Frame Telephone RDD Designs. *Journal of Statistics and Mathematics*, 15, 3696-3710.

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error should be adjusted to recognize the effect of weighting the data to better match the population. In this poll, the simple sampling error for 1,006 New Jersey adults is +/-3.1 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence interval. The design effect<sup>3</sup> is 1.52, making the adjusted margin of error +/- 3.8 percentage points. Thus, if 50 percent of New Jersey adults in this sample favor a particular position, we would be 95 percent sure that the true figure is between 46.2 and 53.8 percent (50 +/- 3.8) if all New Jersey adults had been interviewed, rather than just a sample.

Sampling error does not consider other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording, or context effects.

This Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was fielded by Braun Research, Inc. with sample from Dynata. The questionnaire was developed and all data analyses were completed in house by the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling (ECPIP). The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll is paid for and sponsored by the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, a non-partisan academic center for the study of politics and the political process. Full questionnaires are available on request and can also be accessed through our archives at [eagletonpoll.rutgers.edu](http://eagletonpoll.rutgers.edu). For more information, please contact [poll@eagleton.rutgers.edu](mailto:poll@eagleton.rutgers.edu).

**Weighted Demographics  
1,006 New Jersey adults 18+**

**Overall Margin of Error = +/- 3.8 percentage points**

*Please note: Totals may equal slightly more or less than 100% due to rounding.*

		<b>deff</b>	<b>MOE</b>			<b>deff</b>	<b>MOE</b>
<b>Man</b>	48%	1.54	+/- 5.3%	<b>White</b>	57%	1.52	+/- 4.9%
<b>Woman</b>	52%	1.47	+/- 5.5%	<b>Black</b>	12%	1.48	+/- 11.6%
				<b>Hispanic</b>	19%	1.45	+/- 9.2%
<b>18-34</b>	27%	1.40	+/- 7.7%	<b>Other</b>	12%	1.51	+/- 11.8%
<b>35-49</b>	23%	1.41	+/- 7.5%				
<b>50-64</b>	29%	1.58	+/- 6.9%	<b>&lt;50K</b>	22%	1.45	+/- 9.8%
<b>65+</b>	21%	1.64	+/- 8.7%	<b>50K-&lt;100K</b>	35%	1.44	+/- 6.9%
				<b>100K-&lt;150K</b>	18%	1.53	+/- 9.0%
<b>Democrat</b>	38%	1.51	+/- 6.0%	<b>150K+</b>	24%	1.44	+/- 7.0%
<b>Independent</b>	42%	1.52	+/- 6.1%				
<b>Republican</b>	20%	1.48	+/- 8.5%	<b>Urban</b>	17%	1.46	+/- 9.3%
				<b>Suburb</b>	36%	1.53	+/- 6.4%
<b>HS or Less</b>	30%	1.10	+/- 8.9%	<b>Exurban</b>	14%	1.52	+/- 10.3%
<b>Some College</b>	29%	1.24	+/- 7.1%	<b>Phil/South</b>	18%	1.55	+/- 9.2%
<b>College Grad</b>	24%	1.17	+/- 5.5%	<b>Shore</b>	17%	1.52	+/- 9.1%
<b>Grad Work</b>	17%	1.15	+/- 6.4%				

<sup>3</sup> Post-data collection statistical adjustments require analysis procedures that reflect departures from simple random sampling. We calculate the effects of these design features so that an appropriate adjustment can be incorporated into tests of statistical significance when using these data. The so-called "design effect" or *deff* represents the loss in statistical efficiency that results from a disproportionate sample design and systematic non-response.