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## **POLL: Roanoke Parents Strongly Support Sexuality Education in Roanoke City Schools**

A poll of 363 Roanoke City parents with school-aged children indicates strong support for the teaching of sexuality education in Roanoke City Public Schools and overwhelming recognition that such education is appropriate to teach at the middle-school level. The 14-question telephone survey, commissioned by Planned Parenthood Health Systems, Inc. (PPHS), was conducted June 8-10 by Public Policy Polling of Raleigh, North Carolina ([www.publicpolicypolling.com](http://www.publicpolicypolling.com)) using Interactive Voice Response technology. The margin of error is 5.1%.

“These polling results demonstrate that 80% of Roanoke City parents with school-age children believe sex education should be taught in Roanoke City Schools,” said David Nova, Vice President for PPHS. “Only 17% oppose sex education in Roanoke City classrooms.”

Support for sexual education remains substantial regardless of age, race, gender or party affiliation. African American parents tend to be slightly more supportive (87%) than Caucasians (80%). Self-described Democrats (86%) demonstrate stronger support than self-described Republicans (72%) or Independents (79%).

Regardless of their stated preference for or against the teaching of sex education, parents overwhelmingly recognize that specified sexuality education topics are “appropriate to teach” in Roanoke public schools. Specific topics include: the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (96%), the basics of reproduction (95%), how to use birth control methods (90%), sexual orientation (85%) and abstinence until marriage (85%).

“Planned Parenthood believes that age-appropriate, medically accurate information regarding health and sexuality assists students in making responsible and informed decisions, protecting the public health, reducing student drop-out rates and saving Virginia taxpayers millions of dollars in costs associated with teenage pregnancy and birth”, stated Nova. “The polling results indicate that Roanoke City parents may feel likewise.”

Moreover, strong majorities believe in the appropriateness of teaching these and other topics in (or before) middle school: prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (85%), basics of reproduction (82%), abstinence until marriage (74%), how to use birth control methods (71%) and sexual orientation (70%).

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“Teaching sexuality education as a means of delaying too-early sexual activity is especially important given the alarming trends among Roanoke City middle-school students in recent years,” according to Nova. Based upon longitudinal data from the Roanoke City Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), the percentage of middle-school students that have had sexual intercourse has steadily risen: 24.6% in 2002, 27.0% in 2005, 33.4% in 2007 and 35.6% in 2009. (The YRBS is a study conducted biannually by the Centers for Disease Control and the Commonwealth of Virginia to measure health risk behaviors of middle and high school students.)

Parental support for sexuality education may be impacted by concern over Roanoke City’s perennially high teenage pregnancy rates. Based upon the most recent data from the Virginia Department of Health, Roanoke City had the fifth highest rate of teenage pregnancy in the Commonwealth in 2008 and the second highest in 2007.

Parental support may also be associated with growing concerns about the student dropout rate, a fundamental priority of Roanoke City Public School administrators. Based upon the latest data from the Virginia Department of Education, roughly 18% of students who entered either of Roanoke’s two public high schools as ninth-graders in 2005 had dropped out of school before graduation. (The statewide dropout rate is under 8%.) Furthermore, only 67% of the Class of 2005 graduated on time, and only 64% earned either a standard or advanced diploma, the only two credentials recognized by federal education officials under the No Child Left Behind law.

“Teen pregnancy prevention and dropout prevention are interrelated,” says Nova. “Teens who become pregnant are less likely to graduate from high school and those who dropout are more likely to become pregnant as teenagers.” The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Dropout Survey (2005) found that 47% of females surveyed said that becoming a parent was a factor in their decisions to drop out and 33% said it was a major factor.

In July, PPHS provided the Roanoke City Parents Survey results to Roanoke City Schools administrators. The school system has since worked with Planned Parenthood to provide these results, as well as additional sexuality education training, to its health educators at the elementary, middle and high-school levels.

Planned Parenthood Health Systems is a private, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization operating in four states and headquartered in Raleigh, NC. Our organization is an accredited affiliate of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, the world’s largest and most trusted voluntary reproductive healthcare organization. Planned Parenthood has provided sexuality education programming in the Roanoke Valley since its establishment in 1967. We offer preventive reproductive healthcare and medically accurate, abstinence-based sexuality education. We engage in public policy efforts to ensure that women, men and teens can access safe and effective healthcare and education.

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