

Center *for* Mississippi
Health Policy

CHART BOOK:

**SEX-RELATED EDUCATION
POLICY AND PRACTICES
IN MS PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

December 2015

Sex-Related Education Policy and Practices in Mississippi Public Schools

Prepared for

The Center for Mississippi Health Policy

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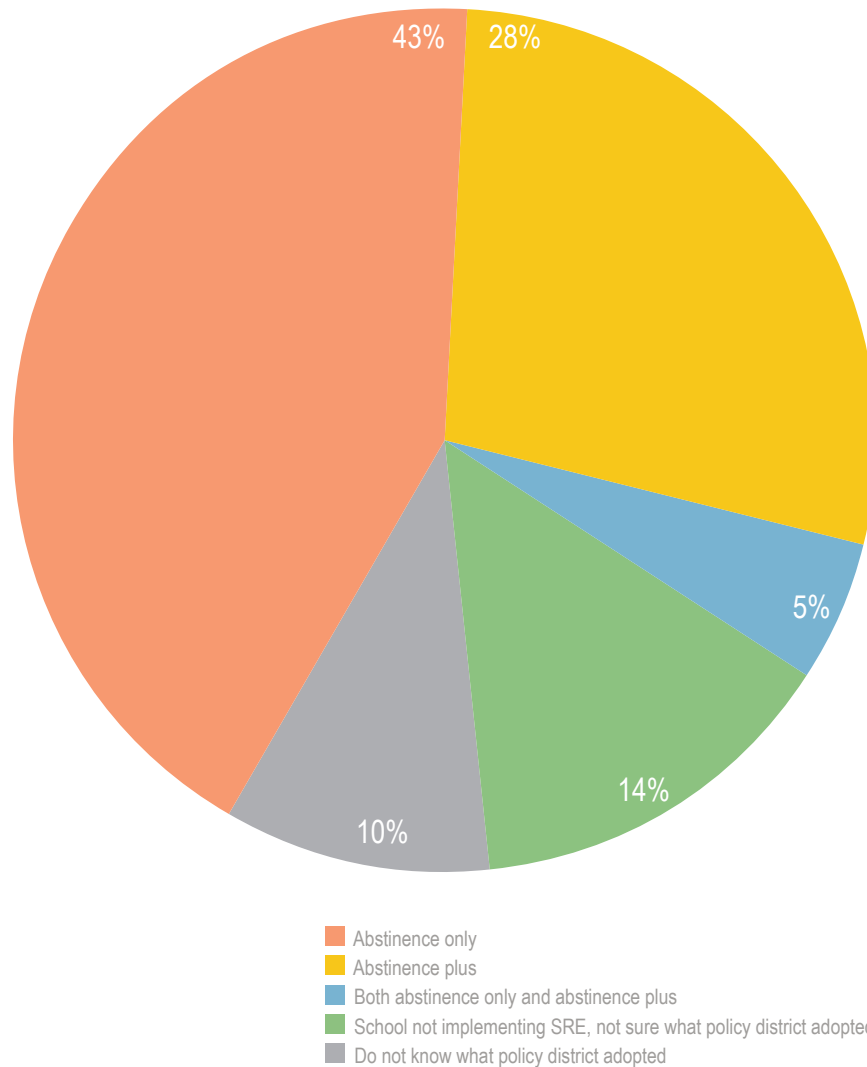
In 2015, the Center for Mississippi Health Policy commissioned researchers at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) to survey and conduct focus groups with a representative sample of public school instructors responsible for teaching sex-related education (SRE) to learn about the successes and challenges of implementing SRE under the 2011 law.

This statute required the local school board of each district to implement abstinence-only or abstinence-plus education into its curriculum by June 30, 2012. Abstinence-only (AO) and abstinence-plus (AP) curriculum had different content requirements specified by the law. Both AO or AP programs must meet certain requirements, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Students must be separated according to gender into separate classrooms at all times during any sex-related education
- Parents must receive notice of sex-related education at least one week in advance and must opt-in for students to be included in instruction
- Condom demonstrations are prohibited

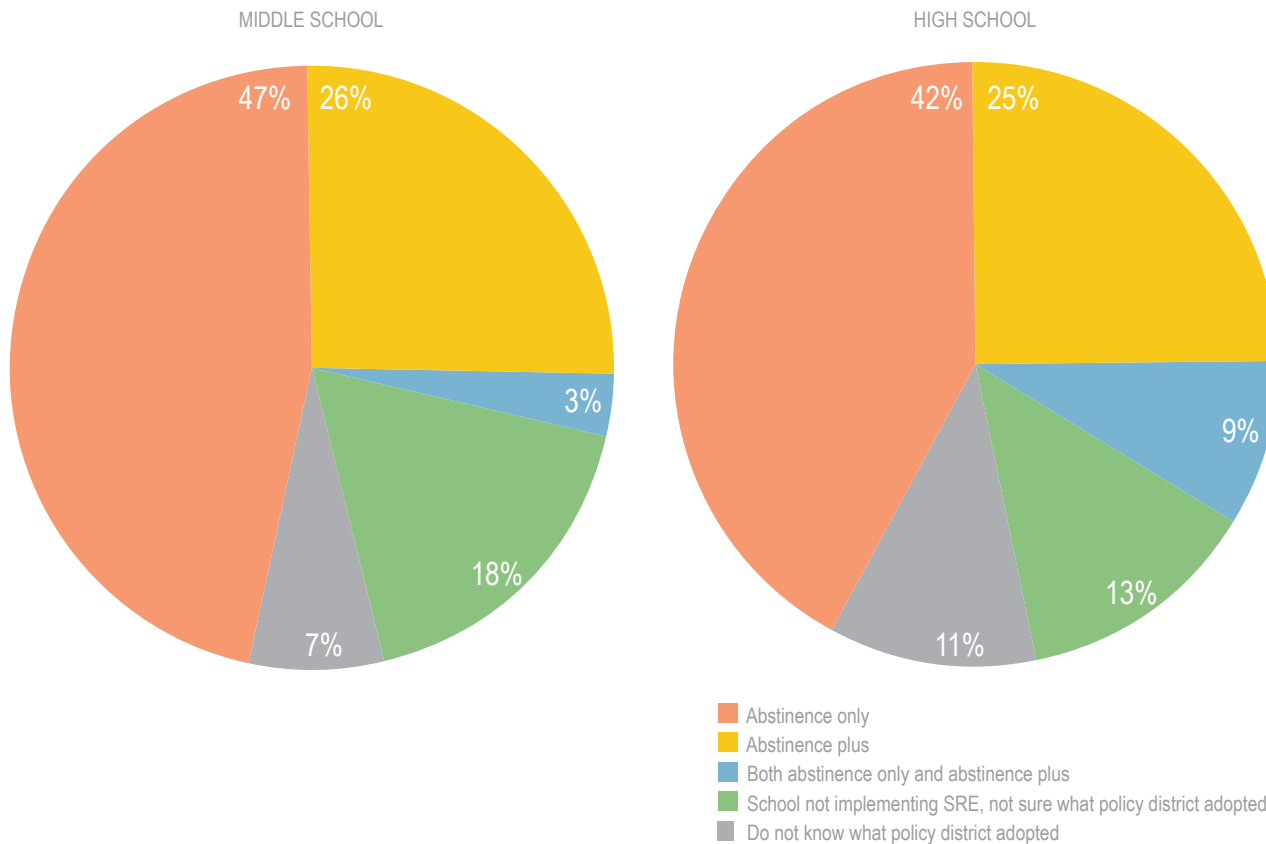
The full results of the survey, including detailed methodology, along with an Issue Brief on the study, are available at mshealthpolicy.com.

Sex-Related Education Policy Adopted by School District Reported by SRE Instructors



In response to the question: “According to MS Code 37-13-171 each local school board was required to adopt a sex-related education (SRE) policy to implement abstinence-only or abstinence-plus education into its local school district’s curriculum by June 30, 2012, which of the following did your school adopt,” 43 percent of SRE instructors indicated that their school adopted an abstinence-only policy, 28 percent responded that their school adopted an abstinence-plus policy, 5 percent answered “both,” and 24 percent were not sure or did not know.

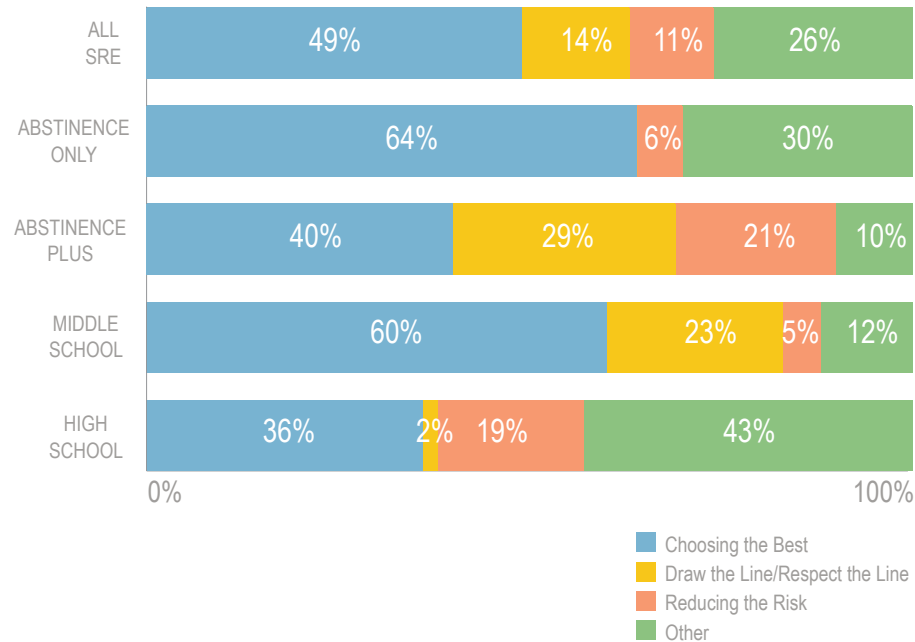
Sex-Related Education Policy Adopted by School District, by Grade Level Reported by SRE Instructors



When divided out by grade level, there are slight differences between answers about the type of policy adopted between answers in middle school and high school.

*Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding

Sex-Related Education Curriculum Implemented at School Level Reported by SRE Instructors

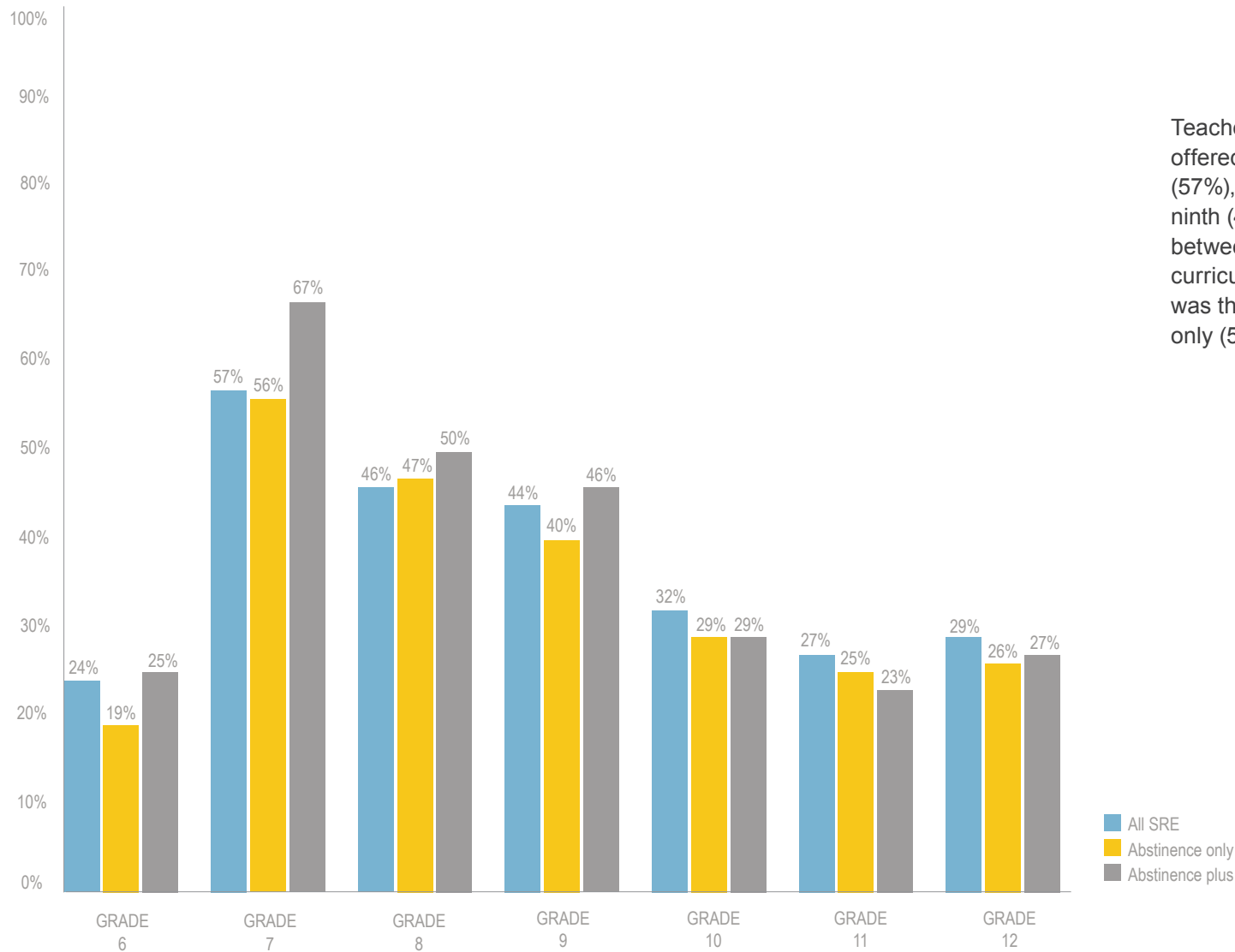


When asked to choose from a list of Mississippi Department of Education approved curricula the name of the specific curriculum being used in the instructor's school, three curricula were cited as being used most often by those who reported implementing a policy:

- "Choosing the Best" (49%)
- "Draw the Line, Respect the Line" (14%)
- "Reducing the Risk" (11%)

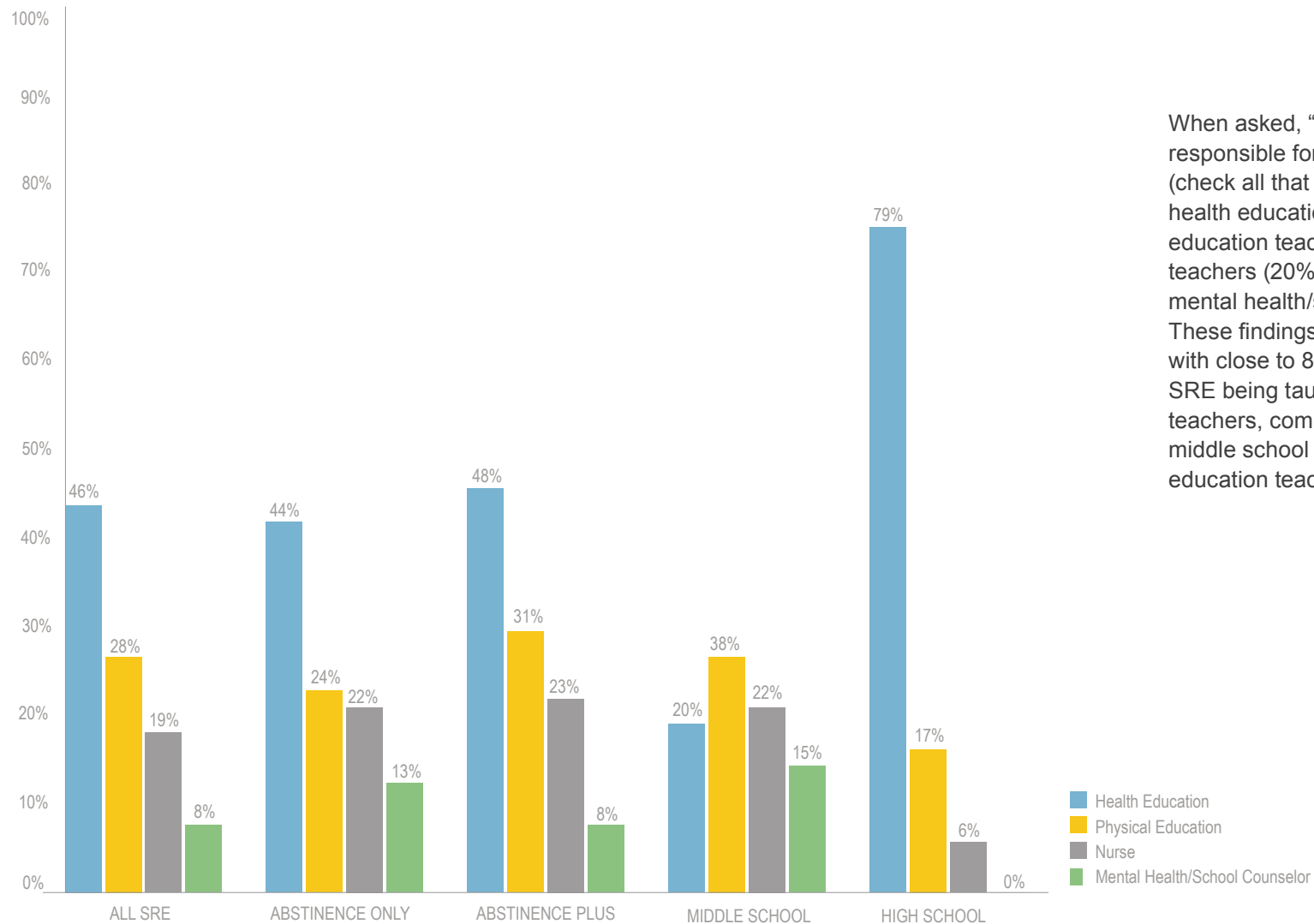
Two of these three curricula were commonly used by both abstinence-only and abstinence-plus programs, drawing into question the efficacy of any distinction between types of programs if the same curriculum is being used in both.

Grades in Which Sex-Related Education Curriculum is Taught Reported by SRE Instructors



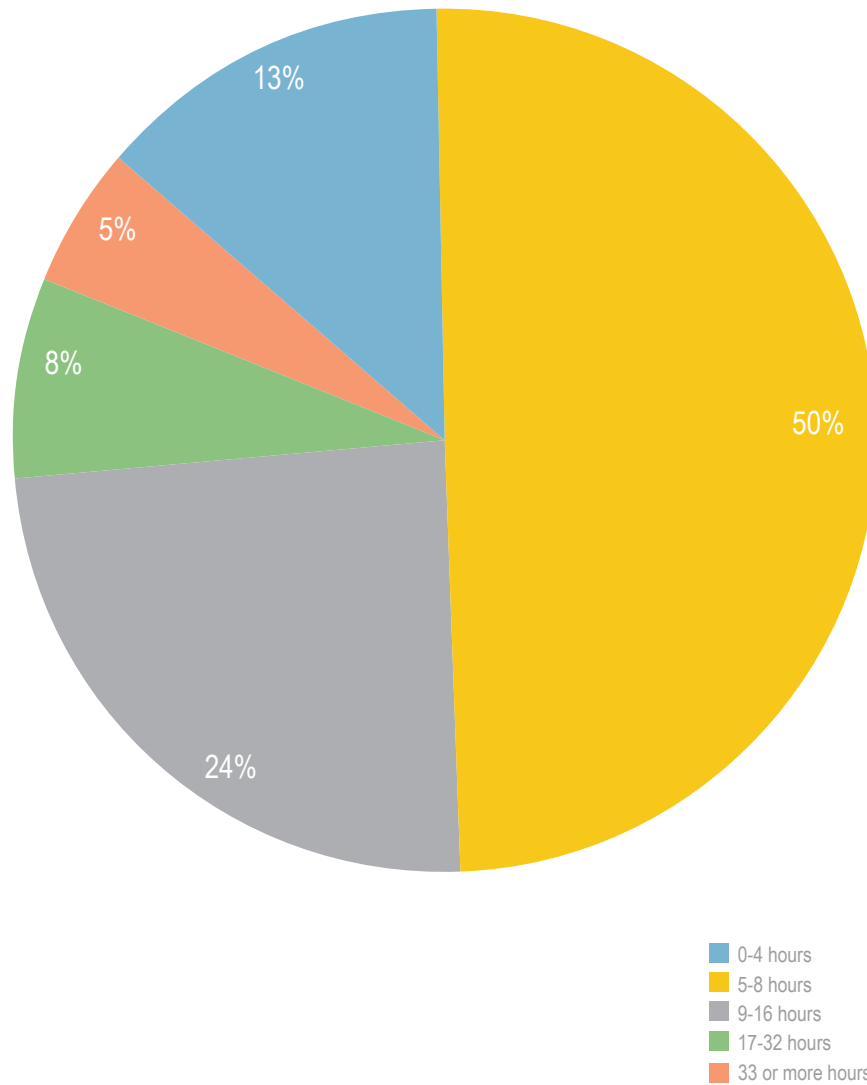
Teachers report that SRE instruction is offered most often in the seventh grade (57%), followed by eighth (46%), and then ninth (44%). There were slight variations between some grades of the type of SRE curriculum being taught, but seventh grade was the most common for both abstinence only (56%) and abstinence plus (67%).

Professional Category of Instructor Responsible for Teaching Sex-Related Education Reported by SRE Instructors



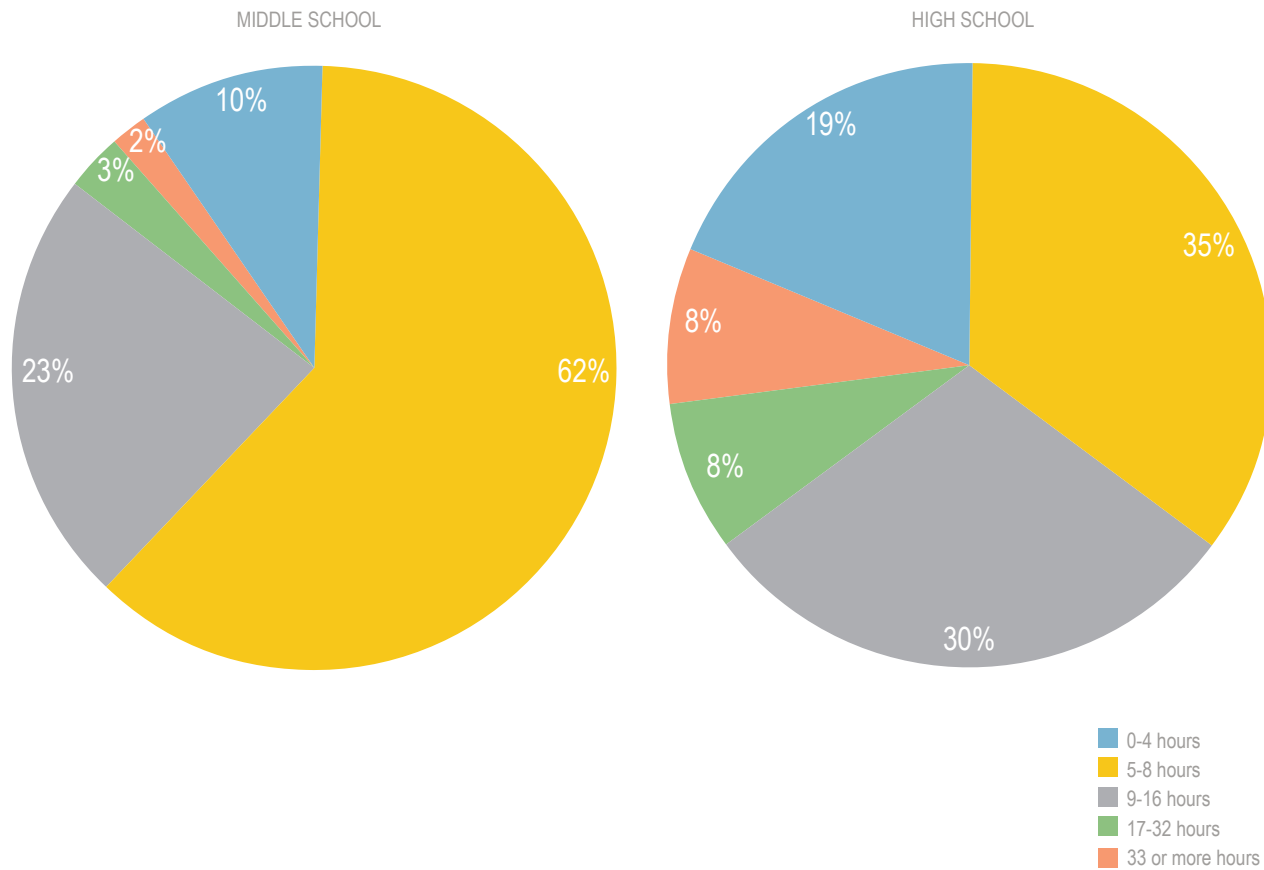
When asked, “Who at your school are responsible for teaching the SRE curriculum (check all that apply),” responses included health education teachers (46%), physical education teachers (28%), other classroom teachers (20%), school nurses (19%), and mental health/school counselors (8%). These findings varied by grade level, with close to 80 percent of high school SRE being taught by health education teachers, compared with only 20 percent of middle school SRE being taught by health education teachers.

Sex-Related Education Hours of Instruction in a School Year Reported by SRE Instructors



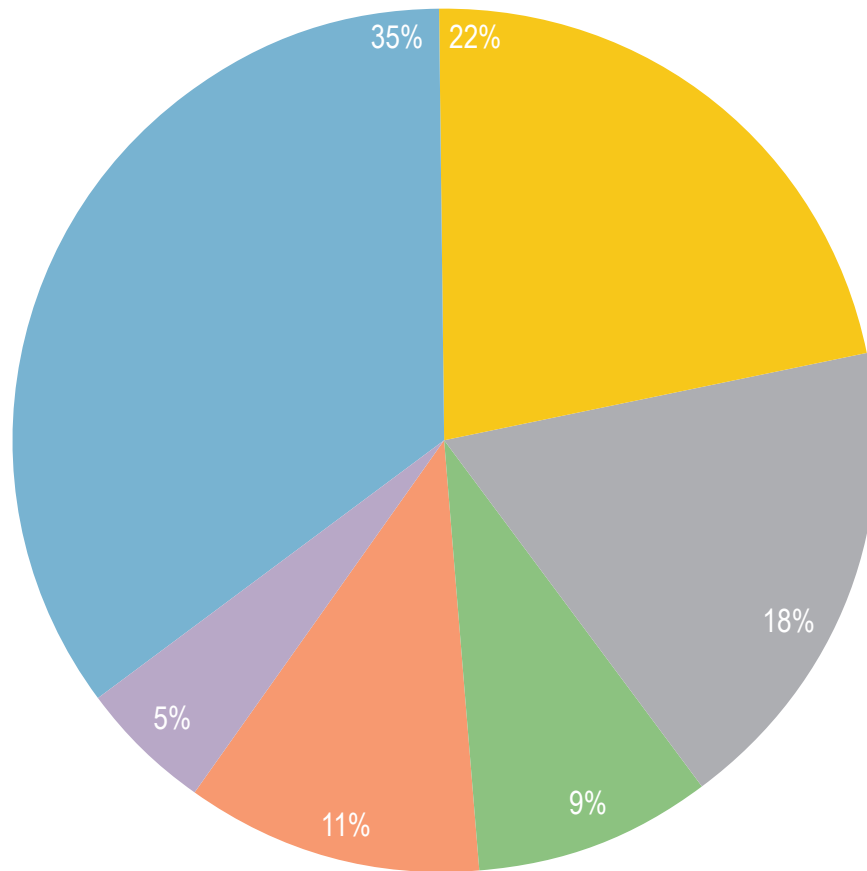
SRE instructors were asked: “For a typical student receiving SRE in a school year, how many hours of SRE specific instruction would that student receive?” Sixty-three percent of the teachers indicate that students receive eight or fewer hours of instruction per year. Hours of SRE instruction varied from fewer than four hours to thirty-three or more hours.

Sex-Related Education Hours of Instruction, by Grade Level Reported by SRE Instructors



Responses regarding the number of hours SRE is taught showed considerable variability between middle school and high school. Seventy-two percent of middle school instructors reported their students were getting 8 or fewer hours of SRE instruction per year, compared with 54 percent of high school instructors reporting the same.

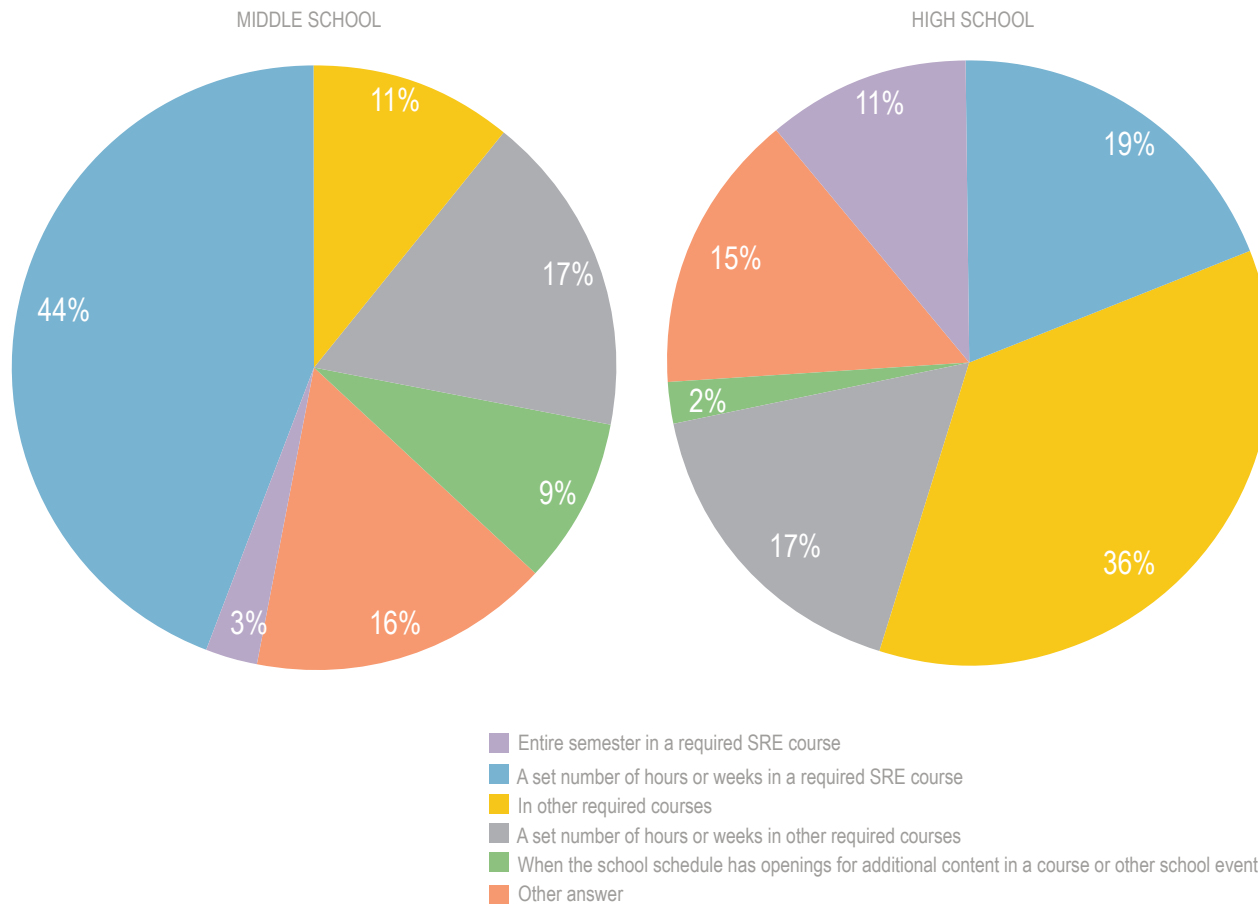
Sex-Related Education Scheduling of Instruction Reported by SRE Instructors



- Entire semester in a required SRE course
- A set number of hours or weeks in a required SRE course
- In other required courses
- A set number of hours or weeks in other required courses
- When the school schedule has openings for additional content in a course or other school event
- Other answer

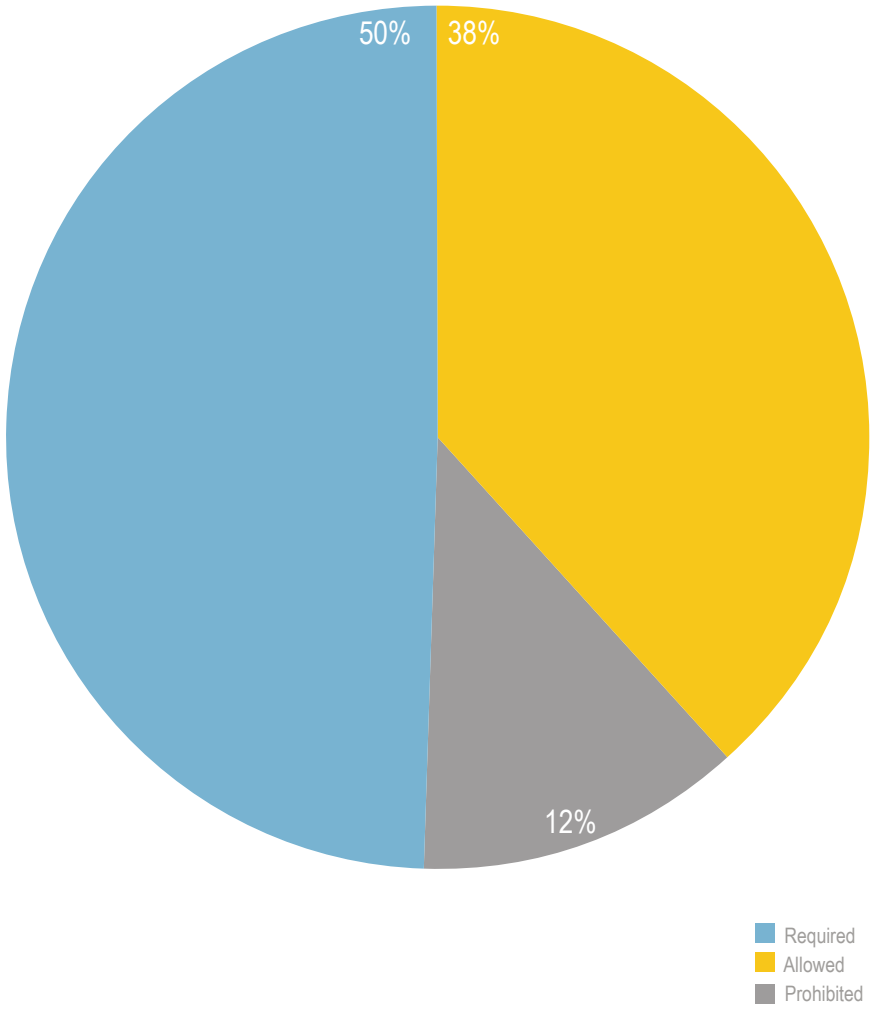
When asked to identify how the SRE curriculum was scheduled to be taught in the school during the past year, the most common answer given was to teach SRE for a set number of hours or weeks in a required course, most commonly Health if not a specific SRE course.

Sex-Related Education Scheduling of Instruction, by Grade Level Reported by SRE Instructors



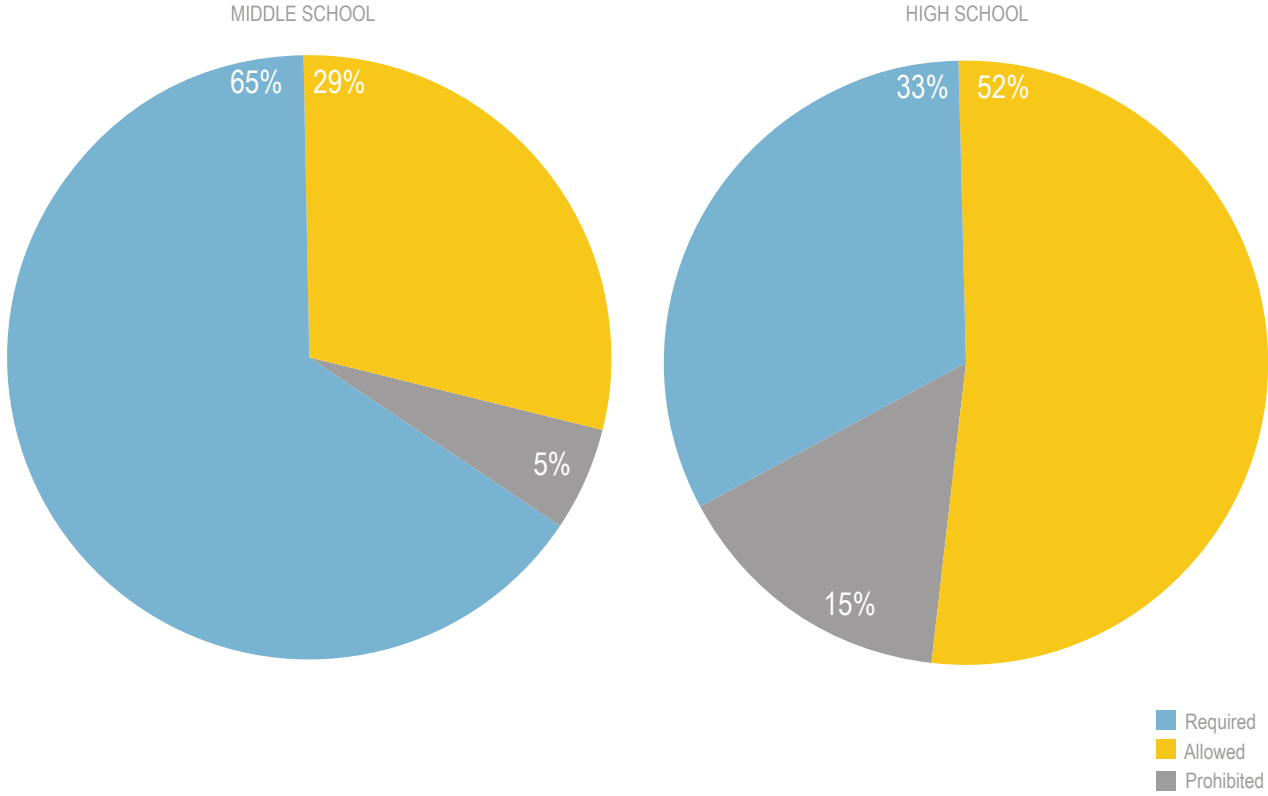
Middle school SRE instructors most commonly reported SRE instruction being scheduled for a set number of hours or weeks in a required SRE course (44%), while high school SRE instructors indicated that SRE was being taught in other required courses most often (36%).

Sex-Related Education Instructor Perception on Gender Separation Reported by SRE Instructors



Overall, half of the SRE instructors surveyed indicated they thought gender separation should be required, while 38 percent thought it should be allowed and 12 percent thought it should be prohibited during SRE instruction.

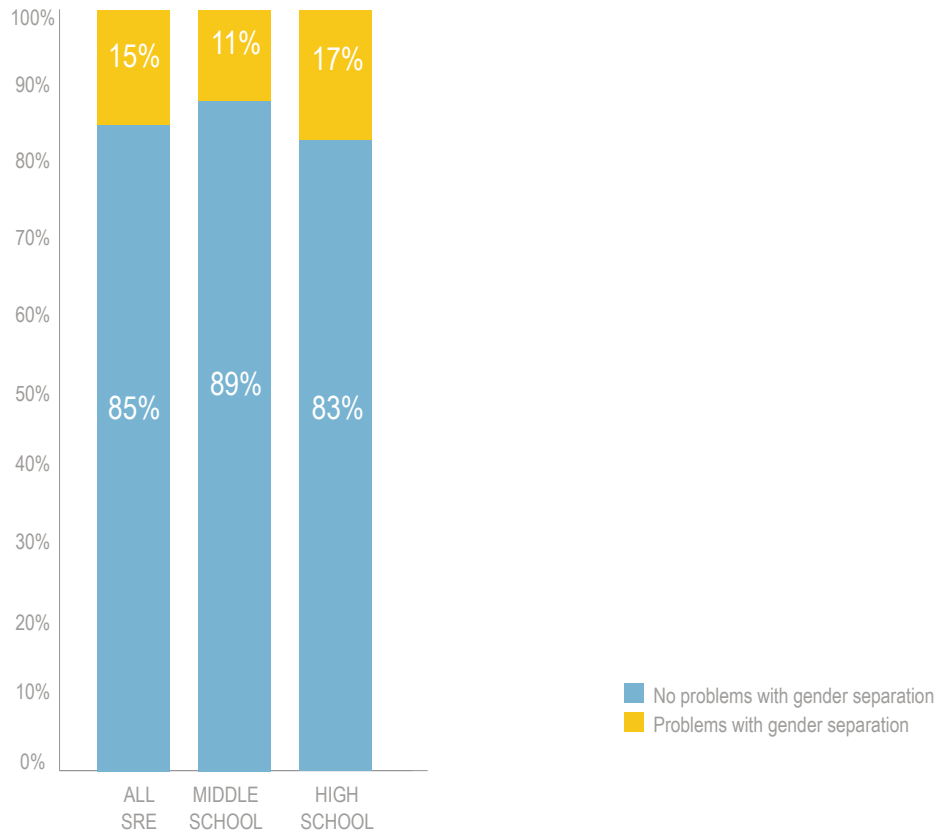
Sex-Related Education Instructor Perception on Gender Separation by Grade Level Reported by SRE Instructors



Almost twice as many middle school instructors (65%) than high school instructors (33%) felt that gender separation should be required during SRE instruction. Three times as many high school instructors (15%) thought gender separation should be prohibited during SRE instruction than did middle school instructors (5%).

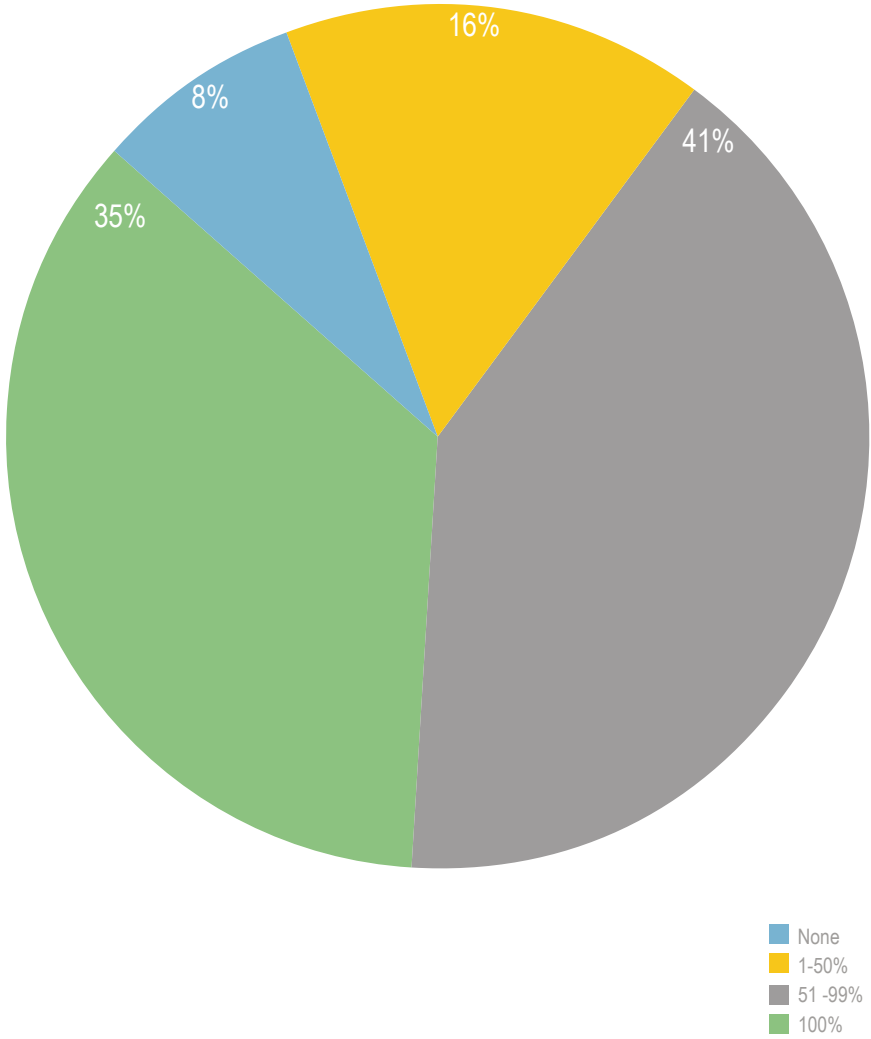
*Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding

Percentage of Instructors Reporting Problems with Gender Separation During Sex-Related Education Reported by SRE Instructors



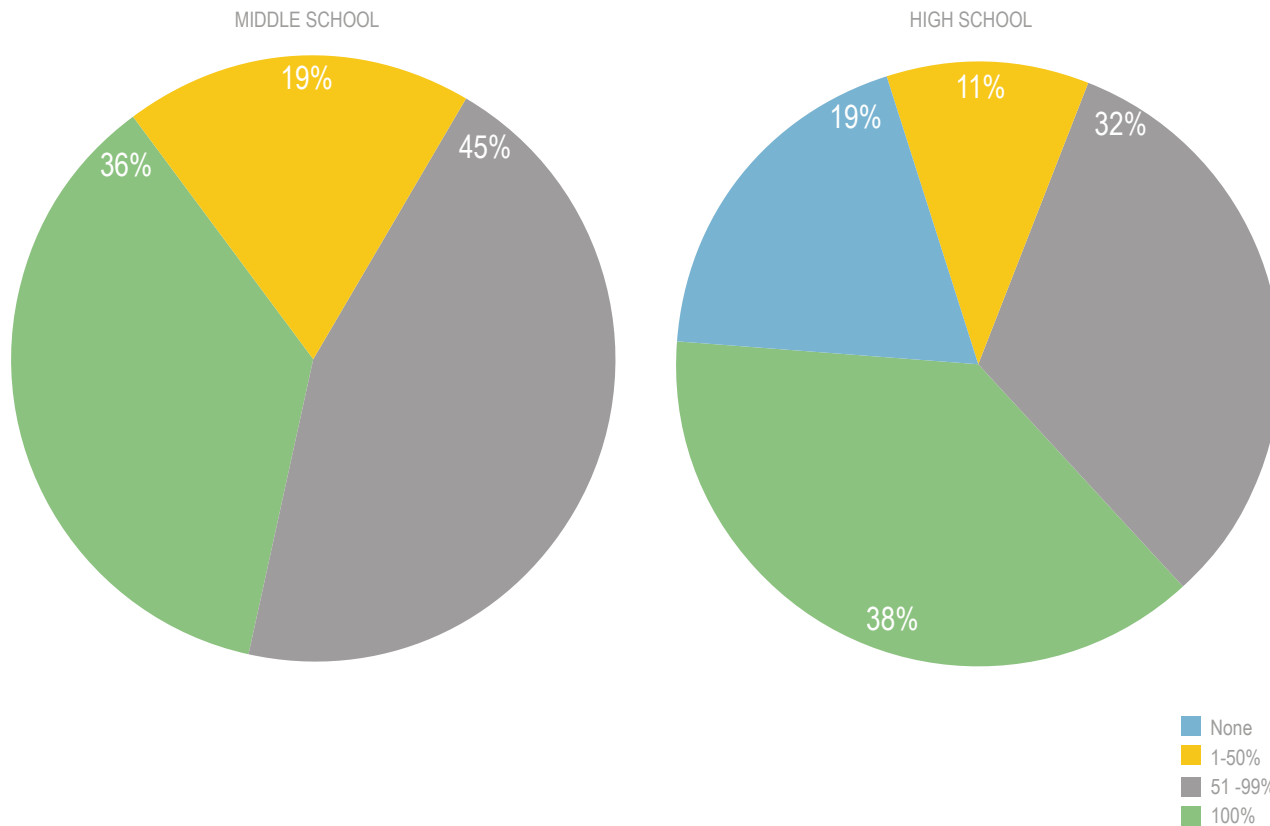
When asked, “Have you seen any problems with the gender separation,” a small percentage (15%) of SRE instructors answered “yes.” A larger percentage of high school instructors (17%) than middle school instructors (11%) indicated problems with gender separation.

Percentage of Students Receiving Parental Approval for Sex-Related Education Reported by SRE Instructors



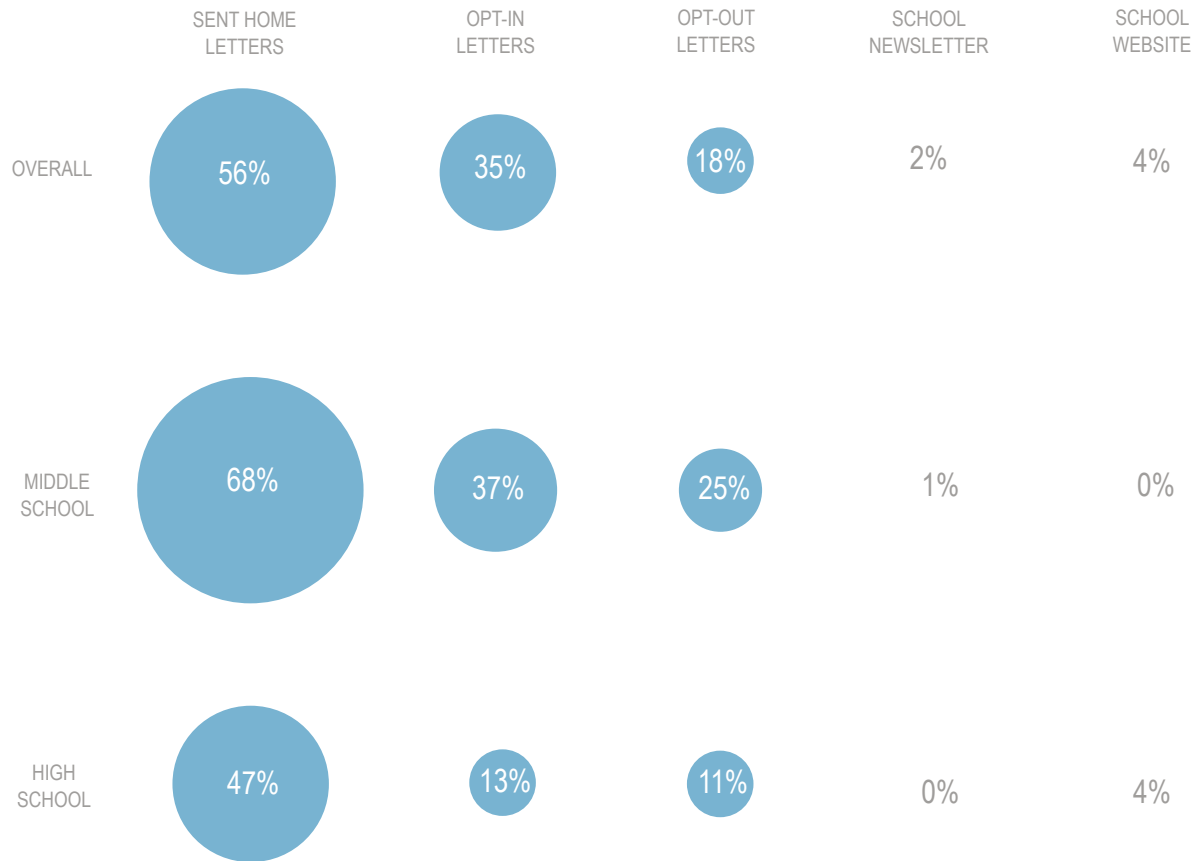
When asked, “What percent of students receive parental approval (opt in) for participation in the form of a written notice,” most (76%) instructors indicated that more than half of their students (41%) or all (35%) were opted in.

Percentage of Students Receiving Parental Permission for Sex-Related Education by Grade Level Reported by SRE Instructors



When asked, “What percent of students received parental approval (opt in) for participation in the form of a written notice,” answers differed between middle school and high school instructors. Middle school instructors reported all students receiving some level of participation/opt in from parents, whereas for high schools, nearly one in five instructors reported that none of the students received written parental permission. The levels of instructors reporting 100 percent of their students opting in were comparable between middle school (36%) and high school (38%).

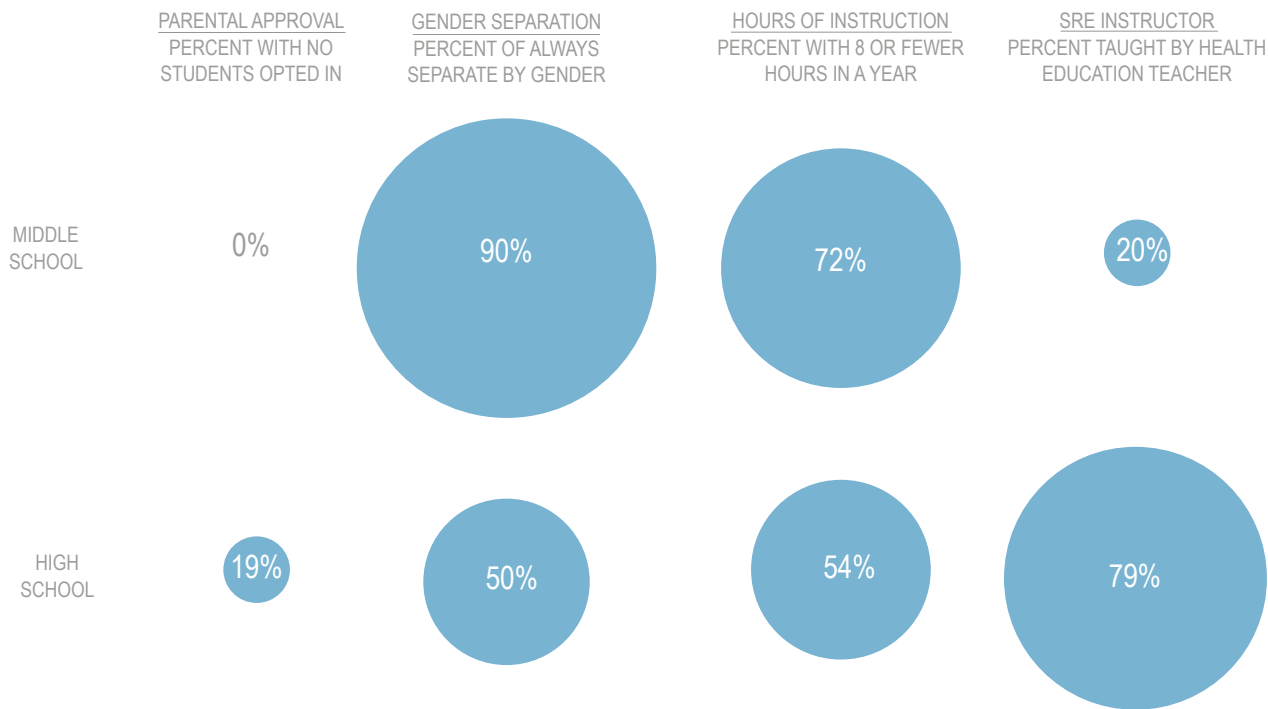
Method of Registration for Sex-Related Education Reported by SRE Instructors



The law (MS Code 37-13-173, enacted in 2011) states that parents must receive at least one week notice of their right to opt students into SRE instruction.

When asked, “How was ‘registration’ for SRE handled at your school (check all that apply),” there was some variation in the approaches taken by schools. According to SRE instructors, 56 percent sent home letters with students, 35 percent had parents sign opt-in letters at the beginning of the year, 18 percent had parents sign opt-out letters at the beginning of the year, 2 percent provided the information in the school newsletter and 4 percent provided information about classes on the school website.

Comparison of Middle and High School on Select Components of Sex-Related Education Reported by SRE Instructors



Responses regarding how SRE is taught showed considerable variability between middle school and high school.

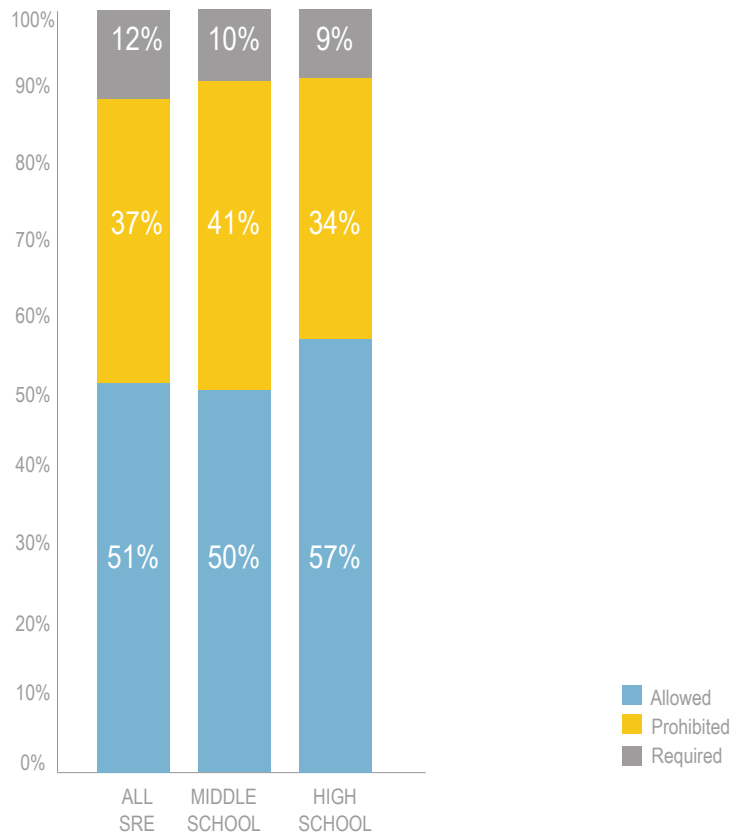
Middle school instructors all reported receiving some level of opt-in from parents, compared with almost one in five (19%) of high school instructors who reported zero percent opting in.

Ninety percent of middle schools are always separating students by gender, while only fifty percent of high schools are always separating students by gender.

Seventy-two percent of middle school instructors reported their students were getting fewer than 8 hours of SRE instruction, compared with 54 percent of high school instructors reporting the same.

Nearly 80 percent (79%) of SRE instructors reported that high school SRE is being taught by a health education teacher, compared with 20 percent in middle school.

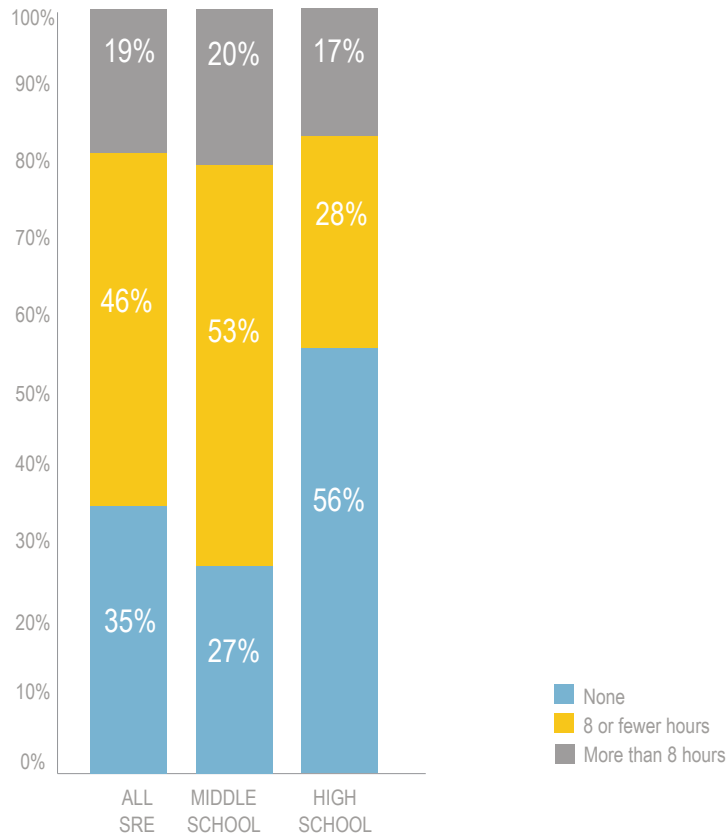
Opinion Regarding Rules for Condom or Contraception Demonstration Reported by SRE Instructors



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When asked if condom or other contraception demonstration should be prohibited, required, or allowed at the discretion of the school district, more middle school instructors (41%) indicated a desire to prohibit the activities compared with high school instructors (34%). More high school instructors (57%) thought it ought to be allowed at the discretion of the school district, compared with middle school instructors (50%).

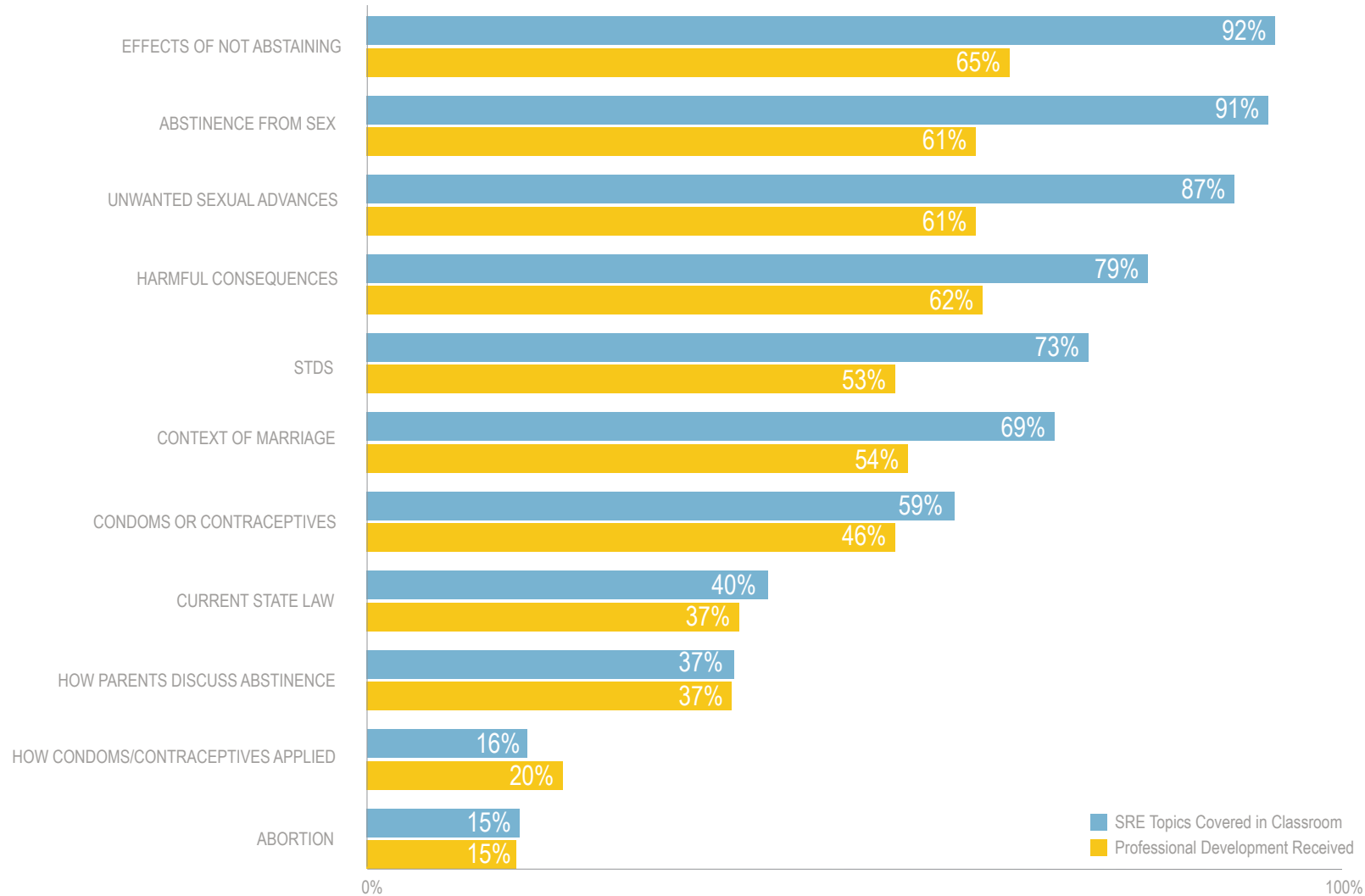
Hours of Sex-Related Education Professional Development Received Reported by SRE Instructors



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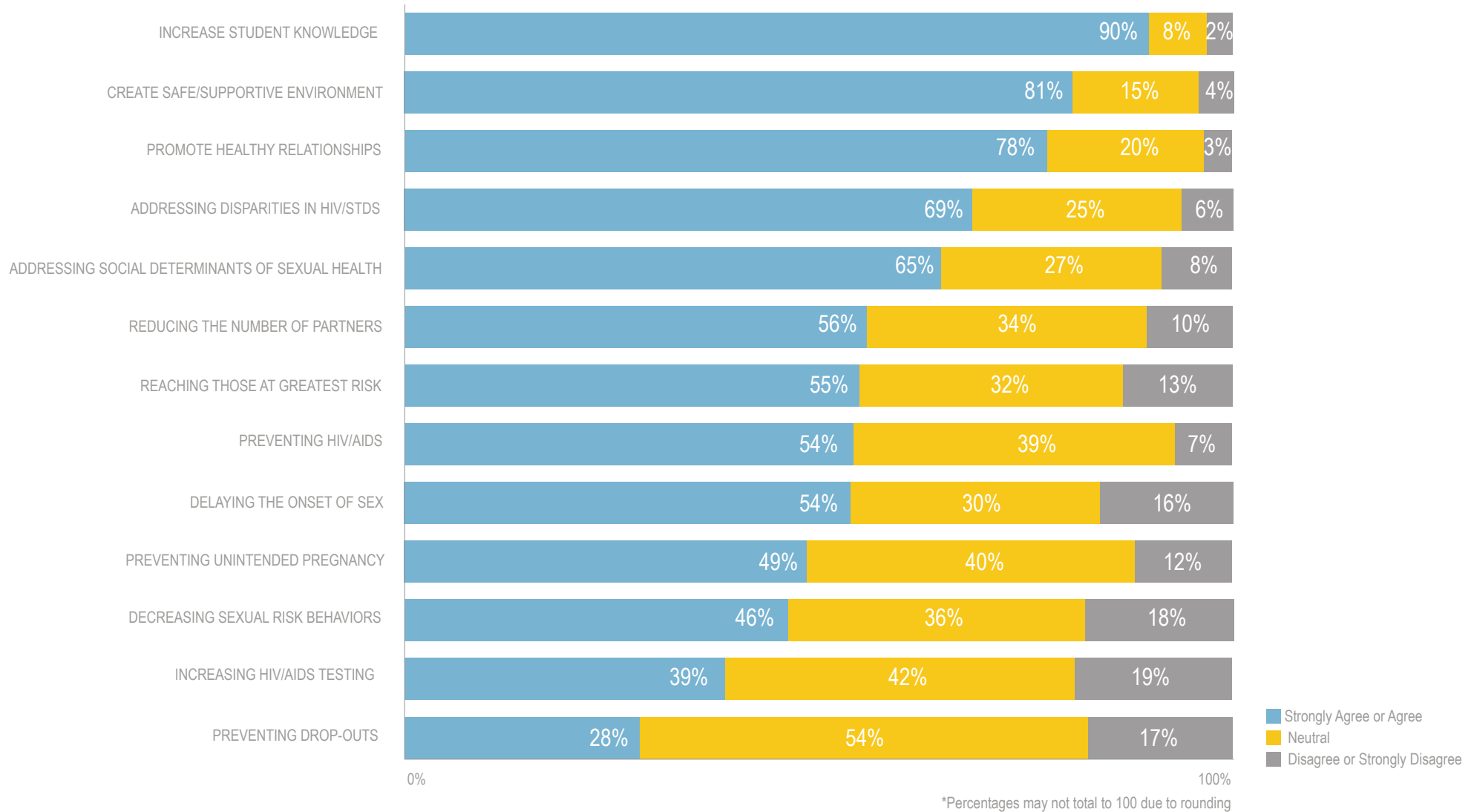
When asked, “In hours per year, what’s the standard amount of annual training/ professional development for those teaching SRE,” more than one third (35%) of instructors answered “none.” Differences were notable by grade level, with more than half of high school instructors (56%) indicating no hours of SRE professional development received, compared with only a third (27%) of middle school teachers.

Sex-Related Education Topics Covered in Classroom Compared with Topics of Professional Development Reported by SRE Instructors



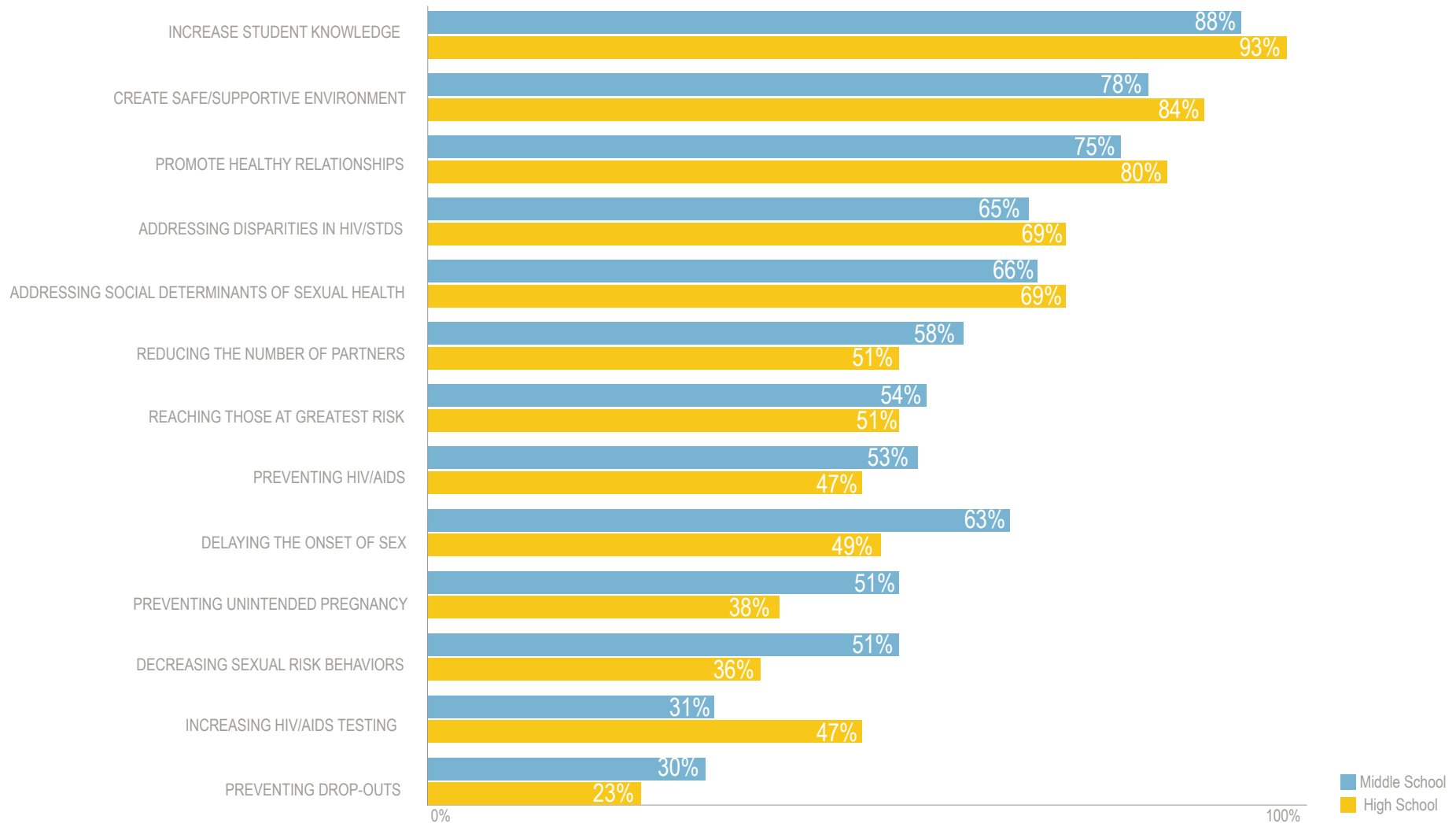
When asked what type of training these teachers received in teaching SRE, three in five teachers (60%) reported having received professional development on topics that they were then, in turn, most likely to cover when they taught the course. Comparing the topics on which SRE teachers received professional development to the topics that are taught by the SRE teachers illustrates that the teachers are more likely to teach the topics for which they received training.

Sex-Related Education Perceived Effectiveness Reported by SRE Instructors



Teachers answering the survey indicated that they felt they were making a difference in some areas, but not in others. When focus group participants were asked to suggest changes for making SRE more effective, the most common responses were to provide more professional training, to increase support from administration, to make SRE a required class, to eliminate the opt-in requirement, and to provide more online resources.

Comparison of Middle and High School Teachers Perceived Effectiveness by Topic Reported by SRE Instructors



There were differences between middle and high school responses concerning perceived effectiveness. Middle school instructors reported feeling effective in more topic areas than high school instructors, as shown above by “strongly agree” to “agree” with the statement: “To what extent would you agree that SRE in your school has been effective in (topic area listed on left axis).”

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