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TOP STORY

Poll finds parents want to be more involved with school curriculum choices

Selena Vazquez

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Jakob Pender, an Ocean City High School graduate, speaks in favor of New Jersey's education standards. Multiple speakers attended the meeting last week of the Board of Education to comment on the latest challenge to the standards.

Bill Barlow, Staff Writer

Selena Vazquez

Two-thirds of New Jersey adults surveyed in a Stockton University poll said they want to be more involved with what gets taught in school.

Six hundred adults took an online survey conducted from Feb. 24 to March 10 by the Stockton Polling Institute of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy.

Nearly a quarter of participants said curriculum was their top education concern, followed by bullying, falling behind in core subjects and other topics.

About 97% of adults considered financial literacy important to school curriculum. Social and emotional well-being followed at 91%. Media literacy, sexual education and racism were important to 85% of parents.

“New Jersey adults support teaching sex education and material about racism and its impact, which have been controversial elsewhere.

“But the poll shows many in the Garden State still have qualms over teaching about sexual identity and gender norms, especially in the earlier grades,” said John Froonjian, director of the Hughes Center.

About 66% of adults considered racism and its impact an important subject, while 57% considered sex education important.

But only 30%-35% considered teaching about gender identity, sexuality, gender issues and stereotypes important.

And one of every five adults said gender and sexuality issues should never be taught at any level of school, according to the poll.



Ocean City school board firmly rejects latest challenge to state standards

“Gender issues being taught in schools has been a hot-button topic for parents in many states and has become part of the culture wars in our politically polarized nation,” Froomjian said.

Since the summer, organizers have held dueling rallies in regard to parental rights and LGBTQ acceptance and protection in Ocean City schools, paired with multiple public comments before the Board of Education.

With material on sexuality and gender identity being incorporated into the state health and physical education standards, some critics, including a few Ocean City Board of Education members, argue the state’s standards went too far.

About 62% of parents with children in grades K-12 said the schools did a good job keeping parents informed about what is being taught, including potentially controversial topics.

“For the most part, K-12 parents are generally satisfied with New Jersey schools’ handling of potentially controversial topics,” said Hughes Center research associate Alyssa Maurice.

Parents in Ocean City have the option to opt their children out of certain lessons, which was consistent with many poll respondents who said their children’s schools give them the option to opt out of controversial lessons.

About one-third of parents with kids in kindergarten to 12th grade said their school did not offer that option, while 27% were unsure whether they had that option.

Those who did not have any children in grades K-12 think schools should keep parents informed about what is being taught at a rate of 71%, while 21% did not think schools should do so.

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