

THE PERIOD PROJECT

Utah HB 162 Impact Report

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The Period Project

Through efforts led by The Policy Project, House Bill 162, "Period Products in Schools," was passed unanimously by the Utah Legislature in March 2022. The law requires all public and charter schools in the state to provide free period products in girls' and unisex restrooms, grades kindergarten through 12th grade. This law required partnerships with legislative leadership, philanthropists, the community, and student advocates. The Larry H. & Gail Miller Family Foundation and the Andrus Family Foundation donated private funds to purchase and install period product dispensers in Utah school bathrooms. The Utah Legislature funded the installation and products to fill the dispensers. The collaborative approach allowed uniform implementation across the state and access to high-quality period products.



The intent of HB 162 is to decrease the effects of period poverty in Utah by 1) raising educational outcomes across the state for female students by increasing productivity and school attendance and 2) de-stigmatizing and de-sexualizing menstruation by normalizing access to period products.

Period Poverty

"Period poverty" is generally defined as limited access to period products. Period poverty also includes poor access to clean water, privacy, menstruation education, and hygienic waste options. Menstruation happens for almost half of the world population, yet access to period products is not normalized like toilet paper in public spaces. Considering populations at or below poverty levels, an individual cannot purchase period products with federal aid programs like SNAP and WIC. Unlike other tax-exempt hygiene necessities, these products remain eligible for VAT or sales tax. According to the article "Unmet Menstrual Hygiene Needs Among Low-Income Women," 46% of women in poverty choose between purchasing a meal over period products each month.¹

School-age girls are at high risk for mis- or under-managed menstruation, as a high percentage begin their periods before they can legally work. They have less control over financial decisions in their home or may lack the ability to purchase period products. In the United States, 8 in 10 girls have missed school due to a lack of access to period products or know someone who has. In addition, 1 in 4 girls can't afford period products.² Adolescent girls experiencing period poverty are at risk of missing school, school activities, and work due to less access. Their health may also be negatively affected both physically and emotionally.

Physically, they are affected by overuse (leaving in products too long) and lack of hygiene options. Emotionally, they may experience embarrassment, avoidance, and shame.

Notes:

1: Period.org, Thinx. (2019). State of the period 2021.

2: Sebert Kuhlmann, A., Peters Bergquist, E., Danjoint, D., & Wall, L. L. (2019). Unmet Menstrual Hygiene Needs Among Low-Income Women. *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 133(2), 238-244.

Implementation

The law went into effect July 1st, 2022, and the installation of the donated dispensers started during the first months of the 2022-2023 school year. Jordan and Box Elder school districts were the only Utah districts to choose alternative dispensers. At the beginning of installation, supply chain issues affected availability in some schools. After implementation, 1,058 schools in Utah have period products available, and over 8,000 Utah school bathrooms have dispensers and free period products.



An estimated 337,000 menstruating students were impacted in Utah

during the 2022-2023 school year, and an estimated 1.3 students will be helped by 2065.

At the end of 2023, reports indicated that some schools had chosen to move the dispensers out of the bathrooms. In these schools, the period products are still available in faculty bathrooms or designated locations. The Policy Project does not have complete details on which schools have moved dispensers, and said schools are not in compliance with Utah law. The Utah State Board of Education is responsible for compliance and each local education agency supplies product refills.

Research

Eighteen months after implementation, this impact report examines two questions: 1) Has access to free period products increased girls' school attendance and activity participation? 2) Has access to free period products affected the dialogue and stigma around periods for adolescent girls and their peers?

The target research population was female students attending public or charter schools in Utah and who were assumed to have started menstruation. The corresponding representative population researched was adolescent girls (age 15-18) attending Utah High Schools and/or participating in a female club or sports.

Data was collected using two strategies:

1. An informal survey was distributed to high school female sports teams asking if they use the product, if they can attend more school and activities because of the access, and if they have been discussing menstruation more since the products became available. There was also an option for comment submission at the end of the survey. The nine-question electronic survey was distributed to high school teams, on social media, and to previously collected interest emails from The Policy Project. The survey had no personally identifying questions and was completely optional.
2. Cold calls to high school front offices to collect responses and stories of how girls access period products differently than before HB 162 passed.

Limitations to Research and Data

This feedback data helps The Policy Project understand the impact of HB 162 and its effect on period poverty in Utah (i.e., reports of the misuse of period products and dispensers in some school bathrooms). Due to a limited timeline since the law passed, there is no compliance information on how many schools have removed dispensers from general bathrooms. Removing the dispensers can change the consistency of access for some students in the state.



One of The Period Project's objectives is to increase class and school activity attendance to help improve statewide educational outcomes for female students. After reviewing attendance records, several variables affected truancy and attendance, but this research could not isolate if access to products improved attendance in the last 18 months. For example, the timing of the implementation overlapped with COVID-19 effects and other variables.

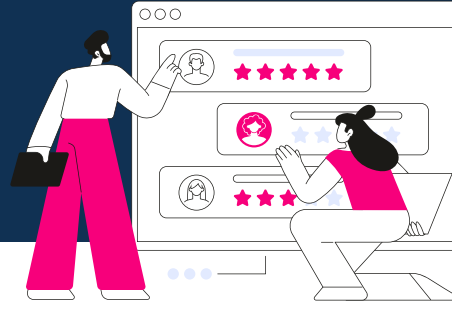
Finally, collecting data from minors required consideration. School-age females will be directly impacted by HB 162, and their data is the most significant to assess compliance and impact. The survey distributed to them was anonymous, optional, informal.

There are two limitations to the data collection and data analysis. First, girls on high school teams received the survey. There may be an assumption that girls participating in extracurricular activities or high school teams are at a higher socioeconomic level than the general research population and may have different usage levels than students at a lower socioeconomic level. The survey did not contain demographic or income questions, but the high level of survey responses should account for this limitation.

A second limitation of the data analysis is using economically disadvantaged schools as an independent variable versus economically disadvantaged individuals. The identification of economically disadvantaged groups is at the overall school level, not the individual. The survey did not collect individual income information.



RESEARCH FINDINGS

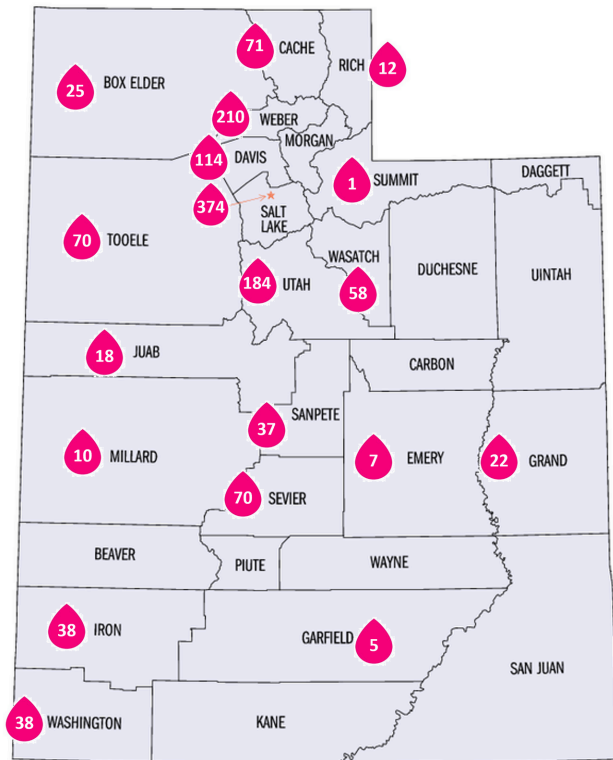


Survey Response Demographics

Demographic response is significant to measure impact because of the intent to support school attendance across the state—both rural and urban areas and across income demographics.

Response Location

1,382 survey responses were collected from 20 of the 29 counties in Utah and were representative of schools across the state.



Notes about the economic groupings:

Economically disadvantaged groups as defined by the Utah State Board of Education. This is indicative of the school as a whole, not the individual survey respondent. Labels were reworded from the original definitions for ease in labeling only, but are not an actual measurement of the income of the individual.

Response Locale Type Representation

The survey responses represent locale types across Utah; however, responses do slightly underweight suburban schools and slightly overweight city, town, and rural schools.

Type of local	% of Local	Utah as whole	Variance
2: Suburb	54%	70%	-16%
1: City	20%	15%	5%
3: Town	16%	10%	6%
4: Rural	10%	6%	4%

Response School Representation

Students from **120 schools responded** to the survey with no single school representing more than 10% of the survey.

School	% of response
Highland High	9.04%
Fremont High	7.74%
Wasatch High	4.20%
Ben Lomond High	2.82%
All other	76.19%

Response Economics

The survey responses closely mirror Utah as a whole in terms of economically disadvantaged schools, with slight overweighting in medium economically disadvantaged schools and a slight underweighting of highly economically disadvantaged schools.

	Surveys/ group	Utah as whole	Variance
1: High Income	57.38%	54.47%	2.91%
2: Med Income	19.61%	13.48%	6.13%
3: Low Income	23.01%	32.05%	-9.04%
Grand Total	100.00%	100.00%	0.00%

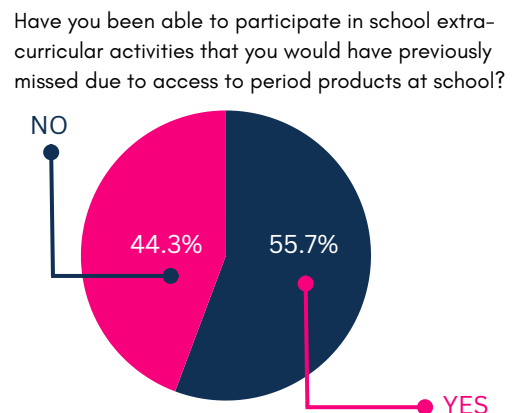
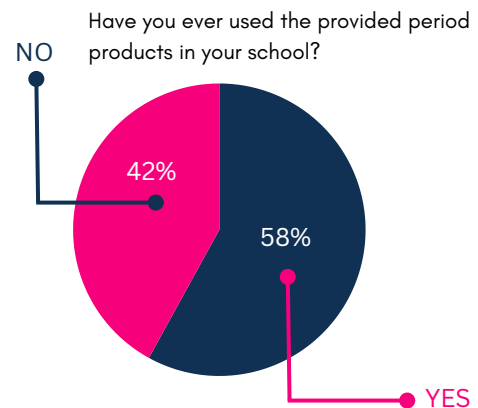
**Because of access from
HB 162...**

**over half
of Utah girls
were able to
attend school
they would
have
previously
missed.**

Survey Results Analysis

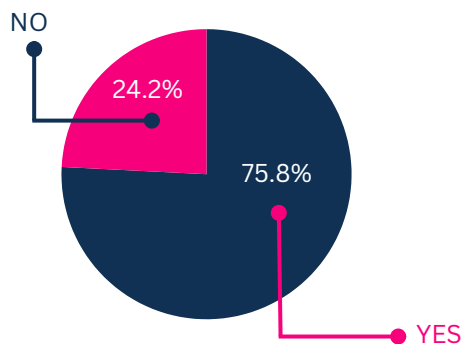
Overall, the research points to a strong correlation between access to period products positively affecting school attendance and reducing negative menstruation stigma.

The quantitative data results show that 58% of Utah female students use the products across economic and location demographics. In addition, over 54% of respondents reported missing school or school activities due to lack of access to period products before the implementation of HB 162, and 56% reported being able to attend school and activities they would have previously missed due to new access from the law. Because of limitations and numerous unaccountable variables, this research does not prove causation for increased academic achievement.

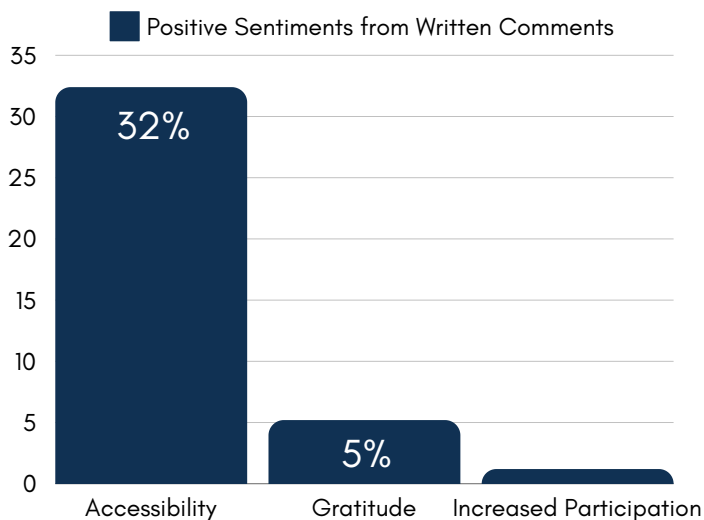


From the three survey questions relating to the stigma around menstruation, 76% of the respondents feel like their comfort level around menstruation discussions has increased over the last 18 months. 40% reporting this comfort level has increased due to better access to period products at school (see page 8 for a complete breakdown of survey results).

Has your comfort level talking about menstruation increased over the last 18 months?



Qualitative results from voluntary respondents' feedback and cold calls to school front offices were largely positive. Three common positive themes from the free response question were: (a) 32% of respondents noted how the accessibility of the period products was beneficial. The convenience and easy accessibility of the products in the bathrooms was highly appreciated, especially compared to schools that don't offer them or require students to go to the office.



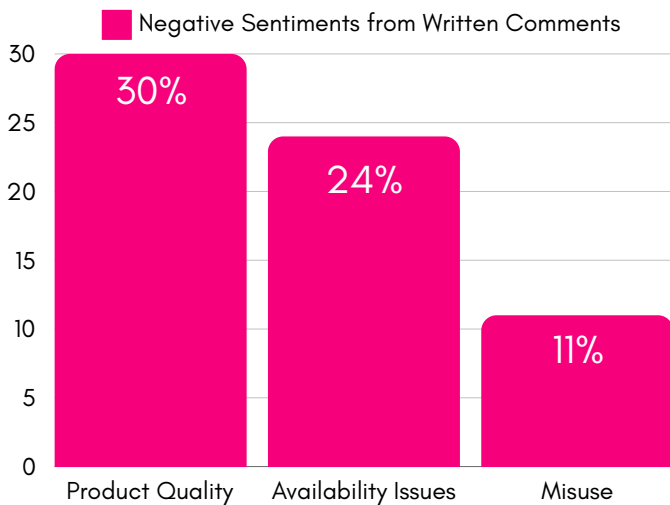
Many students expressed relief knowing products are available. A recurring theme was the benefit of having period products for unexpected needs or emergencies, such as forgetting to bring personal products or sudden onset of periods. School staff also mentioned this theme. Students leave school less when they have an unexpected need; (b) 5% of respondents explicitly expressed gratitude, noting their appreciation towards their school for supplying period products; (c) 1% of respondents shared the ability to attend/participate in school and activities more fully. Comments highlighted the importance of ensuring students can fully participate in their educational and extracurricular activities.

Period products in the bathrooms have been so helpful. I haven't had to miss any important exams or classes because of my period.
- Student respondent



Having access to free period products has allowed so many girls to feel confident attending school during the time of their period and feel confident they will be able to have the things they need. - Student respondent

Three common negative themes from the survey responses were: (a) 30% of respondents reported poor quality and discomfort with the period products. A significant number of comments mentioned the perceived poor quality of the products, especially the discomfort caused by cardboard applicators and inadequate sizes for different flow levels. This sentiment was also common when talking to school staff. The staff often mentioned that the students preferred the pads to the tampons since they were uncomfortable; (b) 24% of the respondents reported an availability issue. These students noted that dispensers are often empty or not refilled regularly, causing inconvenience and unavailability when needed; (c) 11% of the respondents reported issues with misuse and vandalism. Those comments mentioned period products being misused or wasted, with instances of them being thrown or used for vandalism, leading to shortages and removal from bathrooms.



25 of the 42 Utah school districts received cold calls to staff to gather feedback. The overall responses were that students were coming to the office less for period products and leaving the school less for menstruation reasons. There were eight voluntary reports of misuse of the products or dispensers.



Conclusion

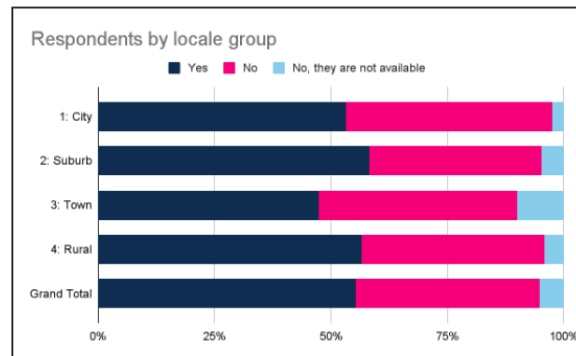
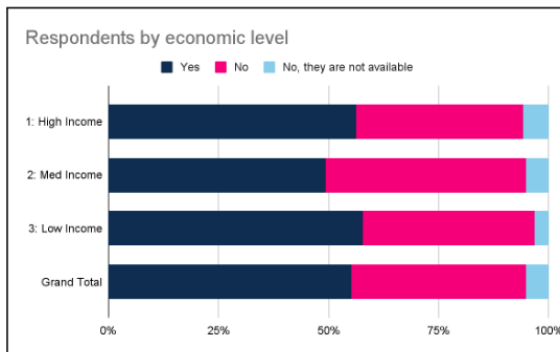
While it may be too early to determine the long-term academic achievement or stigma effects of HB 162, the collected data regarding access to period products is becoming more normalized in Utah public schools. The data also supports that students stay in school and participate in school activities because of access to these products. Students feel confident that products will be available and used as needed in school.

Additional data will need to be collected in two to three years to understand the academic impact and changes in menstruation stigma. Damaris Pereda, national program director at PERIOD, commented on product access, "Access to product is the catalyst for any change. Change in culture takes two to three years to happen."

Now that the implementation has been completed and girls expect products to be available, access to period products may become the new normal for girls and women in Utah.

Survey Results: Access and usage findings (Q1-5)

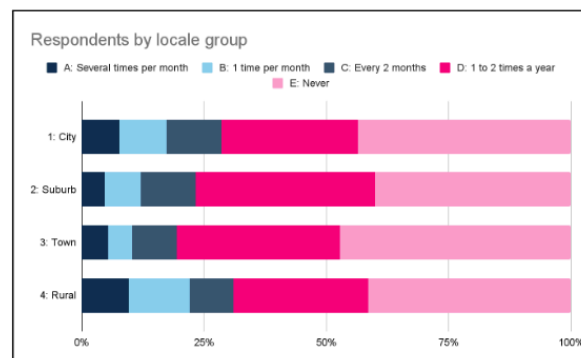
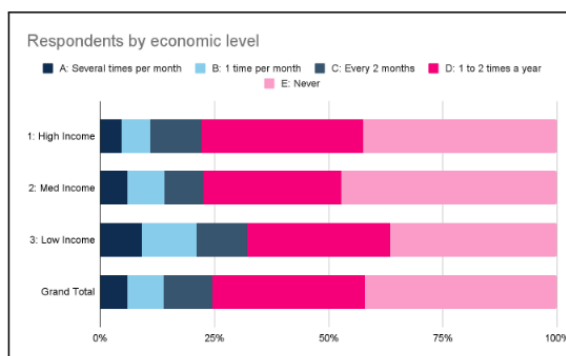
Question 1: Have you used period products provided in your school's bathrooms?



Insights:

- The data suggests that 55% of students surveyed have used a period product provided in school bathrooms.
- Data also suggests that the availability of products is slightly better in highly economically disadvantaged schools.
- Notable that Town has the lowest usage and also the highest issues with availability compliance in schools.

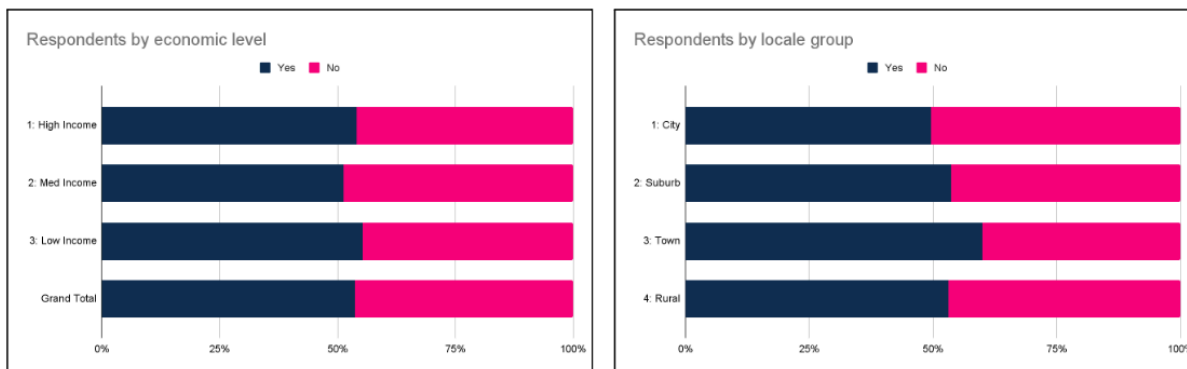
Question 2: How often have you used the provided period products in your school?



Insights:

- The data suggests most students do not use products on a frequent basis, with the most common frequency being one to two times per year.
- More economically disadvantaged and more rural schools use products more frequently than schools in other zip codes.
- Use frequency is highest in city and rural.

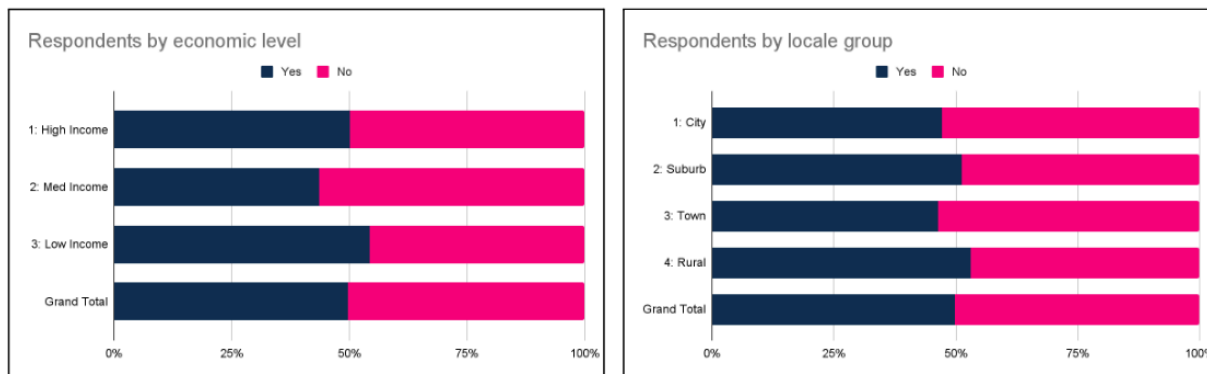
Question 3: Have you ever missed school because of not having a period product when you needed it?



Insights:

- Students have missed school because of not having a period product.
- There is minimal variance based on economic level.
- There is a somewhat increased level of missing school in the towns locale group.

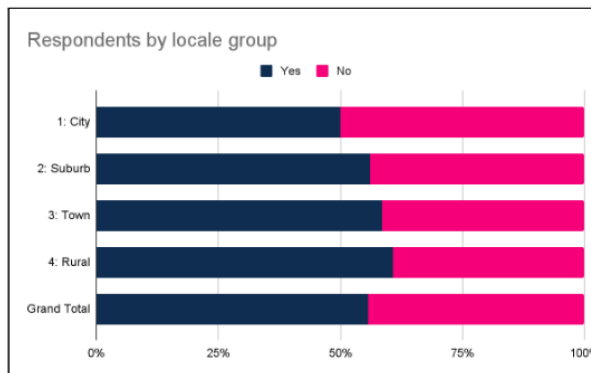
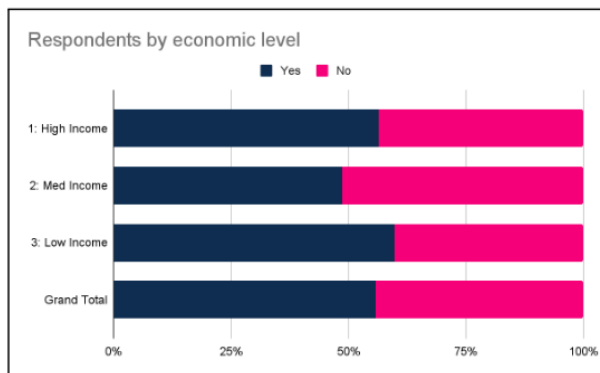
Question 4: Have you been able to attend school that you would have previously missed due to access to period products at school?



Insights:

- Students have been able to attend approximately 50% more school/class because of increased access to period products in public schools.
- This type of "emergency use" is also reflected in the comments where girls say they use products more for emergency situations than for everyday use.
- Some questions remain if this has to do with what is viewed as "low quality" or "uncomfortable" period products (e.g., cardboard applicators).

Question 5: Have you been able to participate in school extra-curricular activities that you would have previously missed due to access to period products at school?

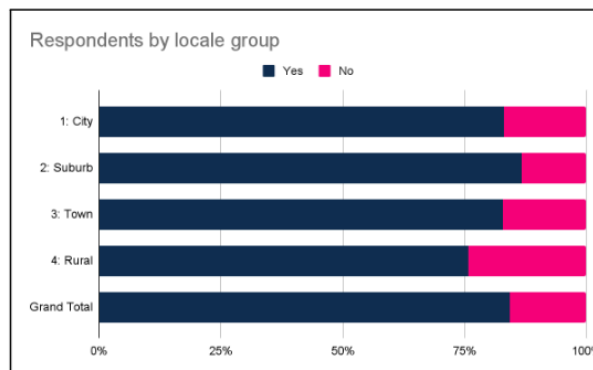
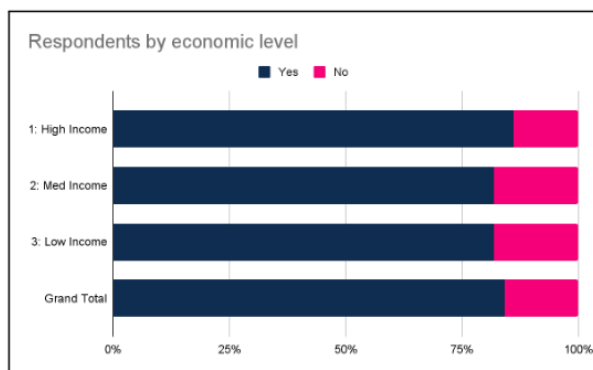


Insights:

- Students have been able to attend approximately 56% more extracurricular activities because of access to period products in public schools.
- There is slightly higher use (60%) in high economically disadvantaged schools.
- The smaller the locale, the higher the usage of products for extra-curricular activities.

Survey Results: Menstruation Stigma (Q6-8)

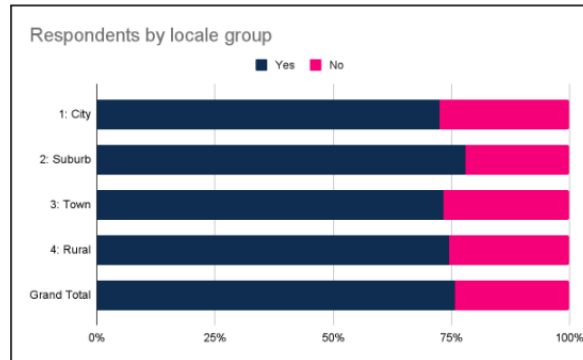
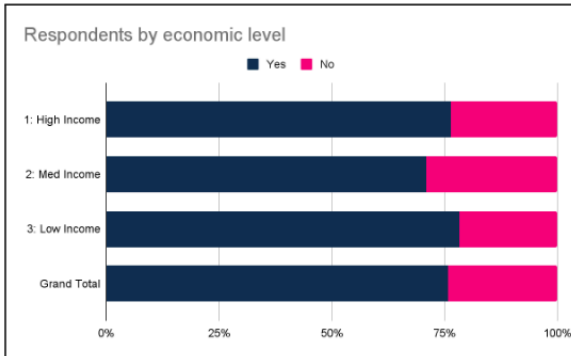
Question 6: Do you feel comfortable talking about menstruation?



Insights:

- The data suggests similar comfort levels across all economic levels.
- Rural schools show a notable decreased comfort level in talking about menstruation.

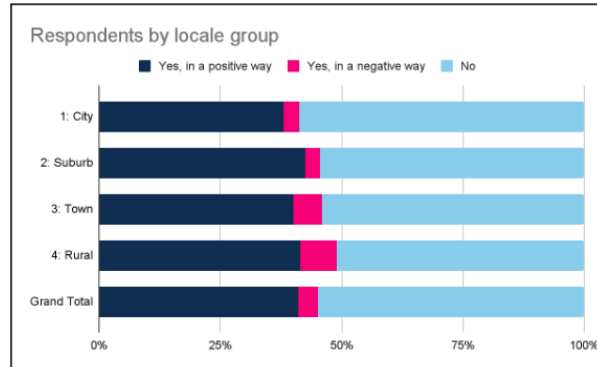
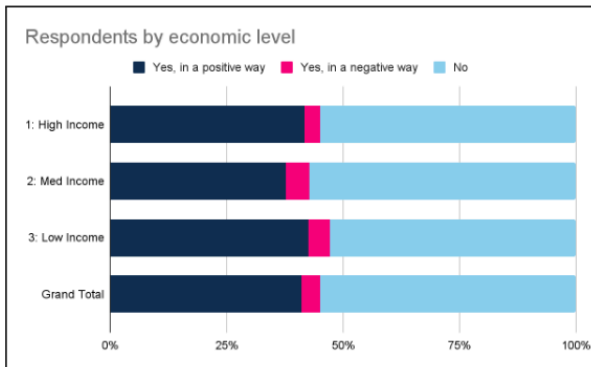
Question 7: Has this comfort level increased over the last 18 months?



Insights:

- The data suggests high results across all school groups and that 76% of students agree they became more comfortable talking about menstruation over the last 18 months.
- Similar across all groups.

Question 8: Has access to period products at school promoted conversations about menstruation?



Insights:

- The data shows similar results across all groups, with 41% citing access to period products in schools promoting positive conversations about menstruation.
- Notable smaller towns and rural locales have increased negative conversations. Perhaps increased education is needed in these areas.

STUDENT COMMENT EXAMPLES



426 comments were submitted by respondents. This is a short sampling of positive and negative responses based on the most common themes.

Convenience and Accessibility

- "I love that we have period products in the women's restrooms because they are easily accessible and handy if needed!!"
- "Thank you so much for having the products available, it's a lifesaver."
- "I just wanted to say on behalf of our school we are so grateful and thankful that we get access and the privilege to these tampons and pads."
- "I'm so grateful that these products are available because it is a shame when you do forget your own products, and it is just such easy access! Thank you."
- "It's super nice to know that I have something if I forget anything I need!"



Support in Emergencies

- "It's a lifesaver when you forget to bring your own products. So glad our school provides them."
- "Having period products available has been a huge relief, especially on those unexpected days. Can't thank the school enough for this."
- "It's such a relief to know that if I ever forget my products at home, the school has got my back. Really appreciate this support."
- "You guys have no idea how many times the period products have saved me. There have been days where I personally bled through my pants because not knowing I had my period or when I didn't have products to take care of it. I'm so grateful for this project because it's helped multiple people, not just me, get through our rough time by destressing our worries about not having period products with us. Thank you so much!"



Attendance

- "Thank you so much for having the products available, it's a lifesaver. I've been able to attend classes without worrying during my period."
- "Having access to free period products means I don't have to miss any sports practice or games due to unexpected periods."
- "Period products in the bathrooms have been so helpful. I haven't had to miss any important exams or classes because of my period."
- "Thanks to the period products in our school, I no longer have to sit out during gym class or other activities when I'm on my period."

Poor Quality and Discomfort

- "The cardboard ones are PAINFUL. They are not helpful. Most of the time when there are period products in the bathroom, most girls choose not to use them due to the discomfort."
- "I tried using the tampons once and they would not get out of the insert part, so it got stuck and I just took it out."
- "The menstrual products provided by the school are not good, and a lot of people are uncomfortable with using them."
- "The provided tampons are too difficult for most students to use. They don't work most of the time."

Availability Issues

- "Sometimes they run out, I wish they would keep an eye on it for the girls that don't have products at home. I've supplied a lot of girls with products because the school runs out."
- "Our school continuously removes the period products from the bathrooms, leaving us girls without access to any. So those who don't have any period products have to ask someone if they have one or they just don't get to use any at all."
- "Sometimes, there will be period product in the bathroom but not all of them and when they run out they take more than a month to fill it again which causes problems with some of the girls and staff at our school."

Misuse and Vandalism:

- "The feminine products end up all over the bathroom and it's gross."
- "At my school, the girls like to take the period products that are given, get them wet, and throw them on the ceiling. They had done nothing about it or said anything to the females in which case they probably know how. But this causes the products to run out, and what if someone needs it and it's not there because of this problem?"
- "These get wasted as much as used."