

The SIECUS State Profiles



ALABAMA

ALABAMA'S SEX ED SNAPSHOT

THE STATE OF SEX EDUCATION

While many of the headlines in 2019 for Alabama centered on the numerous threats to access to abortion care, culminating in the passage of a total abortion ban, advocates across the state have worked tirelessly to amend Alabama's sex education law to ensure sex education curriculum is medically accurate, culturally responsive, and does not include discriminatory anti-LGBTQ language. Although legislation mandating comprehensive sex education has yet to be successful, the efforts of dedicated advocates across the state have made progress toward improving Alabama's sex education curriculum requirements.

Sex education is not currently mandated in Alabama, and schools that do teach sex education must emphasize abstinence. Because Alabama schools are not required to provide sex education to students, school districts are left to decide what type of sex education—if any at all—they provide to youth. Mandating local control over sex education presents unique challenges that have resulted in a glaring disparity regarding the quality of sex education that students receive. Such discretion allows for the implementation of policies and curriculum that stigmatize marginalized youth, such as students of color and LGBTQ youth, and presents further challenges in ensuring that low income districts have access to the resources needed to implement comprehensive sex education. Black youth in particular face racist, systemic barriers to health care and comprehensive education. This has resulted in disproportionate representation among a variety of adverse health outcomes. For example, [in 2013](#), nearly 80 percent of new HIV diagnoses among people ages 15-29 living in Alabama were reported among Black young youth. Additionally, over 70 percent of new HIV diagnoses among men living in Alabama were reported by men who have had sex with men.

Advocates across the state report that medically accurate, evidence-based, and culturally responsive information are among the biggest factors missing from Alabama's sex education curriculum. In efforts to alleviate these barriers, the George Washington Carver High School in Birmingham has worked closely with health care providers to ensure they provide comprehensive sex education to students. Planned Parenthood South East also facilitates the Teen Advocates for Sexual Health Program (TASH), a peer education group that serves five schools from the Birmingham and Hoover School District. State advocates such as the Alabama Campaign for Adolescent Sexual Health have worked to ensure students receive evidence-based and evidence-informed curriculum through providing curricula training to educators, creating sexual health resources, and advocating for improved sexual health policies.

State advocates in Alabama have reported that educators often lack information concerning the state's sex education policy and are afraid of implementing the wrong curriculum. As a result, many opt to not provide any sex education at all. Right now, advocates can take action in their communities to address misinformation about Alabama's sex education requirements. They can contact their local board of education and determine what topics are missing from existing sex education curricula.

ALABAMA

Advocates can then vocalize the importance of implementing specific elements of comprehensive sex education, such as trauma informed, culturally responsive curriculum that addresses the needs of youth of color and LGBTQ youth, or medically accurate instruction on contraceptives, healthy relationships, and consent. Further, advocates can contact their representatives to discuss the critical need for a statewide comprehensive sex education mandate. Advocates are encouraged to use the SIECUS [Community Action Toolkit](#) to guide local efforts to advance sex education.

STATE SEX EDUCATION POLICIES AND REQUIREMENTS AT A GLANCE

- Alabama schools are **not** required to teach sex education. However, students in grades 5-12 are required to receive instruction on HIV/AIDS through a health education program.
 - If a school chooses to teach sex education, curriculum must emphasize abstinence.
- If sex education is offered, curriculum must emphasize that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state.
- HIV/AIDS curriculum, and sex education if offered, is not required to include instruction on consent.
- Parents or guardians can remove their children from sex education instruction if they feel it contradicts their religious beliefs. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)
- Alabama has no standard regarding medically accurate sex education instruction. However, Alabama does require inclusion of the latest medical information when providing instruction on contraceptives.

STATE HOUSE HIGHLIGHTS

This section highlights 2019 sex education bills that were introduced during the last state legislative session and 2020 sex education bills that have been introduced during the current state legislative session thus far. These proposed bills provide a brief snapshot of both recent and current legislative action taken to advance or restrict sex education. For a more comprehensive look at recent and current legislation concerning sex education and related topics such as reproductive healthcare, efforts to advance or restrict LGBTQ rights, and HIV/AIDS as it relates to young people, continue reading on to the “State Legislative Activity” section of Alabama’s profile.

2020 Legislative Session

[House Bill 71](#) (pending):

- If successful, will eliminate anti-LGBTQ language and mandate that sex education instruction be medically accurate.

2019 Legislative Session

[Senate Bill 140](#) (failed):

- Sought to eliminate anti-LGBTQ language and mandate that sex education instruction be medically accurate and culturally appropriate.

MORE ON SEX ED IN ALABAMA

STATE LAW

Alabama state law does not require the teaching of sex education. However, a [resolution](#) adopted by the Alabama State Board of Education in 1987 does require that students in grades 5–12 receive instruction about HIV/AIDS through a health education program. Should schools choose to offer additional sex education, [Alabama State Code Section 16-40A-2](#) sets minimum requirements for what must be taught, but specific content is developed locally. Among other things, the code requires “sex education or the human reproductive process” programs or curricula to include and emphasize that:

- 1) abstinence from sexual intercourse is the only completely effective protection against unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and AIDS when transmitted sexually.
- 2) abstinence from sexual intercourse outside of lawful marriage is the expected social standard for unmarried school-age persons.

The code also states that:

- B) course materials and instruction that relate to sexual education or STDs should be age-appropriate;
- C) course materials and instruction that relate to sexual education or STDs should include:
 2. An emphasis on the importance of self-control and ethical conduct pertaining to sexual behavior.
 3. Statistics based on the latest medical information that indicates the degree of reliability and unreliability of various forms of contraception, while also emphasizing the increase in protection against pregnancy and protection against STDs, including HIV and AIDS, afforded by the use of various contraceptive measures ...
 8. An emphasis, in a factual manner and from a public health perspective, that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state.

Parents or guardians may remove their children from instruction pertaining to “disease, its symptoms, development, and treatment” if the content is in conflict with their religious beliefs. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)

STATE STANDARDS

In addition to this code, [Alabama Course of Study: Health Education](#) provides the foundation for the minimum content requirements for topics such as HIV, STIs, and pregnancy prevention. The sexuality topics covered include: “societal expectations of remaining abstinent until married,” the “physical, social, and emotional effects,” of STIs, disease transmission, responsible decision-making, and refusal skills, among others.

STATE LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

State legislative activity related to sex education does not take place in isolation from the broader embroiled political and policy climate. Attacks on the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ) individuals, and efforts to limit access to abortion care and other reproductive health care services prevent students from receiving comprehensive sex education and accessing sexual and reproductive health care services. Below are highlights of current legislative activity related to these topics.

ALABAMA

2020 SESSION: CONVENE FEBRUARY 4, 2020

TITLE	DESCRIPTION	STATUS
HOUSE BILL 71	REQUIRES SEX EDUCATION TO BE MEDICALLY ACCURATE AND REMOVES ANTI-LGBTQ LANGUAGE FROM CURRICULUM INSTRUCTION.	REFERRED TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION POLICY

2019 SESSION: ADJOURNED JUNE 18, 2019

TITLE	DESCRIPTION	STATUS
House Bill 314	CRIMINALIZES ABORTION AND ATTEMPTED ABORTION EXCEPT IN CASES WHERE ABORTION IS NECESSARY TO PREVENT A SERIOUS HEALTH RISK.	ENACTED
House Joint Resolution 247	CONDEMNES BULLYING IN ANY FORM AND RECOGNIZES THAT BULLYING OFTEN TARGETS INDIVIDUALS BASED ON RACE, GENDER, NATIONAL ORIGIN, DISABILITY, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, MEDICAL CONDITIONS, OR ANY OTHER PERCEIVED DIFFERENCE FROM THE PERPETRATOR.	ENACTED
Senate Bill 140	REQUIRES SEX EDUCATION TO BE MEDICALLY ACCURATE AND CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE AND REMOVES ANTI-LGBTQ LANGUAGE FROM CURRICULUM INSTRUCTION.	DIED IN THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION POLICY
Senate Bill 211	CRIMINALIZES ABORTION AND ATTEMPTED ABORTION EXCEPT IN CASES WHERE ABORTION IS NECESSARY TO PREVENT A SERIOUS HEALTH RISK.	DIED IN THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

LEGISLATIVE KEY

<p>SEX EDUCATION REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY HIV/AIDS (THAT IMPACTS YOUTH)</p>

YOUTH SEXUAL HEALTH DATA

Young people are more than their health behaviors and outcomes. While data can be a powerful tool to demonstrate the sex education and sexual health care needs of young people, it is important to be mindful that these behaviors and outcomes are impacted by systemic inequities present in our society that affect an individual's sexual health and well-being. To learn more about Alabama's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results, [click here](#).

ALABAMA SCHOOL HEALTH PROFILES DATA

In 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released the School Health Profiles, which measure school health policies and practices and highlight which health topics were taught in schools across the country. Since the data were collected from self-administered questionnaires completed by schools' principals and lead health education teachers, the CDC notes that one limitation of the School Health Profiles is bias toward the reporting of more positive policies and practices. In the School Health Profiles, the [CDC identifies 20 sexual health education topics](#) as critical for ensuring a young person's sexual health. Below are key instruction highlights for secondary schools in Alabama as [reported](#) for the 2017–2018 school year.

Reported teaching all 20 critical sexual health education topics

- 13.5% of Alabama secondary schools taught students all 20 critical sexual health education topics in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 33.5% of Alabama secondary schools taught students all 20 critical sexual health education topics in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

Reported teaching about the benefits of being sexually abstinent

- 39.5% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about the benefits of being sexually abstinent in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 96.2% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about the benefits of being sexually abstinent in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

ALABAMA

Reported teaching how to access valid and reliable information, products, and services related to HIV, other STDs, and pregnancy

- 28.4% of Alabama secondary schools taught students how to access valid and reliable information, products, and services related to HIV, other STDs, and pregnancy in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 91.2% of Alabama secondary schools taught students how to access valid and reliable information, products, and services related to HIV, other STDs, and pregnancy in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

Reported teaching how to create and sustain healthy and respectful relationships

- 41.5% of Alabama secondary schools taught students how to create and sustain healthy and respectful relationships in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 91.6% of Alabama secondary schools taught students how to create and sustain healthy and respectful relationships in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

Reported teaching about preventive care that is necessary to maintain reproductive and sexual health

- 28.7% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about preventive care that is necessary to maintain reproductive and sexual health in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 82.4% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about preventive care that is necessary to maintain reproductive and sexual health in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

Reported teaching how to correctly use a condom

- 16.3% of Alabama secondary schools taught students how to correctly use a condom in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 45.6% of Alabama secondary schools taught students how to correctly use a condom in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

Reported teaching about methods of contraception other than condoms

- 19.3% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about methods of contraception other than condoms in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 68.9% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about methods of contraception other than condoms in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

Reported teaching about sexual orientation

- 17.3% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about sexual orientation in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 48.7% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about sexual orientation in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

Reported teaching about gender roles, gender identity, or gender expression

- 21.7% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about gender roles, gender identity, or gender expression in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 54.0% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about gender roles, gender identity, or gender expression in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

ALABAMA

Reported providing curricula or supplementary materials relevant to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) youth

- 33.3% of Alabama secondary schools provided students with curricula or supplementary materials that included HIV, STD, or pregnancy prevention information relevant to LGBTQ youth.

Visit the CDC's [School Health Profiles](#) report for additional information on school health policies and practices.

The quality of sex education taught often reflects funding available for sex education programs.

To learn more about federal funding streams, [click here](#).