

The SIECUS State Profiles



ALASKA

ALASKA'S SEX ED SNAPSHOT

THE STATE OF SEX EDUCATION

Advocates have faced a continuously uphill battle in advancing sex education in Alaska, routinely working to oppose restrictive efforts by state legislators. In 2019, Representative George Rauscher introduced [House Bill 7](#) in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to require educators to teach the “emotional trauma” associated with adolescent sexual activity and that life begins at conception. House Bill 7 also sought to prohibit educators from discussing sexual orientation, gender identity, and contraceptives.

Similarly, there have been multiple targeted attempts to limit any organization affiliated with abortion services, such as Planned Parenthood, from providing sex education in Alaskan schools. In 2016, Senator Mike Dunleavy sponsored [Senate Bill 89](#). If passed, this bill would have prohibited schools from contracting with abortion care providers. Some language from Senate Bill 89 was included in [House Bill 156](#), which was signed into law and details specific requirements to be able to teach sex education.

Despite these setbacks, legislators have made positive progress to advance curriculum through the passage of the [Alaska Safe Children's Act](#) in 2017. This act requires each school district to implement a sexual abuse and sexual assault training program along with a dating violence and abuse training program for educators and students. These trainings highlight an important step toward recognizing the vital need for teaching young people about healthy relationships and sexual abuse prevention.

Since Alaska schools are not required to provide sex education, 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.

While the municipalities of Juneau, Fairbanks, and Anchorage offer more advanced sex education, students who live in rural communities are more likely to feel the impact of inadequate sex education. Half of all Alaskan women have experienced sexual assault in their lifetime and Alaska Native women experience sexual and relationship violence at [even higher rates](#). While the Cook Inlet Tribal Council has received funding to adapt the [Native Stand](#) curriculum for Alaskan youth, it is not available statewide. Advocates report that ensuring sex education is culturally responsive to the needs of native young people, and includes instruction on healthy relationships and consent, is critical.

To increase access to more comprehensive sex education, organizations such as the [Alaska Adolescent Health Program](#) work to increase access to comprehensive health services and education for youth. In addition, the Adolescent Health Coalition meets quarterly to strategize ways to advance sex education statewide.

Right now, advocates can take action to ensure young people in their community have access to quality sex education. After contacting their local school board, advocates can determine what topics are missing from instruction, such as consent, sexual orientation and gender identity, and contraceptives. Advocates can also address misconceptions concerning comprehensive sex education to increase community support. Further, advocates can contact their representatives to discuss the critical need for advancing comprehensive sex education requirements and increase funding to support districts in implementing curriculum. 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

- Alaska schools are **not** required to teach sex education.
 - Alaska has no standard regarding abstinence instruction in sex education.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity. However, the [Content and Performance Standards for Alaska Students](#) suggests that students should be able to comprehend major developments related to class, ethnicity, race, and gender.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on consent.
- Sex education curriculum must be available for review by parents or guardians and they are allowed to object to and remove their children from any activity, class, or program. Parents or guardians may also submit a written request to remove their children from instruction on teen dating violence and abuse. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)
- Alaska has no standard regarding medically accurate sex education instruction.

STATE HOUSE HIGHLIGHTS

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

2019 Legislative Session

HOUSE BILL 7 (failed):

- In addition to emphasizing abstinence, sought to require instructors to provide information on the “emotional trauma” associated with adolescent sexual activity, that life begins at conception, and prohibit discussion of sexual orientation, gender identity, and contraceptives.

MORE ON SEX ED IN ALASKA

STATE LAW

Alaska does not have a statute that requires sexuality or STI education. However, [AS 14.30.360](#) states that “each district in the state public school system shall be encouraged to initiate and conduct a program in health education for kindergarten through grade 12” and “should include instruction in physical health and personal safety including ... the identification and prevention of child abuse, ... sexual abuse, and domestic violence, and appropriate use of health services.” Alaska state law does not specify any parental permission for students to participate in sex education or education of HIV/AIDS.

Effective on October 26, 2016, [AS 14.30.361](#) states that “a person may only teach a class or program in sex education, human reproduction education, or human sexuality education if the person possesses a valid teacher certificate ... and is employed under contract with the school or is supervised [by such person].” Additionally, “before curriculum, literature, or materials related to sex education, human reproduction education, or human sexuality education may be used in a class or program or distributed in a school, the curriculum, literature, or material must be approved by the school board and [be] available for parents to review.”

[AS.14.30.355](#) requires each school district to establish a training program for employees and students, and provide parent notices related to sexual abuse and sexual assault awareness and prevention for students enrolled in grades K-12. Similarly, [AS. 14.30.356](#) requires each school district to develop and approve a program relating to teen dating violence and abuse awareness and prevention for grades 7-12. This program must:

- 1) Include training for employees and students;
- 2) Provide parent notices, and
 - a. Be reviewed by a qualified individual or committee for consistency with generally accepted standards for a teen dating violence and abuse awareness and prevention program.
- 3) The training, notices, and instruction adopted must include:
 - a. Age appropriate information;
 - b. The warning signs of dating violence and abusive behavior;
 - c. Characteristics of healthy relationships;
 - d. Measures to prevent and stop dating violence and abuse;
 - e. Community resources available to victims of dating violence and abuse; and
 - f. A procedure allowing a student to be excused from participating in training at the written request of a parent or guardian. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)

STATE STANDARDS

Alaska provides curriculum standards for schools to follow if they choose to provide sex education. The “Skills for a Healthy Life” section of the [Content and Performance Standards for Alaska Students](#), provided by the Department of Education and Early Development, recommends that students should “understand the physical and behavioral characteristics of human sexual development and maturity...develop an awareness of how personal life roles are affected by and contribute to the well-being of families, communities, and cultures... understand how respect for the rights of self and others contributes to relationships...” and take responsible actions to create safe and healthy environments.”

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. Alaska's 2020 session convened January 21, 2020.

2019 SESSION: ADJOURNED AUGUST 6, 2019

TITLE	DESCRIPTION	STATUS
HOUSE BILL 7	REQUIRES SEX EDUCATION, HUMAN REPRODUCTIVE EDUCATION, OR HUMAN SEXUALITY EDUCATION TO BE AGE APPROPRIATE AND MEDICALLY ACCURATE. CURRICULUM MUST INCLUDE INFORMATION REGARDING THE PHYSIOLOGICAL CHANGES THAT OCCUR DURING ADOLESCENCE AND SUBSEQUENT STAGES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT. CURRICULUM MUST ALSO INCLUDE INFORMATION ON PREGNANCY AND PARENTING, DETAILING THAT LIFE BEGINS AT CONCEPTION.	DIED IN THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
HOUSE BILL 82	REQUIRES THE STATE COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS TO STUDY THE PROBLEMS OF DISCRIMINATION IN ALL OR SPECIFIC FIELDS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY OR EXPRESSION.	DIED IN THE HOUSE 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 Alaska's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results, [click here](#).

ALASKA 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 Alaska as reported for the 2017–2018 school year.

Reported teaching all 20 critical sexual health education topics

- 12.6% of Alaska secondary schools taught students all 20 critical sexual health education topics in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 25.1% of Alaska 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

- 44.6% of Alaska secondary schools taught students about the benefits of being sexually abstinent in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 57.5% of Alaska secondary schools taught students about the benefits of being sexually abstinent in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

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

- 35.9% of Alaska 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.
- 54.9% of Alaska 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

- 48.6% of Alaska 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.
- 67.9% of Alaska 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

- 38.3% of Alaska 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.
- 50.7% of Alaska 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.

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Reported teaching how to correctly use a condom

- 16.8% of Alaska secondary schools taught students how to correctly use a condom in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 32.7% of Alaska 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

- 28.7% of Alaska secondary schools taught students about methods of contraception other than condoms in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 49.1% of Alaska 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

- 21.3% of Alaska secondary schools taught students about sexual orientation in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 37.8% of Alaska 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

- 26.3% of Alaska secondary schools taught students about gender roles, gender identity, or gender expression in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 37.9% of Alaska 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.

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

- 36.5% of Alaska 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](#).