

The SIECUS State Profiles



KENTUCKY

KENTUCKY'S SEX ED SNAPSHOT

THE STATE OF SEX EDUCATION

Advocates have worked diligently to advance sex education in Kentucky over the past few years, most recently culminating in the re-introduction of [House Bill 185](#). This bill, introduced by Representative Tom Burch, sought to establish curriculum standards for sex education in grades 4-12, but was ultimately unsuccessful. While this recent effort aimed to advance sex education, past legislative actions have attempted to restrict curriculum. In 2018, [Senate Bill 71](#) was signed into law and requires sex education curriculum to include instruction on abstinence as the desirable goal for young people and the only certain way to avoid unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and other associated health problems. It also requires teaching that establishing a permanent, mutually faithful, monogamous relationship is the best way to avoid STDs.

While Kentucky schools are required to provide instruction on responsible sexual behavior, including abstinence and preventing pregnancy, preventing STDs, and the basic reproductive system and functions, local school boards are responsible for identifying any additional curriculum schools provide. Curriculum is not required to be medically accurate, culturally responsive to the needs of young people of color, or include instruction on topics such as sexual orientation, gender identity, consent, healthy relationships, or contraceptive options.

While some counties, such as Lee County Schools, offer comprehensive sex education, others continue to fail to meet the needs of young people. Students [report](#) that curriculum continues to fall short and express a need for instruction on sexual abuse, consent, contraception and healthy relationships within sex education instruction. One student, a survivor of sexual assault, [reported](#) that her abstinence-only instructor made her feel like “damaged goods” after comparing women who have premarital sex to used pieces of tape. Advocates report that the current state standards are so vague that educators are often unsure of what they are permitted to teach, and opt to not teach sex education at all.

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.

In efforts to further advance sex education in Kentucky, coalitions such as Louisville Sex Education Now and Lex Ed are working to advance comprehensive sex education in Jefferson County Public Schools and Fayette County Public Schools. Sexy Sex Ed, an Appalachian-based organization, also provides after school programming for young people and facilitates trainings to teach community members how to facilitate a sex education workshop.

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Right now, advocates can take action to ensure young people in their community have access to quality sex education. In 2017, a [report](#) found that a majority of parents whose children attended middle school in a rural Appalachian town believe that sex education should begin in middle school and that abstinence-plus curriculum should be taught. These results demonstrate a unique opportunity for advocates to increase support for quality sex education. After identifying what topics are missing from local sex education requirements, advocates can 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 and includes instruction on consent, healthy relationships, and contraceptives. Advocates can also emphasize the importance of requiring curriculum to be evidence based and medically accurate. Further, advocates can contact their representatives to discuss the critical need for advancing sex education requirements and increasing funding to support the implementation of comprehensive sex education in districts that lack the capacity to do so. 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

- Kentucky schools are required to teach sex education.
 - Curriculum is not required to be comprehensive.
 - Curriculum must include instruction on abstinence as the desirable goal for school-age youth.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on consent.
- Kentucky has no standard regarding the ability of parents and guardians to remove their children from sex education instruction.
- Kentucky 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 Kentucky’s profile.

2020 Legislative Session

[House Bill 296](#) (pending):

- If successful, will require each school district to provide comprehensive sex education.

2019 Legislative Session

[House Bill 185](#) (failed):

- Sought to establish age-appropriate curriculum standards for sex education in grades 4-12.

MORE ON SEX ED IN KENTUCKY

STATE LAW

[Kentucky Revised Statute 156:160](#) requires that the Kentucky Board of Education “promulgate administrative regulations establishing standards [that public] school districts shall meet.” With that authority, [704 KAR 3:305](#) was promulgated, requiring students to take 0.5 credits of health education in order to graduate. It also requires the health education course to include the content standards delineated in the Kentucky Core Academic Standards. Furthermore, [704 KAR 3:303](#) adopted the *Kentucky Academic Standards* into law.

In 2018, Kentucky enacted [Chapter 156](#), stating that any human sexuality or STD curricula must include instruction on abstinence, state that “abstinence from sexual activity is the desirable goal for all school-age children,” and advocate for “permanent mutually faithful monogamous relationship[s].”

Kentucky statute does not require parental permission for students to participate in sexuality or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)-related instruction.

STATE STANDARDS

Sex education is mentioned within the “Practical Living (Health and Physical Education)” section of the [Kentucky Academic Standards](#), which schools are required to follow. Students learn “how decision-making relates to responsible sexual behavior (e.g., abstinence, preventing pregnancy, preventing HIV/[sexually transmitted diseases] (STDs), and impacts the physical, mental, and social well-being of an individual.” Students also learn about the basic reproductive system and functions. No specific curriculum is required.

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.

2020 SESSION: CONVENED JANUARY 7, 2020

TITLE	DESCRIPTION	STATUS
HOUSE BILL 67	AMENDS THE CONSTITUTION OF KENTUCKY TO STATE THAT THE CONSTITUTION DOES NOT SECURE OR PROTECT A RIGHT TO ABORTION OR FUNDING OF ABORTION.	REFERRED TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS, CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
HOUSE BILL 296	REQUIRES SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE SEX EDUCATION.	REFERRED TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
SENATE BILL 72	REQUIRES THE DEPARTMENT FOR PUBLIC HEALTH TO DEVELOP CURRICULUM REGARDING FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION.	REFERRED TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND WELFARE

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2019 SESSION: ADJOURNED MARCH 28, 2019

TITLE	DESCRIPTION	STATUS
HOUSE BILL 5	PROHIBITS ABORTION BASED ON THE FETUSES SEX, RACE, COLOR, NATIONAL ORIGIN, OR DISABILITY.	ENACTED
HOUSE BILL 100	PROHIBITS ABORTION AFTER A FETAL HEARTBEAT IS DETECTED.	DIED IN THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND FAMILY SERVICES
HOUSE BILL 148	PROHIBITS ABORTION IF THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES REVERSES IN WHOLE OR PART OF ROE V. WADE.	ENACTED
HOUSE BILL 185	ESTABLISHES CURRICULUM STANDARDS FOR SEX EDUCATION IN GRADES 4-12. REQUIRES INSTRUCTION ON HIV/AIDS AND OTHER STIs, PERSONAL BODY SAFETY, HUMAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT, HUMAN SEXUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT, HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS, AND RESPONSIBLE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR.	DIED IN THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
HOUSE BILL 211	PROHIBITS A PHYSICIAN FROM ENGAGING IN CONVERSION THERAPY WITH A CLIENT UNDER 18 YEARS OLD OR AN ADULT WHO HAS A COURT-APPOINTED GUARDIAN.	DIED IN THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND FAMILY SERVICES
HOUSE BILL 466	ESTABLISHES AN ENDING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS GRANT PROGRAM THAT PREVENTS AND ENDS YOUTH HOMELESSNESS AND ADDRESSES RELATED DISPARITIES BASED ON RACE, ETHNICITY, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, AND GENDER IDENTITY.	DIED IN THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS AND REVENUE
SENATE BILL 9	PROHIBITS ABORTION IF A FETAL HEARTBEAT IS DETECTED.	ENACTED
SENATE BILL 248	PROHIBITS A PHYSICIAN FROM ENGAGING IN CONVERSION THERAPY WITH A CLIENT UNDER 18 YEARS OLD OR AN ADULT WHO HAS A COURT-APPOINTED GUARDIAN.	DIED IN THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON LICENSING, OCCUPATIONS & ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS

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 Kentucky's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results, [click here](#).

State 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 Kentucky as reported for the 2017–2018 school year.

Reported teaching all 20 critical sexual health education topics

- 14.5% of Kentucky secondary schools taught students all 20 critical sexual health education topics in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 44.3% of Kentucky secondary schools taught students all 20 [D1] 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

- 63.3% of Kentucky secondary schools taught students about the benefits of being sexually abstinent in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 97.1% of Kentucky 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

- 48.2% of Kentucky 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.
- 91.4% of Kentucky 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.

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Reported teaching how to create and sustain healthy and respectful relationships

- 61.3% of Kentucky 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.
- 96.1% of Kentucky 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

- 41.9% of Kentucky 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.
- 90.3% of Kentucky 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

- 19.1% of Kentucky secondary schools taught students how to correctly use a condom in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 60.7% of Kentucky 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

- 31.1% of Kentucky secondary schools taught students about methods of contraception other than condoms in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 82.7% of Kentucky 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

- 20.7% of Kentucky secondary schools taught students about sexual orientation in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 61.9% of Kentucky 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

- 24.1% of Kentucky secondary schools taught students about gender roles, gender identity, or gender expression in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 54.6% of Kentucky 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.

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

- 38.6% of Kentucky 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](#).