

The SIECUS State Profiles



LOUISIANA

LOUISIANA'S SEX ED SNAPSHOT

THE STATE OF SEX EDUCATION

Louisiana has experienced a surge of regressive action intended to limit access to reproductive health care, most notably culminating in the Supreme Court case *June Medical Services v. Gee*. The case could effectively eliminate abortion statewide, and have a devastating national impact. Despite this significant setback in access to abortion care, advocates have seen progress in advancing sex education across the state.

Forming in 2015, the Louisiana Adolescent Reproductive Health Coalition (LARHC) has worked continuously to advance sex education at the local level. Unfortunately, LARHC has had limited success in districts including New Orleans, as the Orleans Parish School Board dissolved in 2005 following Hurricane Katrina. As such, New Orleans schools are entirely handled by charter management organizations (CMOs). Progressive policies within CMOs can allow for better sex education in some schools, but not all of them. This inconsistency between schools only exacerbates inequity. Efforts to advance sex education at the state level have been largely unsuccessful due to opposition from the Louisiana Family Forum, which has a significant base of supporters that routinely turn out to oppose sex education efforts. After an unsuccessful campaign to advance legislation that would improve sex education throughout the state in 2017, advocates are hopeful that the recent overturn of half of the Louisiana legislature in 2019 will create momentum to pass comprehensive sex education legislation. State legislators like Representative Patricia Haynes Smith have consistently introduced positive legislation and continue to fight for better sex education in the state.

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 Louisiana, Black youth in particular face racist, systematic barriers to health care and education that result in disproportionate adverse health outcomes. For example, the [majority](#) of new HIV diagnoses in Louisiana in 2018 were among African Americans. The LARCH is currently conducting a statewide survey to understand the types of sex education that students receive. The group has also recently begun distributing their research findings looking at the impact of religion and political identity on support for sex education. They are hopeful that these efforts will result in building a new support base to advance comprehensive sex education and change restrictive social norms that have prevented schools from implementing comprehensive sex education. To continue to advance sex education, advocates note that a culture of accountability and evaluation of learning standards is necessary for new, comprehensive policy implementation.

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Despite the numerous challenges to advance sex education at the state level, advocates can take action to ensure young people in their community have access to quality sex education. A recent survey by the Louisiana Public Health Institute revealed that [84 percent](#) of parents believe sex education is an important part of school curriculum, indicating that there is a unique opportunity to build a diverse base of local support to advance 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 instruction on consent. Further, advocates can contact their representatives to discuss the critical need for advancing comprehensive sex education requirements. 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

- Louisiana schools are not required to teach sex education. However, schools are required to teach health education, which includes instruction on sexual risk behaviors, HIV/AIDS, and other STDs.
 - Curriculum is not required to be comprehensive.
 - If sex education is offered, curriculum must emphasize abstinence as the expected social standard.
- If sex education is offered, curriculum must not include any sexually explicit materials depicting homosexual activity.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on consent.
- Parents or guardians may remove their children from sex education classes. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)
- Louisiana has no standard regarding medically accurate sex education instruction. However, if a school chooses to teach sex education, instruction must be based on factual biological or pathological information.

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 Louisiana’s profile.

No bills have been introduced concerning sex education to date.

MORE ON SEX ED IN LOUISIANA

STATE LAW

Louisiana statute does not require schools to offer sex education, but [Louisiana Revised Statute §17:24.4\(E\)](#) states that “the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education ... shall develop and establish statewide curriculum standards for required subjects to be taught in the public elementary and secondary schools of [the] state.” Starting in the 2014-2015 school year, all incoming 9th graders are required to take 1/2 credit of health education. Under this authority, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education promulgated [Part LIX. Bulletin 103](#) to describe the state’s health education content standards. From grades 7–12, students learn about sexual abstinence and sexual risk behaviors; in grades 4 and 7–12, students receive human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and other sexually transmitted disease (STD) education.

[Louisiana Revised Statute §§17:281](#) mandates that sex education cannot be offered in grades K–6, except in Orleans Parish, which may offer sex education in grade 3 and above. If a student is parenting or pregnant, schools must provide this education “regardless of the student’s grade level.” The education must be integrated into “an existing course of study such as biology, science, physical hygiene, or physical education.” It cannot include “religious beliefs, practices in human sexuality, nor the subjective moral and ethical judgments of the instructor or other persons. Students shall not be tested, quizzed, or surveyed about their personal or family beliefs or practices in sex, morality, or religion.”

Classes may not include “any sexually explicit materials depicting male or female homosexual activity.” They also may not in “any way counsel or advocate abortion.” In addition, this education must emphasize that:

- a. Abstinence from sexual activity outside of marriage is the expected standard for all school-age children;
- b. Abstinence from sexual activity is a way to avoid unwanted pregnancy, STDs, including AIDS, and other associated health problems;
- c. Each student has the power to control personal behavior and to encourage students to base action on reasoning, self-esteem, and respect for others.

[Louisiana Revised Statute §§17:279](#) requires that all public high schools offering home economics classes must also provide “parenthood education” and include the following topics about family living and community relationships: the consequences of the lack of adequate prenatal care, home management, and the responsibilities of parenthood. In addition, [Louisiana Revised Statutes Annotated §§ 17:263](#) requires that adoption awareness be included in any health education or appropriate class. This includes instruction on “the benefits of adoption for families wishing to add a child, for potential adoptees, and for persons who are pregnant or who have a child for whom they are unable to care.”

In 2018, Louisiana enacted [Act 369](#), requiring schools to provide parents with information regarding “the public health risks and harms associated with pornography,” including “the dangers of sexually charged cyberbullying,” as well as “the addictive and destructive nature of pornographic and illicit materials.”

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Parents or guardians may remove their children from sex education classes. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)

STATE STANDARDS

Louisiana’s [Health Education Handbook](#) outlines expectations that should be mastered by the end of each grade level and defines sexual health as:

“[T]he area of health education encompassing a broad scope of concepts and skills, including acquiring information about sexual development, reproductive health, interpersonal relationships, body image, and gender roles; recognizing habits that protect female and male reproductive health; and learning about pregnancy, childbirth, and the development of infants and children. It also includes skill development in areas such as communication, decision-making, refusal techniques, and goal-setting. Sexual health topics are grounded in the premise that sexuality is a natural, ongoing process that begins in infancy and continues through life.”

The handbook also delineates abstinence as the “safest, most effective risk avoidance method of protection from HIV, STDs, and pregnancy.

Furthermore, according to the [Louisiana Handbook for School Administrators- Bulletin 741](#), students must be taught “the principal modes by which communicable diseases, including, but not limited to, HIV infection, are spread and the best methods for the restriction and prevention of these diseases.” Schools are prohibited from distributing any “contraceptive or abortifacient drug, device, or other similar product.”

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. Louisiana’s 2020 session convenes March 9, 2020.

2019 SESSION: ADJOURNED JUNE 6, 2019

TITLE	DESCRIPTION	STATUS
HOUSE BILL 425	AMENDS THE CONSTITUTION OF LOUISIANA TO PROVIDE THAT NOTHING IN THE CONSTITUTION SHALL BE CONSTRUED TO SECURE OR PROTECT A RIGHT TO ABORTION OR REQUIRE THE FUNDING OF ABORTION.	ENACTED
SENATE BILL 184	PROHIBITS ABORTION AFTER A FETAL HEARTBEAT IS DETECTED.	ENACTED

LEGISLATIVE KEY

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

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

LOUISIANA 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.

Louisiana did not participate in the 2018 School Health Profiles.

Below are key instruction highlights for secondary schools in Louisiana as [reported](#) for the 2015–2016 school year. In this edition of the School Health Profiles, the CDC identified 19 sexual health education topics and has since updated the number of topics to 20.

Reported teaching all 19 critical sexual health education topics

- 11% of Louisiana secondary schools taught students all 19 critical sexual health education topics in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 16% of Louisiana secondary schools taught students all 19 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

- 38.9% of Louisiana secondary schools taught students about the benefits of being sexually abstinent in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 72.9% of Louisiana secondary schools taught students about the benefits of being sexually abstinent in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

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

- 35.5% of Louisiana 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.
- 70.6% of Louisiana 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

- 44.8% of Louisiana 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.
- 72.3% of Louisiana 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

- 31.1% of Louisiana 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.
- 61.8% of Louisiana 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

- 13.5% of Louisiana secondary schools taught students how to correctly use a condom in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 22.2% of Louisiana 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

- 21.1% of Louisiana secondary schools taught students about methods of contraception other than condoms in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 42.1% of Louisiana 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

- 19.5% of Louisiana secondary schools taught students about sexual orientation in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 31.5% of Louisiana secondary schools taught students about sexual orientation in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12.

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

- 20.4% of Louisiana secondary schools taught students about gender roles, gender identity, or gender expression in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 34.3% of Louisiana 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

- 23.9% of Louisiana 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](#).