

The SIECUS State Profiles



WISCONSIN

WISCONSIN'S SEX ED SNAPSHOT

THE STATE OF SEX EDUCATION

Advocates have faced a continuously uphill battle in advancing Wisconsin sex education requirements since the state's statute was revised in [2012](#) to no longer mandate instruction on human growth and development. However, significant advancements have been made at the local level, such as the Neenah Joint School District's 2017 human growth and development curriculum [update](#), which includes instruction on gender identity, sexual orientation, healthy relationships, puberty, and personal safety, among other topics. Sex education is not currently mandated in Wisconsin and schools that do teach sex education must stress abstinence. Since Wisconsin 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.

While [some instructors](#) work to make sex education more inclusive by bringing members of the school's Gay Straight Alliance into their health classes to discuss sexuality, Wisconsin's lack of requirements fail to ensure the same level of intentional instruction is included in health courses statewide. Educators [report](#) that course length and content depend on many factors, including the individual instructor, school board, and review committees.

Students [report](#) that their sex education curriculum placed more emphasis on the responsibility of women and included shame-based language that stigmatized young women who had already engaged in sexual activity. Others reported that instructors have compared sexually active young women's bodies to chewed pieces of gum, a common sexual risk avoidance or abstinence-only program activity.

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 sex education instruction, such as consent, sexual orientation and gender identity, and contraceptives. They can then vocalize the important need for advancing sex education requirements in their community and contact their representatives. Advocates are encouraged to use the SIECUS [Community Action Toolkit](#) to guide local efforts to advance sex education.

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STATE SEX EDUCATION POLICIES AND REQUIREMENTS AT A GLANCE

- Wisconsin schools are **not** required to teach sex education. However, schools are required to provide STD education.
 - Curriculum is not required to be comprehensive.
 - If a school provides human growth and development instruction, curriculum is required to stress abstinence.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity. However, [*Human Growth and Development: A Resource Guide to Assist School Districts in Policy and Program Development and Implementation*](#) includes instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Curriculum is not required to provide instruction on consent. However, *Human Growth and Development: A Resource Guide to Assist School Districts in Policy and Program Development and Implementation* includes instruction on consent.
- Parents or guardians may remove their children from the human growth and development instruction with a written request to the teacher or principal. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)
- If a school provides human growth and development instruction, curriculum must be medically accurate.

STATE HOUSE HIGHLIGHTS

This section highlights sex education bills that were introduced during the 2020 state legislative session as well as bills that have been introduced thus far in 2021. 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 Wiscon’s profile.

No relevant legislation have been introduced concerning sex education to date.

MORE ON SEX ED IN WISCONSIN

STATE LAW

[Wisconsin law § 115.35](#) establishes a “Health Problems Education Program,” which includes instruction on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and human growth and development. While teaching about STDs is a required component, schools are no longer obligated to teach the human growth and development section due to a revision of Wisconsin law [§ 118.019](#) in 2012. To see a comprehensive list of changes to the law, please visit the [Department of Public Instruction \(DPI\) website](#). If it is offered, the “Health Problems Education Program” must include:

1. The importance of communication between the pupil and the pupil’s parents or guardians;
2. Reproductive and sexual anatomy and physiology, including biological, psychosocial, emotional, and intellectual changes that accompany maturation; ...
5. The benefits of and reasons for abstaining from sexual activity ... stress[ing] the value of abstinence as the only reliable way to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and identify[ing] the skills necessary to remain abstinent; ...
10. Adoption resources, prenatal care, and postnatal supports; and
11. The nature and treatment of STIs.

An educational program in human growth and development must also “use instructional methods and materials that do not discriminate against a pupil based upon the pupil’s race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnic or cultural background or against sexually active pupils or children with disabilities.”

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School boards that choose to provide instruction must provide annual notification to parents outlining the curriculum used for their child’s particular grade level. Parents and guardians must be given the opportunity to review all materials related to sex education classes. Parents or guardians may remove their children from the human growth and development instruction with a written request to the teacher or principal. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)

STATE STANDARDS

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has produced [Human Growth and Development: A Resource Guide to Assist School Districts in Policy and Program Development and Implementation](#), which provides assistance on implementing the optional human growth and development curriculum. Furthermore, the DPI offers [Wisconsin Standards for Health Education](#), which provide guidance for the general health education curriculum. “Risky sexual behaviors” are mentioned as a component of the curriculum.

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. Wisconsin’s legislature meets throughout the year.

Wisconsin's 2021 session convened on January 4, 2021

TITLE	DESCRIPTION	STATUS
SENATE BILL 31	PROHIBITS PHYSICIANS FROM ENGAGING IN CONVERSION THERAPY WITH PATIENTS.	REFERRED TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON REVIEW OF ADMINISTRATIVE RULES (2021)
ASSEMBLY BILL 111	PROHIBITS MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS FROM ENGAGING IN CONVERSION THERAPY WITH A MINOR.	FAILED TO PASS PURSUANT TO SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 1 (2020)
SENATE BILL 107	PROHIBITS MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS FROM ENGAGING IN CONVERSION THERAPY WITH A MINOR.	FAILED TO PASS PURSUANT TO SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 1 (2020)
SENATE BILL 420	REQUIRES THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION TO INCORPORATE A TEEN DATING AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION CURRICULUM INTO ITS MODEL HEALTH PROBLEMS EDUCATION CURRICULUM.	FAILED TO PASS PURSUANT TO SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 1 (2020)
ASSEMBLY BILL 182	PROHIBITS ABORTION BASED ON THE DIAGNOSIS OR POTENTIAL DIAGNOSIS OF A CONGENITAL DISABILITY.	FAILED TO PASS PURSUANT TO SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 1 (2019)
ASSEMBLY BILL 367	REPEALS A STATUTE CLASSIFYING ABORTION AS A CLASS H FELONY.	DIED IN THE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY (2019)
SENATE BILL 173	PROHIBITS ABORTION BASED ON THE RACE, COLOR, NATIONAL ORIGIN, ANCESTRY, OR	FAILED TO PASS PURSUANT TO SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 1 (2020)

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	DIAGNOSIS OR POTENTIAL DIAGNOSIS OF A CONGENITAL DISABILITY.	
SENATE BILL 419	REPEALS A STATUTE CLASSIFYING ABORTION AS A CLASS H FELONY.	DIED IN THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, TECHNOLOGY, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION (2019)

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 Wisconsin’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 Wisconsin as reported for the 2017–2018 school year.

Reported teaching all 20 critical sexual health education topics

- 23.3% of Wisconsin secondary schools taught students all 20 critical sexual health education topics in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 49.0% of Wisconsin 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

- 85.7% of Wisconsin secondary schools taught students about the benefits of being sexually abstinent in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 92.8% of Wisconsin 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

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- 70.8% of Wisconsin 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.
- 90.2% of Wisconsin 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

- 84.5% of Wisconsin 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.
- 88.7% of Wisconsin 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

- 65.0% of Wisconsin 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.
- 87.3% of Wisconsin 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

- 34.0% of Wisconsin secondary schools taught students how to correctly use a condom in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 71.8% of Wisconsin 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

- 54.4% of Wisconsin secondary schools taught students about methods of contraception other than condoms in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 87.8% of Wisconsin 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

- 52.0% of Wisconsin secondary schools taught students about sexual orientation in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 69.9% of Wisconsin 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

- 58.9% of Wisconsin secondary schools taught students about gender roles, gender identity, or gender expression in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 70.9% of Wisconsin 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

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- 59.0% of Wisconsin 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](#).