

State Profiles

Alabama State Profile



Alabama's State of Sex Ed

Sex education is **not** currently mandated in Alabama, but 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, if any, type of sex education they provide to youth.

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Sex Ed
Requirement



Sex Ed
Content



[Current Requirement](#)

Current Requirements At Glance

- Alabama 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, the curriculum must emphasize abstinence.
- If sex education is being taught, Alabama requires it to be medically accurate, including the inclusion of the latest medical information when providing instruction on contraceptives.
- Alabama statute does not require that sex education include instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- There is no requirement to teach about consent.
- Parents or guardians can remove their children from sex education. **This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.**

RECENT LEGISLATION SHAPING THE STATE LANDSCAPE

Sex Ed advocates helped pass **House Bill 385** in 2021, which updated Alabama’s sex education curriculum requirements to make them more inclusive.

Introduced by Representative Laura Hall (D-19), it requires sex education instruction to be medically accurate, removing the requirement for materials to highlight stigmatizing and false information about LGBTQAI+ identities, and shifts instruction from an emphasis on self-control and ethical behavior to an emphasis on the importance of delaying sexual activity and discouraging risky sexual behavior. Despite these successes, Alabama experienced some of the 2022 wave of coordinated state legislation attacking sex education and other inclusive programs in schools.

While House Bill 385 represents a strong step towards advancing sex education, 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. This failure in implementing HB 385 uniformly contributes to pre-existing disparities in adverse health outcomes that disproportionately harm Alabama's most at-risk population groups. Advocates across the state report that inclusive, evidence-based, and culturally responsive information are among the biggest factors missing from Alabama's sex education curriculum, even after the passage of House Bill 385.

To advance sex education, advocates report a greater need for support from the Alabama Department of Education and more collaboration between current state partners. There is also a need for increased public knowledge regarding the need to advance sex education in addition to heightened ability to address common myths and concerns associated with sex education. Additional funding for advanced sex education in addition to teacher training has also been identified as a significant barrier in advancing sex education. In the past year alone there advocates report increasing attacks on state and local organizations that support sex education and other inclusive forms of education. Further, advocates expect additional aggressive legislative attacks on sexual and reproductive rights in a state that has historically introduced and passed legislation that allows for the mistreatment of transgender youth and their families, as well as banning access to abortion care.

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. Advocates can then vocalize the importance of implementing specific elements of sex education, such as trauma informed, culturally responsive curriculum that addresses the needs of youth of color and LGBTQAI youth, or medically accurate instruction on contraceptives, healthy relationships, and consent. Advocates are encouraged to take action on pending legislation that seeks to advance or restrict the principles of sex education. Further, advocates can contact their representatives to discuss the critical need for a statewide sex education mandate. Advocates are encouraged to use the [SIECUS Community Action Toolkit](#) to guide local efforts to advance sex education and to reach out to [EducateUs](#) to get connected to local advocacy groups. For a current overview of pending legislation, see table under "State Legislation" below.

More on sex ed in Alabama...

State Law: A CLOSER LOOK

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:

1. course materials and instruction that relate to sexual education or STDs should be age-appropriate and medically accurate ;
2. course materials and instruction that relate to sexual education or STDs should include:
 1. An emphasis on the importance of self-control and ethical conduct pertaining to sexual behavior.
 2. 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

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 Legislation

State legislative activity related to sex education does not take place in isolation from the broader embroiled political and policy climate. In 2022, a national wave of attacks on the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQAI+) individuals, attempts to restrict or prohibit instruction on “divisive concepts” such as “Critical Race Theory” (which is not taught in public schools), and efforts to limit access to abortion care and other reproductive healthcare services swept the country in an effort to prevent students from receiving sex education and accessing sexual and reproductive healthcare services. Below are highlights of current legislative activity related to these topics. **Alabama’s 2024 annual legislative session convenes February 6, 2024.**

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](#). At the time of publication, the 2021 YRBS data was not made available yet.

Alabama School Health Profiles Data

In 2022, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released the 2020 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 22 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 2019–2020 school year.

Reported teaching all 22 critical sexual health education topics

- 6.9% of Alabama secondary schools taught students all 22 critical sexual health education topics in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 43.2% of Alabama secondary schools taught students all 22 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

- 18.0% 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.
- 94.6% 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.

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

- 15.5% 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.
- 92.1% 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

- 16.9% 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.

- 90.7% 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

- 9.0% 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.
- 85.8% 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

- 6.9% of Alabama secondary schools taught students how to correctly use a condom in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 51.2% 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

- 6.9% 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.
- 71.1% 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 the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities

- 9.0% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 51.9% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities in a required course in any of grades 9, 10, 11, or 12

Reported teaching about how gender roles and stereotypes affect goals, decision-making, and relationships

- 9% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about gender roles and stereotypes in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 68.3% of Alabama secondary schools taught students about gender roles and stereotypes 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

- 39.4% 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](#).

