

# State Profiles

## California State Profile



### California's State of Sex Ed

Culturally competent, comprehensive, and medically accurate sex education is mandated in California. While schools are not required to teach consent, they must include instruction on healthy relationships.

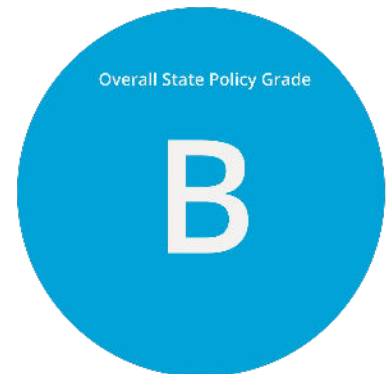
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Sex Ed  
Requirement



Sex Ed  
Content



## Current Requirement

- California schools are required to teach sex education.
  - Sex education instruction must be comprehensive.
  - Curriculum must include information on abstinence.
  - Sex education instruction must be medically accurate.
- Curriculum must be culturally competent for students of all sexual orientations and gender identities, include instruction on gender identity and expression, and when providing examples of relationships and couples, include examples of same-sex relationships.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on consent. However, curriculum must include instruction that provides students with “knowledge and skills they need to form healthy relationships that are based on mutual respect and affection, and are free from violence, coercion, and intimidation.” The updated [Health Education Curriculum Framework](#) also includes instruction on affirmative consent.
- Parents or guardians can remove their children from sex education instruction or STI/HIV education classes. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)

## RECENT LEGISLATION SHAPING THE STATE LANDSCAPE

While California remains one of the few states leading the country with a sex education mandate, there is still work to be done and advocates are currently working to increase funding for improved professional development opportunities for those teaching sex education. In 2022, as part of the state’s

package of bills to expand access to abortion care, the legislature passed [Assembly Bill 2586](#) to provide one-time small grants to organizations that provide sex education and in 2021, [SB 170](#) was enacted by the Governor to address these concerns. Funds were allocated within this budget to develop teacher training resources to support LGBTQAI+ youth and support existing positions and workload related to sex education.

Despite these successes, California experienced some of the 2022 wave of coordinated state legislation attacking sex education and other inclusive programs in schools. [Assembly Bill 1785](#) was introduced in an unsuccessful effort to require schools to notify parents in advance of any instruction related to sex education. While appearing to increase “parental rights,” this bill actually stigmatizes the vital and important information provided under sex education and infringe upon young people’s right to access this education to help them make healthy, informed decisions for themselves.

Currently, advocates report implementation of existing law, lack of funding to support training for educators, and the lack of broad health education requirements all continue to create barriers to sex education for young people in California. Additionally, advocates report an increased need to address the myths and concerns associated with sex education. While sex education is mandated statewide, it is reported that more rural and low-income communities continue to lack support in implementing curriculum. A [2022 report](#) developed by Equality California revealed that only 52% of districts (61/118) have adopted LGBTQAI+ inclusive social science textbooks at the high school level and only 76% of districts (90/118) offer LGBTQAI+ inclusive sexual health education. Despite the overwhelming support for sex education in California schools, there has been a notable uptick in opposition attempting to restrict sex education in specific counties, including Orange County and Riverside. Advocates also report a significant rise in opposition at the local school board level to implement sex education, particularly to LGBTQAI+-inclusive or historically accurate content. In addition to implementation challenges, advocates are continuously fighting efforts to roll back existing legislation especially in the area of “parental permission.”

Right now, advocates can take action by contacting their local school board to determine if their district is compliant with state law. They can then vocalize the important need for increasing capacity to advance sex education requirements in their community. Parents are also able to join local committee groups.

Advocates are encouraged to take action on pending legislation that seeks to advance or restrict the principles of sex education. For a current overview of pending legislation, see table below. Further, advocates can contact their representatives to discuss the critical need for increasing funding to ensure low-income and rural communities are supported in implementing sex education and increase efforts to address misconceptions of sex education. 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.

## **More on sex ed in California...**

### **State Law: A Closer Look**

[California Education Code § 51933-51934](#), known as the California Healthy Youth Act, requires school districts to ensure that all students in grades 7–12 receive sex education and HIV/AIDS prevention education at least once in middle school and once in high school. It also mandates that the curricula be age-appropriate, medically accurate, objective, and “appropriate for use with pupils of all races, genders, sexual orientations, and ethnic and cultural backgrounds; pupils with disabilities; and English learners.” The law further requires instruction to teach students about gender, gender expression, gender identity, and gender stereotypes.

Schools can elect to offer sex education earlier than grade 7, in which case they must adhere to the same requirements. No program may “promote or teach religious doctrine,” instruction must encourage parent-child communication about sexuality, and instruction must “provide information about the effectiveness and safety of all Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved contraceptive methods in preventing pregnancy, including, but not limited to, emergency contraception.” Parents or guardians may remove their children from sex education and/or sexually transmitted infection (STI)/HIV education classes.

In 2018, California enacted three pieces of legislation that impact sex education. [Ch. 428](#) allows school districts to provide an optional component of sex education instruction on the potential risks and consequences of creating and

sharing sexually suggestive or explicit materials through cell phones and digital media. [Ch. 807](#) requires the already-mandated information about human trafficking in sex education instruction to further include information on how social media and mobile devices are used for human trafficking. [Ch. 495](#) extends California's Healthy Youth Act to charter schools, requiring them to provide sexual health education in grades 7–12.

## State Standards

The *Health Education Content Standards for California Public Schools: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*, with a [new version](#) that was set to be released in 2020 but has yet to come out, and *Health Education Framework for California Public Schools: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve* provide guidance for human sexuality instruction curriculum. Sexual Health instruction must be included in grades 7–12, but, starting in grade 6, students must learn how to “object appropriately to teasing or bullying of peers that is based on personal characteristics or perceived sexual orientation.” School districts, however, are not required to adopt these content standards.

## 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. **California's full-time legislative session convened January 3, 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 California's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results, [click here](#). At the time of publication, the 2021 YRBS data was not made available yet.

## California 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. However, California's 2020 data was not weighted to be representative of its sample and therefore was excluded from the 2020 School Health Profiles Report.

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](#).**



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