

State Profiles

Colorado State Profile



Colorado's State of Sex Ed

Sex education is not currently mandated in Colorado, but schools that do must teach sex education that is comprehensive and medically accurate. As Colorado 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.

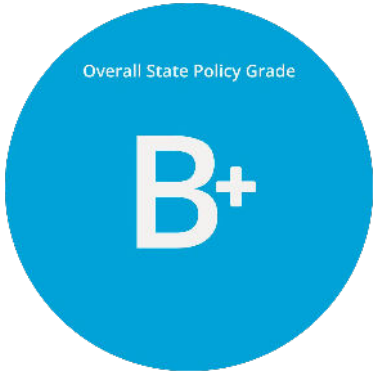
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Sex Ed Requirement



Sex Ed Content



[Current Requirement](#)

COLORADO'S STATE OF SEX ED

Current Requirements At glance:

- Colorado schools are **not** required to teach sex education.
 - If sex education is offered, then the curriculum must be comprehensive as defined by the law.
 - If sex education is offered, curriculum must “not emphasize sexual abstinence as the primary or sole acceptable preventative method available to students.”
- If sex education is offered, curriculum must not exclude the health needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex individuals.
- If sex education is offered, curriculum must include instruction on consent.
- If pregnancy options are taught, abortion must be included as an option for pregnancy.
- Parents or guardians can remove their children from sex education instruction with written notification. **This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.**
- If sex education is offered, the curriculum must be medically accurate.
- Parents/caregivers have the opportunity to review curricula prior to instruction.

RECENT LEGISLATION SHAPING THE STATE LANDSCAPE

Advocates have worked diligently to advance and maintain sex education in Colorado. In 2022, **House Bill 22-1136**, was introduced in an effort to require schools to show a five-minute high-definition ultrasound video of the development of a fetus over time. While this legislation was ultimately unsuccessful, it represents the intersection between attacks on both abortion

care and sex education that is reflective of Colorado's current legislative landscape.

Since Colorado schools are not required to provide sex education to students, school districts are left to decide if they will provide youth with sex education that follows the updated statute. Local control over sex education presents unique challenges that have resulted in a glaring disparity regarding the quality of sex education that students receive. While state statute mandates all schools comply with the new requirements, some schools have applied for and received waivers to avoid implementing the new curriculum. Waivers permit schools to continue teaching abstinence-based curriculum that fails to provide young people with a comprehensive approach to ensuring their own reproductive and sexual health and well-being.

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 if young people are receiving sex education and, if so, ensure that it complies with the new mandated requirements. They can then vocalize the important need for advancing sex education requirements in their community by complying with the new state mandates. 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 increased funding to support schools in implementing sex education. Advocates are encouraged to use the [SIECUS Community Action Toolkit](#) to guide local efforts and to reach out to [EducateUs](#) to get connected to local advocacy groups.

More on sex ed in Colorado...

State Law: A Closer Look

Colorado state law does not require schools to provide sex or HIV instruction; however, it refers to “medically and scientifically accurate information” as a “right” of youth in [Colorado statute §22-1-128](#). Statute mandates that all school districts that offer human sexuality instruction must provide comprehensive and

medically accurate information. This constitutes an “if/then” policy which means that IF sex education is taught in schools, then it must meet state specified requirements according to law. However, because it does not mandate sex education, local jurisdictions are still able to decide whether to provide sex education at all. In Colorado, curricula must include medically accurate, culturally sensitive information about methods to prevent unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, and must include information about abstinence, all FDA approved forms of contraception, and be taught in a “cohesive, integrated, objective manner” so that youth are empowered to make decisions based on their “individual needs, beliefs, and values.”

Additional requirements state that the instruction must promote the development of healthy relationships through providing instruction on:

1. How to communicate consent, recognize the withdrawal of consent, and understand the age of consent
2. How to avoid making unwanted sexual advances or assuming a person’s supposed sexual intentions based on a person’s appearance or sexual history
3. Age appropriate information on “Safe Haven Laws” relating to the safe abandonment of newborn children
4. All pregnancy outcomes, including abortion, if the school district opts to provide instruction on pregnancy outcome options

In addition, sex education instruction must not:

1. Explicitly or implicitly teach or endorse religious ideology
2. Use shame-based or stigmatizing language or instructional tools
3. Emphasize abstinence as the primary or sole preventative method
4. Rely on gender stereotypes
5. Exclude the health needs of intersex individuals or LGBT individuals

Parents or guardians must be notified if a sex education course is taught, and they must be given an opportunity to review the curriculum. They may remove their children from sex education or STI/HIV education classes by sending written notice to the school. This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.

Per [Colorado statute §22-25-104](#), the Colorado Department of Education is responsible for providing guidelines as to the length of courses, the subjects

included, and the manner in which these subjects are addressed.

In 2013, the state legislature established a grant program for comprehensive human sex education, via [Colorado statute §25-44-102](#). Schools that accept this funding must use curricula that are age appropriate, culturally relevant, medically accurate, and are based in science. In 2019, the state legislature amended the statute to ensure that the grant program’s oversight entity is made up of a diverse population of community members. The amendment also instructed that rural public schools and schools that do not currently offer sex education take priority during the grant recipient selection process.

State Standards

The Department of Education provides guidelines on curriculum development through the [Colorado Academic Standards: Comprehensive Health Standards](#). Sexual health topics—including HIV and other STD transmission and prevention, unintended pregnancy, abstinence, and sexual assault—are components of these 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. **Colorado’s 2024 annual legislative session convenes January 10, 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 Colorado's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results, [click here](#). At the time of publication, the 2021 YRBS data was not made available yet.

Colorado 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.

Colorado did not participate in the 2018 or 2020 survey.

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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