

State Profiles

Idaho State Profile



Idaho's State of Sex Ed

Sex education is not currently mandated in Idaho, but schools that do teach sex education must emphasize abstinence. As a result, 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



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Current Requirements

- Idaho schools are not required to teach sex education.
 - If a school offers sex education, the curriculum must encourage abstinence.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on consent.
- Parents or guardians can file a written request to the school board to remove their children from sex education instruction. This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.
- Idaho statute has no regulation on medically accurate sex education. However, the Idaho Department of Education’s health education standards state that growth, development, and family life instruction should be medically accurate.

RECENT LEGISLATION SHAPING THE STATE LANDSCAPE

Advocates in Idaho have faced numerous challenges fighting for sex education in the state, most recently with the introduction of [House Bill 666](#) in 2022. Introduced by Representative Gayann DeMordaunt (R-14) in 2022, aims to create penalties for librarians who distribute “harmful materials” to children in K-12 schools. The sponsors of the bill do not specify what counts as harmful materials, but Idaho [law](#) also states the law doesn’t apply to “any matter which, when considered as a whole, and in context in which it is used, possesses serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value for minors, according to prevailing standards in the adult community, with respect to what is suitable for minors.”

In 2023, Idaho enacted [H 228](#) which amends the previous definition of sex education and defines abstinence as “the absence of any sexual activity prior to marriage, which activity includes physical contact between individuals involving intimate or private areas of the body that can potentially: (a) Result in pregnancy; (b) Transmit sexually transmitted diseases and infections; or (c) Present

emotional risks” while defining sex ed as only studying the anatomy and physiology of human reproduction. This severely limits the kind of sex education that can be taught as the golden standard for sex education is the [National Sex Education Standards](#) which encompass a breadth of topics in addition to reproductive anatomy including puberty, sex, gender, healthy relationships, pregnancy, and much more.

Idaho’s standards require curriculum to encourage abstinence, include instruction on pregnancy and disease prevention and the consequences of sexual activity, healthy relationships, puberty, and STDs. However, local school districts determine if they want to provide additional instruction. As a consequence, advocates report the quality of sex education being taught varies greatly by district.

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 LGBTQAI+ youth, and presents further challenges in ensuring that low income districts have access to the resources needed to implement sex education. Advocates report that the embroiled political climate in Idaho, paired with the minimal health education requirements and a lack of resources to advance sex education, create significant barriers to implementing sex education across the state. There’s an identified need for increased community support for advanced sex education, and more statewide coalition partners.

Right now, advocates can take action to ensure young people in their community have access to quality sex education. After identifying what topics are missing from local sex education requirements, advocates can vocalize the importance of implementing specific elements of sex education with a focus on ensuring that local LGBTQAI+ youth receive the support they need through the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in sex education instruction. Current advocates report that increased community education is essential to fight against future efforts to implement a parental [opt-in policy](#) and successfully implement advanced sex education curriculum. Those seeking to become involved in advancing sex education can start by addressing misconceptions concerning sex education and the benefits of implementing a more comprehensive curriculum.

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 updated health education requirements, increased funding and staff to support districts with the implementation of advanced curriculum, and the importance of amending the current statute to require inclusive sex education statewide. 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 Idaho...

State Law: A Closer Look

Sex education is not mandated in Idaho. [Idaho Statute §33-1608](#) states that the “primary responsibility of family life and sex education” rests with a student’s home and church and that “the schools can only complement and supplement those standards which are established in the family.” Local school boards may decide to offer sex education. If a school board institutes sex education, the program must place “major emphasis” on the home (including “appreciation of the important place the family home holds in the social system of our culture”), family, and church as areas of importance for learning such knowledge. School boards must include parents and community groups in all aspects of instituting and evaluating sex education programs.

In addition, the statute states that programs should give young people “the scientific, physiological information for understanding sex and its relation to the miracle of life.” They must also include “knowledge of the power of the sex drive and the necessity of controlling that drive by self-discipline.”

Parents or guardians who wish to excuse their children from sex education must file a written request to the school board. The school board will then supply the parent with the necessary forms to remove the child from the class. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)

In 2023, Idaho enacted [H 228](#) into law which amends [Section 33-1609 of Idaho Code](#) and changes the definitions of “abstinence” and “sex education” to as follows:

(1) “Abstinence” means the absence of any sexual activity prior to marriage, which activity includes physical contact between individuals involving intimate or private areas of the body that can potentially:

- (a) Result in pregnancy;
- (b) Transmit sexually transmitted diseases and infections; or
- (c) Present emotional risks.

(2) “Sex education” means the study of the anatomy and the physiology of human reproduction.

State Standards

For schools offering sex education, the Idaho Department of Education’s [Idaho Content Standards for Health Education](#) requires content related to the “consequences of sexual activity” beginning in grades 6-8. By grade 12, this content should include “encouragement of abstinence from sexual activity, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (e.g., transmission and prevention), and pregnancy prevention.” All information should be “factual, medically accurate, and objective.”

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. **Idaho's 2024 annual legislative session convenes January 8, 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 Idaho's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results, [click here](#). At the time of publication, the 2021 YRBS data was not made available yet.

Idaho 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 Idaho as [reported](#) for the 2019–2020 school year.

Reported teaching all 22 critical sexual health education topics

- 3.4% of Idaho secondary schools taught students all 22 critical sexual health education topics in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 32.6% of Idaho 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

- 70.5% of Idaho secondary schools taught students about the benefits of being sexually abstinent in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.

- 89.6% of Idaho 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

- 55.7% of Idaho 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.
- 89.7% of Idaho 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

- 74.3% of Idaho 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.
- 90.9% of Idaho 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

- 60.0% of Idaho 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.
- 81.2% of Idaho 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

- 8.4% of Idaho secondary schools taught students how to correctly use a condom in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 44.4% of Idaho 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

- 27.7% of Idaho secondary schools taught students about methods of contraception other than condoms in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 67.2% of Idaho 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 diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities

- 28.2% of Idaho secondary schools taught students about diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 54.7% of Idaho 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

- 43.9% of Idaho secondary schools taught students about gender roles and stereotypes in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 63.7% of Idaho 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

- 39.2% of Idaho 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](#).

