

State Profiles

Kentucky State Profile



Kentucky's State of Sex Ed

While some sex education is currently required by proxy in Kentucky through their health education standards, it is not required to be medically accurate or include instruction on consent.

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Sex Ed Requirements



Sex Ed Content



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Current Requirement

- Kentucky schools are required to teach sex education as a part of their health education.
 - Curriculum must include instruction on abstinence as the “desirable goal” for school-age youth.
 - Curriculum must follow the [Kentucky Academic Standards](#) according to law.
 - Curriculum is not required to align with the [National Sex Education Standards](#).
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on consent.
- Kentucky now requires written parental consent prior to students receiving sex education in sixth grade and up.
- Kentucky has no regulation regarding medically accurate sex education instruction.

RECENT LEGISLATION SHAPING THE STATE LANDSCAPE

Advocates have worked diligently to advance sex education in Kentucky over the past few years, most recently culminating in the introduction of [House Bill 13](#) in 2022. This bill, introduced by Representative Lisa Willner (D-35), sought to require instruction on healthy relationships, which would encompass topics such as human development, refusal skills, consent, bullying/harassment, gender stereotypes, abstinence, information on contraception, STI prevention, and

resources for sexual and reproductive health. Unfortunately, this bill was not successful.

Advocates expect further aggressive legislative attacks on sexual and reproductive rights in a state that is known for the introduction of harmful legislation targeting transgender youth and their families, as well as banning access to abortion care. In 2023, there have already been multiple bills that seek to restrict access to critical gender affirming care for transgender youth, such as [House Bill 120](#). In addition to this, “parental rights” legislation that seeks to stigmatize sex education and shame LGBTQIA youth has been introduced which complicates the struggle to advance sex education. Unfortunately, in 2023, [Senate Bill 150](#) was enacted into law and now prohibits sex education in grades kindergarten through fifth. The law also restricts any instruction in public schools that studies gender identity, expression, or sexual orientation. Further, the law requires written parental consent prior to their child receiving any instruction in human sexuality, changing Kentucky to an “opt-in” system.

While Kentucky schools are required to provide instruction on responsible sexual behavior, including abstinence and preventing pregnancy, preventing STDs, and the basic reproductive system and functions, local school boards are responsible for identifying any additional curriculum schools provide. Curriculum is not required to be medically accurate, culturally responsive to the needs of young people of color, or include instruction on topics such as sexual orientation, gender identity, consent, healthy relationships, or contraceptive options. Additionally, there is a law requiring abstinence to be taught as the “desirable goal” for young people. Advocates report that the current state standards are so vague that educators are often unsure of what they are permitted to teach, and as a result, opt to not teach sex education at all. 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.

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, such as trauma

informed, culturally responsive curriculum that addresses the needs of youth of color and LGBTQAI+ youth and includes instruction on consent, healthy relationships, and contraceptives. Advocates can also emphasize the importance of requiring curriculum to be evidence based and medically accurate. 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. Additionally, reach out to [EducateUs](#) to get connected to local advocacy groups. Further, advocates can contact their representatives to discuss the critical need for advancing sex education requirements and increasing funding to support the implementation of sex education in districts that lack the capacity to do so. Advocates are encouraged to use the SIECUS [Community Action Toolkit](#) to guide local efforts to advance sex education.

More on sex ed in Kentucky...

State Law: A Closer Look

[Kentucky Revised Statute 156:160](#) requires that the Kentucky Board of Education “promulgate administrative regulations establishing standards [that public] school districts shall meet.” With that authority, [704 KAR 3:305](#) was promulgated, requiring students to take 0.5 credits of health education in order to graduate. It also requires the health education course to include the content standards delineated in the Kentucky Core Academic Standards. Furthermore, [704 KAR 3:303](#) adopted the *Kentucky Academic Standards* into law.

In 2018, Kentucky enacted [Chapter 156](#), stating that any human sexuality or STD curricula must include instruction on abstinence, state that “abstinence from sexual activity is the desirable goal for all school-age children,” and advocate for “permanent mutually faithful monogamous relationship[s].”

In 2023, Kentucky enacted [Chapter 132](#), which states that any instruction in human sexuality cannot occur in grades five and below. The law also prohibits any instruction, regardless of grade level, that includes content on gender identity, expression, and/or sexual orientation.

Due to the enactment of [Senate Bill 150](#), Kentucky statute requires parental permission for students to participate in sexuality or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)-related instruction. This constitutes an “opt-in” policy.

State Standards

Sex education is mentioned within the “Practical Living (Health and Physical Education)” section of the *Kentucky Academic Standards*, which schools are required to follow. Students learn “how decision-making relates to responsible sexual behavior (e.g., abstinence, preventing pregnancy, preventing HIV/[sexually transmitted diseases] (STDs), and impacts the physical, mental, and social well-being of an individual.” Students also learn about the basic reproductive system and functions. No specific curriculum is required.

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. **Kentucky’s 2024 annual legislative session convenes January 2, 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 Kentucky’s

Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results, [click here](#). At the time of publication, the 2021 YRBS data was not made available yet.

Kentucky School Health Profiles Data

In 2022, 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 22 sexual health education topics](#) as critical for ensuring a young person's sexual health. Below are key instruction highlights for secondary schools in Kentucky as reported for the 2019–2020 school year.

Reported teaching all 22 critical sexual health education topics

- 12.5% of Kentucky secondary schools taught students all 22 critical sexual health education topics in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 27.4% of Kentucky 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

- 51.7% of Kentucky secondary schools taught students about the benefits of being sexually abstinent in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 91.0% of Kentucky 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

- 49.5% of Kentucky 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.
- 91.9% of Kentucky 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

- 54.8% of Kentucky 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.
- 91.0% of Kentucky 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

- 38.3% of Kentucky 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.
- 86.1% of Kentucky 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

- 16.1% of Kentucky secondary schools taught students how to correctly use a condom in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 71.1% of Kentucky 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

- 31.2% of Kentucky secondary schools taught students about methods of contraception other than condoms in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 86.9% of Kentucky 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

- 24.7% of Kentucky secondary schools taught students about sexual orientation and gender identity in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 64.6% of Kentucky secondary schools taught students about sexual orientation and gender identity 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

- 33.1% of Kentucky secondary schools taught students about gender roles and stereotypes in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 70.6% of Kentucky 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

- 43.1% of Kentucky 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](#).

