

# State Profiles

## Maine State Profile



### Maine's State of Sex Ed

Maine schools **are** required to teach sex education through their course on “comprehensive family life education”. This curriculum, however, does not align with the [National Sex Education Standards](#).

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Sex Ed Requirements



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## Current Requirement

- Curriculum must emphasize abstinence.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Curriculum is required to include instruction on consent.
- Parents or guardians may remove their children from “comprehensive family life education” classes. This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.
- “Comprehensive family life education” must be medically accurate.

## RECENT LEGISLATION SHAPING THE STATE LANDSCAPE

There have been incremental advancements in sex education in Maine over the past five years, signifying a slow but steady effort to make curriculum more comprehensive statewide. In 2019, Representative Matthea Daughtry championed [Legislative Directive 773](#), a successful bill that requires “comprehensive family life education” to include instruction on affirmative consent. This success marked an important, though incremental step forward for Maine’s sex education requirements. However, advocates must continue their efforts to support schools in implementing advanced curriculum that is inclusive of the needs of all students.

While Maine schools are required to teach sex education, curriculum is not required to align with the [National Sex Education Standards](#). Curriculum must include medically accurate instruction that emphasizes abstinence while also instructing on healthy relationships, contraception, family planning, sexually

transmitted diseases (STDs), and conflict resolution. However, curriculum is not required to include instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity, and is not required to be culturally responsive to the needs of young people of color. Local school boards are largely responsible for establishing further curriculum requirements.

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. In 2019, a Maine educator was **dismissed** after answering questions concerning gender affirming surgery and birth control methods in a middle school science course. Parents vocalized their concern regarding the incident after learning about it from their children, resulting in the instructor's dismissal. This incident highlighted a missed opportunity to destigmatize such topics among community members by raising awareness about the benefits of sex education that includes inclusive, age-appropriate instruction on gender identity.

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 what topics are missing from sex education instruction, such as instruction on consent, sexual orientation and gender identity, and contraceptives. They can then vocalize the important need for advancing sex education requirements in their community. Further, advocates can contact their representatives to discuss the critical need for advancing sex education requirements. 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. 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 such as **Speak About It** which promote sexual assault prevention through inclusive sex education.

**[More on sex ed in Maine...](#)**

# State Law: A Closer Look

Maine Revised Statutes Annotated Title 22, §§ 1902 and 1910 mandate that the state’s Department of Health and Human Services “undertake initiatives to implement effective, comprehensive family life education services.” The state must provide:

- Training for teachers, parents, and community members in the development and implementation of comprehensive family life education curriculum;
- Resource staff persons to provide expert training, curriculum development, and implementation and evaluation services on a statewide basis;
- Funding to promote and coordinate community youth forums in communities identified as having high needs for comprehensive family life education;
- Funding for issue management and policy development training for school boards, superintendents, principals, and administrators; and
- Funding for grants to school-based comprehensive family life education programs to recognize outstanding performance and share strategies for success.

Comprehensive family life education must be taught in kindergarten through grade 12. The information provided must be medically accurate, age-appropriate, and respect community values and encourage parent-child communication. Programs must teach about abstinence, healthy relationships, contraception and family planning, STDS, affirmative consent, and conflict resolution. No specific curriculum is mandated.

In 2017, the state passed [Legislative Directive 1180](#), requiring child sexual abuse prevention education in schools. While educators report that some schools in Maine have included instruction on consent for many years, they view the new statute as an important opportunity to ensure that all schools include uniform instruction statewide.

Parents or guardians may remove their children from “comprehensive family life education” classes. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)

## State Standards

Maine’s Health Education Standards guide curricula development and are based on the National Health Education Standards. The performance indicators and descriptors for grades 9–12 include being able to “demonstrate healthy practices and/or behaviors to maintain or improve the health of self and others in ... [the] prevention of STDs, [human immunodeficiency virus] HIV, and unintended pregnancy.” Maine’s Health Education Standards are set to be reviewed in 2025 and 2030.

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

## Maine 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 Maine as reported for the 2019–2020 school year.

### **Reported teaching all 22 critical sexual health education topics**

- 26.3% of Maine secondary schools taught students all 22 critical sexual health education topics in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 60.0% of Maine 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**

- 72.8% of Maine secondary schools taught students about the benefits of being sexually abstinent in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 97.3% of Maine 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**

- 72.6% of Maine 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.
- 97.3% of Maine 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**

- 75.7% of Maine 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.
- 92.2% of Maine 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**

- 63.3% of Maine 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.
- 88.8% of Maine 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**

- 44.2% of Maine secondary schools taught students how to correctly use a condom in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 88.2% of Maine 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**

- 63.0% of Maine secondary schools taught students about methods of contraception other than condoms in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 94.6% of Maine 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 sexual orientation and gender identity**

- 56.5% of Maine secondary schools taught students about sexual orientation and gender identity in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 84.3 % of Maine 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**

- 53.0% of Maine secondary schools taught students about gender roles and stereotypes in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.

- 80.0% of Maine 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**

- 64.2% of Maine 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](#).**

