

State Profiles

Massachusetts State Profile



Massachusetts' State of Sex Ed

Massachusetts schools are not required to teach sex education.

[Download Scorecard](#)



Sex Ed Requirement



Sex Ed Content



Overall State Policy Grade

**State
Profile
Sections**

Current Requirement

Recent Legislation

More on Sex Ed

Bill Tracker

Current Requirements

- If sex education is offered, the curriculum must explain the benefits of abstinence.
- If sex education is offered, curriculum is not required to include instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- If sex education is offered, curriculum is not required to include instruction on consent.
- Parents and guardians can exempt their children from any portion of sex education instruction through written notification to the school principal. *This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.*
- Massachusetts has no regulation regarding medically accurate sex education instruction.

RECENT LEGISLATION SHAPING THE STATE LANDSCAPE

Advocates in Massachusetts have worked tirelessly to advance the Healthy Youth Act. First introduced in 2011, the Healthy Youth Act would ensure youth receive research-based, medically accurate, and culturally competent sex education in districts that require sex education. Broad public support for the bill is often met with opposition from the Massachusetts Family Institute. While the Healthy Youth Act has successfully passed the Senate in the past two legislative sessions, it has routinely been blocked from being introduced in the House. In 2021, Senator DiDomenico led the introduction of the latest iteration of the Healthy Youth Act, *Senate Bill 2541*, which passed the Senate in 2022. While ultimately unsuccessful, the Massachusetts Healthy Youth Coalition is working to re-introduce the bill in 2023.

In addition to the Healthy Youth Act, advocates in Massachusetts are also working to improve current curriculum requirements. **House 4693** was introduced in 2022, and although unsuccessful, had sought to allow for school committees to create coursework on STIs available to both students and adults in the community, with parental notification and ability to review instructional materials. Advocates were successful in passing legislation that designates reproductive and gender-affirming care as protected rights under **H 5090**. This bill protects patients receiving care, as well as providers of the care. Additionally, the bill establishes the Public University Health Center Sexual and Reproductive Health Preparation Fund for the purpose of medication abortion readiness.

In June 2023, Gov. Maura Healy proposed for the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to update the **Massachusetts Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Framework** to advance sex education standards and make the curriculum more comprehensive, inclusive, and closer in alignment with the **National Sex Education Standards**. In September, the updated curriculum guidelines were approved, a win for young people and advocates alike in Massachusetts.

Since Massachusetts schools are not required to provide sex education to students, school districts are left to decide what type of sex education—if any at all—they provide to youth. Local control over sex education presents unique challenges that have resulted in a glaring disparity regarding the quality of sex education that students receive. Many districts, including Boston Public Schools, use the **Rights, Respect, Responsibility** (3R's) curriculum, but over 70 percent of districts use “abstinence-plus” instructional materials. “Abstinence-plus” instruction means that while abstinence is still emphasized, some information is also provided on contraceptive methods such as condoms. Advocates are working to provide sex education curriculum that is not delivered in a gender-segregated manner, which is often alienating to transgender, nonbinary, and/or gender nonconforming young people. Additional efforts by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) are being made to update the Health Curriculum Framework to ensure that discussion of consent is gender inclusive and trauma informed. Previously set to be released in early 2020, the framework has been delayed.

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. 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. For further information on how to get involved, visit the [Healthy Youth Act Coalition](#) website. In addition to local efforts to improve sex education curriculum, advocates must continue to contact their representatives and urge them to support the Healthy Youth Act during the 2022 legislative session and take part in local action to raise awareness concerning this critical opportunity to advance sex education in Massachusetts. 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 Massachusetts...

State Law: A Closer Look

Massachusetts does not require sex education but instead allows local school boards to make such decisions. If a community decides to implement sex education, [General Law of Massachusetts, Chapter 71 §§38O](#) requires that standards be developed with the guidance of community stakeholders, including parents and at least one physician. In 1990, the Massachusetts Board of Education approved a policy that:

[U]rges local school districts to create programs which make instruction about [acquired immunodeficiency syndrome] (AIDS)/[human immunodeficiency virus] (HIV) available to every Massachusetts student at every grade level. These programs should be developed in a manner which respects local control over education and involves parents and representatives of the community. The Board believes that AIDS/HIV prevention education is most effective when integrated into a comprehensive health education and human services program.

Every district implementing or maintaining curriculum which primarily involves human sexual education or human sexuality issues is required to adopt a policy

ensuring parental/guardian notification. This policy must afford parents or guardians the flexibility to exempt their children from any portion of said curriculum through written notification to the school principal.

State Standards

The *Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Framework*, updated in 2023, suggests that curricula include standards grouped under several topic areas including healthy relationships and sexual health. These K-12 standards were developed using resources including the *National Sexuality Education Standards*. Some of the relevant standards include teaching sexual assault/abuse prevention, the harms of gender stereotypes, interpersonal communication strategies for healthy relationships, sexual orientation, gender identity, puberty, preventing sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy, and more.

State Legislative Activity

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. **Massachusetts’ full-time, two-year legislative session convenes on 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 Massachusetts’

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

Massachusetts 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 Massachusetts as reported for the 2019–2020 school year.

Reported teaching all 22 critical sexual health education topics

- 23.3% of Massachusetts secondary schools taught students all 22 critical sexual health education topics in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 59.9% of Massachusetts 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

- 69.8% of Massachusetts secondary schools taught students about the benefits of being sexually abstinent in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 84.5% of Massachusetts 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

- 66.0% of Massachusetts 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.

- 86.5% of Massachusetts 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

- 72.9% of Massachusetts 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.
- 97.4% of Massachusetts 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

- 57.7% of Massachusetts 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.
- 81.6% of Massachusetts 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

- 34.3% of Massachusetts secondary schools taught students how to correctly use a condom in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 75.3% of Massachusetts 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

- 54.0% of Massachusetts secondary schools taught students about methods of contraception other than condoms in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 82.7% of Massachusetts 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

- 64.0% of Massachusetts secondary schools taught students about sexual orientation and gender identity in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 81.6% of Massachusetts 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

- 60.3% of Massachusetts secondary schools taught students about gender roles and stereotypes in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 79.3% of Massachusetts 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

- 65.8% of Massachusetts 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](#).

