

State Profiles

Rhode Island State Profile



Rhode Island's State of Sex Ed

Rhode Island schools are required to teach sex education through their “comprehensive school health education program”. Curriculum must align with Rhode Islands’ *Comprehensive Health Instructional Outcomes*, and the *Health Literacy for All: The Rhode Island Health Education Framework*

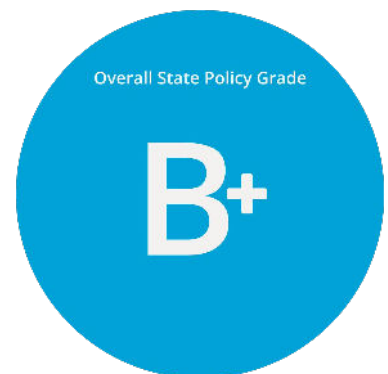
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Sex Ed
Requirement



Sex Ed
Content



Current Requirement

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- Curriculum is **not** required to align with the [National Sex Education Standards](#).
- Curriculum must stress abstinence.
- Curriculum is required, according to health standards, to include instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Curriculum must include instruction on consent by law.
- Curriculum must include discussion of varying types of dating violence by law.
- The administrative head of school(s) is required to designate a certified health educator to administer the health education program.
- Parents must be notified of sex education classes and may view the curriculum by submitting a written request. Students may be removed from instruction by written notification from the parent to the principal. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)

RECENT LEGISLATION SHAPING THE STATE LANDSCAPE

Rhode Island has a long history of taking incremental steps to advance sex education. Most recently, Representative Rebecca Kislak introduced important legislation such as [House Bill 7166](#). While ultimately unsuccessful, HB 7166 would have required family life or sex education to be culturally responsive, recognize sexual pleasure, same sex relationships, and be inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity, including curriculum on the harm of gender stereotypes. The companion bill, [Senate Bill 2285](#), introduced by Senator Tiara Mack, was also unsuccessful.

Regressive attempts to attack the rights of young people were also present in the 2022 legislative session. [House Bill 7539](#), introduced by Representative Patricia Morgan, sought to prohibit teaching divisive concepts in schools, and to prohibit sex education addressing sexual orientation and gender identity. While ultimately unsuccessful, these attempts showcase the importance for advocates to fight against legislation that fails to affirm young people.

Sex education in Rhode Island is required to include instruction on a variety of topics including reproduction, abstinence, dating and dating violence, marriage, and parenthood, as well as information about STDs, sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Despite these requirements, the curriculum is not required to be aligned with the National Sex Education Standards. The lack of such requirements present further challenges in ensuring that low income districts have access to the resources needed to implement sex education. Additional challenges presented by the absence of a comprehensive curriculum requirement allows for the implementation of policies and curriculum that stigmatize marginalized youth, such as students of color and LGBTQ 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 contacting their local school board, advocates can determine if sex education is required, and if not, what topics are missing from instruction. This may include topics such as healthy relationships, and contraceptive options, or ensuring curriculum is culturally responsive to the needs of young people of color. They can then vocalize the important need for advancing sex education requirements in their community. 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 ensuring schools are supported in implementing comprehensive 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 Rhode Island...](#)

State Law: A Closer Look

Rhode Island schools are required by [Rhode Island General Laws §§ 16-1-5, 16-22-17 and 16-22-18](#) to provide instruction including “HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)/AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome): the causes, effects, treatment, and prevention”. Schools must also teach health education in grades 1-12. Further they are required to teach “the responsibilities of family membership and adulthood, including issues related to reproduction, abstinence, dating and dating violence, marriage, and parenthood, as well as information about sexually transmitted diseases [STDs], sexuality, and sexual orientation.”

Parents must be notified of sex education classes and may view the curriculum by submitting a written request. Students may be removed from instruction by written notification from the parent to the principal. [This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.](#)

State Standards

Rhode Island provides three resources, [Rules and Regulations for School Health Programs](#), [Comprehensive Health Instructional Outcomes](#), and the [Health Literacy for All: The Rhode Island Health Education Framework](#), all of which provide curricula development guidance. “Sexuality and Family Life” represents its own instructional outcome, with components such as “us[ing] strategies that improve or maintain sexual health,” and requires discussion of “public health policies, government regulations, health promotion, and disease prevention, [including] issues such as abortion/contraception.”

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. **Rhode Island's 2023 annual session convenes January 3, 2023.**

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 Rhode Island's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results, [click here](#). At the time of publication, 2021 YRBS results were not made available yet.

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

Reported teaching all 22 critical sexual health education topics

- 25.9% of Rhode Island secondary schools taught students all 22 critical sexual health education topics in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 66.3% of Rhode Island 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

- 75.8% of Rhode Island secondary schools taught students about the benefits of being sexually abstinent in a required course in any of grades 6,

7, or 8.

- 93.3% of Rhode Island 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

- 72.9% of Rhode Island 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.
- 93.3% of Rhode Island 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

- 84.3% of Rhode Island 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.
- 88.5% of Rhode Island 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

- 54.6% of Rhode Island 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.
- 93.3% of Rhode Island 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 Rhode Island secondary schools taught students how to correctly use a condom in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.

- 74.3% of Rhode Island 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

- 55.6% of Rhode Island secondary schools taught students about methods of contraception other than condoms in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 93.3% of Rhode Island 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

- 69.2% of Rhode Island secondary schools taught students about sexual orientation and gender identity in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 91% of Rhode Island 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

- 75.9% of Rhode Island secondary schools taught students about gender roles and stereotypes in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 90.3% of Rhode Island 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

- 66.4% of Rhode Island 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](#).

