

State Profiles

Utah State Profile



Utah's State of Sex Ed

Schools in Utah **are** required to teach some sex education. *State law* requires such instruction to occur at LEAST twice between 8th and 12 grades.

[Download Scorecard](#)



Sex Ed Requirements



Sex Ed Content



Current Requirements At Glance

- Curriculum is not required to be comprehensive and must **stress** abstinence.
- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity.

- Curriculum is not required to include instruction on consent. However, the curriculum must include instruction on refusal skills.
- Parents or guardians must give written permission in order for a student to participate in any form of sex education. This is referred to as an “opt-in” policy.
- Curriculum must be medically accurate.

RECENT LEGISLATION SHAPING THE STATE LANDSCAPE

Advocates in Utah have made incremental progress in advancing sex education requirements across the state over the past four years, against many oppositional attacks. In 2016, legislators successfully passed [Senate Bill 196](#), sponsored by Senator Stuart Adams, which removed sex education requirements that prohibited instructors from discussing homosexuality in a positive manner. In 2018, legislators passed [House Bill 286](#), sponsored by Representative Justin Fawson, which requires sex education curriculum to include instruction on refusal skills and the harmful effects of pornography. In 2019, legislators passed [House Bill 71](#), sponsored by Representative Raymond Ward, which allows educators to provide instruction on the medical characteristics and effectiveness of contraceptive methods.

In 2022, two bills were introduced to advance sex education in the state. [Senate Bill 138](#), introduced by Kathleen Riebe, sought to alter sex education curriculum from stressing abstinence before marriage to stressing abstinence as a method for preventing “certain infectious diseases” and defining “expanded sex education instruction” on advocacy for the use of contraceptive methods and devices which is allowed with written parental consent. [House Bill 274](#), introduced by Representative Carol Moss, sought to require the State Board of Education to establish curriculum including instruction on sexual assault resources and sexual violence behavior prevention. This bill would have also required local education agencies to review data for sexual assault in order to inform development of sex education curriculum. Unfortunately, both these bills were ultimately unsuccessful.

The Utah State Board of Education updated the [Utah Core State Standards for Health Education](#) in 2019 to provide further guidance on instruction concerning affirmative consent, contraceptive methods, reproductive conditions and

diseases, relationship violence prevention, and identifying accurate and credible sources of information about sexual health. The standards were fully implemented during the 2020-2021 school year. While schools in Utah are required to teach sex education, Local Education Agencies (LEAs) establish their own standards for sex education in schools. 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 LGBTQ youth, and presents further challenges in ensuring that low income districts have access to the resources needed to implement comprehensive sex education. Students in Utah **report** that curriculum often fails to include instruction on contraceptive options or STI prevention outside abstinence. Advocates report that the biggest barriers to accessing sex education include: a lack of a monitoring system to ensure districts follow updated sex education requirements; a unified opposition made up of parents, stakeholders, and legislators; and a lack of data concerning the sexual behavior of youth in Utah. Further, advocates are aware that numerous topics continue to be excluded from sex education instruction, including instruction on consent and culturally responsive instruction that addresses the needs of youth of color and LGBTQ youth.

Right now, advocates can take action to ensure young people in their community have access to quality sex education. A **recent poll** revealed that 62 percent of respondents support offering sex education beyond abstinence-only curriculum, demonstrating a unique opportunity to stimulate community support for advancing sex education in the state. After contacting their LEA, 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. 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 advancing comprehensive sex education requirements. 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 Utah...

State Law: A Closer Look

Utah Code (§ 53G-10-402, Administrative Code §§ R277-474, and R277-700) mandates the State Board of Education to establish curriculum requirements for grades 8–12 on the prevention of communicable diseases. This instruction must stress “the importance of abstinence from all sexual activity before marriage and fidelity after marriage as methods for preventing certain communicable diseases, and [the importance of] personal skills that encourage individual choice of abstinence and fidelity.”

Among other limitations on what can be taught, the Utah Code states that “[a]t no time may instruction be provided, including responses to spontaneous questions raised by students, regarding any means or methods that facilitate or encourage the violation of any state or federal criminal law by a minor or an adult.” However, educators are permitted to respond to spontaneous questions for the purpose of “providing accurate data or correcting inaccurate or misleading information or comments made by students in class regarding sex education.”

Utah Code, effectively amended in May 2019 to remove language that prohibited “the advocacy of sexual activity outside of marriage,” further requires that materials used for instruction in health not include:

1. the intricacies of intercourse, sexual stimulation, or erotic behavior;
2. the advocacy of premarital or extra marital sexual activity; or
3. the advocacy or encouragement of the use of contraceptive methods or devices.

Further, Utah Code was amended to require the teaching of “refusal skills” and “the harmful effects of pornography” in health instruction. The Utah Code requires that each newly hired or newly assigned educator who teaches or who will be teaching any part of a sex education class must attend a state-sponsored course offered annually that outlines the state-designed curriculum and Utah Code regarding the teaching of human sexuality. In addition, the Utah Code was amended in March 2019 to allow health education instruction to “include

information about the medical characteristics, effectiveness, limitations, and risks of contraceptive methods or devices.”

Parents or guardians must give **written permission** in order for a student to participate in any form of sex education. **This is referred to as an “opt-in” policy.**

State Standards

The *Elementary Core Curriculum: Responsible Healthy Lifestyles 3–6* and *Secondary Health Core Curriculum: The Road to Healthy Behaviors 7-12*, which are suggested education standards produced by the Utah State Office of Education, provide greater detail regarding topics to be included based on grade levels. The *Elementary Core Curriculum* states that in grades 3–6, students should receive disease prevention and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) education. According to the *Secondary Health Core Curriculum*, students should receive instruction that abstinence is the best way to prevent unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) beginning in grade 7. Furthermore, instructors are told that a “strong abstinence message has *always been* and *will continue to be* an expected element” (emphasis in original) of sex education. Schools are not required to follow this framework. However, local school districts must establish a curriculum materials review committee. Curricula must be adopted after “**an open and regular**” school board meeting in which parents and guardians have an opportunity to testify. In the 2020-2021 school year, the updated *Utah Core State Standards for Health Education* were fully implemented in all schools and outline standards related to sex education.

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. **Utah's 2023 annual session convenes on January 17, 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 Utah's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results, [click here](#). At the time of publication, the 2021 YRBS data was not made available yet.

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

Reported teaching all 22 critical sexual health education topics

- 4.5% of Utah secondary schools taught students all 22 critical sexual health education topics in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 5.7% of Utah 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

- 88.8% of Utah secondary schools taught students about the benefits of being sexually abstinent in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.

- 87.1% of Utah 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

- 70.1% of Utah 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.
- 76.9% of Utah 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

- 94.9% of Utah 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.
- 87.1% of Utah 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

- 64.6% of Utah 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.
- 71.8% of Utah 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

- 6.1% of Utah secondary schools taught students how to correctly use a condom in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 9.6% of Utah 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

- 32.9% of Utah secondary schools taught students about methods of contraception other than condoms in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 59.7% of Utah 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

- 25% of Utah secondary schools taught students about sexual orientation and gender identity in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 39.6% of Utah 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

- 43.8% of Utah secondary schools taught students about gender roles and stereotypes in a required course in any of grades 6, 7, or 8.
- 68.2% of Utah 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

- 36.1% of Utah 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](#).

